Enquiry Question:  *An Analysis of the Value and the Preservation of Dai Pai Dong in Hong Kong*

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Notes:

1. Written reports should not exceed 4500 words. The reading time for non-written reports should not exceed 22 minutes and the short written texts accompanying non-written reports should not exceed 1100 words. The word count for written reports and the short written texts does not include the covering page, the table of contents, titles, graphs, tables, captions and headings of photos, punctuation marks, footnotes, endnotes, references, bibliography and appendices.

2. Candidates are responsible for counting the number of words in their reports and the short written texts and indicating it accurately on this covering page.

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A. Problem Definition

With rapid economic development, it has been said that the economic sector has the priority to use the resources. Modernization and urbanization lead to the imbalance development in the society. Today, it is difficult to preserve the historical heritages. Throughout this project, I would study the factors affecting the existing and the potentiality of promoting Dai Pai Dong, one of the cultural heritages as a highlight of Hong Kong.

It has long been criticized that Hong Kong is a cultural desert, but there are still many tangible and intangible cultural heritages\(^1\) available in Hong Kong. Dai Pai Dong is one of precious cultural heritages that embeds Hong Kong’s unique food and social culture. It is said that Hong Kong is an international financial centre which is concerned most about economic activities and even sometimes has to sacrifice the cultural heritages so as to cater for the economic development. However, as a cosmopolitan, there should be no conflicts between economic and culture development in Hong Kong. The main concern, instead, is how different aspects cooperate with one another along the development process.

Recently, many Hong Kong people have been worried that Dai Pai Dongs will one day vanish without a trace. Dai Pai Dong is the one of the icons of Hong Kong that many Hong Kong people are still proud of it.

The city was full of these unique outdoor food stalls 25 years ago, but is now fast losing them. As of today, there only 28 licensed Dai Pai Dongs remain. However, the vendors of Dai Pai Dongs still endeavour to maintain the unique food types and style, and the relaxing eating environment for Hongkongers and tourists. Many of the Dai Pai Dongs are not operated in the open area now but the dining atmosphere has not much changed.\(^2\).

The objective of the study is to review the characteristics and the development history of Dai Pai in Hong Kong and find out the factors for preserving and promoting Dai Pai Dong as a highlight of Hong Kong. Although the unique flavor of its appealing, many problems, such as food safety and hygiene, have actually hidden behind, the potentiality of developing Dai Pai Dong can still be explored when promoting it as a

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\(^1\) Intangible culture is the counterpart of culture which is tangible or touchable, whereas intangible culture includes song, music, drama, skills, crafts, and the other parts of culture that can be recorded but cannot be touched and interacted with, without a vehicle for the culture.

\(^2\) http://hk-magazine.com/restaurants/article/definitive-dai-pai-dong#sthash.2po96qWu.dpuf
highlight of Hong Kong.

Moreover, the study will make suggestions for the government to regulate Dai Pai Dong while the cultural heritage could still be preserved. The role of the government is important to preserve cultural asset in Hong Kong that bring memories to Hongkongers on the one hand, but also promote the value of food heaven that attracting visitors from different places of the world to Hong Kong on the other hand.

The focus of the study is spelled out by the following focus questions which contributes to the delivery of an enquired based study:

1. What are the cultural characteristics and the development situation of the Dai Pai Dong in Hong Kong?
2. What are the factors need to be considered when preserving Dai Pai Dong?
3. What can be done further to further promote Dai Pai Dong in Hong Kong?

Through this study, I want to know how the cultural hesitates and economic developments could coexist that the development of Dai Pai Dong will have a new phrase.
B. Relevant Concepts and Knowledge/Facts/Data

**Cultural Heritage:** Cultural heritage is a legacy of culture in a place that preserved for future generations\(^3\). There are unique features of the culture embedding historical and social development. The people of the place will be benefit from the heritage of the culture such as social cohesion\(^4\) through collective memories and social harmony. Usually, culture heritage includes tangible and intangible culture\(^5\). Dai Pai Dong is a kind of intangible culture which could be regarded as a food culture tradition especially in the 60s and 70s of Hong Kong. Lower class people had their fast lunch and even late dinner in this kind of outdoor food stalls. That was also a common place for social and family gatherings of the lower class people then.

