

EMBRACING THE COMMUNAL
The Perseverance of the Dynamic

I

THE PERSEVERENCE OF THE DYNAMIC

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Embracing the Communal

The world around us is developing constantly. In terms of architecture and urban development, China is unprecedented. In a way, the sheer speed and volume of construction is a phenomenon, becoming characteristic for Chinese developments. Like all matter, this in itself is neither necessarily positive or negative. However, such dialogue becomes relevant when interest of parties differ. Arguments can be made for it being a necessity economically, socially, politically. At the same time, it can be perceived as destructive. This becomes especially apparent in the face of the heterogeneity of border conditions.¹

An exploration of exactly this juxtaposition is the base of the thesis, wherein architecture plays a particular role. Architecture is not merely a collection of built production within context of the urban environment, it is also intrinsically interwoven with the individual and how it is perceived in value. In such way, architecture as its object, while its widely recognized in form as a building, is a mediator in defining life in its cultural-historical, socio-economical, political values. In perceiving architecture not merely as an object, we can explore and understand the values of the existing urban fabric. This understanding is essential for future developments. Proceeding the urban expansion, in this sense, can also mean the continuity of history. It is all a matter of perspectives.

To write about this juxtaposition, the scope has to be defined. Topics such as the heterogeneity of border conditions, the political influence, destructive urbanism and the cultural-historical context are far too large to address in the thesis. As such, the focal point of the thesis is not about the tension of political dissonance around border conditions, rather it is about the issues or chances of rapid and overwhelming planned urban developments, mainly the aforementioned phenomenon in regards of the existing urban fabric. However, the notion of

¹ Border Conditions have profound differences. Think of size of nation-state, political relationships, levels of development, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, etc. Martinez, O. J. (1994). *Global Boundaries*. In C. Schofield (Ed.), *The Dynamics of border interaction* (pp. 1-14). London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

politics is inevitable and should be touched upon, as it is an aspect playing an important role and evidently can not be taken out of the dialogue. This aspect is viewed not to create friction, but as an actor that is providing the urban context. Furthermore, it is about understanding and defining the border conditions on the specifically chosen site. The project is situated on the border of China and Hong Kong, therefore is in need for emphasis and understanding on the socio-cultural aspect. The context will be divided in themes of past, present and future perspectives. Additionally, it is not merely looking to what *is*, but rather, what *can become*. When a region is threatend to become absorbed by the larger development surrounding it, what are the values of such place? What are the necessities of maintaining these? These are the themes that play an imminent role as the border condition of China and Hong Kong.

The border is endowed in a duality. It is, in times, non-physical, yet present. It reflects exclusiveness, yet is universal. It is between inside and outside. In this way, the thesis will take the phenomenon of the Chinese development as an inevitable and take the position in favour of co-existence, rather than restrictiveness. In a way, it is easier to resist something that cannot be grasped, yet having an open approach is encouraged for the sake of new perspectives, activities and understanding. The thesis therefore, is not trying to be a 'toolbox' for urban developments or architectural design.

The thesis, as a base, and the design intervention try to explore and transcend the political aspect of development and uncover the values of a region that is prone to losing its identity and characteristic. A step further, in the relation of Hong Kong and China, the border conditions where the two regions collide, create an intricate dynamic in which co-existence is the norm and an integral part of the area. Frankly, this dynamic is not one politically, rather it is socio-economic and cultural-historical. This dynamic itself is ultimately a notion that transcends the border itself. It is one that creates the communal and one that is embraced.

CHINA, A MONOLITH

Forming the Context

Looking at China since the emergence of nation states and the rise of nationalism seem to offer a more relevance for understanding current and future behavior than does the pre-modern era. As assessed by Michael D. Swaine (2015) in *China: The Influence of History*.

2

Conrad Schirokauer (1991),
*A Brief History of Chinese
Civilization*.

3

The continuous growth of China, and its influence expanding outside of Asia, causes many interest from (foreign) analysts to look into China and its history to understand how China will behave.

According to Michael D. Swaine (1951-), an expert and prominent American analysts in Chinese and East Asian security studies, China is often, incorrectly, viewed as a monolithic whole over the centuries. Which is to say that, throughout history,

*'it possessed the same political and security outlook at each stage of its development, and behaved as a modern state does today.'*²

This, however, is a heavily simplification of the relevance and meaning of centuries of Chinese behavior and thoughts. Obviously, the reality is more intricate and nuanced. Because of the extensive variety between the dynasties, many (Chinese) historians could not find any meaningful way to generalise traditional Chinese policies, as mentioned by Swaine. Similarly to Conrad Schirokauer, a German-American historian (1929-2018), his collection on the history of Chinese civilization, where every major dynasty or other discrete period has to be treated as a separate chapter.³

This strengthens the notion how it seems impossible to conclude something meaningful (and correct) by generalising such a long and diverse history.

However, as analysts have tried to prove many times, history still can be an effective learning tool to extrapolate for present and future perspectives. In order to frame this, but at the same time not undermine the great differences in socio-economic and cultural history, focussing on a specific thematic aspect might give us a glimpse of possibilities.



As some see it as peak modernity in architecture, some were dissatisfied in the works of architects. Did China also tread in like a dramatic depiction?

A Hugh Ferriss:
The Lure of the City (1929),

Charcoal and pencil drawing from *The Metropolis of Tomorrow*.

7 Daniel Little (2009), *Understanding Society. Generalizations in history.*

5

Hereby referring to China in its current state as *modern* China.

4

There is this non-existence of what is called *Chinese Architecture* in its modern form in China. A form of architecture as a self-contained, philosophical focussed object of contemplation. As assessed by David Wang (2016) in *A Philosophy of Chinese Architecture. Past, Present, Future.*

6

Edward Denison (2017), *Architecture and the Landscape of Modernity in China Before 1949.*

Perhaps a viable distinction can be made of pre-modern China and China in its current state. As David Wang (1954-), professor of Architecture at Washington State University, writes:

*'Since 1840, "What is Chinese architecture?" remains contested ground. The year 1840 marks the First Opium War, which is widely regarded as the starting point for China's entrance into the way of being called modernity.'*⁴

Looking at *modern* China⁵ seems like a logic way to extrapolate for future behaviours within architectural development. It is the China we might be most familiar with and the China known for its unprecedented developments both in size and, as Dr. Edward Denison (1974-) mentioned, in diverse architectural condition.⁶ Truthfully, pre-modern China is as monolith over the centuries as it is now. From personal experience, a way to tell which Chinese subgroup is present or predominant is by their food. That is to say, each subgroup has its own traditions, culture and, more apparent, cuisine.

Then, are we suppose to avoid any generalisation in order to not overly simplify and therefore miss important, yet specific traits? Philosopher of social science Daniel E. Little (1949-) writes that

*'Too much generalization, and you lose the point of historical research -- you lose the tangible granularity of real people and social settings in history (...) Too little generalization, however, and the research becomes pointless -- just a specification of a collection of actions and outcomes for which the existing historical record happens to provide some information.'*⁷

Of course, there is perhaps an irresolvable tension between the 'genius loci' and 'a general representation'. In the same way, generalising pre-modern China and *modern* China as two entities might not be applicable in most cases, however, as a learning tool in this specific instance, it could prove valuable.



Even if we isolate pre-modern China from *modern* China, they will always be intertwined, as they *share* a common history.

B Joseph Tong:
Tabula Rasa (2016-2018),

Installation of industrial aluminium beneath structured Plexiglas.

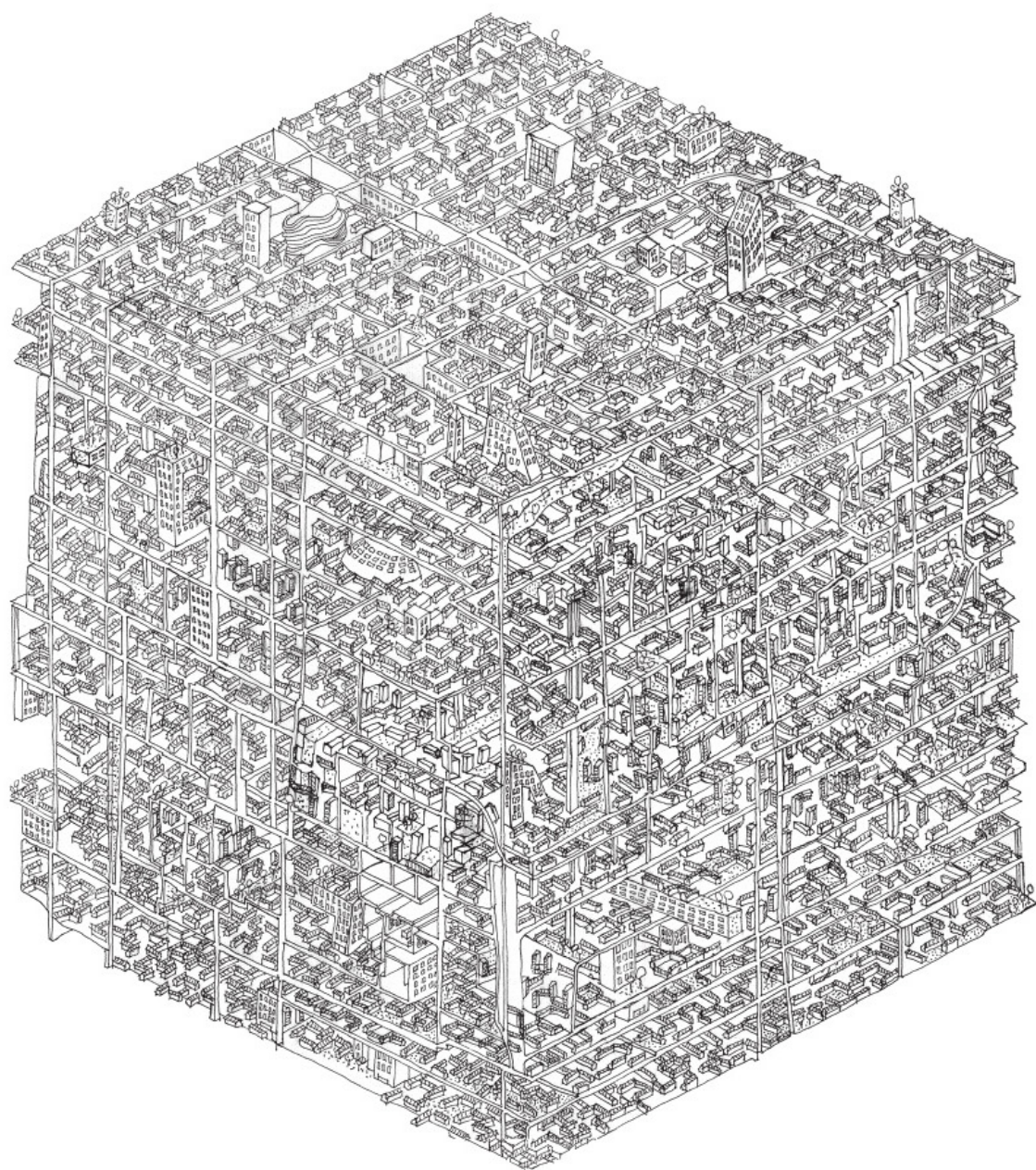
- 8 Kevin A. Lynch (1960), *The Image of the City*.
- 9 Alfredo Mela (2014), *City, Territory and Architecture*. Retrieved from: <https://cityterritoryarchitecture.com/content/1/1/15>
- 10 Hereby referring the tier system as classified by South China Morning Post (2016). Retrieved from <https://multimedia.scmp.com/2016/cities/>
- 11 Hereby referring the tier system as classified by South China Morning Post (2016). Retrieved from <https://multimedia.scmp.com/2016/cities/>

Every region has its own characteristics, its own charms. One can roam a city and retell what attracted them to it. As urban theorist Kevin Lynch (1918-1984) writes:

*'Here, presumably, the citizen is presented with a rich choice of routes to his destination, all of them well structured and identified. There is a similar value in an overlapping net of identifiable edges, so that regions big or small can be formed according to taste and need.'*⁸

In the same way, from a different perspective, professor Alfredo Mela (1948-) writes about the public space as a crucial theme for both theoretical reasons and practical-political relevance.⁹ Focused on 'approaches that emphasize the fragmentation of public space', it becomes apparent that the fragmentation of the public space tends to be connected to the privatisation of the city. In itself it does not necessarily pose direct issues. However, it might cause socio-spatial inequallities in contemporary cities. Thus, in a dialogue of identifying, what would we wish the public space and urban fabric to represent?

As we set our focus on *modern* China, the rapid developments may change the way how we used to identify the city. Often times, new developments interact with the existing urban fabric, however, the development strategies in China are famous, or infamous for that matter, for their radical top-down approach resembling '*tabula rasa*'.¹⁰ We should take note that there is a difference in how the cities develop. In particular, there is a diversity in the strategies of development between cities. As a point of reference, Chinese cities are unofficially listed in a so-called '*tier system*'.¹¹ The system itself is of no specific importance, however, it does create a comparable aspect between different cities. In this case, a first tier city like Beijing is no stranger to top-down



C META-Project:
Meta: Hutongs (2013),
Exhibited at: 14th Venice Biennale of Architecture & Beijing Design Week
2013.

14

Bill Dodson (2010), *The Disappearing Hutong*. Retrieved from: <https://thedioplat.com/2010/07/the-disappearing-hutong/>

13

John Sexton and Ren Zhongxi (2010), 'Untouchable' area of old Beijing under threat. Retrieved from: http://www.china.org.cn/china/2010-05/13/content_20033631_2.htm

12

Wang Shuo (2013), *Beijing Design Week. META:Hutongs*. Retrieved from: <http://grahamfoundation.org/grantees/4973-meta-hutongs>

interventions. In the case of the *hutongs*, relatively small alleys bordered by single-story courtyard houses, are under pressure. As Chinese architect and curator Wang Shuo (1981-) states:

*'the historically planned urban fabric, the "hutongs", in the old city of Beijing, where despite the increasing obsession of current public discussions with the idea of preservation, hutongs continue to disappear rapidly.'*¹²

The hutongs were known to be an extremely social area. A hub of commerce and community life, where locals opened small shops by creating a large opening in their, often, front walls. These private shops are the cause for the very lively days and even nights. They are the main reason, for most people, to roam these alleys at all. Only the generations who have the nostalgia and understand the importance of these hutongs, as part of their socio-economic realm, feel the necessity of preserving. One can argue this is how 'real' Beijing was supposed to be like. However, to answer the question of density (and 'safety' of public order) within a city as congested as Beijing, the lowrise hutongs have been the target of radical redevelopment for the last decades.

Of course, not everyone agrees with the demolishment of traditional neighbourhoods. According to a Chinese state-run web portal 'Beijing conservationists bemoan the disappearance of traditional neighborhoods and complain that the city has become an experimental zone for foreign architects.'¹³

However, even with the increasing public interest, the pace does not seem to slow down. It is not hard for the public to get the attention, however, it is difficult to be represented. According to author Bill Dodson (1961-), who wrote about a disappearing hutongs district to make way for a theme park:

*'Though local residents put up a strong and very public fight against the park, the final decision was made without the town hall meeting on the issue that the local government officials had promised.'*¹⁴

The Cultural Revolution has been a benchmark to value cultural and historical relics, due to the loss of many. However, it seems that these relics does not include urban developments. In that instance one might wonder what it takes to preserve or

even what it takes for something to be *considered* an urban heritage. Taking a step further, it seems it is not a matter of sentiments nor *how many* people take value, rather it becomes an issue of *who* values.

A strategy, or perhaps lack of, pertaining *tabula rasa* is not only about the demolition of existing fabric. It is then also immediately about the lack of tangible context to relate to. This aspect will also play a role into the development, growth and decline of villages.

As Chinese architect Li Xinggang (1969-) states about his project *Gymnasium at New Campus of Tianjin University* (2015):

*'The most important question and the genesis of the Gymnasium is, of course, a kind of tabula rasa. It was planned like a new settlement. (...) There was literally nothing there before. To give the place a sense of belonging became the most important issue.'*¹⁵

A smaller, lesser known city like Changzhi in the Shanxi Province attempts a similar approach. Whether this is due to lack of knowledge on the potential, speed of construction or due to the profit of maximising development on every possible area, it either way is not giving a chance to any potential preservation of the urban fabric as they see no value at that moment.

In comparison with Beijing, where the central government is directly involved, the lower tier cities are often developed through private land owners in cooperation with the local government. These owners often seek for something 'outstanding' to give a sense of desirability and therefore profitable. However, something 'outstanding' does not necessarily equal 'new', especially in these common ways of development. Thus, in practice, there is room to intervene as an architect.¹⁶ This is a step that is both important and has potential in giving a sense of belonging.

