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Case Study

Touring Walled Villages –

**An Alternative Experience in
East-Meet-West Cosmopolitan Hong Kong**

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Introduction

■ About This Case Study

This case study attempts to examine the concept and practice of heritage tourism in the light of looking into a real focus example – walled villages in Hong Kong.

The focus example has been selected on the basis of its current and potential qualities to become a typical aspect in the heritage tourism development of the represented region – Hong Kong (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China).



The Regional Location of Hong Kong

The logic of this study derives from the established concepts of heritage and

heritage tourism in the academic field, particularly those as taught in the curriculum of *Travel and Tourism* education programme in the represented region. It also makes frequent references to some definitions as documented or applied by authorities and bodies involved in the process of heritage protection, management and tourism operations.

The core part of this study comprises of library research, field observations, interviews, policy evaluations and discourse. It aims at assessing the current reality of the case through diversified channels, and paying attention to a variety of perspectives, particularly of those parties actually involved in the process of heritage tourism of the studied sites.

The theme of this study is as follows:

To look into the current status of walled villages as a single unit of heritage attraction in tourism and its possible development prospects for future.

It includes examining the qualities and functioning of walled villages as heritage tourist attraction.



Walled Villages as a Single Unit of Heritage Attraction in Tourism

■ About Heritage Tourism

The concept of heritage has been an evolving one. It is mainly divided into two domains, namely cultural heritage and natural heritage. This case study mainly focuses on cultural heritage.

Notably, the year 2002 has been proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly to be the *United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage*. It also marks the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the *Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972). The gravity of the value of heritage to nations seems to be steadily growing all around the world (only with a few exceptions, such as the former Taliban government of Afghanistan). Heritage tourism, being a part and also a beneficiary of this positive trend, has developed quickly in both developed and developing countries.

According to *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO), cultural heritage can be categorized into the following types:

- Cultural Heritage Sites
- Historical Cities
- Cultural Landscapes
- Natural Sacred Sites
- The Underwater Cultural Heritage
- Museums
- The Movable Cultural Heritage
- Handicrafts
- The Documentary and Digital Heritage
- The Cinematographic Heritage
- Oral Traditions
- Languages
- Festive Events
- Rites and Beliefs
- Music and Song
- The Performing Arts
- Traditional Medicine
- Literature
- Culinary Traditions
- Traditional Sports and Games

The UNESCO's formulation can be said to be systematic and comprehensive. Nowadays, it has been widely accepted worldwide and is often quoted or referred to at important occasions; many governments have adopted this categorization into their administration systems, which deal with cultural heritage research, policy-making, legislation and management.

This case study also applies the UNESCO's formulation to identify the heritage properties of the walled villages. Such application has shown tremendous help to making suggestive measures to improve the conditions of heritage tourism concerning touring the identified walled villages.

The UNESCO's listed types of heritage form the core of heritage tourism. The key tourism product in heritage tourism, on top of supply or provision of basic tourism goods, facilities and services, is undoubtedly heritage attraction.

Heritage often goes well with different forms of tourism and among those cultural tourism takes the best advantage of it. For tourists who are curious about different kinds of experiences in other cultures, cultural heritage can be the sole attraction motivating them to pay visits to a foreign destination. Tourists with such travel purpose usually have a strong preference for museums, heritage sites and traditions to normally visited scenic spots. They are often more daring and willing to try new travel routes and exotic destinations. In this case study, two real examples are used to illustrate this point.

Heritage also attracts leisure/holiday tourists who arrive in tour groups or individually. Visiting famous heritage spots is often a travel fashion. Spots of international status are best to do even with mass tourists who might have very little thoughts about what they want to see. Heritage can be therefore compatible with mass tourism and properly developed heritage tourism can provide the necessary improvement and enhancement to the attractions and their peripheral supporting developments.

Both visitors and local residents can benefit from the improvement and enhancement of the attractions. This case study attempts to identify the positive measures that might be applied to improve and enhance the functioning of walled villages as heritage to both tourists and the local community.

■ About Hong Kong's Heritage

It is important to have a basic understanding of the whole picture of heritage in Hong Kong before one can accurately assess the role and value of walled villages thereafter.