**Collective Memory:** Collective memory is regarded as a kind of cultural memory that people in a place commonly construct, share and transcend\(^6\). Collective memory is an invisible bondage that brings people of a place together because they have a common experience, no matter it is joyful and painful, in a period of time in the past. It has been said that songs, food, incidents, movies and buildings could be of generating collective memory for a society\(^7\). More importantly, cultural memory is said to be an element to construct cultural identity of a place (or national identity)\(^8\) as well as make a society more consolidate and harmonious. It is said that the food and eating environment of Dai Pai Dong is already a kind of collective memory of Hong Kong\(^9\). As an intrinsic attribute of collective memory, that’s why people in Hong Kong endeavor to preserve Dai Pai Dong because it is not only an eating place but also a symbol of lower class life in Hong Kong in 60’s to 70’s.

**Characteristics of Dai Pai Dong:** Dai Pai Dongs are open-air food stalls that usually

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\(^6\) [http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E9%9B%86%E9%AB%94%E5%9B%9E%E6%86%B6](http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E9%9B%86%E9%AB%94%E5%9B%9E%E6%86%B6)

\(^7\) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8alwbPZXGg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8alwbPZXGg)


operate “on the roadside with fold-up tables and chairs and no air-conditioning”

Dai Pai Dongs are stalls in simple and practical structures made up of metal and a canopy, with a sign of Dai Pai Dong on top.

A large variety of food is available at Dai Pai Dongs, ranging from inexpensive porridge and fried doughs to seafood at night. Some are selling Chinese cuisine while others are selling Western-styled dishes. Usually there are no set menus. Customers may order from different stalls, like buying a cup of milk tea from one and fried noodles from another.

**Government Regulation:** The government is authorized by the people to exercise its power to regulate various activities in a society so as to ensure a smooth and stable environment for development. However, the degree of regulation is always subject to debate due to the various interests and needs of different sectors and stakeholders of a society. The means of conducting regulation is usually through policy making and legislation. For Dai Pai Dong in Hong Kong, with considering the issues of food safety and street hygiene, there was a big change in the mode of business of Dai Pai Dong in Hong Kong. The unique features of Dai Pai Dong was said to be vanished. The government should have a role is preserving the Dai Pai Dong culture that the business operation, hygiene and food safety of it could be improved.

**Development of Dai Pai Dong in Hong Kong:** In the late 19th century, there were many outdoor food stalls in different places of Hong Kong. The name of “Dai Pai” means a big size license. At that time the vendors of the outdoor food stalls were required to display the license in the food stalls for checking. This type of outdoor food stalls was commonly called as Dai Pai Dong (outdoor food stalls with a big license displayed). With the provision of convenient, cheap and delicious food by Dai Pai Dongs, they became fast popular in busy streets and lanes in Hong Kong.

However, with the popularity of Dai Pai Dong, the problems of food safety and hygiene became an issue. Some Dai Pai Dongs also occupied some public space due to their good business especially in the evening, there was also a problem of traffic congestion in busy districts. The government stopped to issue the license and limited the

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10 http://3w2tgroup.wix.com/daipaidong#history
11 http://3w2tgroup.wix.com/daipaidong#history
12 http://3w2tgroup.wix.com/daipaidong#history
transference of license in 1956. When time passed by and the tightening up of the the requirements of food safety, the number of Dai Pai Dongs in Hong Kong gradually reduced.

Since 1975, many Dai Pai Dong have been moved into temporary markets or into cooked food centres, which were established in public housing estates and still exist nowadays. Some more successful ones have turned into air-conditioned restaurants. Although the hygiene conditions of Dai Pai Dongs have been improved, they have lost its traditional characteristics, especially in the latter case.