In order for the public to understand why certain preservation might be necessary, it is important to create awareness of the existing urban fabric and lay out the potentials for future development strategies. The pioneers of Chinese historical architecture, and the

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Li Xinggang (2020),
Li Xinggang on *tabula rasa* as the most
relevant and challenging situation in
China. Retrieved from:
<https://www.stirworld.com>

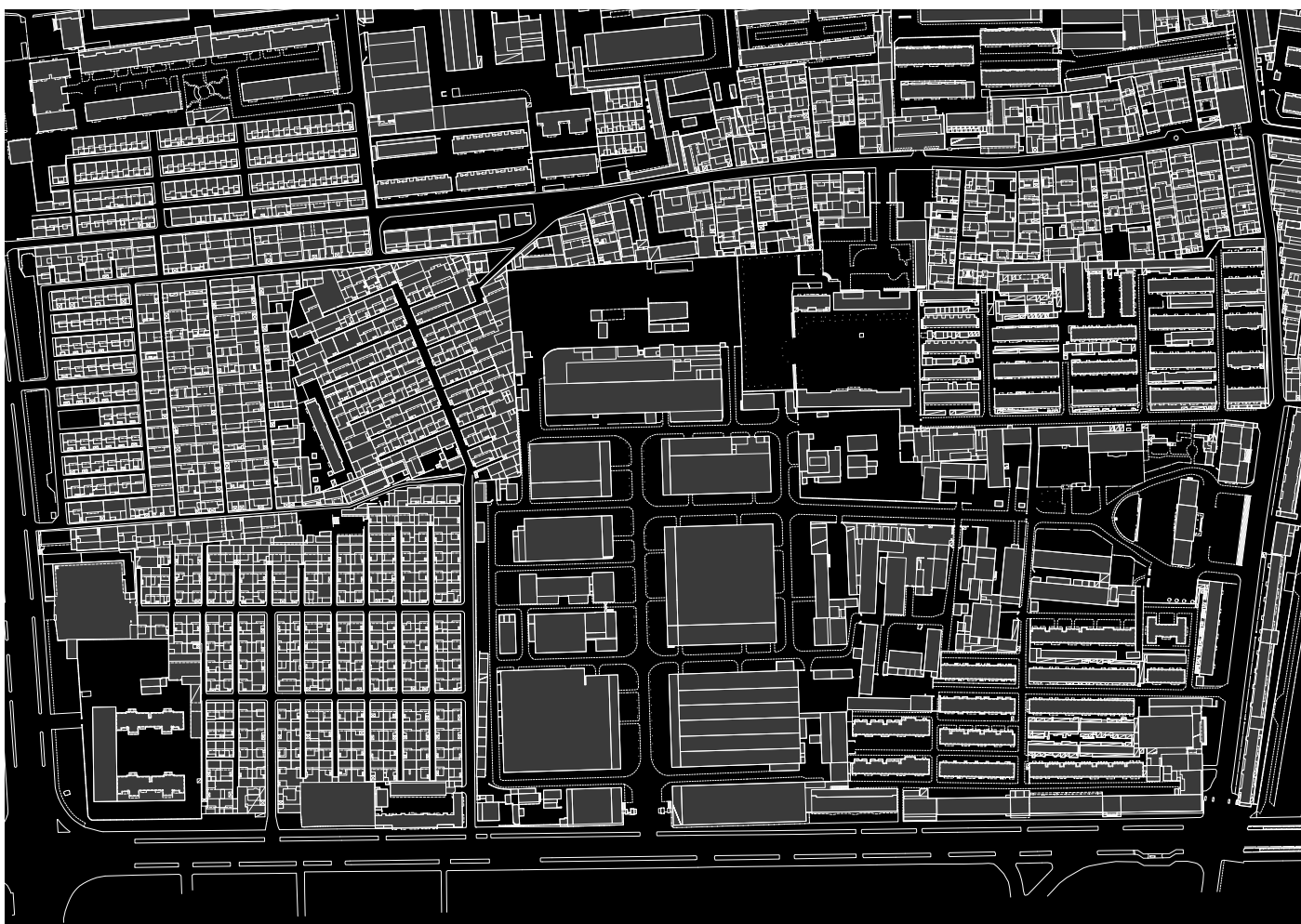
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From personal experience; working with a
client operating in Changzhi,
Shanxi Province.

Both Liang Si Cheng and Lin Hui Yin were educated 'overseas' in the United States, thus bringing 'radical' ideas for traditional Chinese scholars.

17

preservation of such, Liang Si Cheng (1901-1972) and Lin Hui Yin (1904-1955)¹⁷ noticed that the notion of theory is not enough to truly understand a region (and its architectural value), thus through exploring and observing it in person is the only way to make this tangible. This is particularly important when preservation might be the only way to keep the historical narrative of the city and allow for a sense of belonging and whether they *care* or *desire* to. This opens up many possibilities in how the city then develops and the integration of chosen valuables, whether tangible or intangible, within the city.



D Superimpose Architecture:
Future Cities: The Multiplier Effect (2017),
The existing map of Changzhi city before large redevelopments.



E Superimpose Architecture:
Future Cities: The Multiplier Effect (2017),
Implementation of a large scale grid.



F Superimpose Architecture:
Future Cities: The Multiplier Effect (2017),
Execution of the plan without regard of potential value.

SOCIAL ENTITY

Pride and Philosophy

16 The influence of history on Chinese thought and behaviour in the present day by three set of traits. As assessed by Michael D. Swaine (2015) in *China: The Influence of History*.

17 See 'Urban Remembrance', page 14, referral point 12.

18 Also known as the *Socialist Market Economy*.

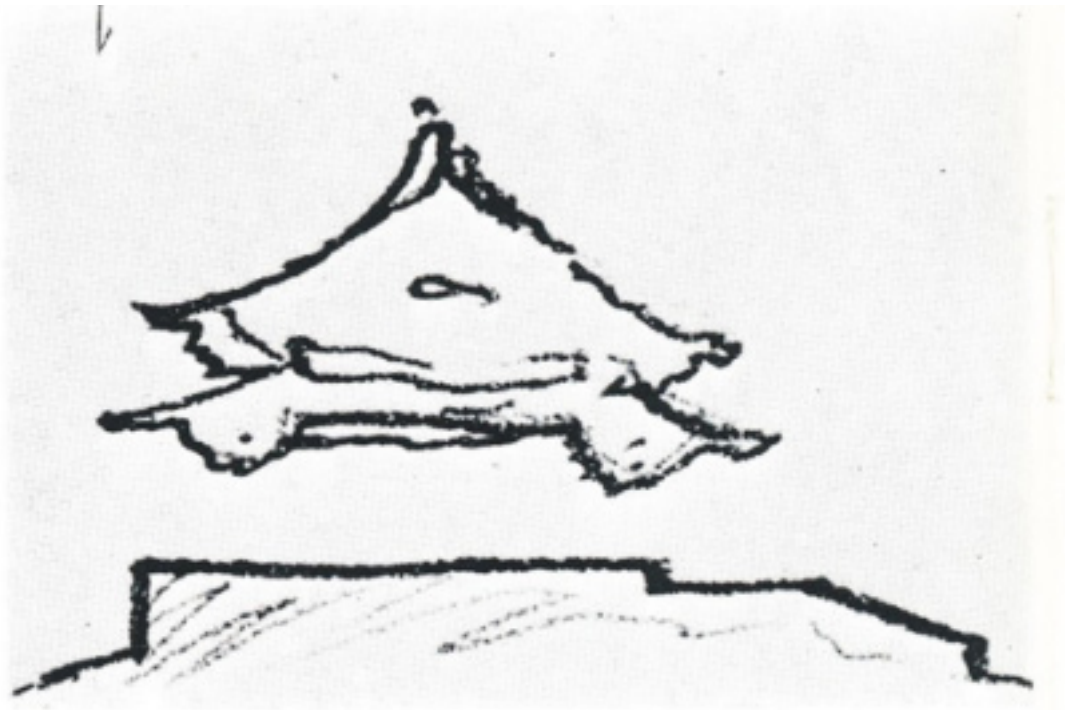
19 Zhang Lihua (2013), *China's Traditional Cultural Values and National Identity*. Retrieved from <https://carnegietsinghua.org/2013/11/21/china-s-traditional-cultural-values-and-national-identity-pub-53613>

Chinese people take pride in the country's long history as a strong and vibrant culture and as a highly influential political and *social* entity.¹⁶ This is reflected in the way Chinese people interact and talk about their culture and country. However, there also exist a layer of contradictions regarding the, mostly educated abroad, generations.¹⁷ Through conversations, a sense of admiration towards Western accomplishments can be distinguished. Many, therefore, 'seek to emulate Western practices', both and mostly in economic and some social realms.

These realms are what people value highly. It is exactly a combination of the economical and social realm that the people are proud of 'China's accomplishments during the market-driven economic reform era' which is often deemed to run with capitalist market logic and principles.¹⁸ This also triggered the community and commerce hub as exemplified by the *hutongs* in Beijing. These developments are connected to the social aspects of the community and is an important factor for the people to create a sense of belonging. The Chinese have a strong ideology, mostly derived from Confucianism, when it comes to social culture. There is this philosophy through the concept of *harmony*. As resident scholar Zhang Lihua writes:

*'Of these, the core value is harmony. Harmony means "proper and balanced coordination between things" and encompasses rationale, propriety, and compatibility (...) Modern Chinese society tries to maintain harmony between humankind and nature; between people and society; between members of different communities; and between mind and body.'*¹⁹

She argues that differences does not necessarily mean contradiction. That is to say, one's views may differ and that might lead to conflict, but instead one can seek to coexist harmoniously.



A reference to harmony. These same features can be seen in the Taihedian, the Supreme Harmony hall in the Forbidden City.

G Jørn Utzon (1918-2008):
Inspirational drawings for the Sydney Opera House (1962),

Conceptual sketch

22

Empirical results from a nationwide survey on Chinese residents' spiritual life. From Anning Hu (2015), *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary China: An Empirical Investigation*.

20

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 1 BC - 65 AD), Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/seneca/>

23

E.g., Watson, J. (1988). *Structure of Chinese Funeral Rites*; Paper, J. D. (1995). *The Spirits Are Drunk: Comparative Approaches to Chinese Religion*.

21

Cultural and religious tradition is referring to the ancestor worship, veneration and offering in Taoism.

From that perspective, not every difference is in need of being 'resolved'. In a way, we can specifically look for diversity, as the basis of a harmonious coexistence. It is like the famous quote from Roman philosopher Seneca; *A gem cannot be polished without friction, nor a man perfected without trials.* ²⁰

Looking at the history of China, there is a plethora of diversity in every aspect. Instead of only looking for friction, differences and contradictions as a problem or hindrance, perhaps there is a way it can co-exist. We can aim to live with differences by achieving a mutual understanding, a balance, an equilibrium. Through a way to allow a continuity of the narrative of the community and commerce; a continuity of history and, in specific cases, therefore a continuity of the socio-economic.

For most Chinese, on an individual level of social intimacy, the ancestral traditions can not be excluded. It is mainly considered a cultural or religious tradition, but is intrinsically social. It is to cultivate kinship values like filial piety, family loyalty, and continuity of the family lineage. ²¹

Most of the ancestral traditions have slowly dissipated in contemporary China. Part of it is due to urbanization and became less attractive to well-educated adults. However, the few of the traditions that are practiced, are considered an important part of their activities, according to Anning Hu, professor of sociology (1983-), who writes:

'In Chinese society, ancestor worship is one of the most important cultural traditions ... penetrating in almost every aspect of an individual's daily life. (...) Economic status is positively associated with ancestor worship participation. Nevertheless, urbanization and migration have a negative effect on people's propensity of practicing ancestor worship.' ²²

The social aspect of these traditions, like rituals of family gathering and food-sharing, are considered to be an integral part of Chinese culture by scholars. ²³ The notion of where ones roots are, or derived from and what path ones ancestor has taken, are reflected in many ways. This is especially true for local clan communities in rural China, where the lineage plays an important role in the

becoming and belonging of that village.

Through architecture, a common way is portrayed by a communal hall for the village. For individual families, an altar is placed across the entrance. It is to keep the remembrance alive and as well as to pay respect for those who came before and have formed the lineage. However as Chinese sociologist Zongli Tang (1954-) states:

'Starting with the late 1990's, a large migration from villages to cities has rapidly altered rural China. This geographic mobility would ruin the common residence that serves as part of a clan's foundation. (...) Will the system continue to revitalize or die out?' ²⁴

The process of urbanization has weakened the traditional sentiment, most notably in the well-educated young adults. This, in turn, led to a decline of villages in its whole. Especially in the New Territories, Hong Kong, this has become apparent. Many of the closed, exclusive land of the clans became available to the 'public'. Today, most of these villages are part of clans only by name. Of course, as aforementioned, this does not necessarily translate to the country in its whole, but does allow for a representation of what could become for other villages. The current developments do not only impact the physical, but it seems they also affect the intangible. The traditional values, loyalties and sentiments perhaps are merely a product of the past, yet should not be forgotten, for it is part of their heritage and identity.

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EMBRACING THE COMMUNAL
The Perseverance of the Dynamic

II

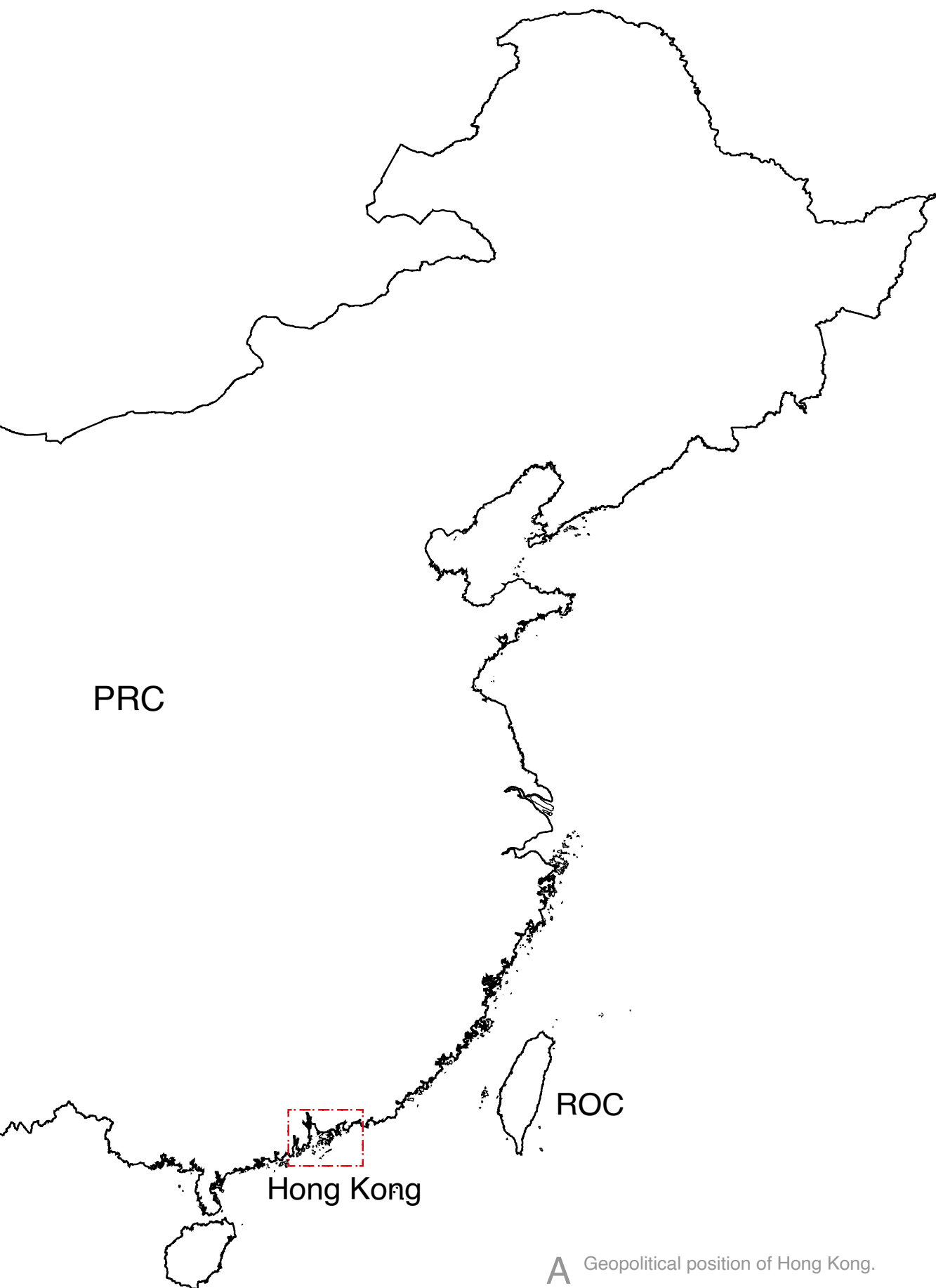
DEFINING THE FRAMEWORK
A Contextual Analysis of Sha Tau Kok Village

THE HAKKA

Introducing the Indigenous



A personal connection to a township on the border of Hong Kong and China, is the subject in the face of potential radical change. The township in question is 沙頭角 Sha Tau Kok (Mandarin; Sha Tou Jiao) on the most Eastern side of the Hong Kong - China border, one that is, at first hand, neither particularly unique or specifically valuable for architecture. However, the underlying narrative and its becoming poses an interesting and potential case to develop the area after the aforementioned 'inevitability' of the disappearance of the border.



