

Time for TV

# Study of a dying village

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S.C.M.P.

By BARRY GIRLING

ATV's *New Territories Special* series of a quartet of glimpses at the changing face of the New Territories began well with a study of one "dying village" — Fanlau on south Lantau.

Originally produced for ATV's Chinese channel, the documentary profiles will illustrate how much the official policy of benign neglect of the New Territories was changed a decade ago when population pressures and land revenue needs forced the Government to open up the New Territories to "progress."

Ten years ago, according to Yeung Chi-kwong's informatively restrained script (read well, with his usual quiet sense of concern, by Chris Bale), the village of Fanlau was a thriving community of 100 families.

It was as prosperous as the "capital" of Lantau, Tai O, is today, and had pig farmers, merchants, opium parlours and gambling houses as well as a large fishing fleet trawling out of its wide sandy bay.

Today it is largely in ruins, populated by a dozen elderly villagers surviving on charity in a decaying rural wilderness two hours' walk from anywhere and only connected to the outside world (Tai O) by a Saturday ferry service.

Eighty-year-old "Uncle Ng," his arthritic wife and their few remaining relatives and neighbours eat twice a day, sweep the village streets, wait for the few younger generation visitors returning to their home village for brief trips, and close their doors at dusk.

"What destroyed Fanlau?" the narration asked, postulating two answers — a communication gap between the village generations and "social progress" that had attracted the younger generation to city life.

Thus Fanlau was a typical mood-piece TV documentary — pensive, edited thoughtfully, with a soulful soundtrack of Chinese instrumental music and lapping waves.

Fanlau's collapse was seen as a "casualty of change," like many outlying communities on the islands and the New Territories mainland.

Next week's study (Sunday at 7.30 pm) will look at one of the new towns that have hastened such change — Tuen Mun — and the following programme profiles a pair of New Territories farming communities.

Gently educational, with character-acted dubbing of villagers' interview comments, the *New Territories Special* series broadens our understanding of Hongkong's little-seen corners with these pleasant televisual essays.

They provoke questions (such as why did a Fanlau man kill his brother over an inheritance dispute during the Japanese occupation? And what happened to the property speculators' plans of the 1970s?) that could prompt a never-ending series of detailed documentary studies.