Place and Culture in Identity Construction and Negotiation:
The Case of Hong Kong

by

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Abstract

Identity, a contested subject in postcolonial and global cities, is discussed in this thesis as a construct that is represented in the processes of cultural production and consumption of “places”. The postcolonial global city is where identities and cultures blend and contradict, and also where new identities and cultures arise. Portrayed as a space of “in-between” - not entirely “Western” nor exclusively Chinese, Hong Kong demonstrates the complexities of multiple global cultural flows mixing with local and national aspirations of identity. Exactly at a time when the new government and citizens are grasping the identity and culture that is unique to Hong Kong, it threatens to “disappear” in a political and cultural sense (Abbas, 1997). The struggles to define Hong Kong’s identity are exemplified in the outcomes and negotiations of the city’s spatial processes – urban development, renewal, and heritage preservation. Two cases in the cultural production of space are investigated. As studies in contrast: the grand development of the to-be international arts destination West Kowloon Cultural District that symbolizes Hong Kong’s global aspiration, and the local residents’ struggle for the preservation of Wing Lee Street representing the values of Hong Kong’s working class. The narratives of identity projected by those in power (elites, states, markets) are found to contradict with how Hong Kong people identify themselves and their city, and these contradictions are demonstrated in the place negotiations in the city.
Lay Summary

The identity of Hong Kong is shown in its unique places and culture, but this identity is mixed and complex. Hong Kong is going through a time of change that is sparked by the city’s reunion with China. While the Government of Hong Kong tries to keep Hong Kong’s status in the world by creating world-class arts facilities, local people want to protect familiar places that they connect with. The two cases in this study are the development of West Kowloon Cultural District and the protection of Wing Lee Street. By exploring these two contrasting cases, I show how the creation of new places and the protection of old places can disrupt or strengthen the identity of a city and its residents.
Preface

This thesis is an original work by Carmut Me. No part of this thesis has been previously published.
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<tr>
<td>DEVB</td>
<td>Development Bureau</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government, the</td>
<td>The Government of Hong Kong</td>
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<td>HAB</td>
<td>Home Affairs Bureau</td>
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<tr>
<td>HKSAR</td>
<td>Hong Kong Special Administrative Region</td>
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<td>PRC</td>
<td>People's Republic of China</td>
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<tr>
<td>URA</td>
<td>Urban Renewal Authority</td>
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<td>WKCD</td>
<td>West Kowloon Cultural District</td>
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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

This paper discusses the intersection of place and identity in the specific case of Hong Kong. Negotiating between post-colonial, global, national and local narratives, Hong Kong’s experience presents an instructive avenue to investigate its production and construction of images and identities. It offers an opportunity to explore the gaps and contradictions between cities as “storehouses of memory” (Hayden, 1997) and as places that are constantly being reshaped in the active present. Prior to the official designation of Special Administrative Region in the People’s Republic of China in 1997, Hong Kong had been a British colonial city for over 150 years. During this period, it experienced tremendous growth – from colonial trading port to industrial center to international finance and commerce hub. The combined effects of colonialism and globalization are apparent in the city’s social and urban fabric. A mixture of colonial, modern, and vernacular architectural styles are apparent the city; the ideas of a free market prevail, facilitating international trade; and forms of late capitalism can be seen as a dominant value in the city and its people. After sovereignty of the region was returned to China in 1997 (referred to as “the Handover”), the Region is ruled under the “one country, two systems” principle which would allow Hong Kong’s partially democratic governmental and capitalist economic systems to remain autonomous and separate from China’s for the next 50 years. However, with “true” reunification looming on the horizon, the future of the
city-region remains uncertain. Local scholars suggest that the reunion with China is a continuation of its colonial history – a form of neo-colonialism with a nationalist agenda (Ng, 2009; Siu & Ku, 2008; Ku & Tsui, 2008; Chan & So, 2016). China strategically positions Hong Kong within its regime, allowing Hong Kong’s capitalist market economy to continue autonomously while still belonging to the state.

The anxiety of political uncertainty is exacerbated by social, economic and cultural changes since the Handover: an increase in political, social, business and economic networks and mobility between China and Hong Kong resulting in tensions drawn out by the cultural differences between the Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese people; heated debates about the government’s reinforcement of “civic and national education” to strengthen national identity (Jones, 2015; Chong, 2013); a desire for Hong Kong history that mobilized a heritage movement (Erni, 2001); the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and 2004 SARS outbreak that brought increased concern over whether the strength of Hong Kong’s economy will continue; a large pro-democratic movement driven by increased political participation among youth.

Other crucial questions are what role Hong Kong will be allowed to play in China’s increasing capitalist development, against Shanghai’s rivalry as a financial core and Hong Kong’s absorption into the Pearl River Delta Economic Zone. Hong Kong’s identity, one that was never given much attention prior to the return of sovereignty, is now in the center of discussions across social, cultural, economic and political issues as it threatens to be lost in the city’s reintegration with China. For many factors that should not be simplified or isolated, including those above, Hong Kong
people are reflecting upon what Hong Kong is and what it means to be a "Hong Konger".

The making and remaking of places, imbuing meaning into space, is a process through which the powerful impose their imagined vision for the city and the civil society reinforce their identity and make claims to space. We make and remake places everyday though “social reiterative practices” (Cresswell 2004; Tuan, 1977; Fraser & Lepofsky 2003; Ho & Douglass, 2008). Through everyday practices, one builds a relationship with others and with place, and it becomes a part of one's sense of self (Proshansky, 1978). The “lived” spaces such as streets, plazas and civic spaces become representations of identities as locations where social memories are constructed and stored (Lefebvre, 1991; Hayden 1997; Ho & Douglass, 2008). This thesis is situated in the premise that no urban place is void of memories, meanings and identity, and that these meanings can be strengthened or challenged through changes in social, cultural circumstances and also in the remaking of the built environment. Urban landscapes are not neutral spaces: they are complex structures and a result of the interaction between humans and the environment. The urban landscape incorporates social, cultural and economic dimensions and is formed and shaped by human activities. They thus embody the values, beliefs and symbolic meanings of communities; values, beliefs and symbolic meanings that also may change as time and society progresses: the physical reflection of urban identity.

The place-making and image-making practices in Hong Kong are abundant, fluctuating and complex as various agencies actively seek to address the concept of
identity, globally and locally, whether explicitly or implied. Market, state and local actors are attempting, contradicting at times, to establish identities for the city and its residents. On the one hand, the Hong Kong SAR government invests 2.6 billion US dollars towards a world-class cultural district, while local grassroots activists actively call for the protection of built heritage. Central to this discussion is how the city-region is grappling with its colonial past and its reunification with the socially and ideologically disparate China. While Hong Kong has politically reunited with China through the “one country, two systems” principle, a social and cultural integration has yet been achieved (So, 2011). How do the processes of identity construction, discovery, and realization reflect the place-making practices and organization of the city’s built environment?

Global cities of today are repositioning to the mixing of cultures brought by flows of people, goods, and ideas. The processes of globalization intensify cosmopolitanism in such cities, and create lasting affects upon their cultural identities, as well as within built and spatial forms. Globalization has facilitated cultural interaction and the formation of new social relationships, producing multicultural cities containing plural identities. The urban landscape is continually restructured and transformed. Since the 1970s, with the aim of positioning cities in the global arena, planners, architects and policy makers utilize various strategies to insert these places in the world cities arena. “Homogenization” of globalizing cities is attributed also to some grand “worlding” projects (Ong 2011, 2011), creating “places of nowhere” and spaces for consumption. Friedmann (2010) refers to these practices as place-
breaking rather than place-making. As neighbourhoods are renewed and redeveloped, places are reappropriated and, as a consequence, embedded social memories and collective identity become fragmented (Hayden, 1995; Kusno, 1998; Yeoh, 2001).

Dualistically, globalization has brought a revival of interest in the ideas of locality and place. As cities become homogenized, a need arises for the national/local state to emphasize the culture of the “local” and “authentic” identity in order to both reinforce nationalism and establish competitive distinction (Kong, Gibson & Khoo, 2006; Sassen, 2002; Douglass, 2002). Cities turn their focus to cultural development, integrating economic and cultural activity around the production and consumption of the arts, architecture, fashion and design (Scott, 2000), alongside the enhancement of place-based heritage to strengthen place identity. Concurrently, histories and memories are valorized - often with re-interpretation of those memories (Mckenzie & Hutton, 2015; Kong, 2007; Douglass & Ho, 2002). Images and symbolism are used to showcase the city’s cultural identity. In attempts to articulate the city’s local identity through these intentional policies and design, the imagined hegemonic narrative is imposed on the landscape, often contradicting the narratives of the lived spaces. In this context, the places in question are not just territories where material transformations take place, but also where identities and power are negotiated.

Moreover, the focus on cultural consumption of forms of internationally recognized arts, at times challenge the recognition of vernacular spaces as well as intangible
heritage. As opposed to the tangible heritage of buildings and monuments, the concrete objects that validate social memories, intangible heritage is more fragile and requires a different set of tools and programs for conservation. UNESCO (2016) defines intangible heritage as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups, and...individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.” In this sense, intangible heritage manifested in oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events contribute to a sense of identity.

In recent years, Hong Kong has followed other major cities and invested in cultural development as a strategy to strengthen its economy and to attract the “creative class” (Florida, 2002). This has sparked contentious debate from local political and cultural critics (Cartier, 2008). In the context of its reunification with China, and the backdrop of the “one country, two systems” principle, Hong Kong and its people are faced with the ideals of a global city while dealing with struggles in attempts to define the identity of the city; and for whom cultural development serves.

1.2 Scope and Research Questions

This paper explores place-making practices and processes in the form of cultural infrastructure development and heritage preservation in Hong Kong to document and understand the implications for local identities. From this discussion, I hope to better document and describe the organic self-realization of Hong Kong people's
collective identity via the rejection of cultivated and projected identities through
government and privatized urban development and the culture which facilitated
this process. Through this research, we can identify interdisciplinary connections
between urban studies, sociology and cultural studies research; and when applied to
either discourse can contribute another dimension of value.

The principal research questions of this study are:

1. What is the relationship between the cultural production of place-making
   and identity in postcolonial globalizing cities during periods of change?

2. How is Hong Kong establishing identity through cultural production of place-
   making and heritage? What are the various place-making practices set up by
   the states vs. market vs. local; elites vs. non-elites?

3. How do the place-making practices discussed in Q2 portray the multiple
   narratives of identity in Hong Kong? What are the similarities/contradictions
   between the images created?

4. How do everyday practices and individual identity contradict or comply with
   projected narratives by states and markets?

1.3 Method

This thesis is informed by qualitative methods of inquiry. This research uses a
comparative analysis approach and case study method. An extensive literature
review in an interdisciplinary approach is used in the exploration of the questions above. The intersection between identity and the built environment is a discursive one, and thus requires an examination using various perspectives of geographers, historians, sociologists, and cultural and planning theorists. This research contributes to the fields of human geography, urban and policy studies and research regarding post-colonialism and identity. Furthermore, it provides a cross-disciplinary view that connects the processes in place-making and processes involved with construction of identity.

To address Questions 2 and 3, a case-study method is used to investigate the issues and themes discussed in the previous question in a specific example: Hong Kong. As current meanings of the city spaces were negotiated within a historical and social context, formal scholarly studies and media articles regarding the places were analyzed to understand the perceptions of the places and practices by the local government, state officials, and local residents. To understand the state’s objectives for the cases, policy documents and public statements were further investigated for a critical perspective on the issues of place identity and place-making.