A Geopolitical position of Hong Kong.

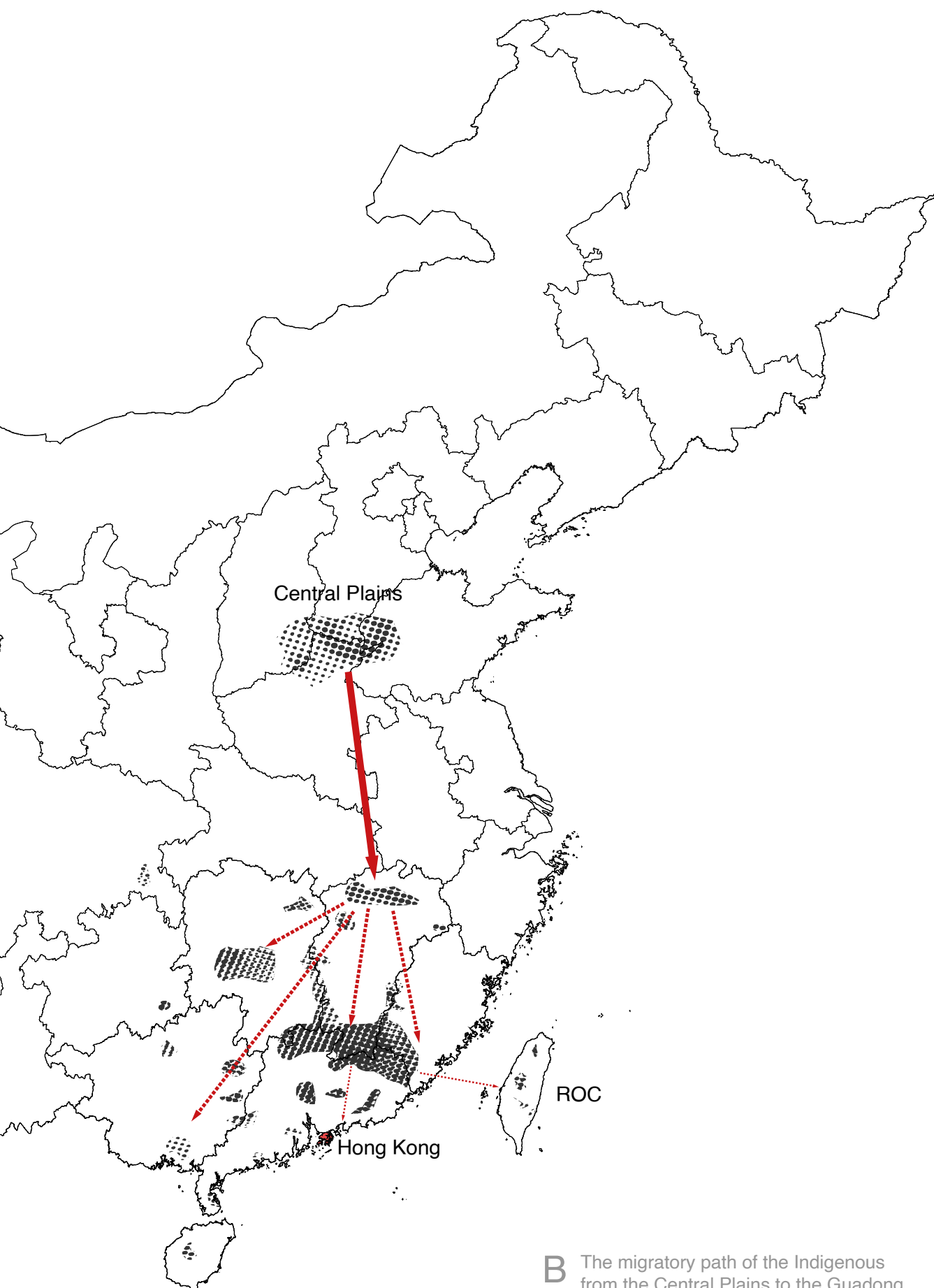
The narrative originates from people of the Hakka culture, a subgroup of the Han ethnicity. Hakka, meaning *guest house* or *guest people*, did not have their identity shaped until three major migrations and scattered them throughout South-East China. The migration during the early Qing dynasty in the 17th century, led them to the coast of the Guangdong area.¹

According to research of historian Luo Xianglin (1906-1978), proving the Hakka are Han Chinese as well as their migratory path from the Central Plains to Southern China. Traces show the path of the Hakka, even though the migratory path is not exclusive to the Hakka.



1

One cultural aspect of the Hakka, due to their nomadic nature, is a necessity to be low on possessions. Due to this, most of their culture manifests in the forms of language, traditions and relationship. One of the few tangible heritages are vernacular structures; 土楼, the *Tulou*, known as Hakka earthen buildings, mostly found in South East China, next to the Guangdong province.



B The migratory path of the Indigenous from the Central Plains to the Guangdong region after three major waves.

These rural dwellings, contained whole clans or families and were to establish a community. They were an important place of gathering and exchange, but most of all, a defensive structure. The structure consists of local materials found on the lands. They used a technique known as *rammed earth* by using local materials found from the lands such as clay, earth and lime. By creating a rather thick base for the outer walls, it acted as both protection and insulation.²

By using materials within their vicinity and the integration into the mountainous landscape, it also shows their position of man and nature, wherein harmony between the two are key.

Chinese scholar Hanmin Huang (1958-) described the time period, function and process of the constructions in *Fujian's Tulou: A Treasure of Chinese Traditional Civilian Residence*, 197-212. Singapore: Springer Singapore.

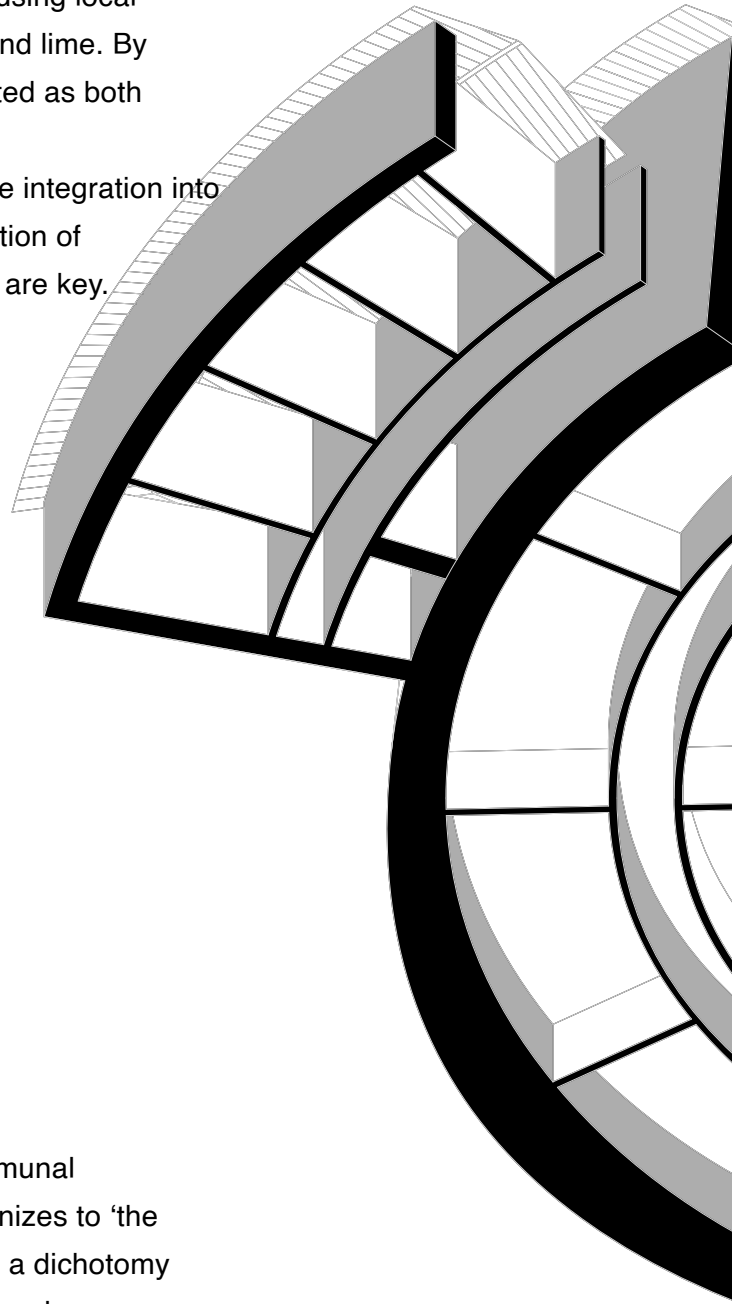
Hereby referring 'the Others' as people excluded from the Indigenous community, regardless of the time period.

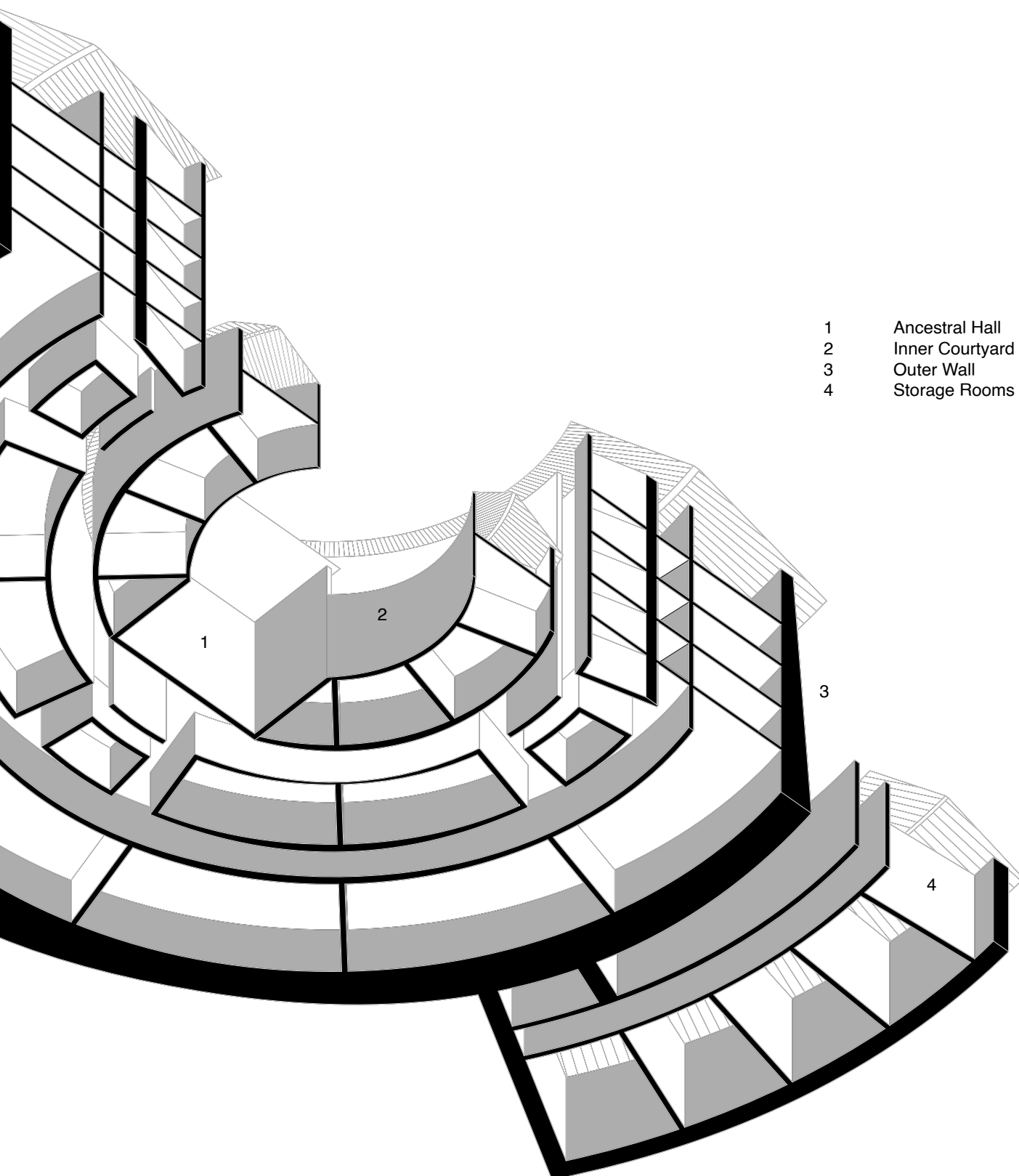
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Intriguing is the building itself, as a unified and communal building for the clan, which at the same time antagonizes to 'the Others'.³ The sheer size of the outside walls causes a dichotomy of interior-exterior. It also proves to be a point in time where the identity of being *guests* slowly faded and became a social community living of what nature provided.

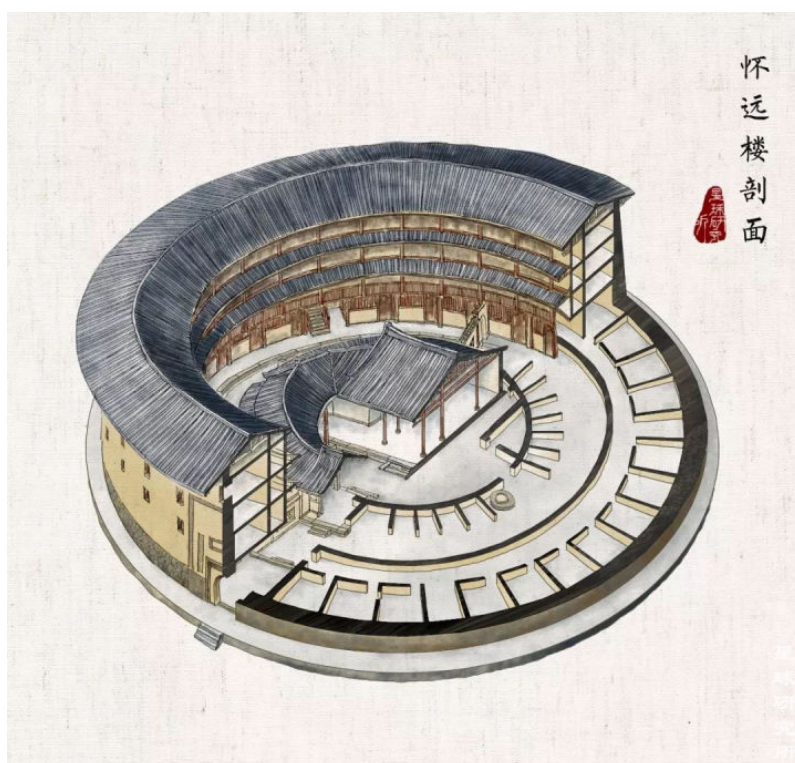
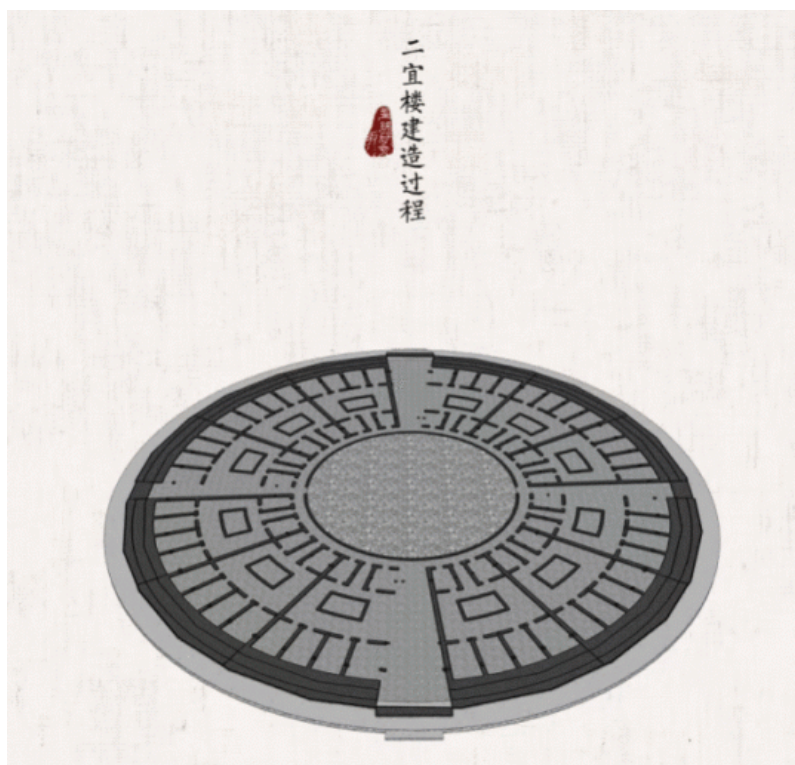
Within this structure, the social status of everyone is equal by creating same size rooms. By doing so, an emphasize is made on social and equal exchange within the families. The early Tulou were rectangular in shape, however later changed to more circular, due to being less performative (less luminous and more exposure of the corners, thus more vulnerable).





