

MASTER'S THESIS

A geographical perspective to social sustainability: with special reference to Tai O, Hong Kong

Woo, Ka Yan

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A Geographical Perspective to Social Sustainability:
With Special Reference to Tai O, Hong Kong

WOO Ka Yan

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for the degree of
Master of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Dr. CHUNG Him
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ABSTRACT

This study is about social sustainability and the planning for it in Hong Kong. Social sustainability is not a new idea. It has been developed, investigated, discussed, and applied for over three decades. Despite the long discussion of it, the idea has remained vague and unclear. Not only a universal definition, but also a set of common agree practice is missing. As a result, a variety of interpretation has been observed under different projects.

The inadequacies call for a new perspective to guide the discussion of social sustainability and to advance the knowledge generated from it. It is therefore the objective of this study to suggest looking social sustainability from the geographical perspective. Taking geographical concepts, such as people and place relationship, spatial uniqueness and place, into consideration, this study seeks to develop a better framework for achieving social sustainability.

Employing the revitalization of Tai O, a small community in Hong Kong, as a case study, this research also investigates how the idea of social sustainability is interpreted locally; and how the idea is translated into government plans. Through this investigation, the way that sustainable development is interpreted and implemented in Hong Kong is discussed. Particular attentions are put on the planning of a ‘sustainable community’ in Tai O. Investigating the government’s tourist-based planning suggestions and local residents’ response, this study suggests that the top-down imposed plan is going to destroy rather than revitalize Tai O. Not only the plan fails to meet local need, its understanding on local characteristic remains superficial. Such failure, as this study suggests, is the

failure to think geographically. It is, therefore, imperative to incorporate geographical ideas into the discussion and planning for a socially sustainable Tai O.

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