

From the View of the People: Preservations and Developments of the New Territories

鄒文君 (Christine Chow)

Since the Anti-High Speed Rail Movement in 2008, the “preservations and developments of the New Territories” has become a highly contested discursive field of the Hong Kong society. While “the scarcity of land” have been used as the main argument for the HKSAR government to justify their new developmental plans, on the side of civil society, activists, who are not convinced by the official discourses, have been requesting for autonomous planning.

The New Territories was not an official colony of the British Empire. It was then on lease (1898-1997), which partly determined its differences from Hong Kong Island and Kowloon as the latter two were already ceded. Within a century of time, the New Territories has gone through several periods of developments and preservations. Interestingly, each period has formed its identical discursive field. From the colonial government, Hong Kong society, to the habitants of the New Territories, these stakeholders were contesting for the domination of the interpretation of “the New Territories”, i.e. how it should be preserved, developed, discussed, and finally, imagined. Since the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997, the floating signifier of “the New Territories” becomes more and more contested. This time, it has been transformed into the frontier of integration of Hong Kong and mainland China. Needless to say, the preservations and developments of the New Territories now closely relate to the future of Hong Kong.

In this field research, I'd like to focus on Muiwo, a rural town on Lantau Island of the New Territories. Lantau Island was mainly undeveloped until the early 1990s, when the Hong Kong International Airport as well as the new town Tung Chung were built on the northern part of it. Since 2010s, as the “East Lantau Metropolis” has been proposed by the HKSAR government, Lantau Island is put under a brand-new official vision of “Lantau Tomorrow”, aiming to create another Central Business District on the reclaimed artificial islands (>1700 hectares) between Hong Kong Island and Lantau Island. The new CBD is believed to facilitate the flows of people, goods as

well as capital between urban Hong Kong and rural Hong Kong. At the same time, since “Lantau Tomorrow” is also believed to facilitate flows between Hong Kong and mainland China, the new developmental plan then becomes more and more controversial.

In order to monitor the new developmental plans on Lantau, the Save Lantau Alliance(SLA) is formed in 2014. Members of SLA are mostly against the abovementioned plans. In their point of view, those plans would cost more than a high price of public avenue, but also the natural environment of Lantau. At the end, the ordinary lifestyle and community bonding in Muiwo will be sacrificed. In this field research, I'd like to investigate how people in Muiwo (including SLA members) conceive of the new developmental plans of Lantau, and how they are going to react to them. There must be diversity of attitudes towards these developmental plans. Standing at the critical historical conjuncture, how will they relate these plans to their understandings of Muiwo's past, present and future?