Hong Kong has a long history of human inhabitation dated back to 4,500 years ago. Its development in the past several hundred years was very dynamic. It has experienced major migrations of people from Mainland China dated back to the 14th century and many of those establishments have become heritage today. The exploration in the early stage of Western explorers coming to Asia brought upon tremendous traits of economic and cultural exchange at the port areas. The 19th century's Opium Wars and the British colonization added in a unique source of European culture into this tiny little place and generated a huge and fundamental change to the society and culture of the territory.



Early Settlements in Hong Kong



French Mission Building

The National Father of China, Dr. *Sun Yat Sen*, who overthrew the Manchurian regime and ended the *Ch'ing* Dynasty, founded his revolutionary movement in Hong Kong. The forty-four months of occupation by Japan and the struggle during the Second World War left numerous historical marks. After the War, this place faced another major migration of people from Mainland China and thereafter experienced a major economic change into industrialization. In the last two decades, it was gradually converted into a world-class financial, trade and service centre. In 1997, the British handed over the place to its initial sovereign, China, and now it is a *Special Administrative Region* of the People's Republic of China. This unique and dynamic background of Hong Kong naturally created a special blend of heritage that is hard to find elsewhere in the world.

Geographically, Hong Kong is divided into three main areas:

- Hong Kong Island
- Kowloon
- The New Territories

The city centre, or downtown is located in the districts near the *Victoria Harbour* where Hong Kong Island and Kowloon are separated. Most of the tourist activities take place in these two areas. The New Territories starts from the northern tip of Kowloon, right stretching to the border dividing Hong Kong and Mainland China.



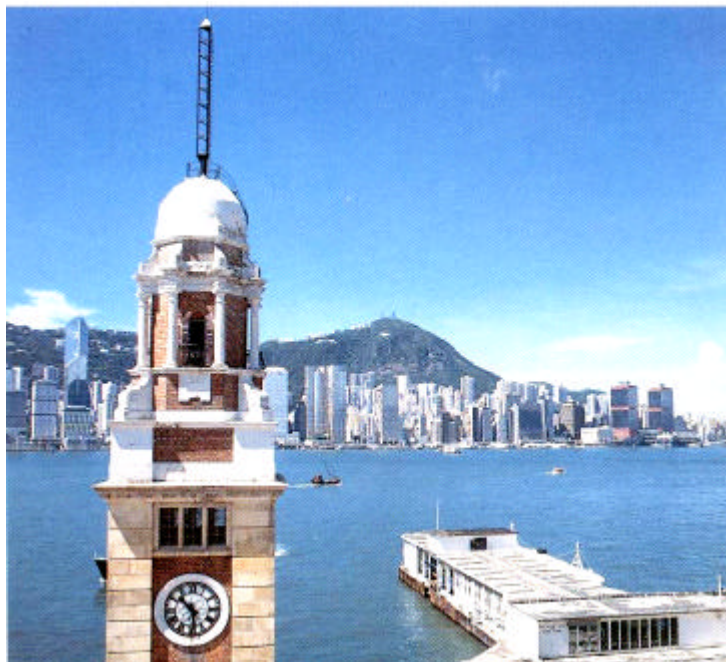
The Map of Hong Kong

The physical location of heritage attractions in Hong Kong has a certain pattern. Hong Kong Island, being a latecomer in the history of Hong Kong, has numerous marks of British colonial influence stretching from the city centre, *Central*, to the residential retreat in the south, notably *Stanley* and *Repulse Bay*. From the harbour shore to the *Peak*, the presence of British culture is quite evident.



St. John Anglican Cathedral – a Strong Presence of British Culture

Kowloon, on the other side of the *Victoria Harbour*, has a mixture of both Western and Chinese cultures. Heritage spots in and around the southern tip of *Kowloon Peninsula*, which is one of the most visited parts of Hong Kong by tourists, have stronger essence of the West. Moving back towards north to other districts, it is much more Chinese.



Former Kowloon-Canton Railway Terminus Clock Tower

The New Territories, in large, is quite Chinese. An overwhelming majority of historical monuments is in the New Territories. Old forms or very traditional ways of living are still in place in the established districts in the New Territories.



Old Forms and Traditional Ways of Living in the New Territories

Basically, with around ninety-five percent of the population being Chinese, signs of Chinese culture are naturally everywhere. Many weddings are still conducted in traditional styles. Festive events, cuisines and even traditional medicine (e.g. acupuncture, herbal medicine) still retain their shapes and functions nowadays.