The number of Dai Pai Dongs has been declining since the 1980s. According to Food and Environmental Hygiene Department in 2010, there are only a total of 28 old street food stalls in Hong Kong, “14 stalls in Sham Shui Po, 10 stalls in Central, 3 stalls in Wan Chai and one stall on Lantau Island”.

As Hong Kong is on the verge of losing all Dai Pai Dongs, which is a valuable cultural heritage, this study aims at analysing the potential for the further development of Dai Pai Dongs.

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13 [http://3w2tgroup.wix.com/daipaidong#history](http://3w2tgroup.wix.com/daipaidong#history)
14 But after much persuasion and discussion in society, especially with the idea of preserving “intangible heritage” floating around these days, the government has decided to reopen that door—a Dai Pai Dong license can now be inherited by the original licensee’s children. [http://hk-magazine.com/restaurants/article/definitive-dai-pai-dong#sthash.2po96qWu](http://hk-magazine.com/restaurants/article/definitive-dai-pai-dong#sthash.2po96qWu)
15 [http://3w2tgroup.wix.com/daipaidong#history](http://3w2tgroup.wix.com/daipaidong#history)
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C. In-depth Explanation of the Issue

When the issue of redevelopment of Dai Pai Dong is considered, some factors should firstly be discussed. The factors identified is primarily based on the previous discussion that how Dai Pai Dong was disappearing and the awareness of the importance of local food culture. These factors determine the potential for the future development of Dai Pai Dongs.

Positive views on Dai Pai Dongs

Public’s preference

Dai Pai Dong is undoubtedly an indispensable element in Hong Kong due to the collective memories. The main reason why traditional Dai Pai Dong is so popular, it is because it relates to old Hong Kong. Most Dai Pai Dongs which were set up by old-aged people from grass-root families. The cheap and delicious food attracted many people to have meal at that time.

Nowadays, Dai Pai Dong still remains popular among the public. From the interview conducted by News Magazine\textsuperscript{18}, many office workers in Central would like to have lunch in Dai Pai Dongs once a week. They think that a group of colleagues have a meal in there like the family union. It shows that Dai Pai Dong as the family provided warm and comfortable feelings to the public. They do not fear of the hygiene problem, contrary they have the collective memories in there because when talking about Dai Pai Dong, it evokes resonance among the public.

Providing Cheap Food More Varieties and Convenience

Dai Pai Dongs provide cheap food at a convenient location to residents. From a survey conducted by FEHD in 2001, the majority of respondents indicated that the convenient location is the reason for patronage (53\%)\textsuperscript{19}. There is no need of bookings or to plan, you can get an infinite variety of food and drink, and it would add character to our rather boring environment. They attract customers of different ages, enabling the young and the elderly to meet in the community. Therefore, these characteristics of Dai Pai Dongs should be preserved in the future development projects.

\textsuperscript{18} News Magazine: 香港大牌檔 一牌兩制 Part B
\url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SS9mOUaOwo}

\textsuperscript{19} \url{http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/fseh/papers/fe1214cb2-492-5-e.pdf}
Negative views on Dai Pai Dongs

Nuisance to Residents

Most Dai Pai Dongs in Central are located adjacent to residential buildings. The Hong Kong and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has been receiving complaints from residents on the operation of Dai Pai Dongs. With reference to the statistics of FEHD posted on the Press Release, about 380 cases regarding the complaints of Dai Pai Dong were received in that year, including noises, poor hygiene, blocking of passageways and illegally extending food business.

Hygiene issue

Hygiene problem is the main reason that the residents complaint. Since SARS in 2003, more people raise the awareness of public health. Thus, when they have meal outside, they would put the hygiene condition in first place. However, the environmental hygiene and food safety in Dai Pai Dongs raise doubt among the public. Referring to a survey conducted by FEHD in 2001, about 65% respondents consider the environment in Dai Pai Dong is unhygienic. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that lots of complaints concerning the poor hygiene of Dai Pai Dong. In order to promote Dai Pai Dong, it should build up the public’s confident towards the hygiene and hence the safety of food first.

