

HERE AND THERE: RE-IMAGINING HONG KONG LANDSCAPES

# 極目足下

想・見香港風光

# 田邊樹的碎碎唸

## MUSINGS OF A TREE AT FIELDS' EDGE

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在《元朗：懷鄉戀土的地方》一書，陳雲妮娓娓道出：

「香港位處丘陵地帶，只有靠近后海灣一帶養出元朗這片河谷平原。每逢大雨，后海灣或附近河道難免氾濫或倒灌而水浸元朗，卻也令元朗土地肥沃，尤其適合挖魚塘養魚、又或在泥灘修築海堤養蠔養蝦。魚塘泥含有魚糞與腐葉，可以促進土壤的肥力，用以種植稻米、甘蔗、果樹等。」<sup>1</sup>

這就是我記憶中的元朗——水天一色、田田相連的一片靈山秀水。記得鳥兒把我帶來此地時，泥土散發著生機勃勃的鮮香、諸種微生物與蚯蚓又唧唧噥噥的交換營養心得。當我破土而出之際，抬頭望見藍得明澄的天空，遊目四顧盡是黃得燦燦然的禾稻、夾雜著翠綠的菜與橘紅的果<sup>fig 1</sup>。

大好風光有賴自然萬物的協作、也多得千百戶農家辛苦經營。農夫順應春生冬藏、秋收夏長的韻律，翻土下種、除草落肥、蓄水灌溉、收割留種；也忙著調度人手、修整耕地設施、管理收支帳簿、兼且穿梭於肥田料行、貨運司機與批發零售商之間，維繫生產與銷售的關係網。終年幾乎不曾間斷的勞務，他們種出元朗絲苗、白泥蘿蔔、錦田蕃茄等土產名物，也養護此間無數生靈——水鳥、泥鰍、田螺、蛇、青蛙、粉蝶、蜜蜂、千足蟲…<sup>2</sup>大夥兒得到自然與農人的照料，也各盡其力或鬆土施肥、或播種授粉、又或對付天敵，回饋天地人的庇蔭。不知什麼時候開始，香港經濟起飛，農夫的生計卻越見艱難。加上，政府大力推動新市鎮的發展，元朗不再願意種米種菜種瓜果，只愛收地種鋼筋大樓。我眼見車路、鐵路與行人路將青山綠水劃得破碎；農地被荒廢、被倒上建築廢料、被改建成割車場；溪流要麼乾涸見底、要麼污染成烏亮斑斕的溝渠。我的夥伴一個接一個的消失，但吸血的蚊與蠓卻肆無忌憚的聚攏。清風再也喚不回鳥鳴蛙叫，只餘下機器撞擊的轟隆隆與汽車奔馳的嗖嗖聲。

據政府及漁護署年報所載，1962年香港農地總面積佔14,108公頃，此後農田日減，2018年跌至4,327公頃。本地蔬菜自給率僅餘1.9%、稻米出產近乎零。<sup>3</sup>驟

眼看來，農業的式微已無可挽回。不過，學者周思中仔細整理各項數據的關聯，直指1960、70年代，農夫即使面對田地減少，卻一直為四五百萬人口的香港提供逾四成的新鮮蔬菜。顯見，香港農業生命力頑強，農夫自有其應對時代轉變、經濟轉型的辦法。<sup>4</sup>今時今日，在百衲布似的元朗平原上，一班老農夫、年輕人、中生代正在荒地與露天倉庫之間以不同方式投入農業生產。他們或尋求靠山吃山的簡樸人生、或實踐半農半X的多元生活方式，又或研究本土農業技藝與知識。他們在這片土地種出符合本地人胃口的食物，保住了山河地貌的蔥翠，也致力維護鄉郊的生態平衡。

四年多前，我的村子也來了一位想要親近田野、投入種植實驗的雕塑家何遠良<sup>fig 2</sup>。起初，我對一位以斧劈刀斫為業的藝術家尤為忌憚，擔憂他看上什麼良木而令手足一再折損。但阿良走入田間，率先想的不是如何創作出永存世間的地標作品，反而考慮到創作過程會否影響周遭農友的工作、其處理木材的物料如油漆、防腐劑等，又是否天然有機對水土無害。