C Zhencheng Tulou, Fujian (1912):
Redrawn axonometric (upside down).

The societal conditions forced the erection of walls, the dichotomy of interior-external.



D 张靖/Planet Research Institute:
Base layout of the Eryi Building in
Zhangzhou, Fujian (2018).

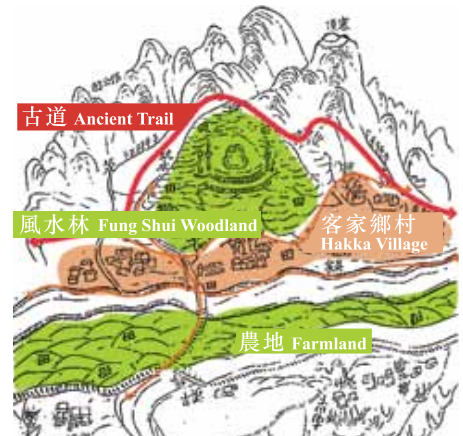
Referring to the change of authority of Hong Kong in 1997 by the British empire. This independency treaty between the British Empire and China is set to expire in 2047.

The circular shape tends to be more symbolic as well; it reinforced the communal ideology, wherein the center is for the most important. It is used as a flexible central square, mostly as an inner courtyard for family unity or serves for commerce. It also shows the importance put on an open, public space.

Most Tulou have their ancestral hall attached to these inner courtyards, to remember the importance of commemoration. Even though the Tulou are not found in Sha Tau Kok, due to not being an immediate necessity, it does give insight in the nature, tradition and philosophy of the Indigenous. It allows us to understand the path taken and what the priority are of the Hakka within their narrative of the founding and potential change of the village. The Tulou followed their ideology of harmony with nature. In that same train of thought was the settlement in Sha Tau Kok. It is based on the Mountain-River-Village-Farmland relationship, the Hakka being farmers and fishers, being self-sustaining.

Sha Tau Kok is a village on a controversial borderland. In relation to the 50 years of independency of Hong Kong (SAR; special administrative region)⁴, the next change of authority will undeniably have consequences on the borderlands. The aspect of change lies in the dichotomy of the village itself, just as the symbolic dichotomy of the Tulou. As Sha Tau Kok is split by the border, there exists a phenomenon of the separation of the village, making it a 1 village – 2 inhabitant morphology, a 1 village with 2 political systems. In essence, it is 1 village with 2 identities where one side is part of the larger metropolis of Shen Zhen and the other remained as a rural township, consisting of several smaller communities.

It once was founded as a permanent settlement for the nomadic Hakka people, but has slowly lost most of its indigenous character. This is partially due to urbanisation aspect of the younger generation, but the extreme rapid development of the Chinese side of the border also plays a role. This contrast of development is directly related to the Frontier Closed Area, a buffer zone which acts as a separation between the two authorities. It is an area only accessible for permit holders, such as the residents of Sha Tau Kok.



E Jia Shu Lin and Hao Lin:
Kejia Tu Lou and Kejia Wen Hua (1992).

7

See 'Chung Ying Street', page 66.

6

See 'Appendix 1 - Interview', page 80.

5

See 'Frontier Closed Area', page 46.

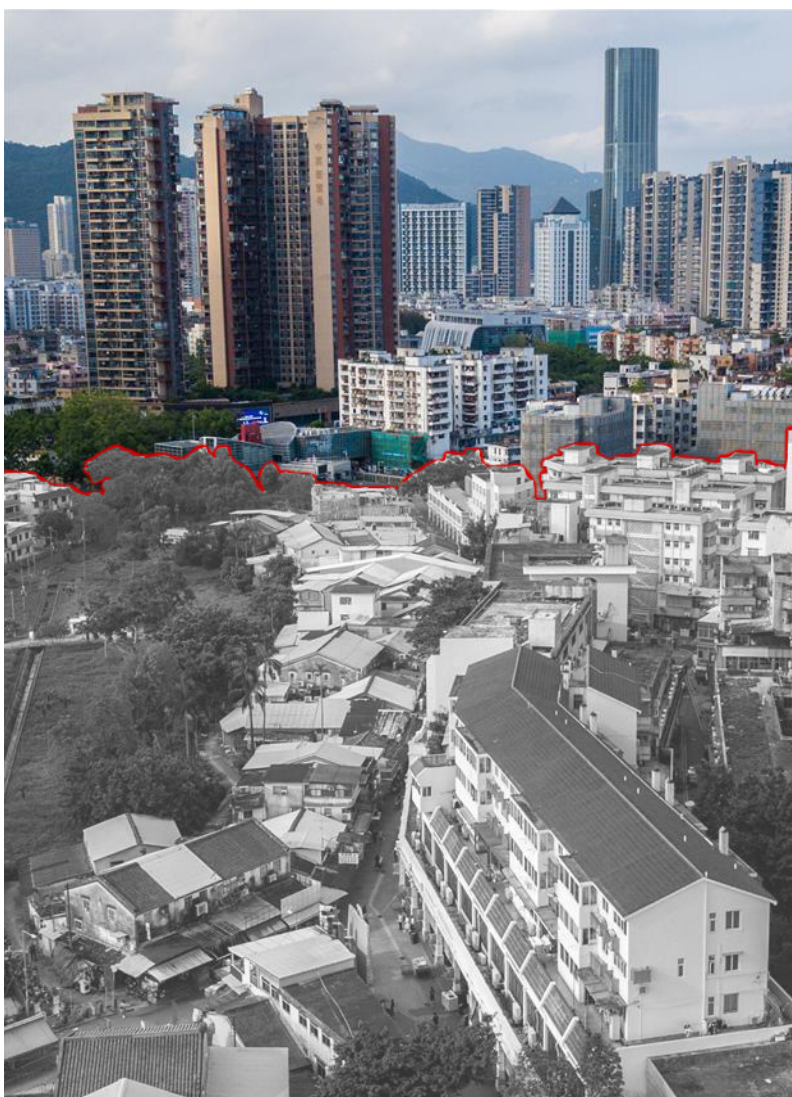
Due to the way the developments take place in China, it is possible that the village will need to make place for continuation of the metropolis.

The change of borderlands also comes with the increase of interest, by both 'the Others' and the indigenous themselves, in the identity of the village. After the change of authority in 1997, the borderlands slowly began to change, wherein the restricted area gradually decreased.⁵ This caused the accesibility of Hong Kong residents to be able to go further into the village than they were allowed to previously. The phenomenon of this two village - one system was not seen by many people, thus caused a large influx of visitors to see the ambiguous situation. For the Indigenous, the recent change and possible dissapearance of the border in its whole, triggered a sense of belonging. As Mr. Chung, member of the local clan committee, says:

*'We (The community) have been fairly passive until recently. Sha Tau Kok has always been quite closed off ... this change or displacement of the border brought attention to us, but it also gave us the urgency to showcase ourselves as well. ... It showed that this is our home and that we belong here. By having people outside of the community become interested, we hope to make our mark.'*⁶

For a village like Sha Tau Kok, the history is quite rich. Especially 中英街, Chung Ying Street (litt. China England Street) has its fair share of story. It is there where the village started to bloom through the market street. However, history does not only exists of the positives. This street, as the name suggests, is the physical seperation of the area.⁷

Through the eyes of the Indigenous, the geopolitical situation does not necessarily define their village and identity. It remains their sense of belonging regardless of the situation. For them, it can only be enhanced. Thus, it seems more beneficial to look at the situation not focussing on the geopolitical, but rather the communal. An approach that focusses on the social-economic.



F Chung Ying Street, Sha Tau Kok:
*Representation of the differences in development
through the dichotomy.*



G '十約'有'你' (2020):
Festival on Chung Ying Street.

The historical narrative portrayed through dance performances, story telling and decorations.



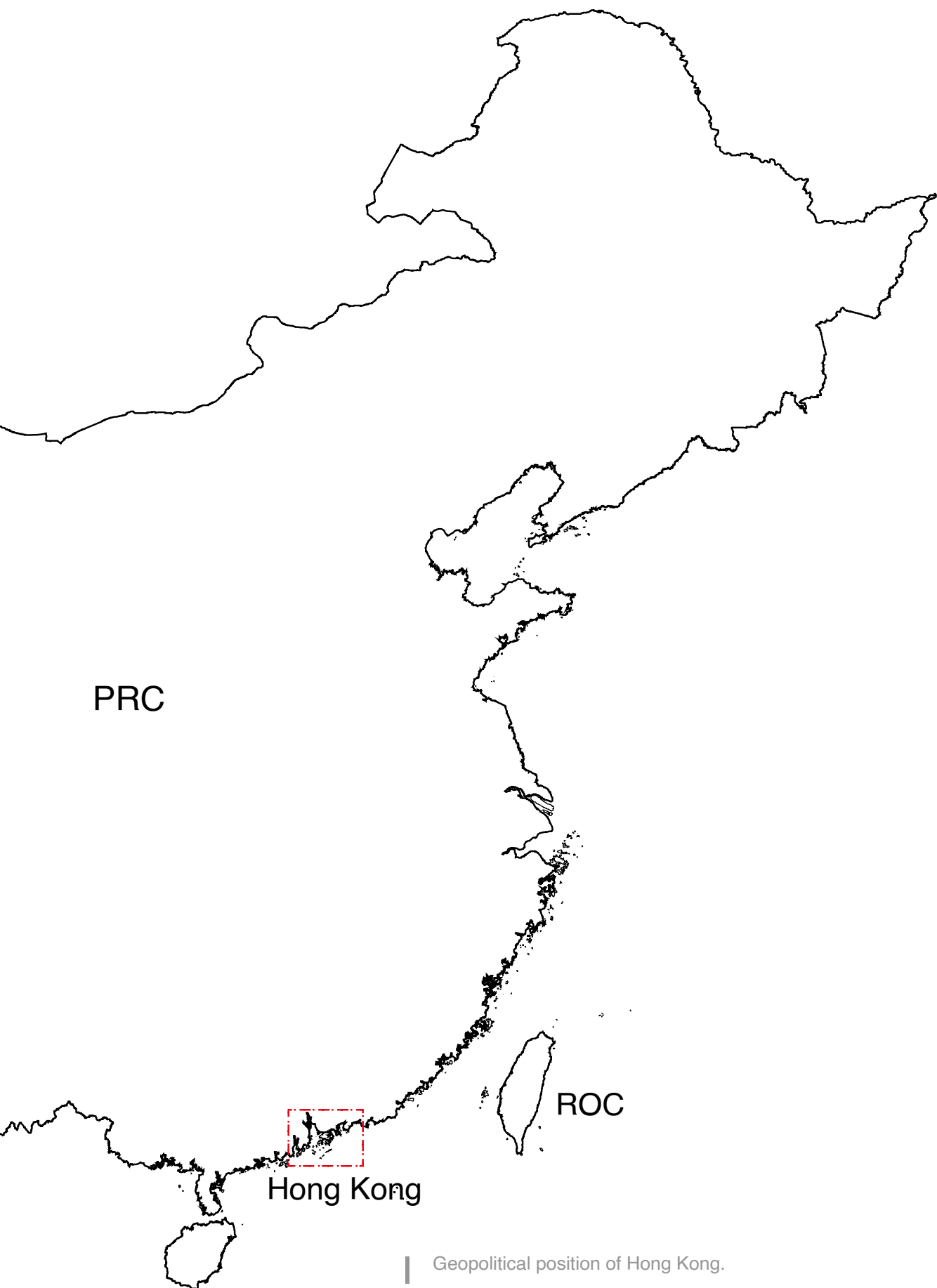
H Harold Ingrams:
Main Street, Chung Ying Street, Sha Tau Kok
 (1952).

'MAPPING'

A Contextual Analysis of Sha Tau Kok Village



The border between Hong Kong and China is ground for interesting positions, yet is considered controversial. In order to translate the narrative of the Indigenous alongside the history of the context, an attempt to visualize the dichotomised state is done through the exercise of framing the site that relates more to the author's personal background.



Hong Kong, even though being highly accessible, has a complex and controversial relation with national and international relations. This is due to being a SAR of the PRC. Together with Macau, these are the only two special administrative regions and form the 'one country, two systems'.

Acronyms

STK	<i>Sha Tau Kok</i>
PRC	<i>People's Republic of China</i>
ROC	<i>Republic of China (Taiwan)</i>
FCA	<i>Frontier Closed Area</i>
SAR	<i>Special Administrative Region</i>

Through the FCA as the northern border, there are areas in Hong Kong that are not freely accessible. Villages that are located within the FCA, are only accessible through an entry or resident's permit. The FCA is an extreme border condition mainly consisting of wild growth and barricades and is comparable to the Demilitarized Zone between North-Korean and South Korea, albeit less armed in recent years.

The only remaining village located in the FCA is Sha Tau Kok. Mainly acting as a logistics checkpoint nowadays, its identity as a dichotomised village is still wide known. Roots from the author stem from this very village. Stories and frequent visits has intrigued the author so much, that this graduation project is dedicated to it.



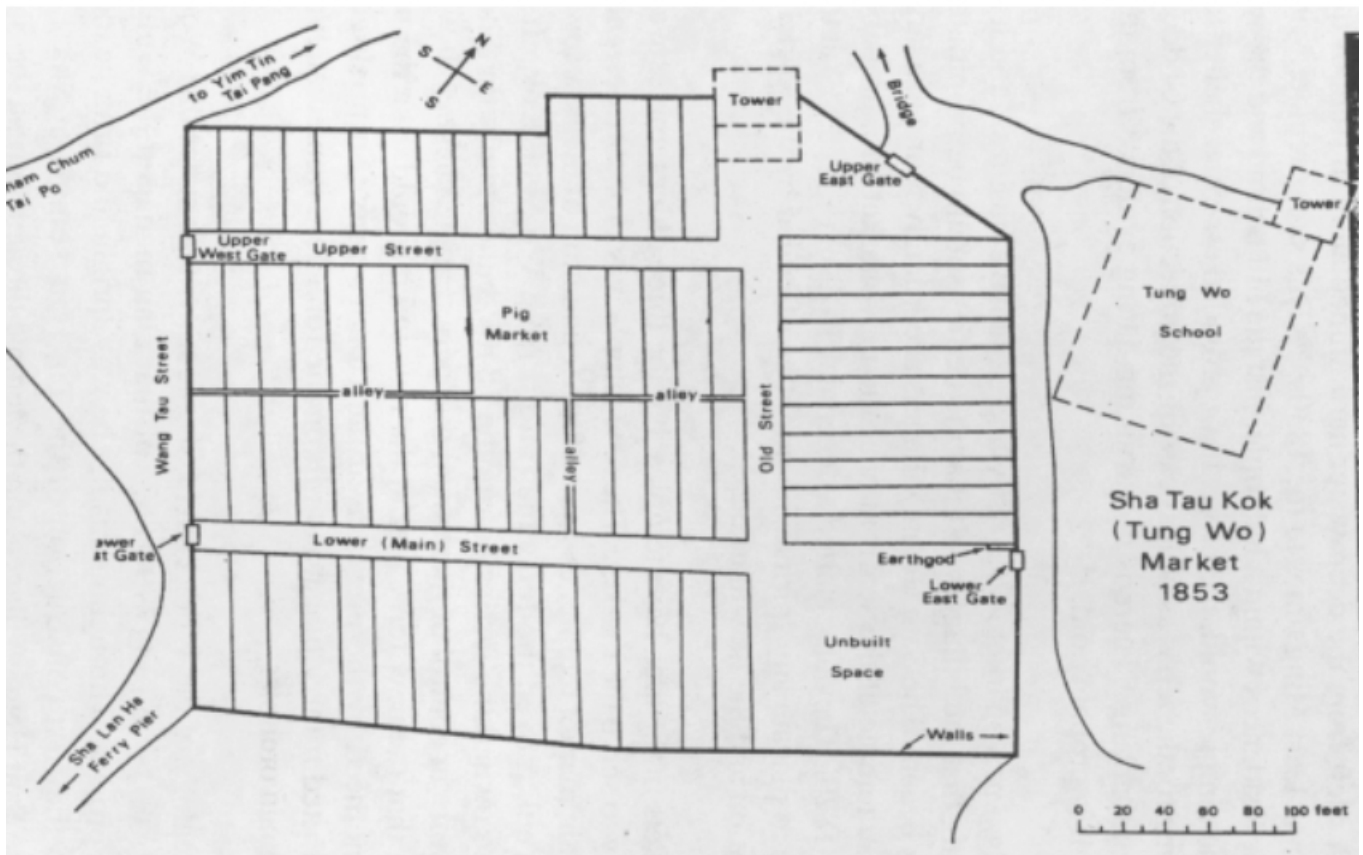
J The SAR boundary of Hong Kong and Macau.

Sha Tau Kok is located in the most north-eastern edge of Hong Kong and, like many cities, started as a village near the Sha Tau Kok river. Through the years the original mouth of the river has dried up and the village has expanded far beyond it.

Founded by the Hakka, Sha Tau Kok quickly gained prosperity through the 東和 Tung Wo Market (Cantonese; literally translating to the Eastern Peace Market).⁸ The commerce hub could only establishment through agreements of forming an alliance with surrounding clans, with Sha Tau Kok becoming the center of it.