The two cases, West Kowloon Cultural District and Wing Lee Street, were chosen for their relevance with the issues and themes in this thesis: globalization, cultural production and consumption in 21st century Hong Kong. The cases are compared and contrasted to provide unique and complementary insights into the research questions. Both cases take place in the context of the globalizing city, present global-local tensions, and also highlight the local people’s concerns about identity, place
and place-making. At a first glance, the WKCD project advances globalization by creating a place for the global consumption of the arts, while the outcome of preservation of Wing Lee Street resists urban growth and development often exacerbated by globalization. The former is the Hong Kong government’s overt response to global tendencies of capital/cultural production and a key strategy for economic development, whereas the latter case is tied to local stakes and the production of vernacular cultures. The two contemporary cases, taking place in post-Handover Hong Kong, are temporally relevant and therefore able to speak to questions regarding identity issues and social change since 1997.

The West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) case is purposefully selected for its significance as a key state-led hegemonic cultural project and largest cultural facility development project in post-Handover Hong Kong. WKCD is chosen simply because there is no other cultural development project of this magnitude in the city. As one of the first major projects conceived after Hong Kong’s transfer of sovereignty, the social and cultural implications of this project are extensive and significant, such as concerns about its community consultation processes and implications on local arts industries (Ku and Tsui, 2008; Lui, 2008; Cartier, 2008). Moreover, wide coverage of the project in the media provides rich material for analysis of public opinions.

The case of Wing Lee Street is chosen to juxtapose the case of WKCD in terms of scale and representation. WKCD is state-led whereas the Wing Lee Street case is community-focused (and in the latter case, state agencies played a reactionary role). Symbolically, the WKCD as a new project represents an outlook for the future. In
comparison, Wing Lee Street as heritage project is one that looks to the past (while serving the present). The Wing Lee Street case stands out from other controversial cases of heritage preservation for the purpose of this study because of its relevance in contemporary cultural production, stemming from its relationship with the local film “Echoes of the Rainbow”. Comparing their spatial scales, the twelve tenement buildings along the length of 70 metres of Wing Lee Street are miniscule compared to the 40 hectares of land that the WKCD sits on, and provides contrasting perspectives towards the meaning of identity for Hong Kong.

Other contenders of the case selection included two cases of adaptive reuse of colonial structures into cultural hubs: Police Married Quarters (PMQ)¹ and the Central Police Station Compound (CPS)². The redevelopments of these two sites were led by government agency partnered with non-profit organizations. These two are instructive towards cultural development and post-colonial identity formation (given their symbolic representation of the colonial period), and either one would have been added as a third case, but the current research is limited by time and

¹ The PMQ is a graded historic building which was a dormitory for policemen families between 1951 and 2000. In November 2010, the HKSAR Government announced the plan to preserve the site for creative industries uses. The project was completed in 2014 in collaboration with charitable organization

² The CPS is a heritage revitalization project, named “Tai Kwun” which “comprises of three declared monuments, the former Central Police Station, the Central Magistracy and the Victoria Prison”. It began in 2007 through a partnership between the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and The Hong Kong Jockey Club. The Jockey Club CPS Limited is a not-for-profit operator set up by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust to manage the centre for heritage and arts. (Retrieved from: http://www.taikwun.hk/en/tai-kwun/about/)
availability of resources. Furthermore, information on these two projects were not as readily available, therefore limiting the required analysis.

This study is also grounded in the subjectivity of personal experiences. Sense of place and perceptions of it are idiosyncratic, though there are commonalities between individuals and groups. The investigation and discussion about Hong Kong culture and identity are dependent on individuals’ perception of the city, and gathered through published articles, media and official statements, as well as through the researcher’s observation, reflection and introspection. Therefore, the researcher’s positionality and reflexivity is needed to clarify what has shaped this research inquiry. As the researcher, awareness of my own position as an intentional agent and acknowledgement of my subjective biases shaped by personal experiences and preconceptions is integral in recognizing my rationale in pursuing this topic.

I am considered a transnational migrant; I was born in Hong Kong and had the opportunity to immigrate to Canada at the age of five with my mother and older sister. My father stayed in Hong Kong for work. When we immigrated in 1994, we joined the wave of mass migration from Hong Kong to Canada that was sparked by the concern about the Transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong to China in 1997. I later came to understand that this was a very common phenomenon for Hong Kong families. The phenomenon is called “Astronaut families”: based on “strategic decisions”, transnational members of the family reside away from their country of origin while maintaining social and familial ties. In the process, “social identities
may be reinforced or reconfigured" (Ho, 2001; Yeoh, Huang & Lam, 2005; Kobayashi, 2007). In my case, my father had better economic opportunities in Hong Kong, while my sister and I were accompanied by my mother in Canada for a preferred education.

Because my father stayed in Hong Kong and the ramifications of the Handover did not have significant or immediate impact on daily life, we moved back in 2000, a few years after obtaining Canadian citizenship. Our new citizenship became a safety net in case subsequent consequences arose and a mechanism for more convenient mobility relative to Hong Kong citizenship. In Hong Kong, my sister and I attended an international high school taught in English and was based on British and International curriculum - the fact that it was the colonial education system even after the Handover, has contributed to some of my research biases. Furthermore, our Chinese language proficiency had worsened significantly during our recess in Canada, and we were no longer able to keep up with the local school curriculum. For university, I went to the United States and pursued a bachelor’s degree in landscape architecture at the University of California at Davis. This furthered my learning in the “west” and cultivated a bicultural perspective as I became acutely aware of cultural differences. Before my current graduate opportunity, I again moved back to Hong Kong for several years; working and interacting with local people gave me an integrated perspective.

This amalgam of experiences had profound influence in shaping my own identity and my relationship with and perception of Hong Kong, and contributed to the
framing of the current research inquiry. As such, I view Hong Kong through a perspective informed by this lived experience. I view Hong Kong as an individual who simultaneously has deep connection via ethnicity, cultural heritage and familial ties, as well as significant separation given substantial physical distance, notable temporal separation and epistemology that is fundamentally based on my Eurocentric education background. I acknowledge that my upbringing in a democratic and capitalistic society sympathizes towards Hong Kong’s democratic development and therefore shapes an argument that allows Hong Kong to have a self-discovery of identity.

1.4 Limitations

There are several limitations pertaining to the scope, findings and methods used in the exploration of this thesis. First, this thesis discusses various histories and narratives of Hong Kong’s plural identities in relation to place, heritage and the built environment, however, the in-depth study and analysis of the formation of these identities is beyond the scope of this thesis and research questions. Second, the multiplicity of place creates a challenge to the study of it and observation through a cultural place-making lens is only one of many ways to analyze identity and the interpretations of it. Moreover, this study is focused on providing specificity for the case city of Hong Kong and the cases are grounded in this specific experience and geopolitical context, therefore, caution should be taken when generalizing findings to other localities. Rather, this research may be offered as a comparison with other cases and contributes to a wider understanding of identity and place in globalizing
and postcolonial cities. Finally, as this research is based on qualitative inquiry, limitations include researcher bias and interpretation, which the previous positionality statement attempts to address.

**1.5 Organization of This Thesis**

The following chapter (Chapter 2) introduces the concepts of place, identity and place-making and their interrelationships. This chapter proposes that as cultural/social constructs, place and identity are open to subjective interpretation; hence, identity can be reinforced or contradicted through place-making practices. From this perspective, the dominant narrative of the city can be critiqued, making possible the exploration of processes in identity transformation and discovery in place politics.

Chapter 3 discusses globalization and its effects on urban places and identities, and examines the production of cultural capital as a strategy for cities to achieve global status. The development of cultural icons and heritage preservation practices can be both complementary and contradicting place-making processes in postcolonial globalizing cities. Introducing an understanding of globalization and the trend of culture-focused urban development and revitalization, this chapter will provide context for the in-depth case studies in the following chapters.

Chapter 4 discusses dominant identity narratives of the case city, Hong Kong. This chapter examines place-making practices in the city on a broader scale, making
connections between Hong Kong’s perceived identities and its place-making practices. Through the exploration of the various portrayals of Hong Kong’s identity, including its post-colonial, national and global accounts, this chapter highlights the struggles, tensions and contradictions in the dominant narratives in past and present day Hong Kong. This chapter sets the context for the following case studies by elucidating the residents’ and state’s increasing concern for the development and construction of Hong Kong’s identity after 1997.

The first case study of West Kowloon Cultural District is examined in Chapter 5. This chapter explores the cultural and social issues arising from the development of this highly political and controversial multibillion U.S. dollar cultural project. The development of this prestigious cultural project, legacy of Tung Chee Hwa, the first Chief Executive of Hong Kong in 1999, demonstrates the complexities between the political and social dimensions of place and identity.

The dualism observed and experienced in the city, of rapid development and the surge of public interest in nostalgia and heritage are seen to be working at opposite ends, with contradicting objectives for the city. In Chapter 6, the role of place-making in heritage revitalization and its intersections with culture-led urban regeneration, are examined through the second case study. This chapter explores the preservation argument for the lived spaces at Wing Lee Street. While the tenement housing on the street is not designated as monument or antiquities by authorities, it is recognized by locals as a place that represented the collective identity of citizens. Place-making processes at this site disclose implications of
contesting interests of capital and the local. In both case studies, I highlight the tensions, contradictions and resistance amongst locals, states and the market.

The final chapter concludes the arguments made in this thesis and makes recommendations for further research. I propose key areas for further investigation and discussion to highlight specific identity and place-making discourses, cultural and heritage planning issues, and provide a guiding framework that acknowledges the intricacies at play when dealing with notions of identity and place: informed in my study by the unique socio-econ-political landscape of Hong Kong.
Chapter 2

Place-making in Cities: Understanding Identity, Culture and Place

Place and identity are interrelated. The concept of place-identity is connected to the physical environment around us, as well as our interpretation and relationship with space. The places that our societies create express dominant meanings, identities, and values of those such as the state and the market. Certain cities portray a strong cultural identity and imagery, while others present more nuanced forms of cultural expression. Power relations can be comprehended and inferred through the reading of place and politics of identity.

2.1 The Salience of Place: The Reflexive Relationship Between Place and Identity

“We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology.” (Edward Soja, 1989:6)

“Place” for the most part has to do with materiality and location. But more than just physical space, place is a realm with human meaning (Cresswell, 2004). Academic literature acknowledge place as a social construct, underlining its socio-spatial-
temporal linkages (Massey 2010; Lefebvre 1991). Place and society “are simultaneously realized by thinking, feeling and doing individuals, and different conditions in which such realizations are experienced by thinking, feeling, doing subjects” (Keith and Pile, 1993, 2004). As Lefebvre (1991) has pointed out, the material environment is both the product of, and the condition of, the possibility of social relations by which identities are formed and transformed; therefore place cannot remain static or be isolated from the social.

Our sense of attachment to certain locations, for example, our “hometown”, is closely tied to how we identify others and ourselves. Cresswell (2004) reflects that a sense of place is the subjective and emotional attachment people have towards place. Whether a place invokes a sense of belonging, familiarity, nostalgia, or conflict is subjective to our interpretation and also our identity. Place is a location intertwined with our lives and experiences, in which collective memories, images, feelings and meanings are held (Lowenthal, 1975). The physical environment provides stability to our identities because they act as visual reminders of our histories, our personal and collective memories (Hayden, 1997).