我覺得阿良是徹頭徹尾的農夫，既種田，也種藝術作品。無論種什麼，他總是慢條斯理的四處走走看看，容讓時間滲和其中，找出自然與人力相輔相成之所在。他認為農業是人類投入生命自然衍生的行動<sup>fig 3</sup>。農人必須順服於生命莫可測知的軌跡，仔細觀察陽光、流水、土壤與田間生物的互動，自己方能參與自然的變化。對於創作，阿良更視之為可有可無、隨心而為的遊戲，借以令城市棄置物料重投自然生化的循環。我看他不時將倒塌樹木帶回工作室，但他每年創作的雕塑才不過一兩件而已。有時他乘興在木頭上揮刀劈割，然後隨手將之擺放經年；偶爾又再拿起某年某月的雕塑再三敲打琢磨，重新發現樹木天然去矯飾的姿態。

他的木雕作品看似一株株城市植物，時而扁狹的根塊自縫隙撐出一線生機，時而纖瘦的莖枝戳破種子顫抖抖的奔向陽光。儘管成長環境不易，這些作品形態畸歪勁拔，激發起人為生命的奇蹟而驚豔。在阿良眼中，創作不是個性才氣的展露，而是自我反省的過程。在這過程中，藝術家將市區抵不過歲月與風雨的樹木轉變成創

作媒材，並以其技藝尋回樹的聲音、說出彼此對世間滄桑變化的感懷。因藝術之名，木雕得到展廳燈光的映照、也在公共空間獲得觀眾的注目，但藝術家卻終歸將之帶回田野、由得風吹雨打將作品分解成孕育生命的腐殖質，重投自然生生不息的循環。

大抵「減」是阿良的處世哲學。從事農耕就是減去多餘的欲望，回到生命最基本的需要；而藝術創作更講求不斷的捨棄，察照自己的本來面目，真誠的面對世界。可是，我不知道自己該減去什麼。一棵樹所求的僅僅是青山綠水永存，好教老朋友認得元朗、記得回家的路線，閒來跟我一起看田園風光。可是，牠們迷路了、失蹤了。就算找到這裡，那幾只候鳥總是失魂落魄的，張口就問元朗何以變得越來越陌生，打聽如何憑藉僅餘的標記找到安身之處。每每聽到牠們的聒噪，我的根彷彿硬生生被剝離家園而痛得渾身起疙瘩。

想來我該讓阿良在身上劈走多餘的牽掛，回歸大地靜待元朗綠意滿盈的一天。在漫長的等待，我會唱著電影主題曲：

「風中仍共你癡癡愛在，  
未讓浮雲壞諾言。  
即使那海枯青山陷，  
與你的約誓也不變遷…」





fig 1

元朗是河海交界之地，得天獨厚而成為香港西北最肥沃的魚米之鄉，其出產的絲苗、烏頭、黑毛豬、桑椹等名物令人懷念不已。



fig A

Located at where the rivers and the sea meet, Yuen Long is blessed to be the most fertile land of fish and rice in Hong Kong. People still miss its local speciality, including long grain rice, flathead mullet, black pig, and mulberry.



fig 2 雕塑家何遠良認為藝術創作不能妄顧生態環境，其木雕作品往往在展覽過後回歸自然。





fig B The sculptor, Ho Yuen Leung, believes that art making cannot ignore environmental sustainability, and his wood carving works often return to nature after the exhibition.

fig 3 & C

儘管從事農業看似前景黯淡，但不少農夫胼手胝足解決重重困難，種出新鮮又健康的食物，也期望農田為蟲鳥提供棲地維持本地生物多樣性。

The prospect of engaging in agriculture seems bleak, but many farmers are determined to grow fresh and healthy food for the local communities and provide habitats for insects and birds to enhance biodiversity in our place.





In *Yuen Long: A Place of Local Nostalgia*, Horace Chin wrote this eloquent passage:

Hong Kong is located in a hilly region, with just one alluvial plain near Deep Bay (Hau Hoi Wan), where Yuen Long was established. Whenever there is heavy rain, the bay or nearby rivers inevitably experience flooding or saltwater intrusion, inundating Yuen Long. But this also makes its land fertile and particularly well suited to raising fish in excavated ponds, or to growing oysters and shrimp on sea walls constructed on its mud flats. Pond mud, which contains rotten leaves and the faecal waste of fish, can promote soil fertility and be used to grow rice, sugar cane, fruit trees, and other food crops. <sup>1</sup>

In my memories of Yuen Long, the sky and water are one colour, the connected fields a tranquil, unspoiled landscape of great beauty. I remember when a bird brought me to this place. The earth gave off a fresh, vital scent, and the various microorganisms and earthworms quietly exchanged nutrition tips. When I broke through the soil, I looked up at a clear blue sky before my gaze wandered over the rice paddies that surrounded me. They teemed with glorious yellow, interspersed with the emerald green of vegetables and the red orange of fruit <sup>fig A</sup> .