Thus, the village became a socio-economic network for the alliance. Eventually, the economical prosperity came to an end, however, the relations of clans still remain.

8



K Patrick Hase (1993):
東和市場 *Eastern Peace Market of 1853*.

The notion of market has and, even to this date, is still an important aspect of the village.

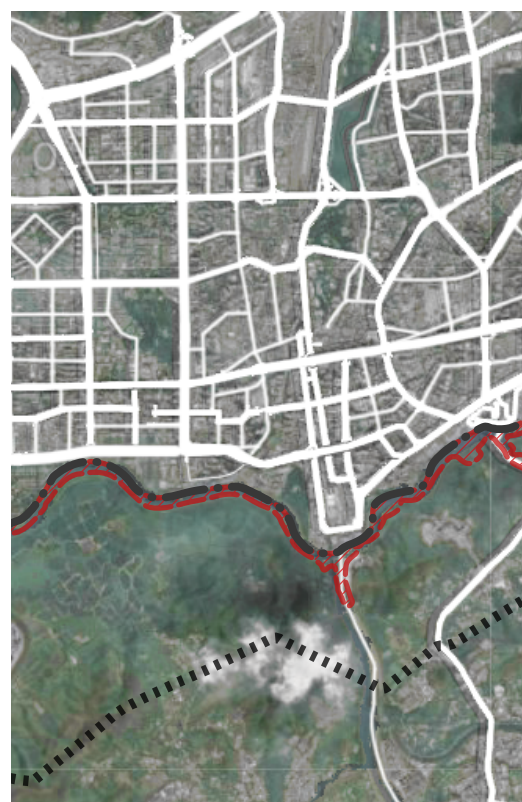


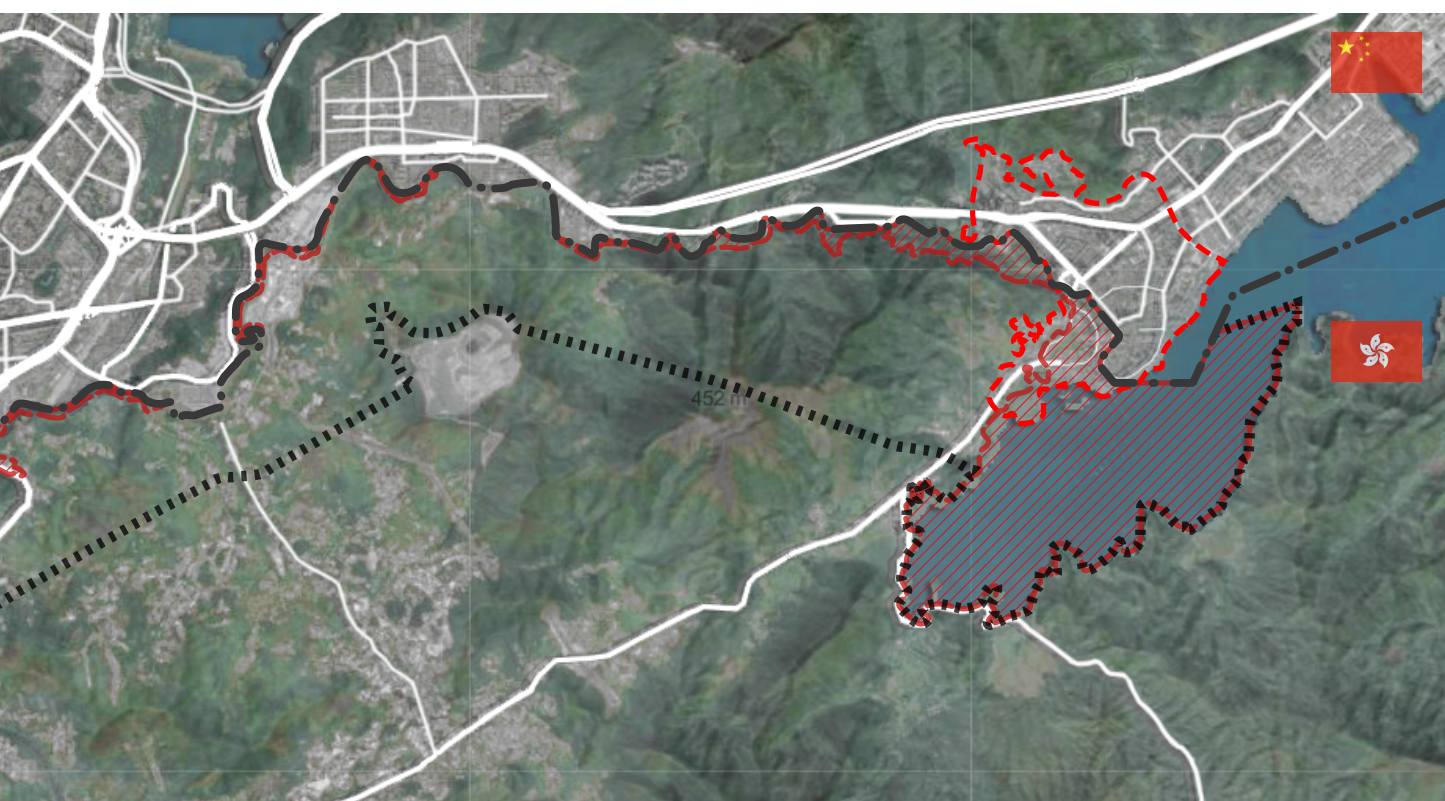
Hong Kong/Shau Tau Kok
Site location.

The Frontier Closed Area was established in 1951 as a restricted area that acts as a buffer zone, once used to keep out illegal immigrants. Through the years it has been expanded and reinforced until the the change of authority in 1997. Since then, the FCA has been revisited and reduced a couple of times, the last one being in 2015.

Legend

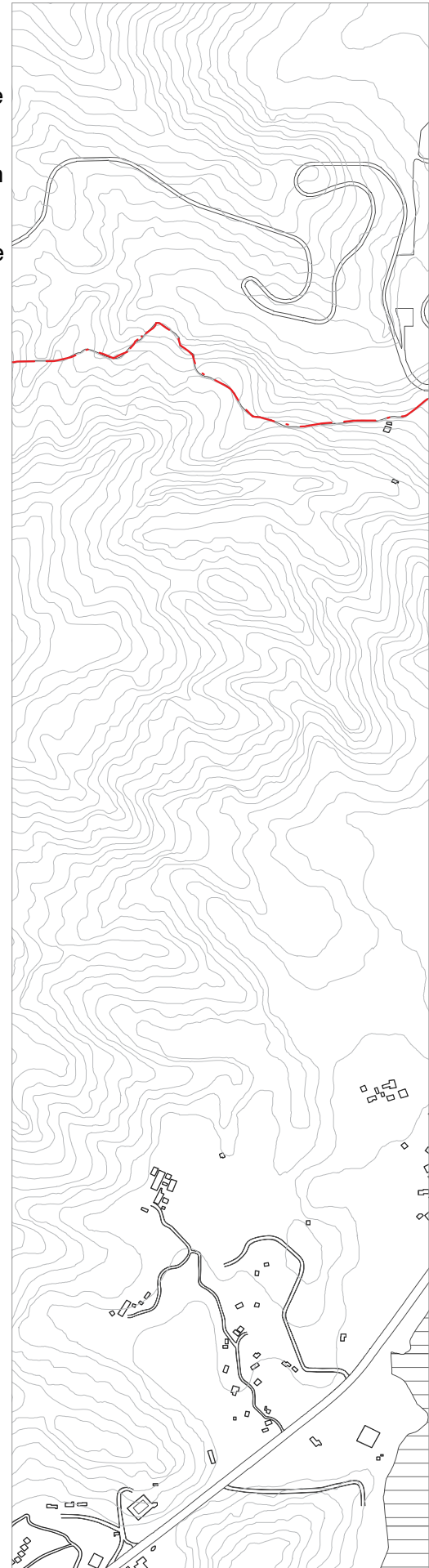
- • — SAR Boundary
- - - - - Sha Tau Kok Village
- Previous Frontier Closed Area
- ▨ Current Frontier Closed Area



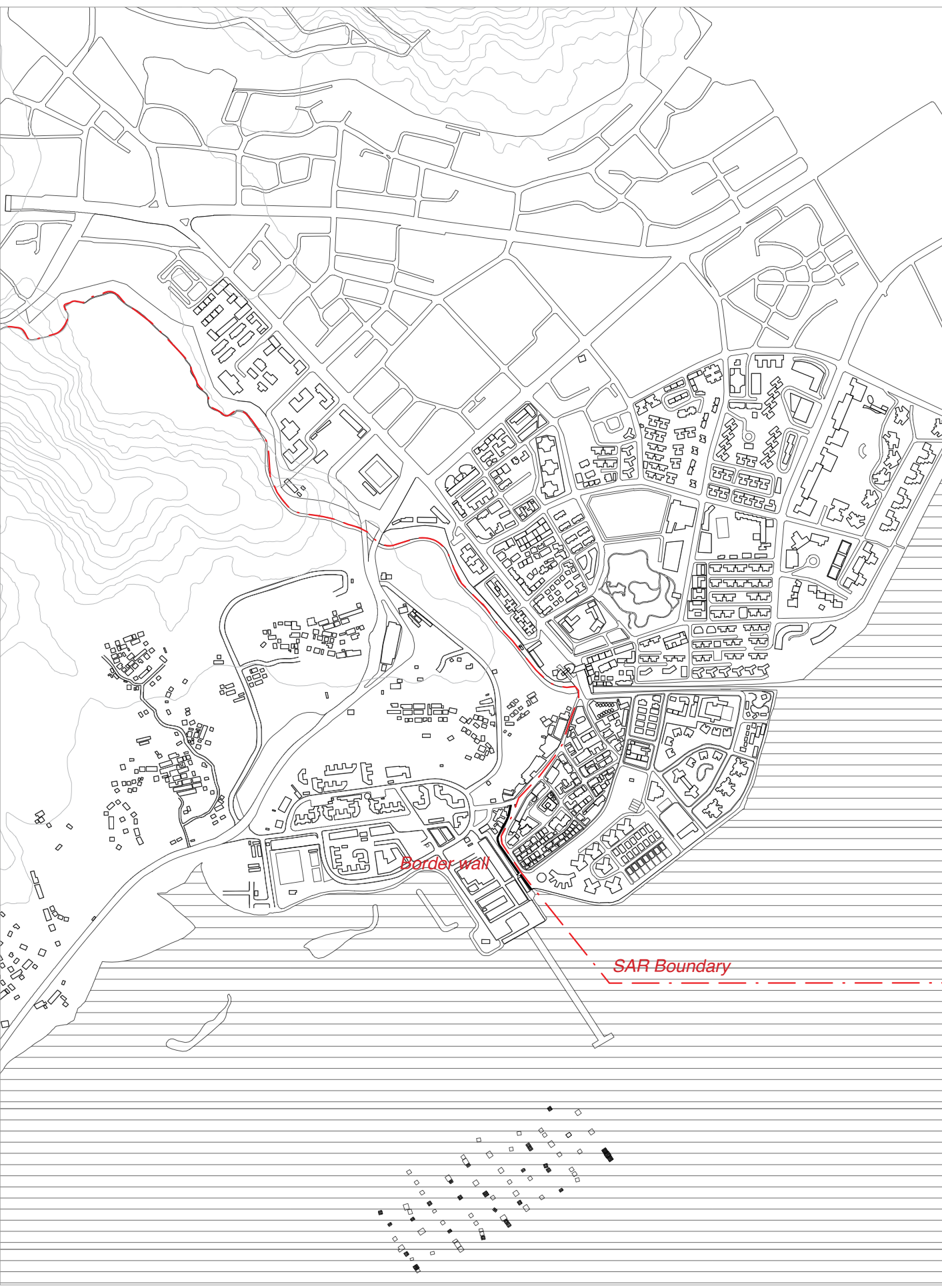


M The Frontier Closed Area and its area reduction since 2015.

Where once was the mouth of the river, now a wall is erected to create the physical dichotomy. It was this place where the establishment of the village was. Nowadays, the village is in decline both culturally and economically. However, in earlier times, through commerce and alliances like the Tung Wo Market, the village began to prosper and through British Hong Kong, the village once more became the center of attention. Thus, this area has significant value both historically and present.



N Sha Tau Kok Site.
1:30000



Much of the wealth was poured into large reclamation projects, as it was aimed at increasing the arable land available in the area. Traces of the Hakka still remain, albeit somewhat hidden most of the times.

As the indigenous are known for being farmers and fishers, these traces would still remain, mainly on the Hong Kong side of the river, as this in a sense, is true to its rural expression. The farmlands still remain mostly in use and the fishing, once prevalent, is still present.

Legend

Historical:



Indigenous Structures

Sha Tau Kok River

Land Reclamation

Relational Networks:



Economical Relations



Worship Relations of Tin Hau

Present:



Indigenous Structures

Public Square

Irrigated Land

Relational Networks:



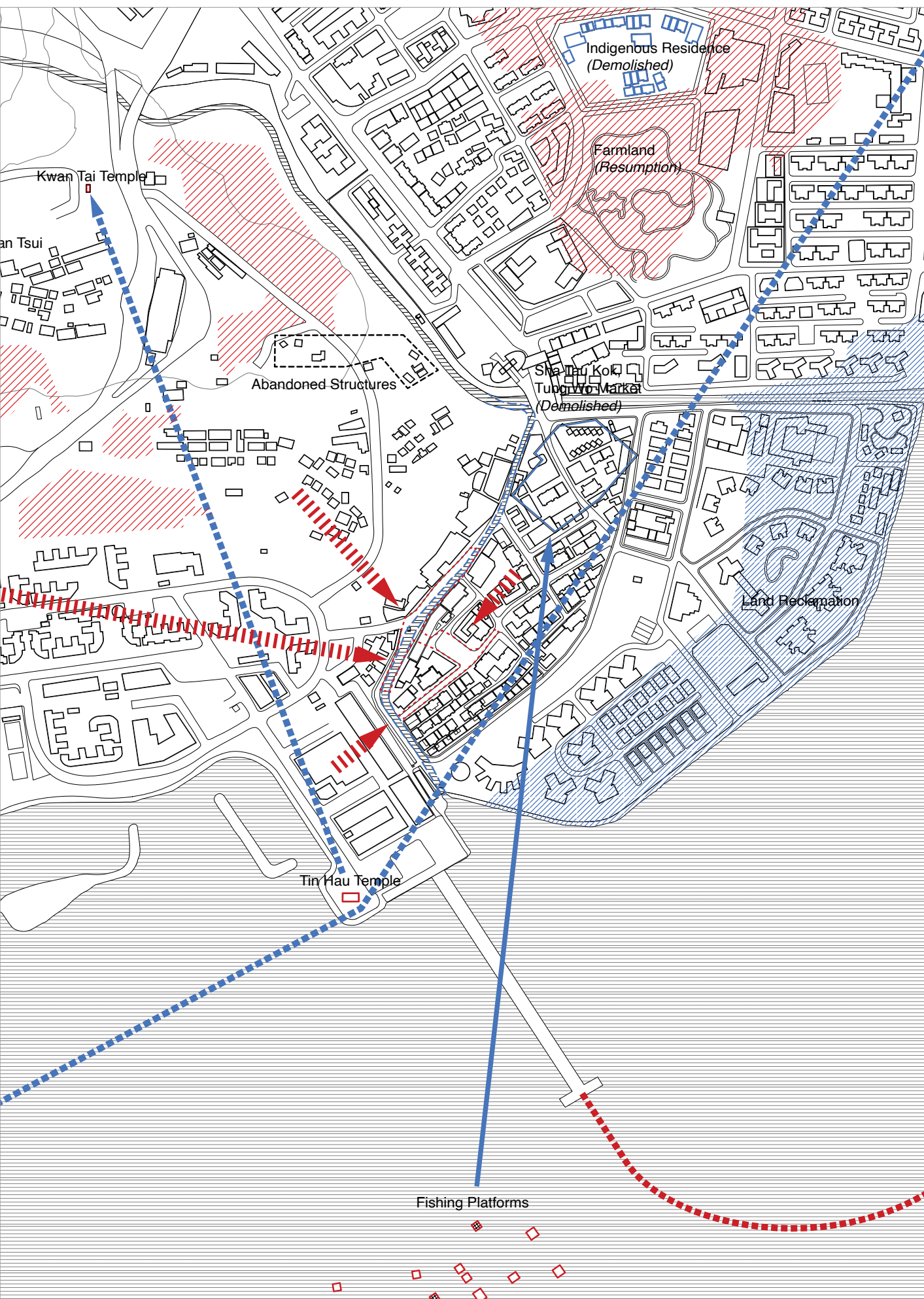
Social Network



Economical Network (Shap Yeuk)

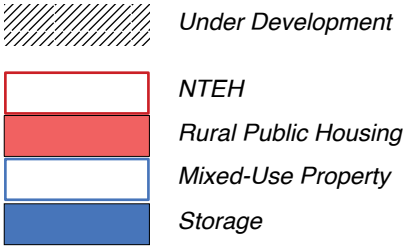


N Sha Tau Kok; Indigenous Footprint
1:10000



Looking at current situation, Sha Tau kok is, in a sense, true to its rural expression with low rise, open spaces, low density formations. The main typology exists of New Territory Exempted Houses, a typology with strict regulations regarding building height, floor area and residents. These types of housing are present all around villages in the New Territories.