Cresswell (2004) adds that place is “a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world. When we look at the world as a world of places we see different things. We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experience (11).” As a social construct, a location and a way of seeing, place contributes to the formation of identity as it functions to provide a sense of belonging, construct meaning, foster attachments, and mediate change (Proshansky,
Reciprocally, our identity and how we see the world also affects how we build and use place. People who experience place may be “reading” and interpreting the built environment through everyday usages of place. By understanding this reciprocal relationship between identity and place, we may also better understand the relations and consequences of restructuring places on identity.

2.2 Reading the City

For sociologists and psychologists “place-identity” is a concept linked to personal identity and our interpretation of certain places, whereas in spatial planning and design place-identity is related to qualities of the place itself and how certain places are distinguished through its physical features. The two ideas are inextricably connected. The discussion of place-identity, both in terms of the physical forms as well as the underlying social processes, is important in unraveling the layers of meaning that exist in human settlements. The politics of place are not only about the design and function of places, but also of identity, how groups express their “sense of self and their desires for the spaces which constitute their ‘home’ – be it the local neighbourhood or the nation home, an indigenous home or one recently adopted” (Jacobs, 2002, 2).

2.2.1 Spatial forms, symbolism and cultural identity

A city can be read through its spatial forms and physical structures. Focusing on the physical form of the city, Lynch (1960) observes how a city’s image is perceived by city dwellers through its streets, buildings, nodes and landmarks. For Lynch, the
“legibility” of a city is related to clarity and coherence – how easy it is to recognize
the symbols and patterns, and to distinguish them from others – that evokes a sense
of place and gives a city its identity. In *Spaces of Global Cultures: architecture, urbanism, identity*, Anthony King (2004) is interested in how the image of buildings transmit symbolic messages, social and political meanings of power, status and identity. King explores how the transplanting of architectural cultures from one cultural location to another has social and cultural effects on subjects and their identities, as well as how meanings of symbols and icons of power can change over time. King’s (2004) example of the skyscraper demonstrates this fluidity. The skyscraper became a symbol of economic power and modern identity in America in the late nineteenth century. China’s adoption of the vertical form of the skyscraper and shift away from its historically symbolic representation of power (as seen in, for example, the Forbidden City) is a result of global cultural influences.

Place identity and the cultural identity of cities are closely related: cities which have
distinct cultural production and performance are also acknowledged as cities with
strong place-identities (Scott, 2000). “Orthogenic” cities “formed essentially from a
single cultural basis or origin” have a high degree of “cultural legibility” (Hutton
2015, 39). These cities are identified as having an overall coherence in the built
environment. Rome, Venice and Paris are cited as examples of places that
demonstrate a powerful cultural imaginary, a sense of place. Often centralized
around grand plazas and monuments that express civic pride or power of rulers
(Healey, 2002), the historic city of cultural identity is embodied through physical
locations. The naming of streets, plazas and parks after historic icons cements the importance of such figures in the building of nations and states, contributing to the “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991), as a symbol, a visual and concrete reminder of memory, and used by hegemonic agents in the construction of nationhood and national identity.

But, we should not dismiss the diverse forms of cultural production in “heterogenic” cities and their multiple layers of culture, histories and urban change (Hutton, 2015). Heterogenic cities may also have a strong sense of place and a distinct place-identity. Heterogenic cities that come under the influence of multiple social, political and cultural contexts such as London, San Francisco, Singapore and also Hong Kong, generate more conflictual forms of cultural expression and identity formation (Hutton, 2015). For example, readings into postcolonial cities may provide more understanding of how the multiple layers of culture, history, and politics interact in the cultural production of space. Correspondingly, Oakes (2015, 5) states that it is important “to recognize from the outset that all cities are already cultural”. We should look at these cities “not as sites of local ‘variations’ of universal Western models, but as locations where mobile policies are always already remade as they travel within the networked space of global urbanism” (Oakes 2015, 5).

2.2.2 Memory, heritage and symbolism in the everyday spaces

Memory is critical in the formation of both personal and place identity and important in shaping discourses on preservation, development and how heritage is
defined and represented (Moore, 2007). As we read and experience place, we are also reading its multiple layers of “stored memory” (Hayden 1997). The city is seen as place where collective memory is embodied (Lowenthal, 1975) and where memory is expressed in a multitude of forms and scales: in the form of built heritage (Henderson, 2001), the valorization of monuments, buildings or neighbourhoods, in the expression of architectural styles and materials through different time periods (King, 2004; Kusno, 2010), even the spatial organization of a cluster of buildings (Hayden, 1997; Moore, 2007).

In our modern day society, everyday structures (examples here are the football club, heritage district or retail precinct) may also, over time, symbolize a city for its residents and visitors. In Everyday Globalization, Timothy Shortell (2014) demonstrates that signs of collective identity are embedded and visible in the everyday public spaces of urban neighbourhoods. Analyzing the visual signs of the everyday vernacular landscape in immigrant neighbourhoods of Brooklyn and Paris, Shortell elucidates the capacity for the everyday spaces to become a signifier of cultural identity of a neighbourhood, in contrast with institutional and overt cultural identity development presented in museums and monuments. Immigrants create their own sense of place, establishing a cultural identity of the neighbourhood that both enhances collective identity of people who are associated with the place and also distinguishing it from other neighbourhoods. Shortell argues that these visual signs not only enable people’s recognition of the space, but also contributes to how individuals perform in the environment and towards others.
2.3 Multiplicity, Tensions and Contestations

While the physical signs and symbols do help us read and understand a city, we should not remove the subjective dimension of personal experience and how individual understanding of the world contribute to our readings of places. For example, how an affluent person reads the city is different from how a marginalized person does. Ilse Helbrecht (2004) proposes a perspective of seeing the city “as text and as art”, both as a representation and as a lived reality, through two lenses simultaneously: non-representational and representational theories. Through the non-representational theory, we see cities as the concrete, inferring, for example, the look and feel of the urban landscape; and through the representational theory, we connect the abstraction of theory to what we see physically. By looking beyond the materiality of space, we can analyze underlying social, political and economic factors of place and identity building (Massey, 2004, 2010).

Multiple narratives and perspectives must be uncovered for an understanding of agencies and agents in the production of place. In her seminal work, *Space, Place and Gender*, Doreen Massey (2004) saw space and place as socially constructed; proposing that this way of looking at it turns “geography into history and space into time”. She challenges the idea that space and place are static, and argues that seeing space as such is problematic because it ignores that place, people, and cultures have trajectories. Her perspective sees space as social constructs and where power relations are played out.
Michael Keith and Steve Pile in *Place and the Politics of Identity* (2004) make two points in regards to the relativist notion of spatiality (1) “There is no singular, true reading of any specific landscape involved in the mediation of identity”, “multiple enunciations of distinct forms of space are simultaneously present in any landscape.” (2) “Each and every reading of a specific landscape is not of equal value or validity.” (2004, 6). Keith and Pile maintain that place is “more than a passive abstract arena where one can seek a relationship between real, the imaginary and the symbolic” (identity and one’s perception and representation) (Keith and Pile, 2004, 2).

**2.3.1 Place and power; counter-hegemonic place-making**

Readings of place help us remember and reconnect the spatialities of counter-hegemonic cultural practices. Place is important in considering the “right to the city”. Whose memories are celebrated through festivals and events organized in public plazas? Whose victories are celebrated through the erection of monuments and the placement of plaques? More subtly, who is allowed (and/or tolerated) to make their mark in the city through their daily activities? In asking these questions, we are able to critically analyze the making and using of place and dissect power relations associated with it.

Place-making activities in the everyday are in one way or another, representative of societies’ power relations. Harvey (1989) reflects that those who have the power to produce space are therefore able to enhance their own power, and have greater
capacity to change and control the appearance and access of space. On the one hand, place articulates social constructions imposed by those in power. “Neighbourhood organizations put pressure on people to tidy their yards; city governments legislate for new public buildings to express the spirit of particular places” (Cresswell, 2004, 5). On the other hand, ordinary people inscribe themselves in the city though everyday practices of using and interpreting place, forming a dialogue with the cities’ past, present and future.

In *The Power of Identity*, Castells (1997) distinguishes between “legitimizing”, “resistance” and “project” identities. Legitimizing identities, such as national citizenship, are created and enforced by dominant institutions out of hegemonic ideals. Resistance identities are produced by marginalized people’s contesting perceptions of place. Project identities are new identities that redefine people’s position in society, and as the resistance identity overtakes legitimizing identity. When applied to place and place-making, such identities become materialized and manifested in spaces that organize and structure our daily activities.

Within nation-states, oppressed groups attempt to assert their own identities through place-making. Cultural struggles over place and place-making are often interpreted from the perspective of the marginalized in issues around ethnicity, gender, and class. Borrowing from literature on translocal place-making, immigrants exert agency on their locality and the production of power, meaning and (new) hybrid and multiple identities. Here, place-making is seen as a vehicle for cross-cultural learning and collective action. As an act of resistance, place-making
produces spaces of identity “in the face of open rejection, marginalization and racism” (Main & Sandoval. 2015). It is also seen as subtle resistance against the hegemony, and is associated with civic participation during times of social peril and political instability. Main and Sandoval (2015) observe this in the case of MacArthur Park in Los Angeles. They illustrate how the South American immigrant population finds a sense of belonging in seeking to recreate places from their homeland through informal activities (soccer and vending). Main and Sandoval (2015) characterize these as acts of resistance that contributed to the production of the park’s sense of place for this group of people. Moreover, while the aesthetics of the park was different from South America, it still reminded them of home.

Again in the transnational city of Los Angeles, Caceres (2009) observes the role of graffiti art as an act of resistance and as an art form. She contends that graffiti articulates the “ethos of the working class, those on the margins, and/or communities of color throughout urban centers around the world” (2). Connecting graffiti with diversity and Los Angeles’ transnational identity, she argues for better support of diverse forms of art through inclusive municipal planning.

Castells’ (1997) ideas can also be analyzed in Keith and Pile’s (2004) writing about the London Docklands. The community’s resistance towards the redevelopment of their neighbourhood created a project identity from a resistance one:

“The notion of Docklands became a symbol around which people mobilized; a way in which residents defined their neighbourhood; and an administrative
and economic zone; an imagined geography and a spatialized political economy - a way of seeing and a way of life. (multiple groups with different areas/interests) led to a multi-layered and multi-dimensional geography of resistance. "by mobilizing a territorialized sense of both place and community identity, they forced themselves on to the political agenda and, because of their continued commitment to ‘their land’ (even thought they neither own it nor control it), they will outlast the London Docklands Development Corporation and continue to resist the fly-by-night property developers." (Keith and Pile, 2004, 13)

In summary, this chapter explores the notions of place and identity, with emphasis on how both are concepts that are fluid and prone to interpretation and manipulation. The view that place contains multiplicities enables us to interrogate spatial practices to reveal occluded histories, memories, and motives of agents and agencies. The dominant identity projected by cities and places represent those who hold power, but it can also be challenged and changed by efforts of those who are less powerful. The discussion of power relation in place and place-making will be continued in the next chapter, exploring how representations, symbols, imaginations are affected in changing, globalizing cities.
Chapter 3

Globalization and Cultural Cities

As cities and places are restructured in the progression of society and technology, the symbolic meanings of the places of identity are transformed. As we increasingly become under the influence of multiple cultures and technology, our concepts of identity, nationhood and sense of belonging also become mobile and flexible. Globalization plays a significant role in such transformations and reorganization of place and identity. “Global cities” are characterized as sites where global political, economic and cultural flows meet and collide with local imaginaries and identities (Sassen, 2001). New urban spaces are created and old spaces take on different meanings as a result of global ebbs and flows of capital, culture, production and trade. Cities with global aspirations are increasingly recognizing the need to accumulate particular forms of cultural capital to compete for global position. The cultural production of icons (Kong 2007) and images (Scott, 2000), alongside the (re)invention of place-based heritage, are becoming commonly used as strategies for gaining global status, while the cultural identity of the city is being framed as a driver of economies and well being of residents (Douglass, Ho & Ooi, 2008). Scholarship suggests that such strategies are sometimes “at odds with projects of nationhood” (Kong 2007), or that a dominance of a global culture contributes to a loss or dilution of intrinsic local culture/identity, and ironically limiting the development of creativity (Zukin, 1995).
3.1 Globalization: Effects on Urban Spaces and Identity

The restructuring of place through urban development and renewal is associated with the processes of neoliberalism and globalization (Douglass, Ho & Ooi, 2008). To what extent does the globalization of cities and places transform the identity of these places and consequently the identity of inhabitants and vice versa? What roles do place and place identity play in the context of globalization?