Such magnificent scenery relied on all of nature’s cooperation. It also owed thanks to the hard work of several thousand farmers. The farmers followed the seasonal rhythm of sowing in spring and storing in winter, harvesting in autumn and growing in summer; they tilled and planted, weeded and fertilised, stored water in reservoirs, irrigated the fields and gathered the harvest, keeping some as seed. They were kept busy dispatching field hands, tending to the land and facilities, managing cash flow and doing accounts, as well as negotiating with fertiliser suppliers, truck drivers and wholesale retailers while they maintained production and sales networks. Breaks in the work throughout the year seemed to be rare. They planted high-quality Yuen Long rice, Pak Nai radishes, Kam Tin tomatoes and other local produce described by the area in which it was grown. They were also conservationists, preserving the countless creatures who lived in this place: waterbirds, loaches, river snails, snakes, frogs, pierid butterflies, bees, millipedes . . . <sup>2</sup> All of this wildlife was cared for by both nature and farmer, each of the various species doing its utmost to repay the earth and human beings for their shelter, perhaps by loosening the

soil or spreading natural fertiliser, by dispersing seeds or pollinating flowers, or maybe by keeping natural enemies and pests in check.

At some unknown point, Hong Kong’s economy took off even as it became increasingly difficult for farmers to earn a living. At the time, the Government was also relentlessly pushing forward the development of the New Towns, and Yuen Long was no longer willing to cultivate rice, vegetables or fruit; its love was reserved for government land compensation, for planting the steel reinforcement bars of high-rise buildings. Now I see roads, train tracks and paths cutting through the green and blue landscape; I see abandoned farmland littered with construction debris and turned into parking lots for scrap vehicles; I see streams that have dried up so that the streambed has become visible, or so polluted that they are black ditches full of decay. My companions have disappeared one by one, but the bloodsucking mosquitoes and midges swarm unchallenged. The breeze no longer carries bird- or frog-song; the only remaining sounds are the noisy pounding of machinery and the whoosh of cars speeding past.

According to annual government reports as well as reports from the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, agricultural land in Hong Kong accounted for 14,108 hectares in 1962. By 2018, this number had steadily declined to just 4,327 hectares. The self-sufficiency rate for local vegetables had fallen to only 1.9%, while rice production was close to zero. <sup>3</sup> At first glance, agriculture’s demise would seem to be a foregone conclusion, but the scholar Chow Sze Chung has meticulously correlated all the relevant data and shown that in the 1960s and 70s, farmers continued to supply more than 40% of the fresh vegetables to Hong Kong’s population of four or five million, despite the reduced number of fields. Hong Kong agriculture is clearly resilient, farmers having found ways to cope with the changing times and altered economic landscape. <sup>4</sup> On the Yuen Long Plain today, a group consisting of grizzled farmers, young people and the middle-aged are engaged in various types of agricultural production that span fallow land to open-air storage facilities. They are seeking a simple, self-reliant life, or living a mixed lifestyle that is one-part agricultural and one-part something else, or researching local agricultural techniques and practical know-how. Committed to maintaining the rural ecological balance, they grow food on this land suited to local tastes and preserve the lush green of the landscape.

Four years or so ago, a sculptor named Ho Yuen Leung arrived in my village. He too wanted to live close to the land, to get involved in the agricultural experiment <sup>fig B</sup> . At first, I was deeply apprehensive about an artist who made his living by wielding an axe and wood carving tools, concerned that he would take a fancy to this or that especially fine tree and inflict damage on my brothers and sisters. But Ah Leung walked into the village, and his first thought was not how to create a work of art that would make an enduring mark on the world, but how his creative process might affect the work of the farmers around him. He also gave thought to whether the materials he used on our wood, such as paint and preservatives, were natural and organic, things that won’t harm the natural environment.