Traffic problem

In addition, blocking the road is another significant problem caused by developing Dai Pai Dong. A report posted on South China Morning Post in 2005 indicates that out of 200 complaints in 2004, 90% of them accused Dai Pai Dong of blocking the road. They have occupied the pedestrian street by tables and chairs, just leaving little spaces preserved for pedestrians, it caused inconvenient to the public. Until now, the problem does not solve. For future development, the residents and Dai Pai Dong owners should cooperate together. Also, the government should strike a balance between residents’ dissatisfaction and the owners’ operation.

20 Press Release LCQ 16: Dai Pai Tongs and Hawker Permitted Area
21 Openzine: Behind the Façade of Dai Pai Dong
D. Judgment and Justification

After the above discussion, from my point of view, I agree the Dai Pai Dong’s culture should be preserved in Hong Kong. And the government has a role to have better arrangement. From the Legislative Council records\textsuperscript{23}, it mentioned that in order to increase the room for the survival of Dai Pai Dong, the government should strive for preserving the culture of it and tie in with the promotion focus of the tourism industry.

Reasons for the Preservation of Dai Pai Dongs
The reasons for preserving of Dai Pai Dongs can be divided in two aspects; social aspects and the economic aspects.

Social cultural aspects

(a) Uniqueness of Hong Kong Collective Memory
Dai Pai Dongs are so valuable that its existence is well justified in Hong Kong. Both the friendly environment and the good food quality are the important considerations. Dai Pai Dongs should be preserved for its uniqueness, symbolizing the grass-root culture and the hard working spirit in the collective memory of Hong Kong people.

Cultural heritage issue of Dai Pai Gongs has been discussed in the Legislative Council before. The Legislative councilor, Tommy Cheung Yu-yan, representing catering industry raised a motion to support to preserve Dai Pai Dong.\textsuperscript{24}

(b) For local people’ convenience
As mentioned before, the style of Dai Pai Dongs promote causal culture. It is an open-air food stalls, not required to book seats, the food stalls are `convenient with a rowdy yet friendly atmosphere’, a call a 29-year-old interviewee\textsuperscript{25} reported in a newspaper article. It allows friends reunion to chat loudly, drinking beers with relaxing mood, many clients cultivate friendly relationship with the owner of Dai Pai Dong. Some Dai Pai Dongs are open up to mid-night or even for 24 hours,\textsuperscript{26} it

\textsuperscript{25} http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hkedition/2008-1031/content_7160406.htm
matches with the busy and tight schedule of Hong Kong people with long working hours.

**Economic aspects**

(a) **Cheap and variety of food provided**

According to an introduction of a web site[^27], the average consumption price is below $40. It is suitable to the grass roots to provide cheaper food than in the restaurant. For the general public also praise the food of Dai Pai Dong is fresh, many varieties ranging from western to eastern food style, quick to serve food, etc. which match the HK style of living of fast and efficient. 28

(b) **Tourist Attractions**

Dai Pai Dong has the potential to become a new attraction for tourists in Hong Kong. The tourist industry is positive about the attractiveness of Dai Pai Dongs for tourists, especially those from the States and Europe and welcomes the preservation of Dai Pai Dongs. Andrea Ng, a veteran tour guide, thinks, "Dai Pai Dongs match their imagination of an old Hong Kong," Ng elaborated. [^29] Local study[^30] and councilors [^31] also agree that preserving Dai Pai Dong can promote tourists as many western visitors want to see the old tradition of Hong Kong. Hong Kong can follow a successful experience in Singapore (Hawker Centres) which is a tourist attraction.