“Global cities” are characterized as networked nodes, with multiple and intensive global flows of people, goods, services, ideas and images (Sassen 2001). Lily Kong (2007, 384) suggests that “global cities often share more in common, have more to do with, and identify more with other global cities than with other cities and hinterlands in their own countries.” Rapid urbanization, the development of mega-projects and flagship projects are some of the results of inter-city competition. Further, post-industrial cities “turn entrepreneurial” to seek global capital, resulting in the commodification of the city and its places of culture (Yeoh, 2005; Harvey, 1989). Furthering Sassen’s paradigm of global cities, Graham and Marvin (2001) characterize the shattering effects of transnational infrastructural networks on urban environments and political conditions as “splintering urbanism”. Graham and Marvin’s theory of splintering urbanism claims that increasingly privatized systems, including urban spaces, are supporting the fragmentation, polarizations and disparities of metropolitan areas across the world.
The privatization of the public sphere, of public urban spaces, semi-public spaces that dominate public life is driven by global flows. Global ideologies contribute to the development of “grand projects... created not only for their functions as offices, commercial outlets or living spaces. They are also intended to create symbolic value as elements of world city status” (Ho and Douglass, 2008, 202). Imageries are utilized by cities, and also by corporations, to drive consumption and attract foreign investment. Zukin (1991; 1996) argues that contemporary landscapes in the global and postindustrial economy, such as the gentrified downtowns, tourist areas and commercialized neighbourhoods, are cultural products created by a market culture. Zukin (1991) applies Schumpeter’s (1942) concept of “creative destruction” to the landscape, arguing that the processes of capitalism replace authentic, public and vernacular landscapes with market-oriented and franchised “nonplaces”. These spaces conform to private and market values to serve the consumer economy, ultimately affecting our sense of place and attachment to place.

Another example of how spaces are changing in cities as a result of globalization is in the emergent spatial divisions of labour within districts and neighbourhoods. Hutton (2009) examines the respatialization of the inner cities of London, Vancouver, Singapore and San Francisco, showing the interactions between processes of industrial change, space and place in the city in relation to new industry formation. Derelict inner city neighbourhoods of post-industrial cities where warehouses, and labour once accumulated are being reconstructed and re-imagined as “zones of experimentation, creativity, and innovation”, largely enabled
by transnational flows (Hutton, 2009). The re-imagining of these spaces from industrial to “creative” changes the identity of such spaces and the neighbourhoods where they are housed. Additionally, these new appealing place-images are used towards marketing strategies by developers and cities to drive economic objectives.

On a social level, Friedmann (2010) and Zukin (2009) argue that the place-marketing practices that favour consumption emphasizes “place-breaking” and creation of dehumanized spaces. It results in a privatized urban sphere that decreases public spaces and, consequentially, democratic governance (Ho and Douglass 2008). Friedmann (2010) stresses the need to re-establish the local, neighbourhood-focused social (and cultural) relationships as an important aspect of a healthy city in the context of gentrification, real estate speculation and consumption. Moreover, the building of a global city identity contradicts the building of national identities and national citizenship. Zabielskis (2008) adds that the practice of “place-breaking” is exacerbated by the “widespread prevalence of weak or undeveloped senses of citizenship and civil society in many urbanizing areas” (269).

Rather than simplifying the global culture as one of homogeneity, Arjun Appadurai’s (1990) five “scapes” offer a pluralist view of capitalism processes and the restructuring urban place and identity. Appadurai’s (1990) global cultural economy is a “disorganized” one of complexity and irregularity. The five dimensions, “scapes”,
of “global cultural flows” construct the “imagined world”\(^3\) in which people and social groups live.

*Ethnoscapes* are "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live," (33) stable communities often partly constituted by movement of immigrants and/or people from other places. *Technoscapes* are the global configuration shaped by the increasingly rapid exchange and transfer of technology from one place to another (34). *Financescapes* are the changing configurations of global capital as it moves through "currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations" (34). *Mediascapes* are both "the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios)" and "the images of the world created by these media" (35). Finally, *Ideoscapes* "have to do with the ideologies of states and the counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it. These ideoscapes are composed of elements of the Enlightenment worldview, which consists of a chain of ideas, terms, and images, including *freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation*, and the master term *democracy*" (36).

While the forces of capitalism and globalization disrupts and fragments urban neighbourhoods and affect the formation of identity, the restructuring of the global

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\(^3\) Building on Benedict Anderson’s (1991) “imagined communities”
economy also enabled the emergence of a new cultural economy that is connected with place-identity and place-based memories.

### 3.2 Cultural Cities in the Context of Globalization

*Culture is the hallmark of global cities*

Allen Scott (2000) highlights the highly symbiotic connection between place, culture and economy. Both the perceived and experienced image of a city largely has to do with the idea of culture. “Culture is both a unique differentiator of cities and urban places, as well as a potent force in globalization” (Hutton, 2015, 72). The emergence of the cultural industries and “economy of signs” (Urry, 1994) – “exchange of cultural goods with highly aesthetic content, identity, and function” - play a large role not only in the tourism industry, but also urban restructuring. Cultural consumption and cultural production play significant roles in the development of identity and create a city that consists not only of aestheticized urban landscapes and gentrified neighbourhoods for the consumer, but also the myriad development of cultural industries in the arts, media and education that correspond to these consumerist activities.

The relational aspect of space – histories and memories that contribute to the operation and restructuring of urban economics – is “especially pronounced in the cultural economy of the city” (Hutton, 2015, 195). The interest in locality and culture was, as many scholars point out, affected by the restructuring of places, the
changing material practice of production, consumption, information flow, and communication, the reorganization of space relations and of time horizons within capitalist development (Urry, 1994; Scott, 2000; Ley, 2003; Hutton, 2009). “As cities became increasingly global and homogenous, it had become necessary to re-image the city and manufacture distinctions... creating heterogeneous striations within the smooth and undifferentiated” (Douglass, Ho & Ooi, 2007, 248). As Sharon Zukin (1996) puts it, “culture is more and more the business of cities...and their unique competitive edge.”

Richard Florida (2002), in his international bestseller, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And how it’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, posits that a “Creative Class” of highly talented and mobile workers are drivers of the future economy. He argues that in order for cities to succeed, they need to cater to the needs and wants of this elite group of individuals who seek vibrant urban cultures. He asserts that it is the city’s role to create the conditions to attract this creative class. Harnessing the allure of place, by imagining and attempting to evoke a sense of place, cities use cultural production and creation of images to combat “placelessness” (Yeoh & Kong, 1997; Kaymaz, 2013). In the last two decades, the integration of economic and cultural activity through the production and consumption of culture is increasingly deployed to attract the affluent urban cosmopolites (Ley, 2003). Place-based cultural strategies of economic development take many forms, from the encouragement of historic preservation to creating new museums and tourist zones. Creative strategies in the field of urban policy “works
with extant ‘neoliberal’ development agendas, framed around interurban
competition, gentrification, middle-class consumption and place-marketing” (Peck, 2005). Through the construction of flagship projects as part of the cultural
regeneration of the city (Evans, 2003), production-based strategies such as the
development of a cultural industries sector, and consumption-based strategies
through image promoting and place-marketing (Kong, 2000), cities have become
amalgams of cultures and symbols with the grain of neoliberal agendas (Peck, 2005).

3.3 Contradictions in Representation, Symbolism and Identity in
the Cultural City

There are social and cultural implications of this regeneration and gentrification of
the urban landscape. The dominance of images and branding utilized to construct
and reconstruct the identity of a city inherently affects individual and collective
identities. Romanticized images created for visitors not only contribute to the
tourists’ perception of the city, as these identities constructed amidst processes of
globalization become a part of the identity of residents, too. Are the images
reflective of existing identities or are these images substantively new, to enable the
story of a new identity? Does this limit the organic construction of identity?

In the past few decades, the processes of globalization was seen to “dilute” the
inherent culture of cities, creating places of a dominant global culture, one that is
driven by consumerism and the privatization of public spaces. Others suggest that
rather than the dominance of a global culture, transnational flows are localized to create a “glocal” or “hybrid” culture that is unique to the host city (Robertson, 1994; King, 2004). In addition, Kong (2007, 384) asks, “are efforts at attaining global city status at odds with projects of nationhood, which essentially emphasis the building of internal ties?”

Lepofsky and Fraser (2009, 129) point out that place-marketing projects work at the cultural meaning of the city in terms of “who can make claims upon the city” and “whom cities are for”. The use of imagery reinterprets local memories and histories, sometimes embellishing the identity and lifestyles in the urban global city. As a result, this vision of the urban global city becomes the dominant vision of the city’s life and culture. Moreover, place-marketing efforts “dilute the diverse nuance derived from the local residents that organically vitalizes and shapes a community”, creating displacement of residents and local businesses (Kong, 2007).

“In the reconstruction of place, some histories are privileged while others are expunged from the collective memory” (Winchester, 2003, 135). The alteration of the meanings or forms of the landscape through heritage preservation and revitalization then also contributes to identity building, or contradiction, refashioning the imaginaries of the past for future purposes. The valorization of various landscapes as heritage areas or historic monuments, whether utilized to increase a national sense of history or belonging, or as place-marketing and place-branding for tourism, whether led by the state or by community, enforces a specific memory and identity.
In *Consuming Places*, Urry (1995) suggests the processes of place-marketing through the creation of images for tourists or potential visitors affect the construction of place or local identities. Increasingly, images produced for the tourist become a part of the identity of a city. Images that are created for tourist project a certain identity of place, which may contradict vernacular or local cultures. Similarly, Yaldiz et al. (2014) argue that with the continuous changing and regeneration of cities, their iconic urban identity, architectural identity and the urban images about them are lost – that their “readabilities” are lost. The concern is that these cities’ citizens live these perception and memory problems, ultimately festering feelings of disconnect. This sense of disconnect then makes preservation of the historical – cultural heritage, local originalities and identities within that city – more challenging.