I think Ah Leung is a farmer in every respect, cultivating both the land and works of art. In either case, he doesn’t rush into things. He takes a measured, deliberate look around, makes time to mingle with others, and seeks out all the places where natural and manual labour complement one another. He thinks of farming as an activity that arises naturally from humans participating in life <sup>fig C</sup> . Farmers must obey life’s unpredictable trajectory and can play their part in the ever-changing natural world only by paying close attention to how living creatures interact with the sunlight, water, soil and fields. As for his artmaking, Ah Leung sees it as a game to be played when and as he likes, one which allows him to recycle the city’s discarded materials and put them back into the biogeochemical cycle. I sometimes see him take a fallen tree back to his studio, but he seldom makes more than one or two sculptures in the course of a year. Sometimes, gripped by impulse, he sets knife to wood, splits it, slices into it, and then he lets it sit for months or even years; he returns to this sculpture every so often, refining and polishing it again and again, rediscovering the wood’s natural, unpretentious beauty.

His wood sculptures appear to be urban plants. Sometimes a flat, narrow root ball unfurls a slender thread, its sole hope of survival pushing upward out of a crevice; sometimes a narrow stem perforates a seed, trembling in its rush towards sunlight. The sculptures have lopsided, irregular forms but rise up tall in spite of difficult growing conditions, inspiring wonder at the miracle of life. For Ah Leung, creating art is not about showcasing artistic talent, but a process of self-reflection. During this process, he turns urban trees that have fallen to time and the natural elements into a creative medium. His artistic skill gives back the trees’ voices, expressing both his and the trees’ sentiments about the tremendous changes in the world. For art’s

sake, Ah Leung’s wood carvings are placed under exhibition hall lights and gazed at in public spaces. Eventually, however, he returns his sculptures to the open. There, subjected to wind and rain, they decompose into life-nurturing humus and once again become part of the natural cycle.

In general, Ah Leung’s life philosophy is one of “subtraction”. To engage in farming is to pare away any superfluous desires and return to life’s essentials. To create art is to constantly look for something to discard, to examine one’s true self and to face the world with sincerity. But I don’t know what to subtract. As a tree, I ask for nothing more than a landscape that endures, to teach old friends how to recognise Yuen Long and remember the way back here, to ask these friends to come join me in looking at the rural scenery when time allows. But those friends have lost their way and disappeared. Even if they find this place, the birds who pass through here are bewildered. They ask why Yuen Long is becoming increasingly unfamiliar; they inquire how to find shelter by following the few signposts that still remain. Every time I hear their noisy chatter, I feel as if my roots have been ripped loose from my home’s soil and my body has broken out in painful knots from crown to roots.

I should probably let Ah Leung prune back all my excess cares. I should return to the earth and wait for a day when Yuen Long is lush and green. During my long wait, I will sing these lines from a film’s theme song:

Even during storms, I’m still so in love with you,  
Haven’t let the clouds break my promise.  
Even if the seas dry up and the mountains fall,  
The vow I made to you will never change. . .



- 1 陳雲：《元朗，懷鄉戀土的地方》（香港：花千樹出版社，2017年），頁22。

Chin Horace, *Yuen Long: A Place of Local Nostalgia* (Hong Kong: Arcadia Press, 2017), 22.

- 2 半斗：〈學農拾記〉，《種植香港》2017年7月號，頁103–116；鐘智峰等：〈陳坤記菜種行一個點：縱觀香港農業邊界〉，《種植香港》2016年10月號，頁81–90。

Bun Dau, "Learning Forgotten Farming Lore," *Planting Hong Kong*, July 2017, 103–116; Cheung Chi-fung et al., "The Chan Kwan Kee Seed Co. As Node: Surveying Hong Kong's Agricultural Boundaries," *Planting Hong Kong*, October 2016, 81–90.

- 3 周思中：《夕陽的光：誰說香港沒有菜園》（香港：藝鵠有限公司，2022年），頁36–40；姚偉彤等：〈香港農業狀況〉，載鄧崇銘、姚松炎主編：《香港在地農業讀本：追尋生態、適切、低投入、社區農業》（香港：土地教育基金，2015年），頁26–28。

Chow Sze Chung, *Light from the Setting Sun: Who Says Hong Kong Has No Vegetable Gardens* (Hong Kong: Art and Culture Outreach, 2022), 36–40; Yiu Wai Tung et al., "The Agricultural Situation in Hong Kong," *A Reader on Local Agriculture: The Pursuit of Ecological, Adaptive, Low Input, Community*, ed. Chow Sung-ming and Yiu Chung-yim (Hong Kong: Land Education Foundation, 2015), 26–28.

- 4 周思中：《夕陽的光：誰說香港沒有菜園》，頁46–47。

Chow Sze Chung, *Light from the Setting Sun: Who Says Hong Kong Has No Vegetable Gardens* (Hong Kong: Art and Culture Outreach, 2022), 46–47.