The type of heritage attractions in the three different areas can be summarized as follows:

<u>Areas</u>	<u>Types of Heritage Attractions</u>
▪ Hong Kong Island :	museums, colonial establishments, cathedrals, temples, traits of urban development
▪ Kowloon :	museums, colonial establishments, cathedrals, temples, traits of urban development
▪ The New Territories:	museums, historical monuments, temples, Chinese monasteries , villages

Walled Villages as Heritage Attraction

■ **Presence & Role**

To understand walled villages as a heritage attraction, one needs to have an idea of its presence and role in the heritage tourism of Hong Kong. One of the best ways to look into the spectrum of Hong Kong's heritage tourism is by identifying the elements of heritage as presented by *Hong Kong Tourism Board* – the authoritative destination promoter of the region. On its official website, the tourism board listed out the following categories of heritage attractions:

- Origin, history and transformation of Hong Kong
- Inhabitants
- Historical sites
- East-Meet-West cultural traits
- Chinese wedding
- Chinese festivals
- Museums
- Heritage Tours

This categorization is simple, user-friendly but quite inclusive. The majority of Hong Kong's heritage - including architecture, lifestyle, rituals and arts - is well knitted into an easy-to-find network. It serves to summarize the chief domains of the city's most representative features in cultural heritage. In this case study, the direct and indirect presence of walled villages in the tourism board's structure of heritage presentation is examined as follows:

■ **Origin, History and Transformation of Hong Kong**

The history of Hong Kong, in heritage sense, is divided into three main periods:

- Pre-colonial
- From Opium Wars
- The 20th century

A big portion of information regarding the pre-colonial period has to do with the *Hakka* migrants from Mainland China since the 14th century. The *Hakka* people formed a significant part of the history of the New Territories. Many major civilian establishments and historical events that took place in the New Territories have a lot to do with the migration, settlement and transformation of *Hakka* clans in Hong Kong. Some of the most well-known and well-kept walled villages have been housing *Hakka* families in the last several hundred years.



Hakka Settlers in the New Territories

Walled villages played a central role in the civil history of the New Territories. They were first built to fence off bandits, pirates and even imperial soldiers. They marked the settlement of different local and immigrated clans in the area and also signified a certain degree of local resistance to and independence from the many historical incidents in Hong Kong. In the 20th century, walled villages survived the Second World War and the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong.

Some interesting and touching stories happening in walled villages are reported in many history readings available in public libraries. The vast historical materials, though mostly published in Chinese language, showed the importance of walled villages in the New Territories. Library research shows that almost a majority of the history books and materials about Hong Kong has at least a section, sometimes many, on walled villages. *Kat Hing Wai* is among the most mentioned ones.

▪ **Inhabitants**

In the above-mentioned tourism board's promotion materials, special attention is given to the following groups of inhabitants:

- *“Five Great Clans”*
- *Tanka* people
- *Hoklos* people
- *Hakka* people

Among these four groups, the *Tang* Clan of the *“Five Great Clans”* and *Hakka* people have built, and are still keeping, some of the best preserved walled villages up to now. *Tanka* people and *Hoklos* did not make similar settlements. Certain descendants of the *“Five Great Clans”* have strong influence on the economic, political and community affairs in the New Territories. Getting to know their walled villages is a must if someone wants to learn about the history of these inhabitants.



Tang Clan's Ancestral Hall in Lung Yeuk Tau Heritage Trail

Walled villages do form a living proof of their stories of settlement in Hong Kong. Tourists who want to know more about these peoples inevitably come up to meet their walled villages. In a brief interview outside *Lo Wai*, a walled village near *Fanling*, a Western tourist indicated that history of walled villages had attracted him to the site.