Brenda Yeoh (2005) observes how urban image-making and branding is used by the state to maintain a cultural identity in Singapore and as a nation-building exercise. “Cultural Imagineering” in the city-state included a shift towards heritage conservation and creation, revalorizing the images and histories of the nation in “historic districts” like Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam. Yeoh argues that this was an economic motivation, as well as a strategy to foster national pride, catered to attract tourists and to retain foreign talent while attempting to forge an identity for Singaporeans. In the process to reify heritage, boundaries between the “valued” historic areas and the excluded landscapes are created, exacerbating the cultural disparities and tensions between the existing diverse cultural groups in Singapore (Yeoh, 2005).
Critics of the cultural and creative city place-marketing strategies exemplify that such practices contribute to cities’ inequalities, fragmentation and struggles between social and cultural classes. Such practices that favour the “creative class” and outside capital leads to a negligence of inherent resources. A criticism of Richard Florida’s theory is its contribution to intentional gentrification effects that the type of marketized capital bring to older neighbourhoods, particularly the pricing out of lower income, working class communities in order to house creative industries and professionals. Pratt (2010, 8) states “there is an implicit hegemonic project of favouring a particular type of culture (that appeals to a modern, or cosmopolitan, sensibility) over local or indigenous styles... In many senses this is the classic cosmopolitan/international–local tension: played out very strongly via culture.” Florida’s tasks for policy makers are ostensible and widely adopted by cities left and right. However, the market-oriented and individualistic “creativity strategies have been crafted to co-exist with urban social problems, not to solve them,” writes Peck (2005). The privatization of public spaces, driven by cities’ increasingly entrepreneurial and neoliberal governance places the responsibility of place-making and consequently of identity construction into the hands of private developers and corporations.

As demonstrated in this section, the culture and identity of the city is dynamic, and is driven by global flows. To further explore the multifaceted situation, the next chapter turns to the case of Hong Kong and examines how place and identity in the
context of globalization is played out in a global city that continues to undergo global, national and local pressures.
Chapter 4

Hong Kong: Identity, Culture and Space

This chapter examines Hong Kong’s dominant identity narratives, which are closely related to and portrayed in the urban landscape of the city. The main narratives of Hong Kong are shown to be consistent with its historiographies, and persist to the current day. This chapter argues that these narratives are used for the maintenance of Hong Kong’s global city identity, and to drive the continuation of economic development. At the same time, recent events such as the concern with heritage, exemplify increased resistance of this status quo, as Hong Kong citizens are reaffirming and reconfiguring how they identify with the city. By drawing on dominant narratives and studying who and what are driving these depictions, we gain a better understanding of the tensions and contradictions present in the city.

4.1 The “Hong Kong Success Story” and Dominant Narratives of Hong Kong

The “Hong Kong success story” tells the tale of how a rural fishing village at the edge of China became one of the “Four Asian Tigers” (The Economist, 1998) in the 1980s and a global city. The persistent, dominant narratives of Hong Kong can be recounted in this story.

In 1841, after the Opium War, Hong Kong Island - a “barren rock” - was ceded by Imperial China to Great Britain. Kowloon Peninsula was ceded to Britain after the
Second Opium War, under the Convention of Beijing in 1860. In 1898, under the Second Convention of Peking, to add a buffer zone between the mainland and the island, the British negotiated for a lease period of 99 years for the New Territories area (Yu, 2004; Caroll, 2007). In the early colonial period, Britain continued to exploit Hong Kong and its resources as a colonial trading port between Europe and Asia, and America, during which the Gold Rush brought large numbers of workers and sojourners to and from America. Most people were from the surrounding region of Canton, in search for better work and lives. Since this time, the port city has been characterized as a territory of flows, trade, labour, money, and a mixture of cultures.

After Japanese occupation in the Second World War, during which the territory suffered harsh captivity, military and cultural oppression under the Japanese, Hong Kong resumed as a British colony. The Empire maintained the status of Hong Kong as an entrepot in hopes to continue its trade with the new Beijing government that was forming in the 1940s. Hong Kong’s manufacturing and export industries grew spectacularly, enabled by laissez-faire conditions, labour supply and entrepreneurial business migrants from China. The establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 and the Cultural Revolution during the 1960s and 70s brought great numbers of Chinese refugees to Hong Kong. The population of Hong Kong rapidly increased from 1.6 million in 1940 to 3 million in 1960, and 5.2 million in 1980 (Morris, 1988). The colonial government restricted the number of refugees entering Hong Kong while China closed itself off to prevent the infiltration of capitalism from Hong Kong (So, 2011). Instead of trade with China, Hong Kong sent
its exports into the global market. Until the introduction of the Open Door Policy in China in 1978, the economies of Hong Kong and China remained largely separate.

The 1956 riot was one of the first full-scale riots in the territory, partly sparked by the dissatisfaction towards low wages, long working hours, and overcrowded conditions. Nationalist and Communist groups in Hong Kong also built up an anti-colonial sentiment. As the rest of the world was going through decolonizing processes, in the 1970s the government introduced the positive non-intervention governance, which facilitated economic development and capitalism. This laid the groundwork for Hong Kong’s establishment as a financial centre and global city, its economy and industries became more advanced than China’s. Key institutions such as the Hong Kong Bank, Standard Chartered were established which contributed to the economic growth of the tertiary sector. A series of reforms improved the public services, environment, housing, welfare, education and transportation infrastructures of Hong Kong.

In 1984, then British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher and China’s Premier, Zhao Ziyang, signed the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which set the course for Hong Kong to be “reunited” with China in 1997. The “one country, two systems” principle was to take place for fifty years and Hong Kong would be able to exercise its capitalist system and maintain its way of life as a Special Administrative Region of the PRC.

Chu (2012, 7) argues that in this narrative, Hong Kong was labeled a colonial “experiment”, and is seen as having “unquestionably benefited from the adoption of
colonial policy and legal system, which have been rightly preserved intact after the
turn of the colony's sovereignty to Mainland China”. The success of Hong Kong is
often attributed to the “imperatives of market freedom, harmonious intercourse of
‘cultures,’ and a hardworking Chinese workforce governed by a non-interventionist
government.” (Chu, 2012, 5) The key identities in Hong Kong are its East-West
dualism, a space of flows and a developmental “capitalist paradise.”

The city has always been defined by its hybrid identity of both Chinese and British
and interpreted as mediation between two societies. As a gateway between the
West and the East, Hong Kong held an advantageous position as a node in the
colonial network of labour and capital. Meanwhile, it was described as a “miraculous
offspring of British colonial ethics and Confucian values” (Birch, 1991). The urban
development of Hong Kong is also the conveying of these two cultures and other
dichotomies including tradition and modernity, local and global, (post)colonial and
national – from the colonial structures as symbols of power and civility, to tenement
structures with a Southern Chinese architectural style, hyper-dense public housing
developments, and today’s modern skyscrapers. Moreover, “cultural” activities of
both West and East, i.e., ballet and Cantonese Opera, were incubated during the
colonial period. The non-interventionist, bread and circuses style of governance was
used to maintain a cultural harmony in order to prevent civil unrest (Cartier, 2008).
Associated with the first construct, Hong Kong is often also portrayed as a space of transient flows, a “borrowed place, borrowed time.” As a trading port throughout its colonial history, and highly networked node in modern day, the city’s population is made up of mainly migrants, expats and sojourners, most with a temporary and transitory mindset of coming and going. The success of Hong Kong entrepreneurs is often attributed to this flexibility and mobility to take up a myriad of opportunities in different locations (Ong, 1988). Ackbar Abba’s (1997) writing on the “culture and politics of disappearance” speaks to the transient nature of the city as both an advantage and problem when seeking to define the future of Hong Kong’s identity.

The third construct, which is closely related to the previous two, is the idea of Hong Kong as a land of market freedom, a “capitalist enclave located outside the troubled Chinese Mainland”, combined with a political pluralism and civic freedom “that offered opportunities for those willing to take risks and work hard to become wealthy and successful” (Chu, 2012, 9).

Many observers write about the dominant narratives of the Hong Kong story; and over time, they have become a part of Hong Kong’s history.

“The promotion of utilitarianism and consumerism as a way of life... broke down rigid distinctions between Chinese and Western culture. Thus, Hong

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4 referring to the British’ lease of the territory
Kong's hybrid culture which seemed to effortlessly fuse East and West was brought about by unrestrained capitalism's wholesale demystification of those cultural barriers that had been fostered by an earlier 'colonialism'.” (Chun, 1996, 59)

In Si Ming Li’s recollection (1990), the British colonial legacy of non-interventionism resulted in apolitical citizens. In Li’s observation and recollection, Hong Kong is characterized by utilitarianism and materialism, which have profound effects on urban and land development - driving real estate speculation, rapid development and redevelopment. This is also evident in the heritage arena; he explains that the people’s motivation of economic achievement results in little interest in the preservation of the “old”. Li (1990) argues that because land and housing prices in Hong Kong are some of the highest in the world, there are few local Chinese people who seem to be interested in preservation of colonial buildings. Buildings and districts are demolished and rebuilt to make way for housing. Finally, he observes that Hong Kong may face assimilation with China, but the strength of Beijing's position will also be influenced by international capitalism and by democratic developments within Hong Kong. He was confident that Hong Kong’s culture and urban landscape would remain heterogenic.

4.2 Dismantling Dominant Narratives

These dominant portrayals of the city and society of Hong Kong continue to the present day. While all are still true to an extent, post-colonial academic studies
added nuances and complexities to these narratives, allowing for more interpretations of the “success story”. A closer look into the key constructs reveal certain contradictions and tensions. To fully dismantle these dominant narratives is a worthwhile and interesting endeavour, though it is beyond the scope of the current paper. Plenty of scholars, in particular local post-colonial scholarship, have raised very instructive points in their critique of the “Hong Kong Success Story” (Erni, 2001; Chu, 2012; Chiu, 1997; Lee, 1994). It is relevant to highlight a few of their arguments, such as the problematizing of these portrayals:

The colonial government often cast as benign, and its culture of modernization and civility was largely due to colonial rule – forgetting the rooted racial discrimination and segregation in the city’s past. The “grand historical narrative” of Hong Kong, Cheung (1999) argues, recognizes the city as a “capitalist success and miraculous transformation from a remote fishing village to a world-class metropole, paying little reference to the various kinds of ‘miseries produced by modernity – exploitation, alienation, uneven development’, as well as the history of pre-colonial and rural Hong Kong.

The depiction of Hong Kong people as hard-working, utilitarian and therefore apolitical – when social activism has a long history in Hong Kong, and continues
from the 1950s to today, whether held in anti-colonial\(^5\) or anti-communist\(^6\) sentiments and democracy (Occupy protest) or social justice.

The East-West dualism often seen as a harmonious aspect of Hong Kong society – but actually contains a lot of ambiguity and conflicts. Through the example of the history of the tong-lau or “Chinese Building” typology, Chu (2012) explores that these buildings although seen as characteristically Chinese, many were actually built and owned by European speculators. “The categorization of tong-lau was defined by colonial land policy and...persistently maintained by those with stakes in housing development.”

Chu (2012) challenges these historical constructs and argues that they are a way of framing reality and history, used by different actors for specific purposes.

“The standardized narrative venturing on economic success and upward mobility of an immigrant population continues to be invoked as a source of pride and aspiration by successive administrations, business elites and many Hong Kong citizens themselves. At the same time, the continuous emphasis on Hong Kong’s pragmatism and self-reliant character of its people – and

\(^5\) i.e. the 1967 anti-colonial riots that were instigated by pro-communist unions and events in the PRC (Scott, 1989)

\(^6\) Hong Kong citizens hold candlelight vigils annually on June 4th, in memory of the 1989 Tiananmen incident
emphasis that fits well with today’s neoliberal logic – also repeatedly deflects the call for social reform and political change.” (Chu, 2012, 5)

The constructs pose challenges to the realization of Hong Kong’s identity, and to the related notion of heritage preservation. Ku (2010) demonstrates how the juxtaposition of the rule of law and the Mainland’s legal system is utilized in contemporary Hong Kong, to argue for the preservation of a colonial institutional structure representing the establishment of the rule of law in Hong Kong. The rule of law casted the government as benign, and the abstract “discourses arising out of ... activities [guided tours, public lectures, exhibitions around the site of preservation] were in part subsumed in a benign statist framework and in part impregnated with other possibilities” (Ku, 2010, 396).

