The background of the title area is a faint, light-colored architectural drawing or site plan, showing various lines, curves, and structures, possibly representing a park or public space layout.

Deep Water

Public Spaces in Sham Shui Po,
Hong Kong

Edited by Jürgen Krusche & Siu King Chung

mccmcreations



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Extinct Forms of Spatial-economic Practices — Craft Trades in Sham Shui Po



Siu King Chung

Trades have flourished in Sham Shui Po ever since the 1950s; people were able to develop their crafts and trades during this early redevelopment period in Hong Kong after WWII. Workers in the district evidently demonstrated unique ways of fulfilling their livelihood practices, largely because Sham Shui Po was characterised by mixed transportation, residential, commercial and industrial uses. Although the district remains a trading hub for vendors exporting second-hand electronics, mobile phone accessories and household appliances, as well as for buyers from Africa and South Asia who shop for apparel, for example, at the Cheung Sha Wan Road fashion wholesale stores, the ecology of daily life and the nature of the urban communities back then was rather different from what we witness nowadays. Over the past 10 years, the number of examples of how craftspeople traditionally operated in the district have dwindled, exacerbated by the removal of industrial infrastructure (into Mainland China) and the forced urban renewal scheme instituted by the government. Thus, with the passing of this generation, the crafts-industrial tradition in Sham Shui Po is approaching extinction. This chapter documents some of the past social-spatial practices of these workers in the district — especially those who operated in the nooks and crannies — attempting to understand how they developed a symbiotic relationship within the urban community setting in the past few decades.

Rattan Furniture Making (until 2009)

Driven by the American market and the Cold War agenda in the 1950s, rattan manufacturing had been one of Hong Kong's prominent craft industries. But since the 1980s, with Mainland China's Open Door policy, Hong Kong's rattan furniture industry experienced a drastic recession due to the large-scale relocation of production facilities across the border. At this point, rattan craftsman Mr Liu Tat Shing decided to close down his rattan factory in Tai Kok Tsui and re-establish an "alley shop" at 367A Lai Chi Kok Road in Sham Shui Po, namely, the Tat Shing Rattan Company. While Liu's business continued, the more complex machinery or space-consuming work procedures (e.g. bending and shaping long pieces of rattan) had to move to the mainland and were taken care of by his apprentices. Products were produced and shipped back to Hong Kong on demand. Unlike the operation in his former factory that had ample space for machines



and skilled workers to mass-produce furniture items, Liu had to combine the workshop, warehouse and retail outlet altogether in one shop location and work alone in this limited street corner space from where he took commission orders, handled wholesaling and retailing of hand-made couches, and other small-size furniture items and merchandise, such as car cushions.

Liu's production process started to evolve into a different mode in his small shop, and his merchandising showmanship took full advantage of the back alley space on the street: boards were shaped and utilised instead of the traditional rattan skeleton of the furniture (thereby saving space in bending the long rattan pieces), and strips of rattan and rattan matting were later mounted to the wooden frame. This was a new type of rattan furniture (*fig 1*) that could be assembled with standard modular parts of various sizes, allowing him not only to perform his craftsmanship in the alley space, but to produce just-in-time batches of varied-size furniture upon his customers' requests. The assembling of readily pre-made parts therefore became a production strategy, designed to save storage and production space and thus enabling him to leave more room for displaying more of his other merchandise at his shop front, including the classic lightweight, airy rattan chairs imported back from his Mainland China factory. Although the new, heavier but



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sturdy version bore little resemblance to the classical rattan chairs, they were unmistakably adaptive designs shaped by the ingenuity of the craftsman and the spatial conditions that allowed for such workmanship.

Flanked by a narrow alley (about 2.5 metres wide), the corner shop (*fig 2*) was organised into three sections: the rented shop interior (60sq ft), the front lane and the back lane. The frontal area facing the main road was the "showcase", the shop interior was the office-cum-storage, and the alley constituted the workshop area. Customers were received at the front end where they could see and try out the displayed items, while they could also observe the "work-in-progress" — a kind of showmanship of making — constructing the custom-made furniture at the side.

This part was the workshop area, which was partially shaded from the sun and rain; a makeshift table was set up on a daily basis for the rattan treatment and woodworking. Procedures such as lacquering and colour-spraying, would be carried out in the open alley area at the back (*fig 3*), as these needed sunshine and good ventilation. The existing drain at the side of the alley, when filled with water, readily became a basin for Liu to soak and soften the rattan strips before bending and shaping. 