**Government’s role on the preservation of Dai Pai Dongs**

Thoughout the years, the government has made the licensing policy more responsible to public need’s and some regulations for the operation of Dai Pai Dong. In consultation with the District Councils, the FEH Department has relaxed the “licence succession of Dai Pai Dongs and the transfer restrictions on them”. 32 In other words, although the number of Dai Pai Dong licence remains unchanged, the business could

[^28]: 羅珮貞，羅曉華，《傳統行業的凋零---大牌檔當可去何從？—探討大牌檔的保留問題》，2007年4月26日
[^30]: 羅珮貞，羅曉華，《傳統行業的凋零---大牌檔當可去何從？—探討大牌檔的保留問題》，2007年4月26日
sustain if the direct family members of the license holder would like to continue with the operation. Also, the restrictions on the number of tables and stools allowed in each stall are further relaxed, enabling the accommodation of more customers.

But the preservation projects still have some limitations, for example, if it moves some Dai Pai Dongs into commercial premises, this may increase the financial burden of the small owners of Dai Pai Dongs. It also strongly destroy its unique features that originally as an open-air food stall, which is treasured by Hong Kong people as discussed in part (c) Therefore, I hope the government can subsidize the sanitary facilities in order to upgrade the hygiene conditions of Dai Pai Dongs, instead of forcing them to move into commercial premises. Also, government can have better regulation and policy that design certain places for Dai Pai Dongs outdoor operation. It will bring the convenience to the customers and preserve the unique feature of it.

There are different views in the society about how Dai Pai Dongs should be preserved. For instance, the Legislative Council member (catering) claimed that the call for preserving Dai Pai Dongs in a 100% original style is “irrational”. He said that Dai Pai Dongs should be modernized and transformed to be clean and tidy. However, to me, the essence of this cultural heritage should be preserved in any “modernization process” and sanitary improvement of Dai Pai Dongs. The alfresco dining environment, the structure and outlook of the stall and the variety of food that characterize Dai Pai Dongs and forms an important part of our collective memory. If these are lost, the new “restaurants” or “fast food shops” are no longer Dai Pai Dongs.

I also deem it necessary for the government to consider the traffic problems nuisance to residents and hygiene issues with the operation of Dai Pai Dongs, while launching preservation projects. In fact, the government has tightened the control over the structure, the storage of goods and the locations of hawker stalls afterwards. More comprehensive enhancement projects could be made in the course of urban renewal. The location of stalls could be better planned so that they will not be too close to the residential areas and will not block traffic flow.

Hawker centres in Singapore are examples of how the food culture is being preserved by the government. Some hawker centres are located in the business centre, like Lau Pat Sat. Food stalls are found on the roads at night. The government has invested

in the upgrading of facilities and sanitary conditions of these hawker centres, which are now important tourist spots.\footnote{http://app2.nea.gov.sg/public-health/hawker-centres/the-story-of-hawker-centres-upgrading-programme-(hup)}

In view of the example of Singapore, the Hong Kong government should also take up its responsibility as a regulator, planner and investor in the preservation of Dai Pai Dongs as a cultural heritage of Hong Kong.

**Conclusion**

The study shows that the general public shows appreciation and support to Dai Pai Dong, which leads to a higher chance of promoting its culture as a highlight of Hong Kong.

However, there are some conflicts among the government, the Dai Pai Dong owners and residents related to the priority in economic interest, collective memory and social disturbing. In order to promote Dai Pai Dong as a highlight of Hong Kong, cooperation is a prerequisite.

For the cooperation between the government and the Dai Pai Dong owners, the government could subsidize the sanitary facilities in order to upgrade the hygiene conditions. On the other hand, the Dai Pai Dong owners also need to obey the rules set by FEHD which keep the street clear and ensure the food safety.

For the cooperation between the Dai Pai Dong owners and the residents, the Dai Pai Dong owners should extend their business legally which need to preserve enough space for the pedestrian. Also, the operation hour should be shorter as the overnight operation cause nuisance to residents. On the other hand, the residents should consider the situation of Dai Pai Dong owners. They also need to earn income to support their family.

As a result, the cooperation with different stakeholder could create a win-win situation. The residents could enjoy low price but delicious food. Overall the society, the traditional culinary culture and collective memory can thrive as well as economic interest can be safeguarded.
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