In a post-colonial context, Hong Kong is not seen as comparable with colonial situations elsewhere (Caroll, 2007). Not to entirely invalidate or dismiss the dominant narratives, but to provide an alternative view, these scholars contributed to making possible the alternative and counter-dominant depictions of Hong Kong. It is through these perspectives that we continue to interrogate the results of inserting these dominant narratives on the place-identity of 21st century Hong Kong.

4.3 A Search for Identity Amidst Transformation

Hong Kong has been characterized and recognized by its “success” and “growth”, that in merely 150 years of colonization, it has surpassed its colonizer in terms of
economic development. It is therefore not a surprise that the city and even its people are characterized as such. However, the city is also undergoing widespread change. What is being increasingly brought to the forefront of the discussion is how the city is becoming increasingly polarized, with growing issues of income inequality, housing affordability, environment degradation and poverty. Central to this discussion is how the city-region is grappling with its colonial past and its reunification with China.

As we will see in the case studies below, Hong Kong residents are undergoing a process of identity seeking and reaffirmation. One can see this in light of recent events, most notably the series of protests during the Occupy Central movement that took place in September of 2014. The sentiments of a “Hong Konger identity”; “collective memory” and ideas of democracy were all inherently linked together in support of heritage preservation and in rallies and protests calling for economic, social and environmental justice.

Identity and the definition of a local identity became an important topic in post-handover Hong Kong partly due to social, cultural and political changes in the Special Administrative Region, especially for youth who were born and bred in this instability. “Youth brought up in Hong Kong’s apolitical culture were forced to ask how they were Chinese... The emergence of an identifiable Hong Kong culture was a rather late post-war phenomenon” (Chun 1996, 59). During the period of political separation from China, and closing off of the borders after the Cultural Revolution, the new generation of Hong Kong people born and bred in Hong Kong developed a
sense of belonging to the city. As children of Chinese immigrants who fled from the mainland, they observed the political unrest in the territory, and fostered sentiments towards the Rule of Law and ideologies of democracy and freedom.

The socio-political environment in Hong Kong has sparked what Erni (2001) calls a desire for history by both localists and nationalists. This desire was sparked by an imagined future that Hong Kong will be submerged into the “socialist” ideals of China that emerged in the few years before and after the Handover. In post-97 Hong Kong, Hong Kong is struck by nostalgic sentimentality, as exemplified in publications of research into Hong Kong’s historical past, films and songs that celebrate Hong Kong’s values, and an increased concern for heritage.

Hong Kong is a unique case in post-colonialism because its post-colonial result is not assuming independence, but an asymmetrical reunion with China (Abbas, 1997; So, 2011). Alvin So (2011) argues that Hong Kong and China show a unification process (in legal and political aspects) but not an integration process (in economic, social and cultural aspects). This uneven unification process has contributed to the contestations of Hong Kong identity. Hong Kong was unable to complete a process of decolonization, as the reunification and re-nationalization processes came into the foreground.

“Many people feared Hong Kong would be subsumed by the Chinese cultural hegemony. This was not without basis. Toward the end of Hong Kong’s British era, China’s ambition to reinscribe Hong Kong within the Chinese
national narrative, geographically or ideologically, was overt. There was a
veritable industry of Hong Kong studies in China under the official
sponsorship of different Mainland Chinese academic and political
institutions. In these writings, Hong Kong’s history, society, and culture are
articulated within the Chinese national agenda and thus local experience and
culture are elided, erased, or reconstructed.” (Ng, 2009, 11)

In summary, this chapter underlines the main narratives present in Hong Kong, as
well as how they are being challenged or reinforced by various agents. The changes
in Hong Kong after 1997 contributed to a desire for history as well as a desire for
identity on the parts of both the SAR government and the local community. 1997
signifies a new era for Hong Kong. The following chapter shows how the
government attempts to construct a new identity for the city.
Chapter 5

Crafting 21st Century Hong Kong as “Asia’s World City”

5.1 A New Identity

In 2001, the post-Handover Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government launched a program called BrandHK to promote the city’s identity as “Asia’s World City.” The first Chief Executive of Hong Kong after the Handover, Tung Chee Hwa had likened Hong Kong to New York and London, as a financial capital of the world. As such, to maintain this identity, the Hong Kong government aimed to invest widely in place-marketing and place-branding strategies to continue to attract international capital, labour and investment.

Part of the BrandHK initiative was an emphasis on the development of “creative industries” to facilitate economic growth. The creative city imaginary introduced by Hong Kong’s post-97 government was a timely move: Hong Kong’s economy was facing effects from the Asian Financial Crisis and social and political challenges signaled by the Handover. Tung Chee Hwa, emphasized the strengthening of arts and culture as a strategy to facilitate economic development while enhancing the

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7 In addition, in the wake of the 1997 financial crisis, the government also facilitated large infrastructures in urban peripheries such as Science Park in the New Territories, and Cyberport in Pok Fu Lam, both conceived with heavy private investment from land corporations between 1998-2001. The successes and failures of these projects are investigated in Jessop & Sum (2000), Koh (2006) and Ostrov’s (2002) analyses of Hong Kong’s entrepreneurial strategies.
city as a place for quality living, thus promoting tourism and attracting investment (HKSAR Policy Address, 1999).

For years, Hong Kong was perceived as a “cultural desert”. The city’s success was attributed to its economic growth in the industrial sectors in the 1960s and 1970s, and subsequently in the services sectors, namely, real estate and finance. Cartier (2008) argues that Hong Kong’s cultural development lags behind other global cities as Hong Kong people are identified with utilitarianism and a focus in upward mobility and economic gains, leaving little time or energy for the arts. Indeed, a survey investigating local people’s participation in cultural activities found only a very small percentage of Hong Kong locals go to “cultural” attractions like galleries, and arts performances. Although a large number of them reported going to the movies often, they reserve the idea that “culture” is for the elites and upper class (University of Hong Kong, 2003).

However, these studies are very often a transplant of theories embedded in specific geography and knowledge grounded in “culture” of Western societies. We may think of Hong Kong as rich in forms of culture that are embedded in tradition and folk. Local scholars have noted (criticized) that Hong Kong’s cultural policy development focused too much on marketing, corresponding only to growth, efficiency and prosperity, neglecting the fostering of growth of legitimate cultural capital (Chu, 2010; Cartier, 2008; Kam, 2012). In his critical discussion of BrandHK, Stephen Chu (2010) argues that the assignment of “Asia’s World City” identity placed too much emphasis on defining its international visibility and the developing of Asian creative
industries, but marginalized local creative industries. The development of creative industries as framed by the BrandHK concept limits the “surfacing of vernacular hybrid cultures and spaces”. Chu (2010) argues that the “overwhelming emphasis on branding Hong Kong has ironically led to the loss of Hong Kong’s intrinsic uniqueness which he identifies as its “emergent community” between the global and the local, “where genuine cosmopolitanisms find the space to emerge.”

There is an opportunity here to expand the interpretation of culture in Hong Kong to include not only the contemporary forms of arts but also ones embedded in heritage and the culture of people and way of living. Forms of intangible cultural heritage like Cantonese Opera (recognized as an art form for common people), and traditional arts should be accepted in a creative industries approach. Post-97 (particularly postcolonial) local scholars argue that Hong Kong’s culture has always been vibrant and rich, often citing Hong Kong’s robust film industry,8 which thrived since the 1970s, despite a “lack of” cultural policy in the colonial government’s main agenda (Cartier, 2008).

In his first policy address of the third term, Chief Executive Donald Tsang said, “Over the next five years, we need to cultivate a new spirit for these new times. We need to become new Hong Kongers, better equipped to sustain developments in the new

8 Hong Kong was dubbed “Hollywood of the East.” The Hong Kong film production industry that often created films featuring comedy with a cultural flair and Kung Fu action movies were developed in the 60s (See Ng, 2009; Erni, 2001; Abbas, 1997)
era.” (HKSAR, 2007). Agnes Ku and Ngai Pun (2004) argue that his “new Hong Kongers” messaging is bound by the identity of the global consumer, “failing to adequately answer the claims, the needs and concerns of the people.”

5.2 Branding and Place-making Through the Arts: West Kowloon Cultural District

Like many cities, Hong Kong’s development in the arts and culture is exemplified by struggles between class and capital. The post-Handover government recognized the global movement for generating “creative economy” and attracting the “creative class” (Florida, 2002) as a necessity to compete for worldliness. Aspiring for Hong Kong to remain a transnational global city, while strategically incorporating status quo, the officials supported the promotion of the arts activities in the forms of international art fairs such as Art Basel, attracting international art collectors to Hong Kong since the 2010s. The new strategies to develop culture, creative industries and cultural consumption are not departing from persistent neo-liberal policies and capitalism.

The West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) project (see Figure 1) represented the construction of “Asia’s World City” identity projected by the state. The WKCD is a planned arts and cultural district on a 40 hectare prime waterfront site at the southern tip of the West Kowloon Reclamation Area. The proposed West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) is to be developed to allow Hong Kong people to find a “cultural oasis to enrich [their] lives”, and an attraction to bring in more overseas
visitors (HKSAR, 2002).

“The West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) project is an important strategic investment of the HKSAR Government to meet the long-term infrastructural and development needs of Hong Kong's arts and culture. The WKCD is being developed as an integrated arts and cultural district with world-class facilities. It aims to promote the development of arts and culture, meet the growing cultural needs of the public and strengthen Hong Kong's position as an international arts and cultural metropolis.” (HKSAR, 2008)

In 2002, the Government announced the call for proposals for the WKCD, clearly communicating that this “landmark development” would “enhance Hong Kong's position as a world city of culture”. In addition to its global ambition, the WKCD also aims to “enrich cultural life by attracting internationally acclaimed performances and exhibitions; nurture local arts talent and create more opportunities for arts
groups; enhance international cultural exchange; put Hong Kong on the world arts and culture map; provide state-of-the-art performance venues and museums; offer more choices to arts patrons; encourage creativity; enhance the harbourfront; attract overseas visitors; and create jobs” (WKDA, 2002). Some of these goals are competing – the fostering of local arts versus attracting internationally acclaimed exhibitions; offering more choices to arts patrons versus creating a public space for all.

This project is significant in the discussion of Hong Kong’s identity because its development process represents the city’s struggle to balance between economic growth and preservation, as well as global, national and local pressures. The project has received wide criticisms from the local community, who argued that the project has neither foresight nor long-term planning. The WKCD project was partly driven by foreign companies and investors’ criticisms about the lack of cultural infrastructure and performance venues in a city as globalized as Hong Kong, which attracts millions of tourists every year. The WKCD was a stage in which the post-colonial city-state was to construct a physical space for public and global recognition and consumption.

In the early stages of conceptualization, the project was criticized for not seeking active participation from the local community and decisions that lacked transparency (Lui, 2008). The government made an endowment of US$2.8 billion to develop the project, inviting international “starchitects” to submit designs for the master plan and the structures (see Figure 2). It is worth noting that the public’s
anxiety over this project is a timely demonstration of the people’s deep concern and attempts to grasp and define Hong Kong’s identity in their own terms. The identity projected through the WKCD project is one that continues to place emphasis on the “legitimizing” identity imbued by those in power. Capitalism and commodification is the hallmark of that perspective of the city and is so reflected in the WKCD project, leaving little or no space for development of vernacular culture.