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Liu's daily activities such as making, displaying, selling and unloading his merchandise, chatting with neighbours, or eating all happen in the little area between the pedestrian walkway and his work area which he claimed from the public space. He was able to develop mutually supportive relations with passers-by, neighbours as well as the residents around his shop. It created the condition to encourage communal mingling and to build neighbourhood trust: not only did the shop offer a communal sitting area for his neighbours who would regularly drop in for a chat or relaxation, Liu inevitably became a watchman of the lane, generally helping to keep the neighbourhood safer. And in return, when there was a need to leave his shop (say, for a toilet break), nearby neighbours would temporarily look after the shop for him. In that sense, the street corner space not only epitomised the adapt-and-survive spirit of a generation of artisans, who were able to deploy the public space for their ingenious and communal uses, but also helped to maintain a caring community network among residents of the neighbourhood.



For a craftsman like Liu, the street was a spatial and communal resource to be employed; it allowed his craft to survive and perhaps necessarily transform, and also enabled certain communal relations to develop. However, after 2007, it unfortunately transpired that the entire street block was soon to be “re-developed” into a new

residential high-rise by the Urban Renewal Authority (fig 4), and Liu had no choice but to curtail his workshop operation and reluctantly move his retail business to another shop location 100 metres away on the same street, with higher rent. This was shortly before his sudden death in 2009. The street corner where his shop was located has been replaced by a Herbal Tea shop (fig 5).

Wooden Cart Making (until 2013)

In the midst of “city revitalisation”, our local communities and Hong Kong’s vernacular cultures are being uprooted. The following craftspeople, Mr & Mrs Lee are another case in point.

Mr Lee was originally a self-taught DIYer and Mrs Lee, a seamstress working in a garment factory. She joined her husband’s trade in the early 1980s. During the 60s, with Mrs Lee’s enthusiastic encouragement, they decided to start their own business selling handmade carts and trolleys to the then burgeoning street hawker community. Their shop, Yau Kee Cart, naturally resided in Sham Shui Po, being a prominent industrial and residential area where street hawkers used to aggregate, even over the next few decades.

Out of frugality and ingenuity, the couple managed to cut production costs by reusing materials discarded by their neighbours. They produced wooden carts of various sizes and





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designs (*fig 6*) from discarded materials — wooden planks from old beds, used tyres and ball-bearings, etc — acquired cheaply from an informal network of “material providers” such as street cleaners and garages. Their basic livelihood practice was to upcycle or refashion discarded resources gathered from the neighbourhood and produce custom-made as well as standardised wooden carts for sale, back to the same grassroots community — street cleaners, hawkers, carpenters, construction workers and the like. The couple each had a distinct role, with Mr Lee being the artisan, and Mrs Lee, in an informal sense, the Creative Director and Manager. While Mr Lee concentrated on the making and developing of necessary tools and methods to realise their commissions, Mrs Lee liaised and purchased used materials from the garbage collectors or providers, managed budgets, and (often) received tailor-made orders from their customers. She was able to negotiate with and advise their customers on the specific designs and come up with detailed instructions for Mr Lee to proceed with their just-in-time production. It was said that they could assemble a wooden cart from pre-fabricated parts in just two hours (*fig 7*).



(Drawing by Brian Lee)

Their business reputation spread across the neighbourhood primarily through word of mouth. The Lees were seen to closely attend to users’ requirements and were able to cultivate good relationships with their customers by offering warranty services for their products sold. Sometimes clients even brought their own used materials to the Lees and requested them to transform their materials into specially designed carts or other customised furniture. An informal community economy had thus grown and was sustained for the last few decades in the neighbourhood. It was a time when handicraft and community resources were still valued, conserved and shared; and the street (as opposed to a mall) was an open platform, a community space, for all these materials, informal economy and human exchanges to occur. For instance, Yau Kee Cart was able to use the street as a temporary working and storage space without many regulatory measures from the government. It was the norm that all owners/tenants were entitled to use the pedestrian walkway openly in front of their shop. Neighbours naturally instituted a “check and balance mechanism” along the street and its public uses; they were rather self-regulated, as well as mutually supportive. (Unlike nowadays, the uses of the street are strictly regulated by officers who patrol daily from the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department.)



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Driven by rent increases, Yau Kee Cart relocated its premises a couple of times since the 1960s, but remained around the Sham Shui Po neighbourhood. Between 2005 and 2013 (that is, before Mr Lee passed away), the shop used a space provided freely to the couple by a sign-making company on Boundary Street, under the agreement that the Lees would, in return, look after the shop for the owner if the

latter was out on business — this is a perfect example of mutually supportive neighbours in practice.

