



LIVING ON THE EDGE

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Abstract: This study examines the role that tourism plays for residents of Tap Mun, an island off the northeast coast of Hong Kong which is in its last stages of decline. Once it was a vibrant fishing and farming community, but today its economy is reliant on tourism. The majority of enterprises provide only a marginal income and most workers are seasonal. Yet, this business provides the residents with the economic rationale to remain on the island, and in doing so, enables them to retain their existing social networks, sense of place, and connection to their ancestral homes. Thus, the net social benefits of pursuing subsistence-level tourism outweigh the limited economic gains. **Keywords:** periphery, domestic, social impacts, subsistence. © 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Résumé: La vie en marge. Cet article examine le rôle joué par le tourisme pour les habitants de Tap Mun, une île au large de la côte nord-est de Hong Kong qui est dans les dernières étapes de déclin. Autrefois, Tap Mun était une communauté animée de pêche et d'agriculture, mais aujourd'hui son économie dépend du tourisme. La majorité des entreprises fournissent des revenus marginaux, et la plupart des travailleurs sont saisonniers. Pourtant, ce commerce fournit aux habitants des raisons pour rester sur l'île et leur permet donc de garder leurs réseaux sociaux, leur lieu de vie et leur lien à la demeure ancestrale. Les bénéfices sociaux nets de poursuivre un tourisme de subsistance l'emportent sur les bénéfices économiques limités. **Mots-clés:** périphérie, domestique, impacts sociaux, subsistance. © 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a spatially selective activity that is clustered in relatively compact areas focused around shopping and business precincts or anchored by primary attractions (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996). The degree of spatial selectivity is especially noticeable in a place like Hong Kong, where the Special Administrative Region's (SAR) mountainous topography dictates that all development is concentrated tightly along the coastal fringes of Victoria Harbor, on reclaimed land, or in bedroom suburbs located in lowland areas of the New Territories (HKY 2001). It is this compactness that gives the city its distinctive skyline. While many people consider Hong Kong to be one of the world's most densely populated cities, in reality about three quarters of its 1,092 sq km landmass is undeveloped and almost 40% of it is gazetted as

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country park (AFCD 2004). Most of the undeveloped land can be found in the New Territories or on outlying islands.

These rural areas have largely missed out on the economic miracle that is Hong Kong, in general, and on the tourism miracle, in particular. Many of the villages in the New Territories have suffered depopulation and economic stagnation. Within one generation, formerly vibrant fishing and farming communities settled by ethnic minority Hakka and Tanka people for more than 300 years have entered steep decline. Ghost towns, decaying villages occupied by remnant populations, and abandoned farmland and aquaculture operations are now the norm in many areas. These areas have also undergone economic transformation to become part of the pleasure periphery, providing nature-based, camping, and small-scaled domestic tourism opportunities for city dwellers wishing to escape crowded urban conditions.

This paper presents a study of those individuals who have chosen to remain on one such peripheral island, Tap Mun, and who now own and operate small businesses serving tourists. Tap Mun is a small island (1.7 sq km) located off the northeast coast of Hong Kong (Figure 1). Its name was first given by fishermen for the island's resemblance to a Buddhist pagoda. It once had 5,000 residents and served as the supply station for other coastal communities. However, it began to decline in the 60s as water pollution, a decline in farming, and few opportunities for young people saw its population drift into the city or emigrate

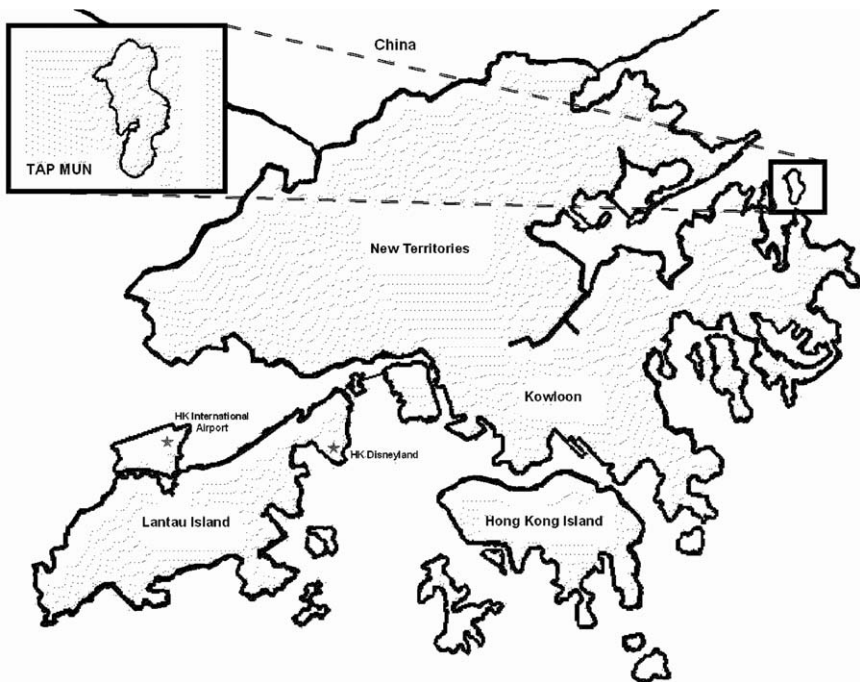


Figure 1. Location of Tap Mun

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