In 2005, a group of Hong Kong residents established a non-profit organization named the People’s Panel on West Kowloon. With the aim to bring together voices from the general public and government agencies, the Panel organized forums, both online and off, to discuss issues ranging from the WKCD project to Hong Kong’s cultural policy in general. The original design of a canopy design for the facility was
challenged by the public's critique of the “landmark space” and “constructed culture” for tourists, which lacks the multidimensional aspects of Hong Kong's existing culture. The Panel released a proposal named “Re-defining West Kowloon” based on public feedback and suggested the process of civic participation for the project. The project was forced to undergo further advisory group reviews. A new design competition was launched and this time, the winner of the project was Foster’s + Partners’ City Park Concept, with its new adopted slogan as “A Place for Everyone.”

To add another dimension of complexity in this highly political project, in late 2016, an announcement was made for a Palace Museum that will be added to the West Kowloon Cultural District. “To foster and reconnect the histories between Hong Kong and China and to showcase Chinese culture and history”, the Palace Museum will foresee major connection with Beijing’s national agenda. “Even the board members of WKCD were unaware until the plans rolled out” (Chow, 2017). This is a surprising turn of event. While WKCD was painted in its early conception as a project departed from political grounds, Beijing’s attempt to foster the “reconnection” of these “histories” has received harsh criticism from arts and cultural critics and the public who were disappointed in the lack of transparency, calling it a “secretive deal” between Carrie Lam (the new Chief Executive who was in the running when the deal was struck) and the Palace Museum to “show her loyalty to the central government” (Chow, 2017 and Kwok, 2017). Some even expressed that a judicial review should be considered.
The colonial legacy of the government was one that supported high-end arts and non-interventionist approach for local indigenous cultural activities; this continued and is evident in the WKCD project, which commits to the privatization of arts and culture. Carolyn Cartier (2008) looks at the WKCD development in a postcolonial context, emphasizing the project as a continuation of colonial-era planning in the centre of the city, while giving less attention to the existing culture in the urban periphery (arts in industrial districts, organic and dynamic arts produced by local artists that explore issues of society and politics.)

The WKCD became (and continues to be) rooted in the symbolic value of a hegemonic identity, the identity of global consumption set in the precarious postcolonial political arena between national and local narratives. Associating a place with a cultural icon is an attempt to imbue a place with a creative character. “Conflicts caused through the hegemonic process of selection, choice, re-evaluation and cultural change, therefore, arise where the city branding and cultural projects reinforce a homogenous culture” (Evans, 2003, 424). Andy Pratt (2010) emphasizes that the focus on the consumption at the expense of production prioritizes consumption and idealizes culture, and this is evident in WKCD. Ku (2004) points out that the approach of the government’s policy and decision-making towards arts and culture is one that is top-down, centralized with a detachment from the community in general.
Chapter 6

Contesting Identities, Nostalgia and Making Heritage

6.1 Post-97 Heritage Preservation Movement

Heritage preservation is not a new concept for post-colonial Hong Kong, however, it is increasingly garnering interest in tandem with the concepts of “Hong Kong identity” and “Hong Kong culture”. Heritage represents identity and values of society, manifested in physical space, and acts as a reminder of past events (Lowenthal, 1975; Henderson, 2008). It is a contested arena, in which the past and the present are intertwined and multiple narratives from past and present are interrelating in the physical space. In the context of the reunification and of globalization and relentless urban renewal, built heritage, which hold memory and meaning, allows the people of Hong Kong to grasp onto the past as a way of remembering, and affirming their identity (Cheung, 2010; Henderson, 2001, 2008; Ku 2010).

The interest in heritage preservation and place identity in Hong Kong increased in the early 2000s, as tensions between Chinese and Hong Kong culture and their political differences brought about a desire to define collective identity on the part of both nationalists and localists. These interests in locality and identity are expressed especially by youth who are distinguishing themselves as Hong Kong people instead of Chinese nationals (Fung, 2001). The “heritage movement” reached a peak in 2006, when planned demolition of the Queens Pier and Star Ferry
Terminal brought protestors to the site, arguing that the site was significant to Hong Kong identity, despite it having “no architectural merit” (Ng et al, 2010).

The everyday and vernacular spaces are gaining value to the cosmopolitan members of Hong Kong, and are viewed as important as those that represent grand historical elements such as monuments or those that represent the authorities. Activists who fought for the protection of Queen’s Pier argued that the structure was symbol of the everyday working class who passed through the pier on their daily commute (Ng et al., 2010). It was not the architectural features that the activists wanted to preserve, but the associated memories and values attached to the place. This desire for history and nostalgic memories has been the major driver of the heritage movement in Hong Kong. Mee Kam Ng (2010) documents this in detail, in her recount of the protest for Queens Pier:

“... Queen’s Pier was adjacent to the City Hall complex and Edinburgh Place, it became a popular spot for social gathering, fishing, boarding launches for cruise trips and dating. ... it was often the gathering place for civic and social functions, including the cross-harbour swimming race. It was also the place used for the Campaign for Chinese as Official Language as well as the Protect Diaoyutai Island Movement in 1970.... [These spaces] not only symbolized the opportunity for new generations of Hong Kongers to live and appropriate space to imbue it with meaning; this public space actually gave them a right to the commercial and political heart of the city core, a right that was denied in Victorian Hong Kong. ...When the Government was about to demolish the
Star Ferry clock tower, the protestors occupied the working areas for 24 hours. ...When the clock tower was dismantled, the activists tried to protect Queen’s Pier by occupying and living in it... Before the actual ‘dismantling’ of Queen’s Pier ... a group called ‘Local Action’, started a hunger strike on the pier... Many other local social and cultural groups attempted to ‘stimulate’ interest in people’s ‘lived’ space at Queen’s Pier... On the eve of the removal of Queen’s Pier, about 200 people gathered outside it for a candlelight vigil to show support for the hunger strikers. On 1 August 2007, the 30-plus protesters were cleared from the site and Queen’s Pier was completely demolished in February 2008…” (Ng et al, 2010, 423)

According to Lu (2009), the local community who demanded conservation saw new developments that destroy older buildings as symbols of the rich and powerful. With a growing gap between the rich and the poor, the working class are resentful towards economic and political power acquired by property developers and big corporations in the city. Heritage conservation is seen as “an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process of urban planning and city development, and democratic right” (Lu, 2009, 266).

6.2 Wing Lee Street

The case study of Wing Lee Street further demonstrates that Hong Kong people are recognizing their identity through struggles for the protection of lived spaces. At the same time, it also presents complexities around nostalgia, memory, cultural
production and consumption, and around the government’s policies regarding heritage.

Wing Lee Street is located in Sheung Wan District on Hong Kong Island, adjacent and to the east of the current central business district (Central District). This area was the original centre of Chinese Hong Kong and Chinese commercial economy until the 1950s. Hong Kong Island has few flat areas and Wing Lee street was constructed in the 1920s-30s as development expanded to the rugged areas of the island. Many terraces were built (haphazardly) during this period to support the pace of development. The population consisted of predominantly working class immigrants from Southern China, as colonial segregation restricted the Chinese living quarters to certain parts of the city.

The Second World War destroyed many of the buildings and tenement structures, including those on Wing Lee Street, and the commercial activity also moved to Mong Kok, Kowloon after the war. The buildings existing today were built after the war, in the 1950s-60s. In the 1970s to 90s, these “tong-lau” 唐樓 literally translated as “Chinese Building” (like shophouses in Southeast Asia, these are traditional post-war tenement buildings unique to Hong Kong and Southern China) were designated residential use, however, there were also many informal uses (such as print shops) that supported the needs of the growing communities. Moreover, owing to lack of housing, it was common for many of the spaces to be subdivided by owners into more units to lease out, and residents built additional structures on the roofs and courtyards.
The *tong-laus* that were built during the post-war period were constructed quickly to accommodate for the growing population using reinforced concrete, which does not last as long as brick and mortar, and were only meant to last about 50 years. Because these buildings have already reached their projected lifespan, many of them are ripe for the URA’s renewal schemes. Wing Lee Street has twelve *tong-lau* structures (see Figure 3). In 2008, a proposal was made to redevelop the cluster of old buildings along Wing Lee Street and Staunton Street. The Urban Renewal Authority (URA) supported the Wing Lee Street redevelopment plan, which proposed to demolish nine of the buildings. However, in 2010, owing to public outcry, the URA withdrew support for the redevelopment of the street, and even proposed to the Town Planning Board to designate the street as a special preservation zone. To date, the URA has acquired a majority of the buildings, and worked with owners of the other buildings to restore the structures.
Heritage activists, students, young architects and academics were among those most interested in the preservation of the street. Wing Lee Street was saved from demolition, while another similar street (Lee Tung) that housed commercial and residential activities was demolished and redeveloped a year before. The preservation of the street is accredited to the award-winning film, “Echoes of the Rainbow” which was filmed at the location, and starred big local actors Simon Yam
and Sandra Ng. Along with the starring cast of the movie, the director and producer were advocates for the protection of the buildings on Wing Lee Street. The film was about a family of a shoemaker in Hong Kong in the 1960s, struggling to make ends meet. Director Alex Law chose Wing Lee Street as the location of the family's home and neighbourhood, and explained that it was the only place he could find in Hong Kong that still retained the characteristics of the city in the 60s. The film won the Crystal Bear Award for Best Feature Film in the Generation category of the 60th Berlinale, the international film festival held in Berlin in 2010.

Scenes shot at Wing Lee Street depicted the sense of place of a working class neighbourhood, recreating the warmth of bittersweet life in the 60s. Families ate meals and carried out their everyday activities on the shared terraces. (See Figures 4 and 5)
Figure 4 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The removed image is a screenshot of a scene in the film “Echoes of the Rainbow”, depicting the use of Wing Lee Street terrace as shared community space, actors in foreground act as neighbours having dinner on the outdoor terrace. Original Source: Law, Alex K. Y., dir. Echoes of the Rainbow. Perfs. Simon Yam, Sandra Ng, Aarif Lee, Evelyn Choi. 2010. DVD. Tai Seng Entertainment, 2010.

Figure 4. Scene in “Echoes of the Rainbow” depicting 1960s working class lifestyle and the outdoor terrace of Wing Lee Street.

Figure 5 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The removed image is a photo of the row of tong-lau structures on Wing Lee Street. Original Source: Peng, Cong Ran. Tong-laus on Wing Lee Street has unique Hong Kong character 永利街的唐樓群極具香港特色. Echoes of the Rainbow actors say save Wing Lee Street 《歲月神偷》演藝人:保留永利街. HK Apple Daily. (23 Feb 2010). Web. Accessed on 30 Oct 2017 from: https://hk.news.appledaily.com/

Figure 5. The original tong-lau structures before restoration.
Cultural identity is expressed in heritage, and in this case, the reaffirmation of identity is facilitated by nostalgia and collective memory represented in the place-based images of Wing Lee Street. The restoration of Wing Lee Street poses an instructive intersection between symbolism, nostalgia and identity. The street’s relationship with the film - how the street is depicted in the film, and the importance of the film in the argument for the street’s preservation - also introduces a perspective different from the previous instances of heritage concerns, such as the Queen’s Pier event.

Wing Lee Street represents several portrayals of Hong Kong’s identities and values. First, the street is a symbol of Hong Kong in the 1960s, and represents the identity and livelihoods of the working class that was depicted in the film. This cultural identity is particularly internalized in the newer generation, born in the 60s, 70s and 80s who are attached to Hong Kong as their permanent home, rather than as a place of “transition” or a temporary shelter during their parent’s era. During the postwar era, the restriction of immigration facilitated the formation of identity, one that is grounded in place; Hong Kong was no longer a place of flows. A sense of local belonging to the city emerged in the 1960s and 70s.