When the sign-maker was present, he was regularly stationed in an air-conditioned (office) cubicle within the shop; the Lees would stay at the shop front and by the walkway (*fig 8*). Two-thirds of the shop area of the sign company (around 300sq ft, along with the pedestrian walkway) served — for the wooden-cart maker (the “free” tenant) and the sign-maker (the shop owner) — as the workshop and also the sales area for both parties, housing all the materials, the pre-fabricated components, equipment and hand-tools, as well as their merchandise. All the cart-making operations took place at the shop front, primarily on the floor. The shop interior, including storage, toilet and kitchen at the back, were also shared, so were some of the tools, like the welding and drilling machine.

The shop had no decoration, only a big Chinese signboard with the company name, Yiu So Kee Hardware Co at the top. For the Lees, an A3 hand-written board was hung on the side of the shop: Yau Kee Cart, 9A Boundary Street, plus a telephone number (*fig 9*). A few carts were constantly on display. This was all Yau Kee Cart used to “advertise” and distinguish itself from the sign company. Of course, the Lee couple, and particularly Mr Lee was always present at the shop from 9:00am-6:00pm as a “living sign” and “frontman” of the business for both parties. A sign-making company and a cart-making workshop had curiously developed a symbiotic relationship with each other in a semi-communal shop-cum-street space.

For half a century, the Lees not only pioneered a unique type of customised crafts practice by “upcycling” (as opposed to recycling, which is less ecologically friendly) available scrap resources from the community, their endeavour also presented a viable business model — a self-help grassroots community which was able to leverage a reciprocal economic relationship developed from the street and neighbourhood (human as well as discarded material) resources. This was an almost forgotten form of community sharing practice at street level, reminiscent of Hong Kong’s early urbanisation. Unfortunately, this code of spatial and economic practice is now being replaced by more stringent street control from the government and incoming “modern” enterprises, such as property agencies and franchised supermarkets, and exacerbated by incessant rent rises and the disappearance of the original established population in the district, and generally in Hong Kong. ■



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BAGGENSTOS / RUDOLF

Heidy Baggenstos & Andreas Rudolf formed a Zurich-based artist group when they began working together in 2003. Born in Zurich, following her schooling Heidy Baggenstos worked and traveled around Europe and Asia for a few years before starting a family. From 1991 to 1997, she studied drawing and painting at New Artschool Zurich, going on to study BBV at the Art School in Zurich from 2000 to 2002. Following her graduation in 2005 with a Diploma in Fine Arts at the F+F Schule für Kunst und Design in Zurich, she has since explored these experiences, working on projects across many different fields of art. Andreas Rudolf was born in Bülach, Switzerland, and trained as an electrical engineer at the Paul Scherrer Institute from 1987 to 1991 before working as a goldsmith until 1995. From 2002 to 2005, he studied for a Diploma in Fine Arts at the F+F Schule für Kunst und Design in Zurich and has been undertaking his own projects inspired by different art media ever since. Heidy and Andreas currently live and work in Zurich. Their work employs media such as video, photography, installation and performance and focuses on the possibilities and the appearances of verbal and nonverbal aspects of modern communication. They participate in numerous exhibitions and video festivals both in Switzerland and abroad.

CHAN Chung Yin

Chan graduated from the Department of Social Work at Hong Kong Baptist University in 2004. Since then, his career has focused on the field of Youth work and China Rural Development. He joined the Society for Community Organization (SoCO) in 2014 and has been working with homeless communities for more than three years.

Patricia CHOI

Patricia Choi is the initiator and head of the artist-in-residence programme in Sham Shui Po. She is also a designer and lecturer at the School of Design, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and founder of Wontonmeen. She likes to think of Wontonmeen as the hub where Hong Kong's creative scene starts its day. It is a unique, diverse living space in the heart of Sham Shui Po, accommodating eleven floors of artists, journalists, musicians, designers, teachers, comedians, curators and Wing Chun disciples. What was once simply 30 flats intended for creatives to

escape Hong Kong's ever-rising rents has evolved into a fully collaborative community, where everything from film festivals and publications to art exhibitions are hashed out in Wontonmeen's buzzing "living room". Whether busy at work or chilling in the communal space, these funky living spaces are a home away from home for locals and non-Chinese alike. It is not just where art gets made; it's where art lives, Choi enthuses.