▪ Historical Sites

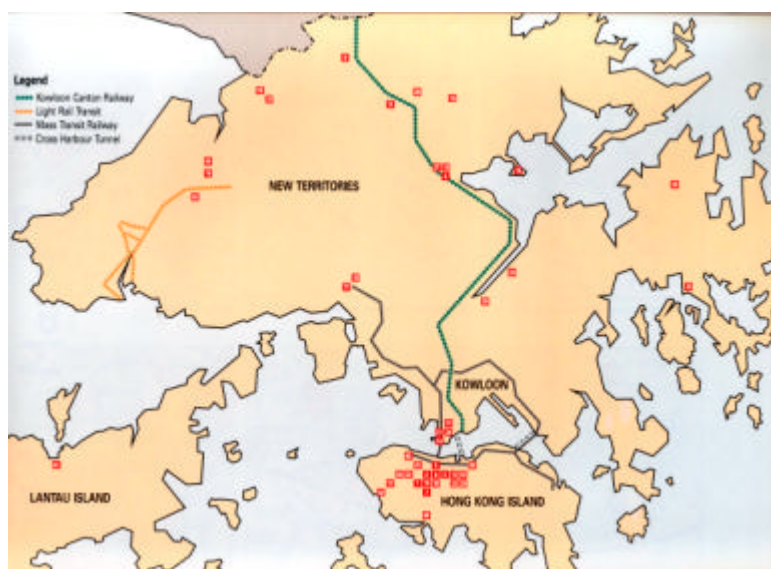
The tourism board presents Hong Kong's historical sites under the following categories:

- Colonial buildings
- Ethnic Chinese
- Archaeological sites
- Religious sites

Walled Village is classified into the category of “*Ethnic Chinese*”. On the tourism board's official website, there are totally thirty listed “*Ethnic Chinese*” sites. Twenty-six of those are in the New Territories. Six walled villages in the New Territories are in the list, they are:

- Enclosing Walls & Corner Watch Tower of *Kat Lung Wai*
- Entrance Tower of *Ma Wat Wai*
- *Kung Lung Gate Tower*
- *Sam Tung Uk Village*
- Entrance Tower & Enclosing Walls of *Lo Wai*

According to the listing, it shows that walled villages have a strong presence as a main part of ethnic Chinese heritage to tourists. Strong presence implies significance.



Location Map of Heritage Sites in Hong Kong

More importantly, many other sites that are also on the list are actually part of the walled village culture. Ancestral halls are typical examples. Some walled villages, such as *Kat Hing Wai*, have a built-in ancestral hall inside it. They are usually smaller and simpler in design and structure. Some clans chose to build a bigger and more sophisticatedly designed ancestral hall close to their walled village. Several of these externally constructed ancestral halls are on the said list.



Ancestral Hall Built Inside Kat Hing Wai

▪ **Museums**

The tourism board highlights the following museums to tourists who have interest in heritage:

- *Hong Kong Museum of History*
- *Hong Kong Heritage Museum*
- *Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence*
- *Hong Kong Museum of Art*
- *Hong Kong Science Museum*
- *Hong Kong Space Museum*

Among them, *Hong Kong Museum of History* and *Hong Kong Heritage Museum* are directly linked with preserving the cultural heritage of inhabitants of the New Territories. *Hong Kong Museum of History*, located in *Tsim Sha Tsui*, has a single section on walled villages in its exhibition hall. It seems to imply that walled village and its culture has a unique value in the history of Hong Kong. Meanwhile, *Hong Kong Heritage Museum*, situated in *Shatin*, displays some exhibits of handicrafts in its exhibition hall. Apparently, the importance of walled villages as part of Hong Kong's heritage is officially recognized through the participation of museums.



A Section in Sam Tung Uk Museum

▪ **Heritage Tours**

The tourism board suggests the following heritage tours on its website:

- *Heritage Tour*
- *Heritage and Architecture Walks*
- *Echoes of Hong Kong Tour*
- *Health Living Tour*

The *Heritage Tour* put walled village as its prime attraction. Description of the tour starts as follows:

“Across the New Territories, much of Hong Kong's rich heritage has been restored to its former glory. Through fascinating sights such as the Lo Wai Walled Village, the Heritage Tour gives you an amazing insight into the territory's unique past- an unbelievable contrast to the city of today.”



Pamphlet and Routing of 'Heritage Tour' Promoted by Hong Kong Tourism Board

The presence and role of walled villages in Hong Kong's heritage is here explicitly indicated. Walled villages are considered to be “unique”, “fascinating” and capable of creating a “contrast to the city of today”. It is exactly this essence that this case study attempts to investigate.