Legend



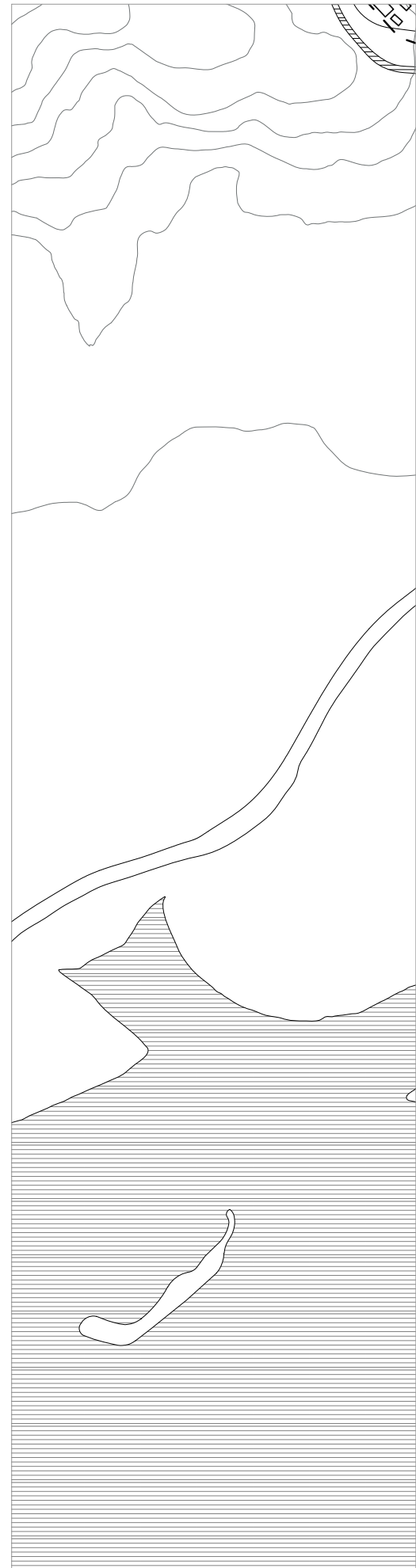
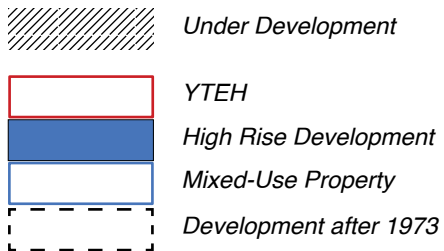
N Sha Tau Kok; Developments Hong Kong
1:10000



The development in Sha Tou Jiao started to arise as a direct result of the growth of Shen Zhen, as a district connected through a port as part of the Special Economy Zone. Previous indigenous settlements have long been consumed by the larger developments.

However, similar building typologies as the New Territory Exempt Houses still exist. Mainly in the neighbourhood directly beside the borderwall. The district is 盐田 Yan Tian, therefore these typologies are hereby referred to as Yan Tian Exempt Houses. In itself, neither part of the border are especially singular.

Legend



N Sha Tau Jiao; Developments China
1:10000



However, the singularity comes from juxtaposing these borderlands. A village consisting of two political systems, a two inhabitant morphology. The authorities have earlier come to agreements of ownership complexities, as exemplified by the relocation of several rural residences to Rural Public Housing. The relocation leaves the possibilities of maintaining the socio-economic network intact, giving a glimpse of the consensus both authorities might agree to.

Legend

	<i>Control Points</i>
	<i>Rural Public Housing</i>
	<i>Residential Relocation</i>
	<i>Demarcation Line</i>
<i>Relational Networks:</i>	
	<i>Boundary Crossing Points</i>
	<i>Economical Relation</i>
	<i>Social Network</i>
	<i>Urbanisation</i>



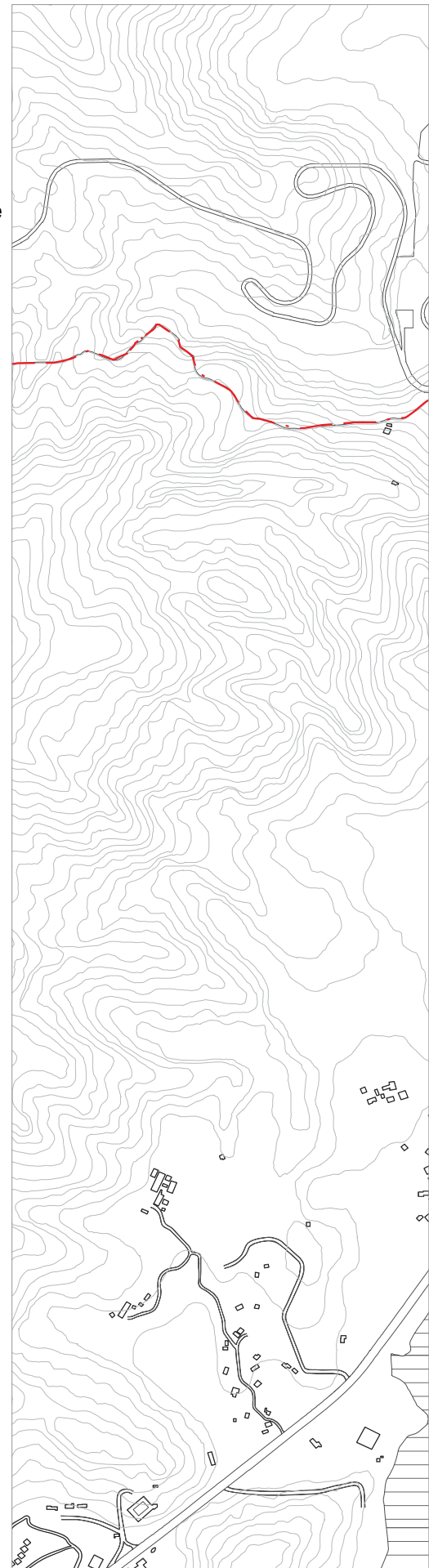
N Sha Tau Kok; Juxtaposition
1:10000



Instead of seeing the site as a place of controversies and the necessity of an 'ideal' masterplan, the research proposes to 'mark-up' certain areas to make these public spaces enhancing the socio-economic, the factor that made the village prosper. This is done with the Indigenous community as the main beneficiary.

These *mark-up* areas are locations that prove to be valuable in the past, present and perhaps future. They are locations that are to be designed, because their function in its current form might not be able to withstand the inevitable disappearance of the border.

These *mark-ups* are not exclusively 3 locations. It is merely that the chosen locations at this instance are proving to be most singular, valuable, bearing potential or *just* interesting. In that sentiment, in time, possible new *mark-ups* will appear, formed and transformed as the urban fabric develops with it, according to the needs of the people. As previously mentioned, the *mark-ups* are intended to be enhancements in public spaces to become catalysts for future developments. Therefore, each of these *mark-ups* are considered to be part of a larger, collective, spatial network, but at the same time should be looked at separately to be designed, because each location poses a different narrative.



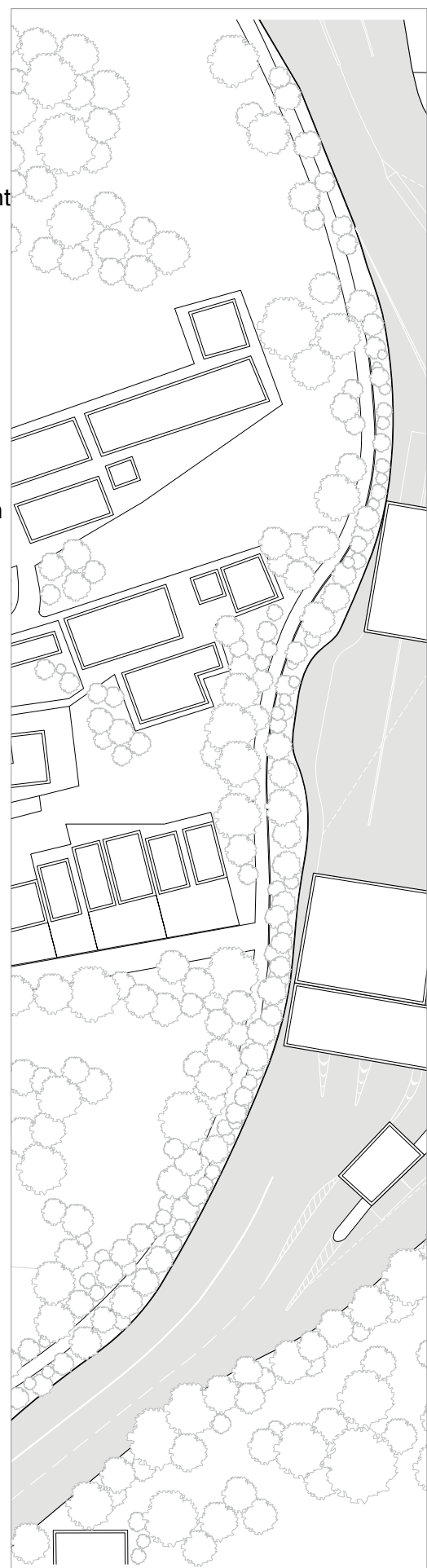
N Value of Locations
1:30000



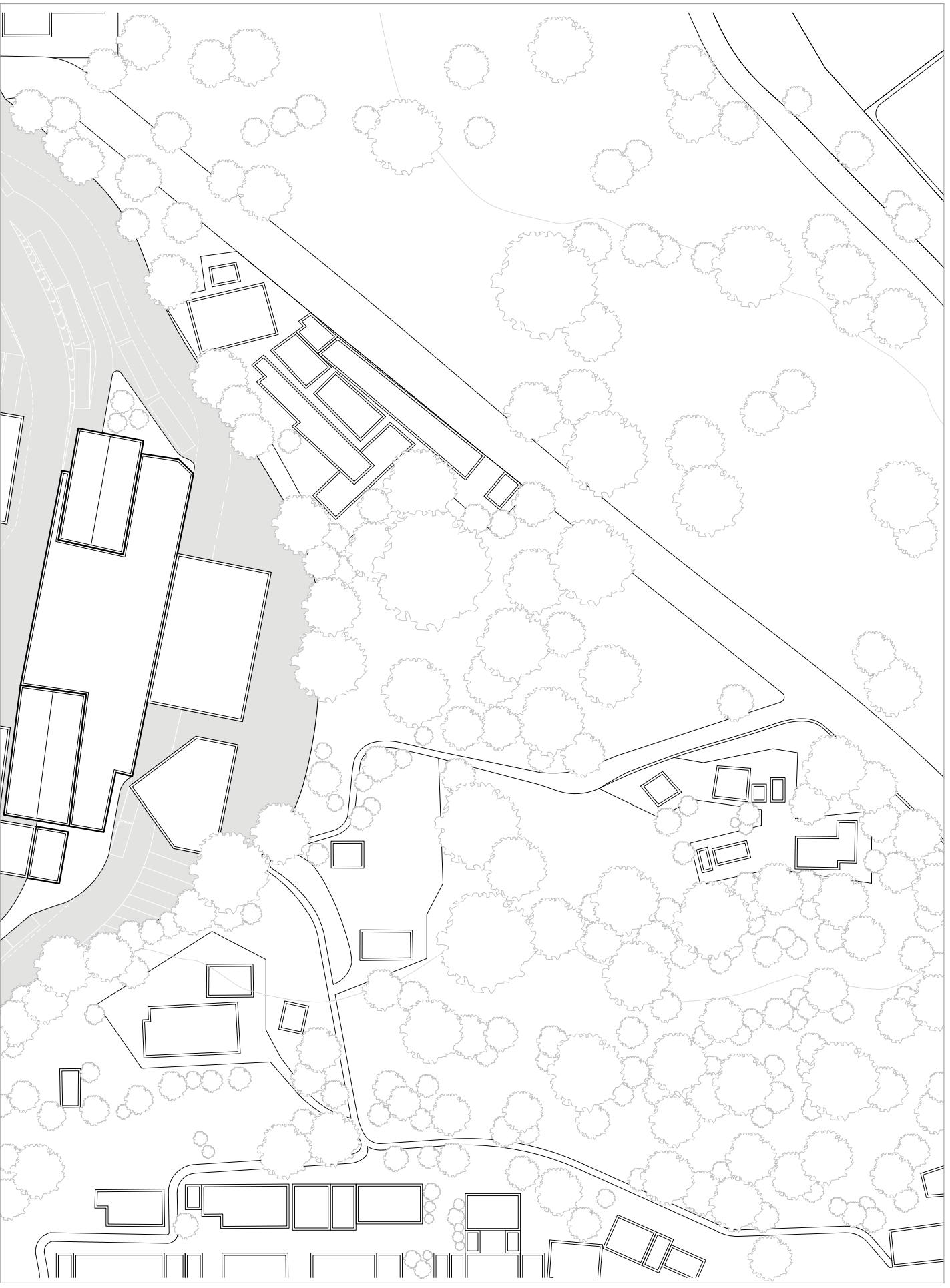
The first *mark-up* is the Border Control Point. It is mainly meant for transportation of goods and the passage way for visitors to mainland China, without crossing the inner village. This area, together with its function, is perhaps the corporeal form of the dichotomy. The moment the border disappears, this area in its current form, is highly likely to disappear with it.

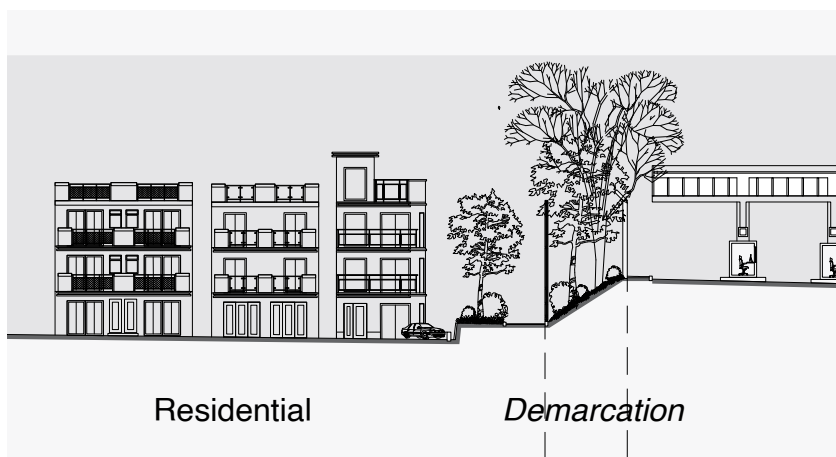
The infrastructure is a highly restricted and monitored area, however, in the more recent years, unplanned development have been slowly rising all around this restricted area. This causes the infrastructure itself to become another means of division of the developments.

It is exactly this reason this area is interesting and might pose potential for future developments in context of history, function and value to build upon this narrative, not to forget or provoke, but to co-exist.