Nuria KRÄMER

Nuria Krämer holds a BA in Multimedia from the Centre de la Imatge i Tecnologia Multimedia from the Politechnic University of Catalunya, an MA in Transdisciplinary in the Arts from Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), and a Certificate in Advanced Studies in Research in Artistic Universities. She has been working in the audio-visual sector as an art director in advertising and as an art director assistant, set decorator, and artistic consultant in various international TV and movie productions. Since 2011, Kramer has collaborated in various research projects with FOA-FLUX, in particular: *The Functions of Art in a Global Context*. Her interests focus on collaborative practices and transcultural collaboration in the field of audio-visual arts. In Hong Kong she presently heads up the development of the transcultural platform for artistic collaboration: *Connecting Spaces Hong Kong-Zurich*.

Jürgen KRUSCHE

Jürgen Krusche is a cultural scientist and artist. He has conducted several research projects at ZHdK and ETH Zurich in the area of urban studies, with an emphasis on public spaces from a cross cultural perspective between Europe, Mainland China and Japan. He has worked and exhibited as an artist since 1990, and lives and works in Zurich, Switzerland, and Hanover, Germany. Since 2011, Krusche has been head of the research programme PUBLIC CITY at the Institute for Contemporary Art Research (IFCAR) at ZHdK. From 2007 to 2011, he undertook the research project: *Taking to the Streets at the Faculty of Architecture, ETH Zurich*. Prior to this, he held a research post at the Institute for Critical Theory (ITH) at ZHdK (2001-2006).

He is currently directing the research project: *The Fragmented City. Processes and Strategies of Exclusion and Their Impact on Public Spaces*, financed by Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF).

Marc LATZEL

Marc Latzel is a professional photographer who works on commissioned assignments for various national and international magazines, publications and advertising agencies. He does this in parallel with several personal projects he is currently undertaking. In 2000, he joined the photographers' agency Lookat-Photos based in Zurich, and as a founding member, he set up Lookatonline.com in 2004. He lectures and runs workshops at the Centre d'Enseignement Professionnel in Vevey (CEPV) and at the Swiss School of Journalism (MAZ). In 1997, the World Press Association nominated him for the Joop Swart Masterclass award. He won the vfg-Selection nomination and exhibition in 2005; and the vfg-Selection public award in 2007. In 2010, he was selected for the Photo Forum Pasqu'Art and received the Landis & Gyr Studio Grant for London in 2011.

Isaac LEUNG

Dr Isaac Leung is an artist, curator, and researcher in art and culture. He was appointed Chair of Videotage in 2013 and lectures at the Department of Cultural and Creative Arts, The Education University of Hong Kong. He holds an Honorary Fellowship of a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the New Media Art Department, Art Institute of Chicago and Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London. His works have been exhibited in over 30 venues around the globe and featured widely in the press, including Agence France-Presse, Chicago Tribune, NY Arts Magazine, and the South China Morning Post. Leung recently completed his doctorate research specialising in the contemporary Chinese art market at School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong. His work at Videotage involves programmes such as exhibitions, workshops, lectures, publications, online projects and symposia, including 40 Years of Video Art in Germany and Hong Kong, Borderline International Film Art Exhibition, 12th Venice Biennale International Architecture Exhibition, Perpetual Art Machine (New York), and Microwave International New Media Arts Festival.

Akram MOHAMED

Akram Mohamed is an anthropologist and works as a research associate (PhD) at the Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies in Geneva.

He graduated in Classical Chinese, minoring in Anthropology at Zurich University before continuing his studies in Crisis Management and Development at Paris Panthéon Sorbonne. His research focus centres on the role of migration intermediaries in defining and shaping transnational ties and networks, which is what drew his attention to the issues concerning Pakistani migrants in Hong Kong.

Patrick MÜLLER

Professor Patrick Müller is the founder and Head of the Master of Arts in Transdisciplinary Studies Programme at ZHdK. He is also the director of Connecting Spaces Hong Kong-Zurich. From 2010 to 2012, Müller was an affiliated fellow at Collegium Helveticum Zürich, a laboratory for transdisciplinarity at the University and ETH Zürich. Having originally studied music, musicology, and German philology in Zürich and Paris as well as cultural management in Basel (from 1995 to 1999), he then held the post of scientific assistant until 2002, and subsequently lecturer at the Department of Musicology, University of Zürich. His interests in (music) curating and publication range from contemporary music with its medial and disciplinary extensions as well as music interpretation as an expression of contemporary authorship. The inclusion of different art forms and the sciences led to his growing interest in work structures that transgress from the traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Ng Wai Tung