Image of a Walled Village (Lo Wai) in 'Heritage Tour' Pamphlet

Remarks

The above-mentioned elements of heritage are framed by the tourism board into what it calls a “*wondrous kaleidoscope of culture and heritage*”, which echoes the special historical background of Hong Kong. It describes Hong Kong as “*a cosmopolitan city where the new meets the old at every turn*” and its “*dynamic character is as much shaped by the richness of its past as by its dreams for the future*”. Evidently, the strong contrast of modernity and tradition is highly presented as unique advantage in the city’s attraction to tourists. Walled villages seem to have a unique identity in the heritage tourism of Hong Kong.



'Cultural Kaleidoscope' Presented by Hong Kong Tourism Board

■ Key Attractions

In this case study, some walled villages are identified as key heritage tourist sites. The selection is based on the following criteria:

- Formal recognition by the public authority as heritage sites
- Recommendation by *Hong Kong Tourism Board*
- Recommendation by tourist guidebooks for international travellers

The first criterion can best be applied by checking out the list of seventy-five declared historical monuments by the *Antiquities and Monuments Office* of the HKSAR Government. Reading promotion materials (pamphlets, booklet, tourist guide map) available to tourists at *Hong Kong Tourism Board's* tourist service centre plus an inspection of information presented on its official website gives a clear picture of what is recommended. For the third criterion, a visit to bookstore checking out the newest and the best-selling international guidebooks will do the job.

The identified key walled villages are listed and briefly described as follows:

Sam Tung Uk Village (*Tsuen Wan, New Territories*)



Sam Tung Uk Village Restored as a Public Museum

Sam Tung Uk Village, a *Hakka* walled village restored in 1987 and opened as a public museum, was built by the *Chan* clan in 1786. The *Chan* clan moved from *Guangdong* in about the 1750s, and settled in *Tsuen Wan*, where they reclaimed land along the seashore for cultivation. *Chan Yam-shing*, a clan leader, first

constructed three rows of village houses on the site. His descendants later built annex houses to the sides and at the back of the village house.

The family ancestral altar was placed in the main hall lying on the central axis facing the entrance. The four Chinese characters signifying '*Chan's Family Ancestral Hall*' were engraved on the granite lintel above the doorframe. *Sam Tung Uk* is the only walled village that was totally restored and managed by designated personnel, it retains its original shape and contents including bits and pieces of items left by the *Chan* clan. For example, its *Hakka* traditional kitchen is well restored and tourists can have a good glimpse of the way food was prepared in the old days. *Sam Tung Uk* is said to be the most recommended among all walled villages in Hong Kong, tourists who prefer more interpretative information at site would find this walled village the most welcoming.

Lo Wai (*Lung Yeuk Tau*, New Territories)



Entrance Tower of Lo Wai

Lo Wai is the first and one of the five renowned walled villages in *Lung Yeuk Tau*, established by the *Tang* clan whose ancestors branched out from the main *Tang* settlement in *Kam Tin* in the 13th century. The *Tangs* had since then established eleven villages in the area, known as ‘*Five Wais* (Walled villages) and *Six Tsuens* (Villages)’. *Lo Wai* is a village enclosed by brick walls on four sides, it has a few numbers of families living inside and the residential portion of the village is not open to public. There is not much new building structure in the village, so it retains a very traditional look and atmosphere. Some parts of the village, in fact, seem unattended and are filled with wild plants. The present village entrance tower is very eye-catching but it is not the original one which faced the north. It was relocated towards the east in order to achieve better *feng shui*.

Although the *wai* has undergone changes with the entrance tower relocated, most of the original village wall and the layout of the village still exist. The western and southern parts of the enclosing wall of the village are much higher than the others, probably because of its surrounding landscape. For tourists who craved for originality in heritage sightseeing, *Lo Wai* is a must-see. Since the walled village is away from the new town establishments widely spread in the New Territories, it feels the most exotic and untouched. *Lo Wai* also marks the starting point of *Lung Yeuk Tau Heritage Trail*, which leads to several other walled villages and related heritage sites.

Kun Lung Wai (San Wai) (*Lung Yeuk Tau*, New Territories)



Gate Tower of Kung Lung Wai

Kun Lung Wai, presently known as *San Wai*, is one of the eleven *Tang* villages in *Lung Yeuk Tau, Fanling*. Although this village was reportedly settled by members of the *Tang* clan during the 14th century, the walls of *San Wai* were built perhaps in 1744 as the stone lintel above the main entrance to the village is engraved with ‘*Kun Lung*, dated this *Jiazi* of the *Qianlong* reign’. *Kun Lung Wai* is enclosed with brick walls on all four sides. It is the most authentic and undisturbed walled village left in the area. The gatehouse of the walled village was declared a monument in 1988 and has been properly restored.