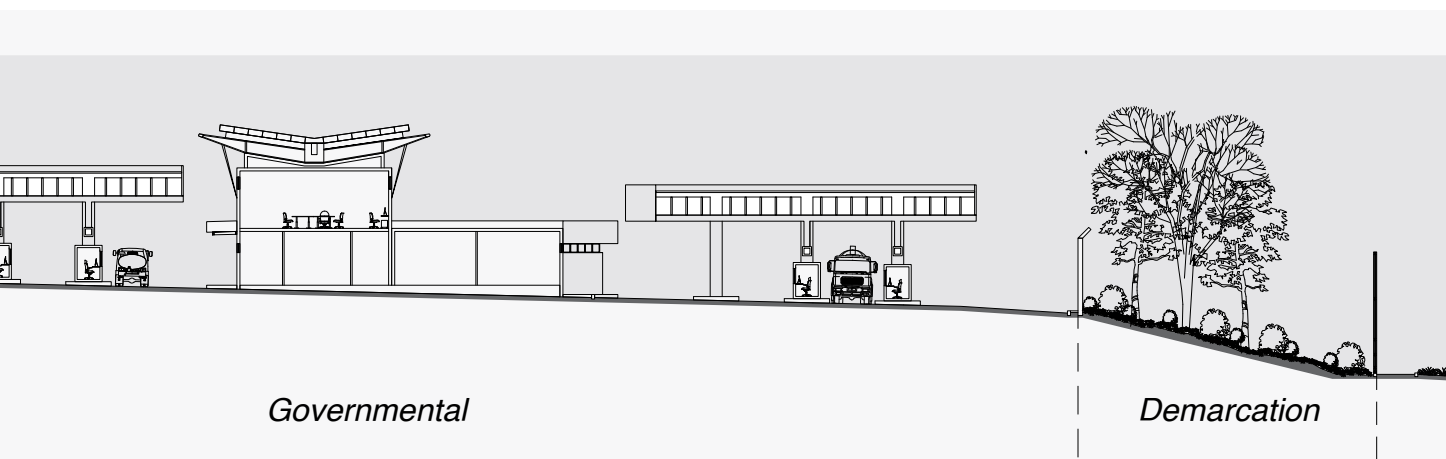


○ Sha Tau Kok; Border Control Point
1:1000





P Border Control Point; Section
1:250



Q Border Control Point; Demarcation
1:100





The lease of Hong Kong to the British Empire led to an impactful division of the prosperous village. This in turn, caused the market to decline and ultimately fall. As most borders, it was dictated by the geography of the landscape. The River, however, dried up and later became known as Chung Ying Street (literally, China-England street), a very important demarcation line.⁹

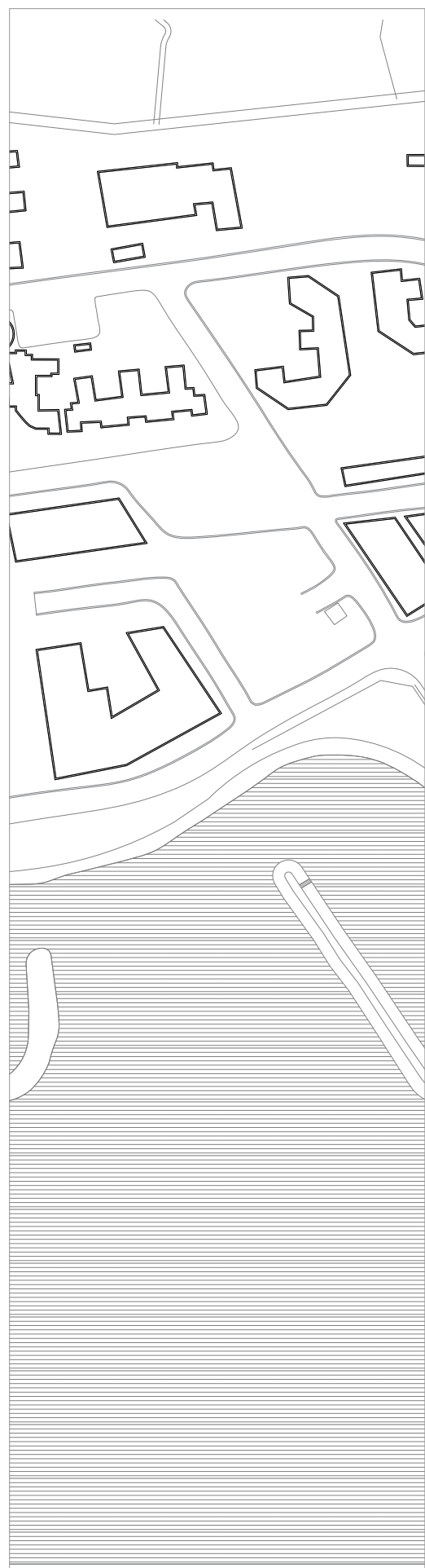
During the early years of Communist China, daily, a large influx of people came into the village, wondering how Hong Kong would look like. Little did they know it was too far from the core, however, the street still peaked interest and became a social hub, a place of exchange promoting or inhibiting cross-boundary ties. The village as the British garrison, once again prospered through consumerism at the border.

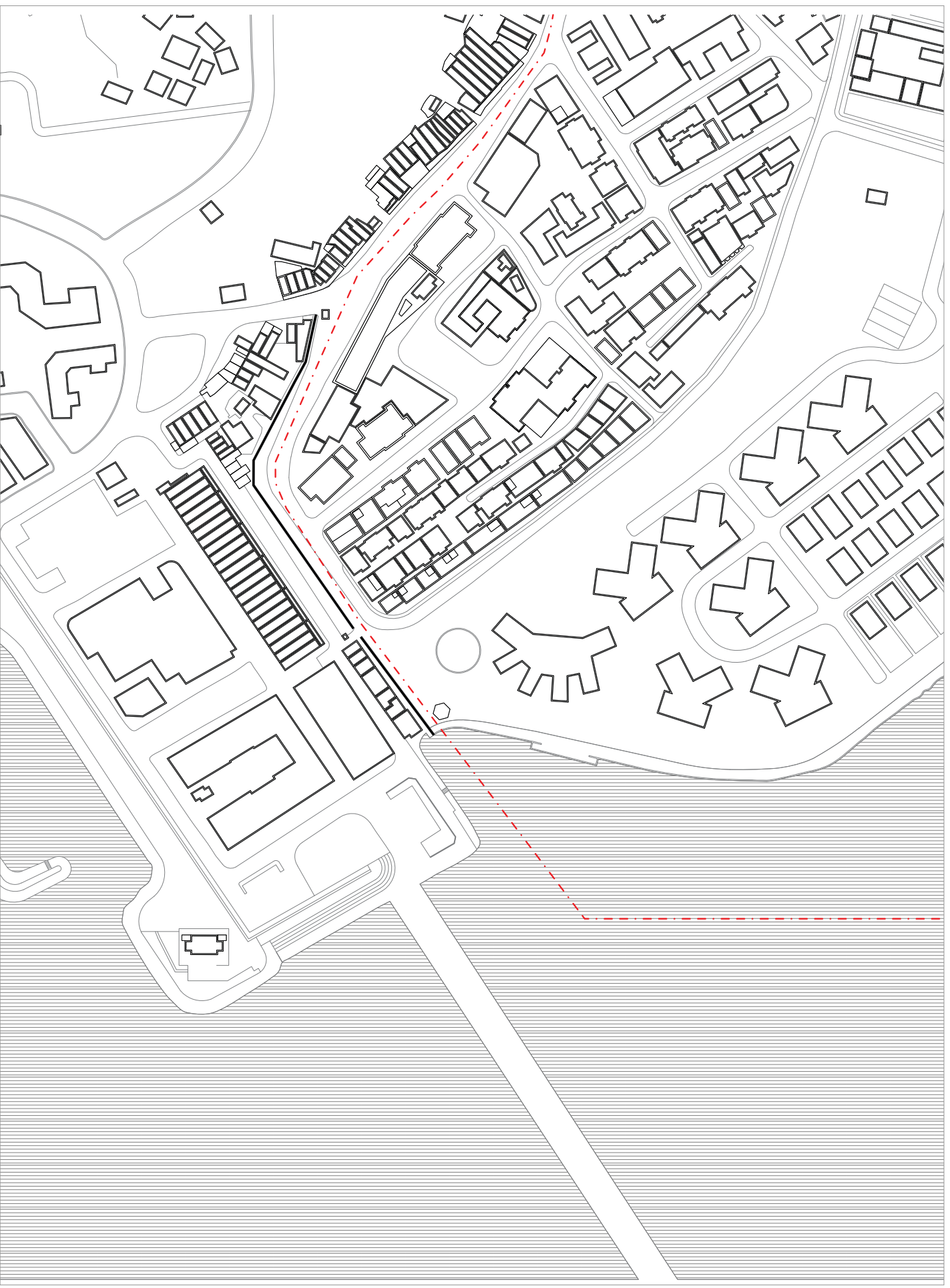
The change of authority in 1997 caused ease of travel restrictions, the village lost its image as a peephole and the mainland's only touch to Western products. The village started its decline and became the least crossed control point as of today.

Sun Xiao, founder and former curator of
Chung Ying Street History Museum:
*'Chung Ying Street bears witness to a
very dark chapter of the Chinese history.'*

9

R The Border on Chung Ying Street
1:2000







S *Top*
Carmen Chen:
Chung Ying Street in 1983.

Bottom
Streetview:
Chung Ying Street in its current state.



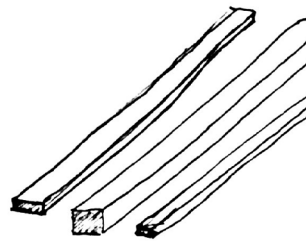
T Ernest Kao:
The Porous border,
 Demarcation and co-existence.

The fishing platforms are floating objects currently in use. The earliest form of these platforms were results of beach foraging, collecting anything of use to be self sufficient. Even though they can be considered mere objects, they are an important part of the cultural heritage. Especially when the border disappears.

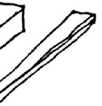
The locals have small boats on the docking areas, and use these to commute inbetween the platforms and land. The platforms, now, provide a small amount of fresh fish to local markets.

However, after the opening of the border, with the acceleration and automatization, these platforms perhaps would become more and more obsolete. Partially remaining and revisiting its repurposing, would then allow it to be part of the urban fabric and become valuable again.

Fishing Platform inventory

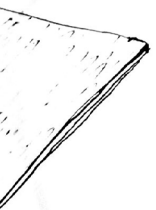


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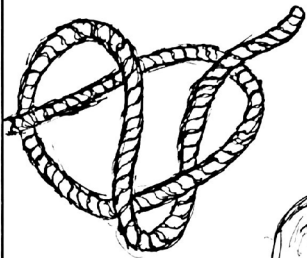