Ng Wai Tung is a Community Organiser for SoCO. He has dedicated his working life to helping the homeless of Hong Kong. SoCO is a pioneer in human rights campaigning in Hong Kong. The organisation firmly believes that everyone should be entitled to equal rights. Equal opportunity in participation and the fair distribution of social resources is the foundation of human rights. In the face of widening disparity between the rich and the poor, and the increasingly restrictive political arena, SoCO stands firm in its crusade to establish an equal society and build a strong power base for the people. Ng and his team are motivated by a common dream, and that is: "Let us work hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder to build a caring, equal and just society". SoCO is an incorporated, non-profit-making and non-governmental community body.

SIT Kim Ping

Sit Kim Ping is a certified Social Worker and has pursued a career in this field since 2008. Initially, her work experience was primarily focused on rehabilitation issues. However when she joined SoCO in 2014, she began working with the homeless communities and continues to do so, to date.

SIU King Chung

Siu King Chung is an art and design commentator, installation artist, and independent curator. He has been actively involved in arts policy and art/design curriculum development in Hong Kong and is Associate Dean and Associate Professor at the School of Design, Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He leads the newly launched BA (Hons) Social Design Programme, and the BA (Hons) Art and Design in Education Programme. His research and writing focuses on art and design education, information design, indigenous creativity and vernacular design, upcycling design, material & visual culture, theme parks, community engagement and curatorial practices.

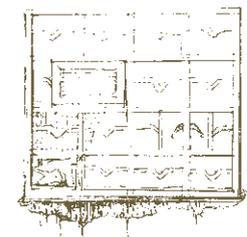
Siu co-founded the Community Museum Project (<http://www.hkcmp.org/>) in 2002, a curatorial collective which endeavours to visualise and disseminate local knowledge and practices in form of exhibitions, publications, cultural tourism and urban pedagogy.

SONG Yunlong

Song Yunlong is a film director and a documentary filmmaker based in Zurich, Switzerland. He completed a BA in Journalism and Arabic language from Beijing Foreign Studies University in 1998. From 1999 to 2001, he held the role of Executive Assistant for television and film projects at the Beijing Film Studio. Song's academic career continued with Film Studies and Journalism at the University of Zurich from 2002 to 2004. From there he continued his film studies, attending the F+F Schule für Kunst und Mediendesign in Zurich until 2008. He spent a further two years undertaking his MA studies in Film at the ZHdK. Besides film and art projects, he is also a professional translator, interpreter, and consultant in intercultural communication.

Mathias WOO

Mathias Woo is a cultural worker in the discipline of cross-media and Executive Director / Co-Artistic Director of Zuni Icosahedron. As a scriptwriter, director, producer and curator, Woo has created more than 60 theatre works which have been performed around the world. Woo's theatre works explore subjects as wide-ranging as literature, history, architecture, religion, current political affairs. He is renowned for his Multimedia Music Theatre Series and the ingenious blending of theatrical space, text, video images and cutting-edge multimedia technology. His pioneering works in the Multimedia Architecture Music Theatre have established a new paradigm for theatrical experience in Hong Kong. In 2009, Woo curated the "Architecture is Art Festival" which explored the artistic potential of architecture and different art forms. He was awarded the DFA Merit Award in 2012, the Arts and Cultural Figure of the Year in Shenzhen, and the Hong Kong Lifestyle Award by Southern Metropolitan Daily in 2013.



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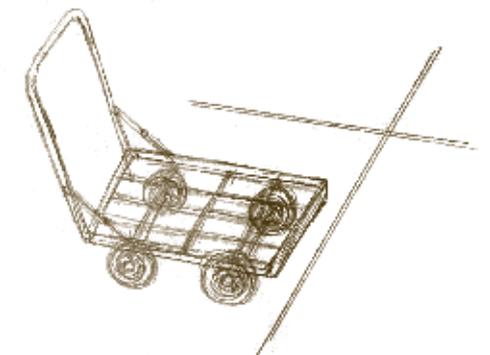
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- Archive Collection, Hong Kong Maritime Museum
- Hong Kong Heritage Project, Kadoorie Farm
- Hong Kong Memory, The Hong Kong Jockey Club Archives
- Hongkong Land Corporate Archives
- HSBC Archives
- Pokfulam Village Community Archives, Hong Kong Archives Society & The Lord Wilson Heritage Trust
- Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong
- The Foreign Correspondents' Club Archives
- The Wire Archives
- TWGHs Records and Heritage Project



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