Ma Wat Wai (*Lung Yeuk Tau, New Territories*)



Entrance Tower of Ma Wat Wai

Ma Wat Wai was built by the *Tang* lineage during the *Qianlong* reign (1736-1795) of the *Qing* Dynasty. It is one of the renowned *Five Wais* (walled villages) and *Six Tsuens* (villages) in the area of *Lung Yeuk Tau* in *Fanling*. The *Tang* lineage in *Lung Yeuk Tau* branched out from the main clan in *Kam Tin*. According to the genealogy of the *Tang* clan, the founding ancestor of *Lung Yeuk Tau* lineage was the eldest son of *Wong Koo* (a Southern *Song* princess), which explains why the soul tablet of *Wong Koo* is still worshipped in the *Tang Chung Ling Ancestral Hall*, the main ancestral hall of *Lung Yeuk Tau*. *Ma Wat Wai* was originally a walled village with brick walls constructed on the four sides and a watchtower on each corner. However owing to past developments, most of the walls and all four corner towers were demolished leaving only this very historic entrance tower. A stone tablet engraved with two Chinese characters denoting a place with

flourishing growth of spring onions was embedded at the facade of the entrance tower. The entrance tower was declared a monument in 1994 and was fully restored with funds from the government.

Kat Hing Wai (*Kam Tin, New Territories*)