wood of varying sizes

plastic barrels



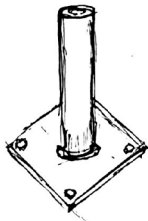
(stainless) steel plates

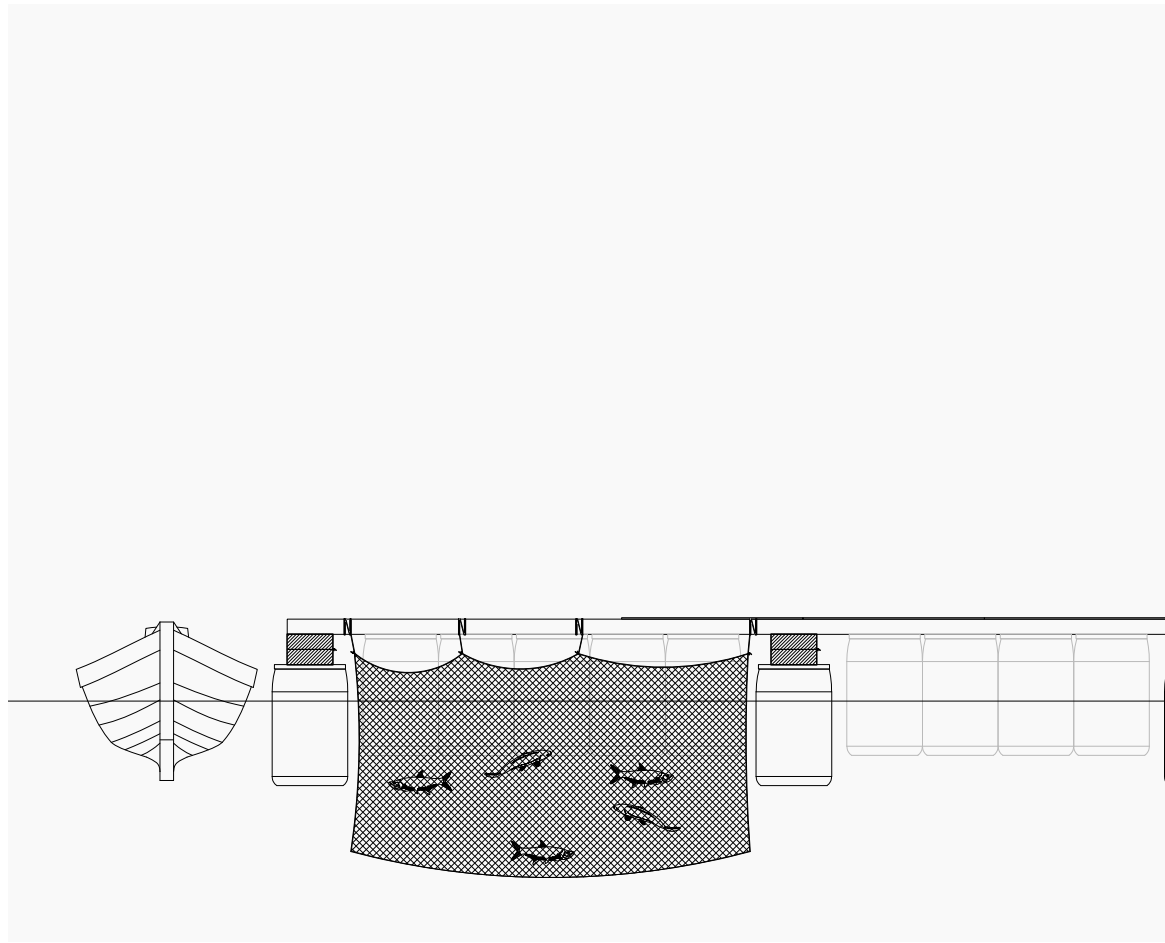


Ropes & fishing nets

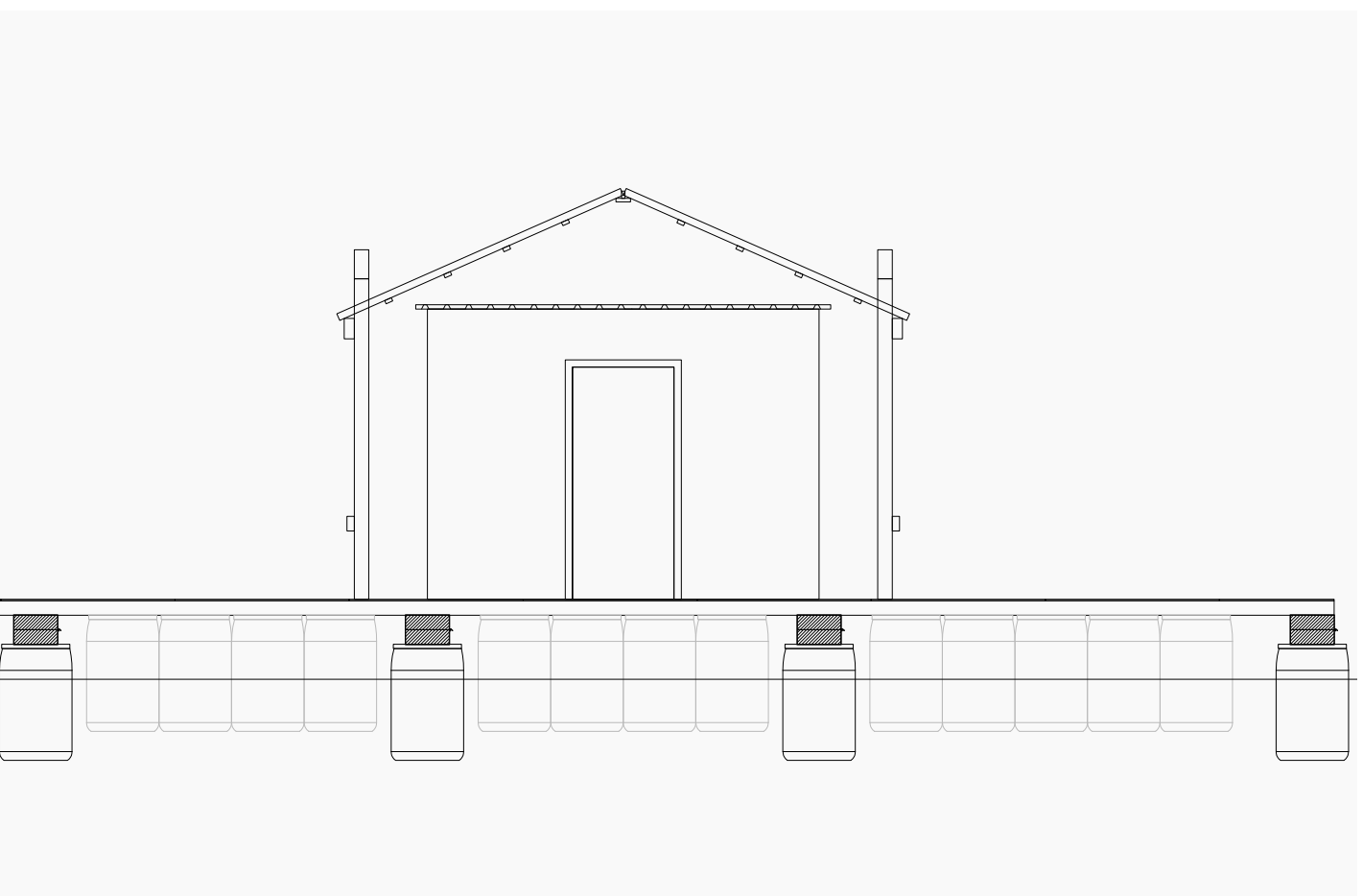


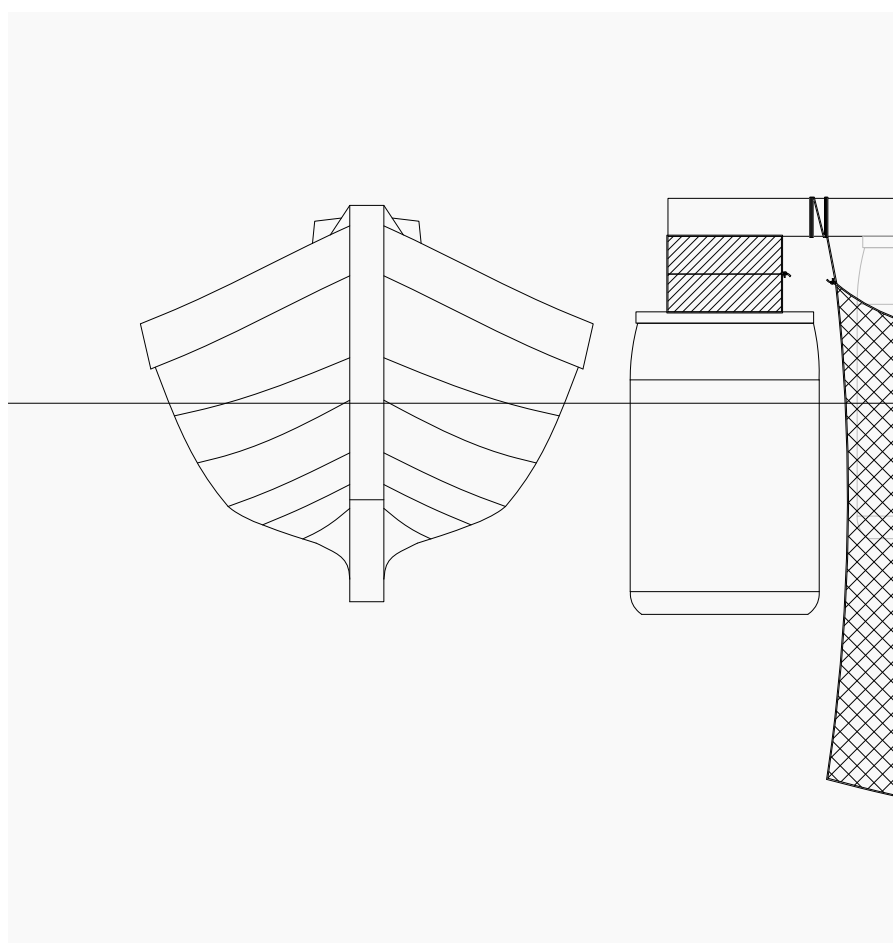
Steel anchor points



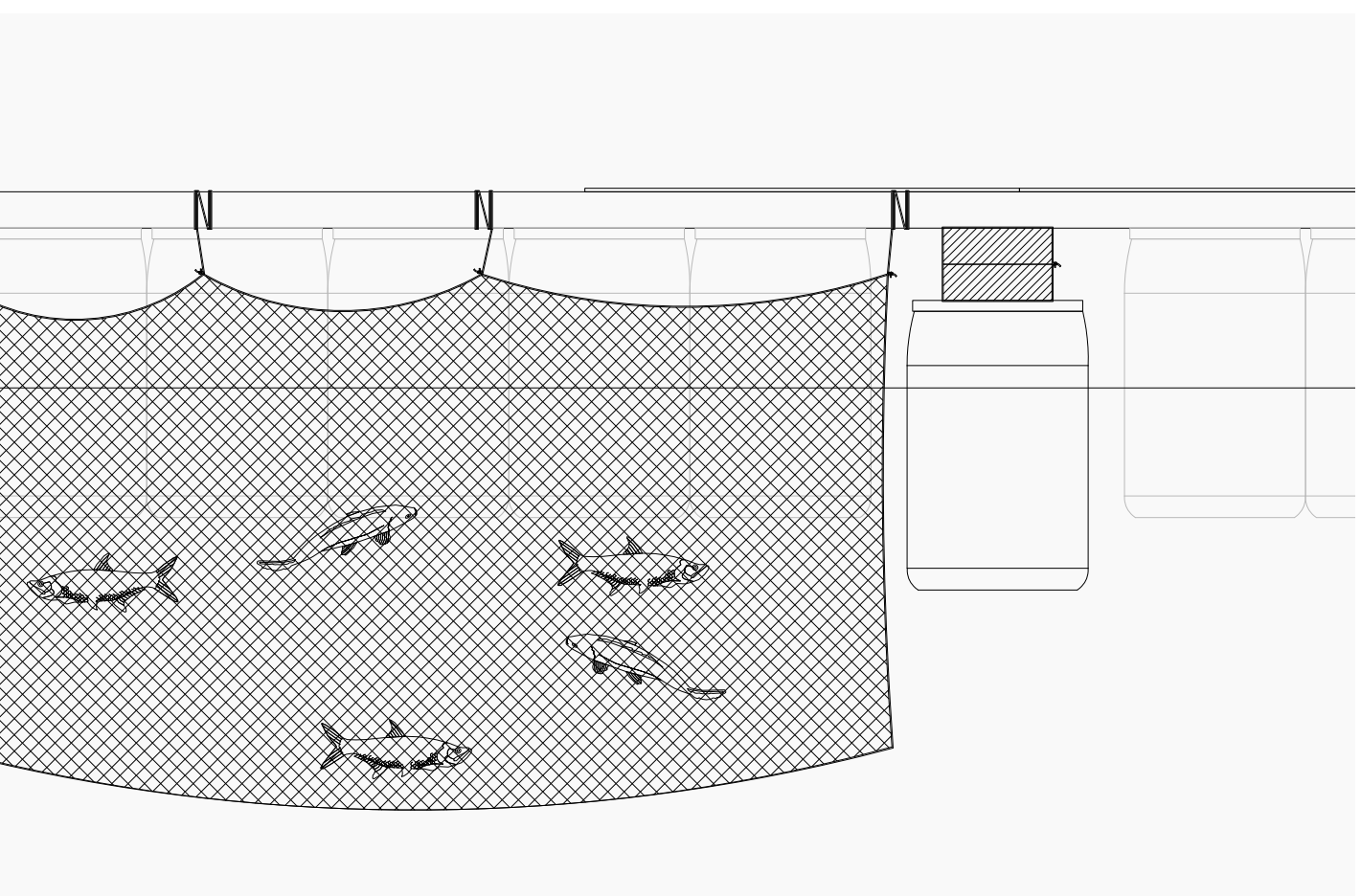


V Fisher's Platform; Section:
1:50





V Fisher's Platform; Section:
1:20





W Fisher's Platform:
Streetview



EXPERIMENTATION

Design

Leading to the experimentation and design, a scenario is set. It is an extrapolation of the past experiences, theories and expectations.

For the rural villages within the urban periphery, there are 3 possibilities of urban expansion;

First, the original residents were either financially stimulated to develop their lands into urban villages or displaced into newly, (formally) planned residences nearby.

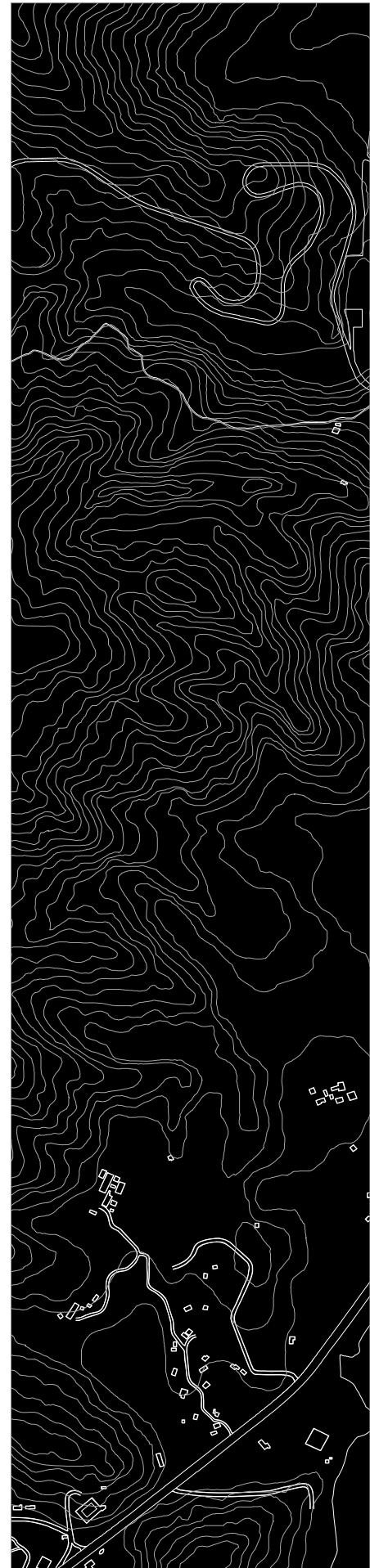
In Sha Tau Kok, the local residents seize the opportunity for developments, as they see the benefits for once the land is to be revisited.

Then, the land owners are directly approached by contractors or investors, who see benefits in developing these lands into semi-planned neighbourhoods. For the current situation in Sha Tau Kok, this is not yet ongoing, as the village is still within the FCA and therefore does not allow non-residents to live here.

Lastly, Sha Tau Kok is not in the center or scope of this economical metropolis, but it follows similar patterns in development. The Chinese side of the border can hardly be called a village anymore. It is a commercial hub with all the necessary facilities for a city to function.

Due to the financial benefits of optimizing GFA, it became a common, uncharacteristic set of developments. So for both private owners as well as governmental planned development, it is more likely to follow the trend of this 'generic' development. Then, due to the lack of land for urban expansion, these built-up areas are revisited, because of the gradual change in density the city.

X Scenario:
Preliminary Site Plan.
1:30000







1.



2.

Y Scenario:
*Phases of Urban Expansion in The New Territories,
HK*

Diagrammatic depiction.



3.



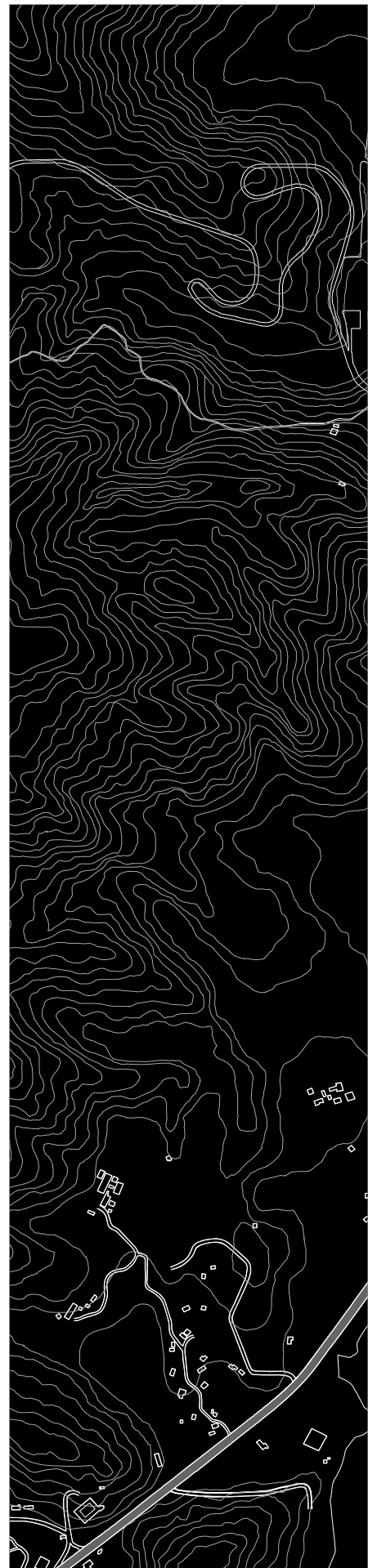
4.

Ultimately, the scenario mostly affects the rural side of Sha Tau Kok, as the Chinese side mostly consists of newly, planned developments. The plots of the scenario are based on existing infrastructure, such as the main roads, landscape of the mountainous area and river and patterns of the existing infrastructure of Sha Tou Jiao (CH). It preserves the spaces of the *marked-up* areas as a valuable asset, that endures the developments of the disappearance of the border due to their value in past, present and future.

This sets the stage to reconnect the village spatially in social and economic terms. Even though the context has partially gone through the Chinese development patterns, there is still a communal context present. With eye on the continuity of history and ultimately the Indigenous as the beneficiary, the design aims to transcend the demarcation of the border.

The design focusses on the public space as a catalyst for both future developments and socio-economic interactions, as it did in the flourishing of the village and the inherent importance for the Indigenous. It is to create a platform for exchange.

Z Scenario:
Infrastructure Superimposed.
1:30000





The proposition to urge the enhancing of the public space and allow them to create a network, in all forms, is in direct relation to the *search for* or *maintainance* of the identity of the village. It creates the physcality of the city for each individual and introduces the quality of the spatial network.

In its current state of being *fragmentized* and *dichotomised*, *socio-spatial* qualities are a necessity for the *perseverence* of the socio-economic dynamic of the village. This is in relation to the village being developed into its own identifyable edges. In the dialogue of fragmentisation of public spaces, they tend to be unfavorable, albeit in a vacuum. Therefore, we are in search to *defragmentize* the public space and by doing so, the city. At the same time, as a contradiction on defragmentization, creating *individual* or *personal* space in the *isolated* public space, becomes a necessity to *encourage* an individual to use or stay in the space.

This allows for an open-ended exploration of spatial objects on all scales. The *impact* of intervention should then lead to defragmentize public space in order to allow the possibility to create a collective spatial network. By allowing such a network, the interventions are to guide logistics, people, visual through the urban fabric. The interventions are to *provide* the possibility, *enabling* and *instigating* action, together with the careful consideration of the *narrative, story, history, culture* and *life* of the Indigenous as the beneficiary within the context of the urban fabric.

Ultimately, the intervention together with its direct context, as *mark-ups*, are to become *catalysts* for future developments being in close relation to the intention of the identity of the city.

The Perseverance of the Dynamic *Reflective Note*

Within the paper, the theoretical aspect is based on an exploration of architectural, socio-cultural and philosophical frameworks, while *superimposing* these with the narrative of the Indigenous and China in attempt to construct an interconnected *context* of value and possibility of a different approach. This, in time, lead to the understanding of the contingencies surrounding the topic and the impact of a statement. Through this perspective, in this exploration, architectural interventions start to become catalysts for future developments within the urban fabric of networks.

Through the constant dynamic of readings on one hand and implementation on the other, both the research and design are slowly *enhancing* one another. An example is the notion of fragmentation and defragmentation of the city through architecture. This has become an important aspect within the design proposal and relates back to the theoretical aspect of the graduation.

Frankly, at the same time, the goal of the paper is not to create a 'formula', 'tool-box' or other, inherently, prescriptive means for both architectural and urban design. The paper and its design complement each other and are specifically looking to understand and transcend geopolitical aspects.

Instead, the fascination started as a way to uncover the unknown and the ambiguous, yet extraordinary narrative of the Indigenous and their 'hidden' village. By going back to the roots. By being open to any form of dialogue. By looking beyond what is given. This exploration in itself becomes a catalysts in discovering personal positions within the discipline of architecture. In this era of increasing polarisation in our society, we, perhaps, have to rethink the role of architecture. To not merely look for solutions, but set the objective beyond what we see and allow for dialogues to emerge.

APPENDIX

Interview

This interview is conducted with the uncle of the author, a local of Sha Tau Kok and involved with the Hakka community in the village. The questions are related to the future aspect of the village and community and the potential disappearance of the border.

Could you please introduce yourself?

My name is 鍾洪浩, Hong Hao Chung. You could say I am a real local. My father was born here and stayed here his whole life. I also have been living here since birth, but I work in Fanling (New Territories, Hong Kong).

I have seen photos and videos of a festival which was held recently in Sha Tau Kok. Could you explain what the purpose is?

The festival is to showcase certain traditions of the Hakka and to shed some light unto our community. The Hakka were looked down upon in the early days, because we were very poor. It was a hard time to be a Hakka, because we never belonged anywhere. However, nowadays people are proud when they say they are Hakka. We also see this in the amount of volunteers willing to help with the festival and other activities to portray the Hakka. It is held in Sha Tau Kok, because it was the central trading hub of the Ten Alliances. Therefore, it is called ‘十約’有‘你’, literally translating to ‘Ten Alliances have you’ and is all about inclusiveness.

Why is it so important for the Hakka and the village?

We (The community) have been fairly passive until recently. Sha Tau Kok has always been quite closed off and no one really took the effort to organize such events, because of the time and money it would cost. It most likely has to do with the developments in the last decades that the effort has increased so much. This is also one of the main reasons we thought it was important to organize an event now, because we needed to create awareness.

Could you elaborate on this matter?

Before this (the change of the borderlands), there was little to no attention for both the village and the community. However, since the opening up of the village, there have been many visitors that are interested in the history and story of the village and people. I guess Sha Tau Kok always had this mystery around it, because the majority of the people could not visit it at all and only heard stories from other people. So this change or displacement of the border brought attention to us, but it also gave us the urgency to showcase ourselves as well.

Are you referring to the potential threat to the village when Hong Kong and China becomes a unity instead of this one country - two systems?

Yes, this has been a topic for a while in our committee. Of course, when the government decides anything, it will be almost impossible for us to do anything about that. This is the urgency of putting ourselves on the map I was referring to earlier, because a lot of areas have already been renewed. In the end, the festival was for our community to get involved with their roots and have something memorable. At the same time, it showed that this is our home and that we belong here. By having people outside of the community become interested, we hope to make our mark.