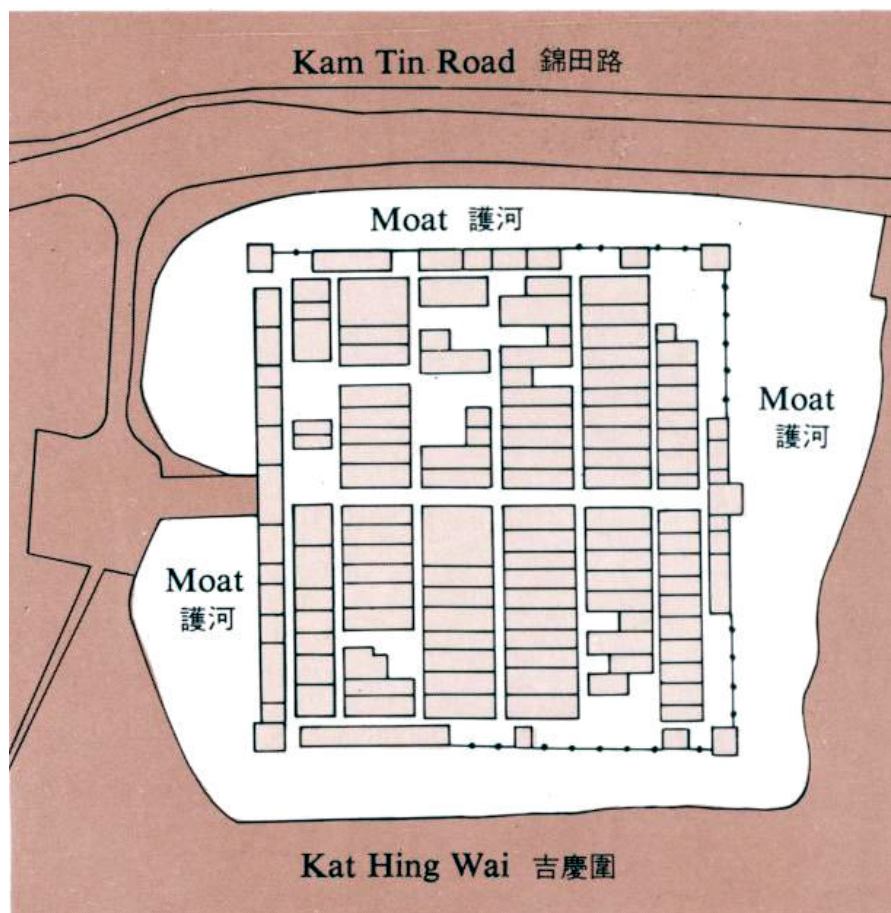
An Old Portrait of Kat Hing Wai

Built in 1600s, *Kat Hing Wai* is probably the biggest walled village retained. It is a lived-in *Hakka* village housing about 400 residents. It is also one of the most visited walled villages by individual or group tourists. The enclosing wall of *Kat Hing Wai* is far much higher than others, its thickness reaches up to 18 feet. Inside the walled village, new bungalows of up to three storeys have been built to meet growing housing need of the clan's descendants. According to *Hakka's* tradition, only sons of a family have the right to inherit its land. The government has strict regulations on the size and the height of newly built houses by local inhabitants of the New Territories. Since *Kat Hing Wai* has not been declared a historical monument by the government, it is not on the list of recommendation by the tourism board although it is recommended in almost all tourist guidebooks on Hong Kong. There is an ancestral hall built inside the walled village.

After field observation, interviews and information inspection, the case study team has identified several major aspects of walled villages that would generate interest among visiting and prospective tourists.

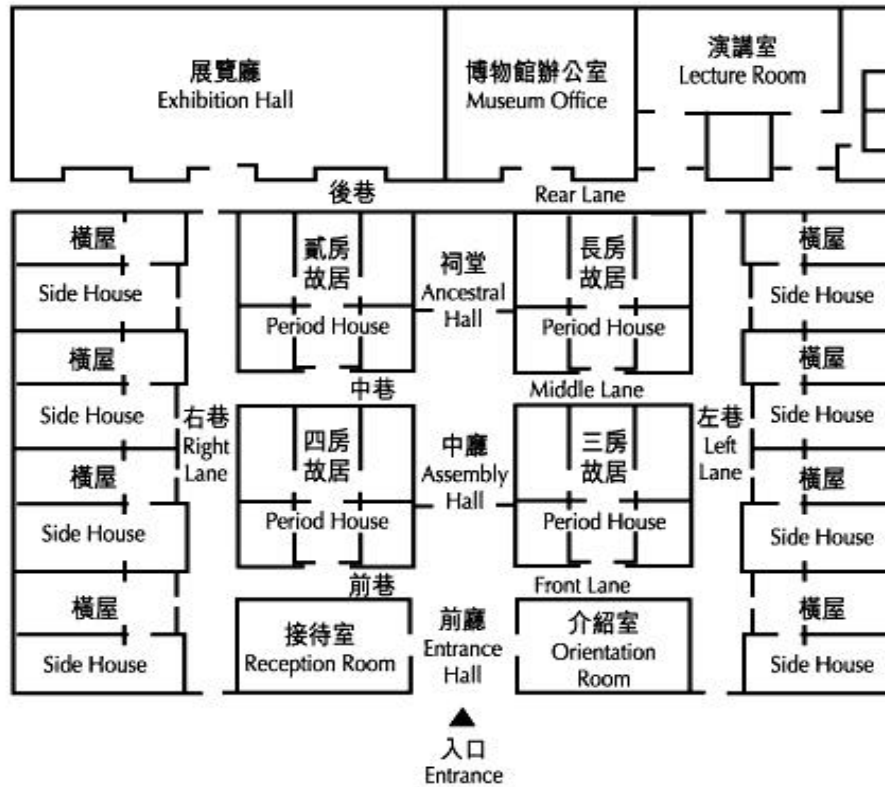
Site and Architecture

A walled village, as it is named, has its unique outlook which tourists often find most interesting. The fact that walled villages are windowless to outsiders is already an attraction, particularly to tourists from the West. Along with guard towers and entrance tower, it reflects not only the historical background of building walls to enclose a village and but also the traditional Chinese conception of a clan or family residence. Eye-catching walled villages on the outside such as *Lo Wai* and *Kat Hing Wai* certainly make a good spot to take photographs.



An Overview Sketch of Kat Hing Wai

The layout of walled village could also create a point of interest. In the case of *Sam Tung Uk*, the walled village occupies an area of 2,000 square metres. It has a symmetrical layout resembling a chessboard with an entrance hall, an assembly hall and an ancestral hall at the central axis. The sketch below best explains the details:



Layout of Sam Tung Uk

The fact that walled villagers, like most Chinese, believe in *fengshui* also adds an extra attraction to tourists. A typical example is the location of ancestral hall right in the middle end of the lane after entrance, it is meant to signify the prosperity of the clan.



Feng Shui – a Point of Concern in Walled Villages