Second, the period of the 1960s and 70s was just before the era of rapid tertiariization, post-industrialism and hyper globalization. Amongst locals, the bustling era of the 1960s and 1970s was seen as a success on the backs of hard-working immigrants and refugees, and was celebrated despite its hardships. Wing Lee Street is a physical reminder of those times, and a part of this local identity. To
Hong Kong people, Wing Lee Street and the lifestyles and ideologies that were showcased in the celebrated film were representative of their identity.

Third, this case demonstrates the value Hong Kong people place on the distinct identity of a Hong Konger, one that is divergent from the Mainland’s. The 60s and 70s were a time when “distinction between Hong Kong and Mainland China became more palpably felt” (Sussnam, 2010). The second and third generation of Chinese immigrants settled into the city, adapting to its colonial influences, and a vernacular culture arose. Hong Kong people were aware of the political unrest in China, the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square incident led to a negative sentiment towards China’s oppressive government. Interestingly, the hands-off governance of the colonialists incubated a local culture of Hong Kong indigenes mixed with the immigrants and refugees. Additionally, a notable observation is the involvement of young people in protests for heritage (as well as in the democratic movement). Fung’s (2001) study found that since the Handover, young people aged 30 and below identified more with a “Hong Kong” identity than a “Chinese” identity.

Further, the case demonstrates not only contestation between market and society, but also between social classes in the heritage arena. The younger generation involved in the heritage movement were, as Lu (2009) alluded in the Queen’s Pier case, concerned about power inequalities, power granted to URA and developers and rapid development. While educated youth and heritage academics fought for the protection of the tong lau buildings; residents were opposed to the renewal project not because they treasured the attached cultural values, but because they thought
that the compensation offered by the URA for their relocation was not enough. Some of the building owners who held these buildings as investment also were looking forward to the prospect of compensation from the URA. Additionally, the URA had trouble reaching other building owners, who seemed to care little about the development or redevelopment of the site.

This case highlights contestations in Hong Kong’s search for and self-realization of identity, which poses challenges to the associated processes of heritage preservation. Keefe (2007) argues that all landscapes qualify as somebody’s heritage, and highlights the contradictory nature of preserving landscape – “landscape that is artificially sealed at a particular moment stops being the landscape that it was and becomes a new landscape... [I]dentities are inscribed in landscapes, even in ones that seem very mundane.” The successful preservation of the street is largely owing to the success of the acclaimed film. As in all films and movies, the location and memories depicted are romanticized and idealized in the story. Challenges arise for the decolonization process and for an affirmation of an independent identity when identity is based on these romanticized and idealistic imaginations of the past.

Finally, the case demonstrates a need for a set of clear policies that are able to guide heritage preservation, taking into account the contemporary histories of Hong Kong, as well as the intangible values of the community. The preservation of the street is a testament to a reactionary mentality, both on the part of the government and the locals who fought for preservation. The preservation of the street would not have
taken place if not for the street’s relationship with the film and the public’s concern over the loss of this particular filming location. Without clear guidelines, urban renewal will continue to happen in similar postwar neighbourhoods, along with piecemeal revitalization and restoration driven by private developers.


Figure 6. Restored *tong-lau* buildings in 2011
Chapter 7

7.1 Conclusions and Implications

In this paper, the importance of place is understood in the context of identity construction and cultural production in cities that are in between globalizing and nationalizing tendencies. Place and place identity, their physical, social and cultural aspects, each contribute to our understanding of the environment around us, grounding us in our relationship with others. Joining earlier scholarship on dynamics of place, this thesis continues the discussion about locating the intangible and obscure constructs related to the seemingly static but convoluted notions of place and identity. Cities with a strong cultural personality are said to have a strong legibility that is apparent in the urban landscape. Yet with increasing global cultural flows, cities are in a constant state of flux. The concept of place identity displays mixed and subtle cues in cities with multiple cultural influences, complicating our readings into power and politics of place. It is also necessary to acknowledge that places are inherently associated with motives (whether implicit or explicit) of agents shaping the construction, destruction and reconstruction of places.

In the postindustrial and postmodern era, cities are aspiring to be global. Governments and policy makers of these cities are increasingly capitalizing on the cities’ identities, places and cultures: culture has become a signifier of world status. The production and consumption of culture and creativity is now at the forefront of
economic development. Moreover, the cultural economy with its fundamental focus on aesthetics and performance, is reshaping the urban landscape of cities and consequently, the identities of cities. For Hong Kong, the aspiration to become “Asia’s World City” involves seeking cultural capital through place-marketing and place-branding. The development of cultural infrastructure hardware is supported by neoliberal policies that facilitate a market- and consumption-centred approach to cultural development.

The longstanding narratives of Hong Kong are questioned in the investigation of urban development and heritage preservation in post-Handover Hong Kong. The dominant narratives of Hong Kong, including its depictions as a city between the East and West, a land of capitalist freedom, and a place of transience, are posing new challenges and tensions as the Hong Kong government and residents are experiencing the largest battle over the concept of identity, an identity that has never been in the foreground of debate throughout Hong Kong’s colonial history. The Special Administrative Region is at a junction between its worlding, nationalizing and decolonizing objectives. This thesis has argued that these conflicts are demonstrated and reflected in the construction, restructuring and revalorizing of place.

The WKCD is symbolic of the attempt to forge a new global identity for the city and also for Hong Kongers. By highlighting its internationalism, the WKCD supports a narrative that disregards cultural challenges of renationalization and fails to acknowledge and reconcile with the city’s colonial experience. It therefore
overlooks the prolific and distinctive arts and cultural production that already exists organically in the city. The narrative that is projected by the global aspiration of WKCD is one that propagates the perception that there is no local art or talent worth the attention or status.

On the other hand, built heritage reinforces existing identity by acting as a “storehouse of memory” (Hayden, 1997), a physical reminder of the past that acts as an anchor for identity in the present. In contrast with the new and global identity central to the WKCD project, the preservation of Wing Lee Street represents the collective identity and community values of Hong Kongers. As a representation of an era when identity was formed and stabilized, Wing Lee Street acts as an important place for today’s Hong Kong society. The activists who cared for Wing Lee Street do not see it as an aestheticized space; rather, they are drawing connections between place and history, and the current affairs pertaining to inequality and democratization.

7.2 Challenges and Recommendations for Policy and Planning Practice

My thesis has attempted to draw connections between the developments of new cultural icons with preservation of the old, situating these in a broader context of identity and globalization. The examination of the two cases demonstrate a need for Hong Kong to achieve a more balanced approach to cultural development, one that places emphasis on nurturing existing vernacular cultures and that involves the
intersection between heritage – intangible and tangible - and consumption strategies that are currently the norm. I agree with Chang and Huang’s (2011, 2085) recommendation for another Asian global city, Singapore: “while some degree of worldliness is essential in any redevelopment, a new balance has to be sought between the excesses of global urbanism and the parochialism of vernacular concerns.” The same can be said for Hong Kong. Singapore has been dubbed a capital of culture in Asia. Lee Kuan Yew excelled in the forging of a new postcolonial identity. But one fundamental difference between Singapore and Hong Kong is that Singapore has the ability to define its own identity, while Hong Kong is not given the option of independence. Built and cultural heritage and cultural industries are opportunities for the expression of identity. I stress that the reinforcement of identity of Hong Kong will benefit from a holistic approach that encompasses culture and heritage under the larger umbrella of cultural development.

Heritage has gained significant traction since 2006, including the government’s commitment towards conservation. Prior to 2006, heritage was managed across a dozen of departments (Distefano & Cummer, 2012). With the loss of Queen’s pier, the government was propelled to create policy that recognized heritage resources. After 2007, a new Development Bureau (DEVB) was established to lead all development related heritage conservation projects and almost all pre-existing departments with responsibilities related to heritage resources were gathered under the DEVB (Distefano & Cummer, 2012). In 2008, the Commissioner for
Heritage’s Office (CHO) was set up to support programs related to conservation. The URA is also a department under the DEVB.

It is an achievement that heritage conservation is now a central part of government policy, but it is almost impossible to achieve conservation without framing it as a driver of development, which is the DEVB’s core focus. The Heritage Revitalization through Partnership Scheme and economic incentives for preservation of privately-owned historic buildings are strategies with conservation related objectives in tandem with emphasis on urban development. Asian cities are the world’s fastest growing cities, so it is also where innovations in heritage conservation have the most opportunities to arise. Hong Kong has an opportunity to be a leader in the preservation of heritage that is sensitive to cultural and social aspects, not just the built environment. This could be in the form of cross-sector collaboration between arts, cultural and heritage, and between private building owners and non-profit organizations. A district-wide advisory committee formed of property owners, residents and arts and cultural groups with local knowledge could advise on heritage and cultural development in their local area, liaise with their district councilor who will be able to bring concerns to the Legislative Council and DEVB.

Currently, the Culture Branch (which deals with arts and cultural programs and managing the Hong Kong Arts Development Council), the Antiquities and Monuments Office (dealing with Heritage Impact Assessments and determining Historical Grades of buildings), as well as the WKCD Project Management Team (which coordinates directly with the WKCD Authority on implementation, planning
and monitoring) are under the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB). Intersections between arts and cultural software, governed by HAB, and heritage hardware, dealt by DEVB, are needed for elevating culture as a way to strengthen identity and civic values. For example, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, which provides funding for education and programs, can be involved with URA and CHO in infrastructure development and planning to leverage for functional spaces for cultural uses.

Of course, there is the challenge of strengthening cultural and heritage policies given the constraints of existing neoliberal spatial ideologies. Land prices in Hong Kong are the highest in the world because of limited supply of developable land (controlled by the government). Further, land sales (actually are leases of up to 99 years) to private developers (and highest bidder) are prime revenue generators for the government. Hence, there are only a few major land developers in Hong Kong and they hold the majority of developments, and thus also power, in the city. This has been the case since the colonial period. These circumstances obviously raise serious challenges to heritage preservation, and also to the development of WKCD as an arts-focused project. In addition to the planned museums and galleries, the site of WKCD will also see immense commercial development, residential towers and luxury hotels.

Further, Hong Kong needs to continue to demonstrate cognizance of histories occluded in colonialism, as well as the processes of renationalization, in order to establish an identity that will strengthen the unique cultural landscape in the city. Wing Lee Street and the West Kowloon Cultural District “are not just personal
view[s] but are not the true representation of the city society either…” The spatialities “draw on a relationship between the real, the imaginary and the symbolic that is not beyond truth and falsity, but is different from it.” (Keith and Pile, 2004, 24). It is imperative for Hong Kong’s future as a globalized yet unique city to acknowledge and mediate the multiple forces vying for claims over its identity to fully reflect and foster the multi-faceted emerging identity in the processes of creation and preservation.

7.3 Recommendations for Further Research

In this research, I have framed cultural development and heritage development around the concept of place identity. Other instructive avenues include the exploration of these themes through social activism and social movement lenses, placing these ideas in the discussion of democracy and social justice. This approach would provide the examination of various other social problems contributing to this uprising of identity struggles, including the concerns about income inequality, housing affordability, environmental degradation, consequences related to hyperdensity, and so on.

The discussion about heritage in Hong Kong poses questions about how heritage should be classified or recognized. The dialogue on “cultural authenticity” may contribute to this investigation. As local scholars such as Stephen Chu (2010) has argued, Hong Kong’s uniqueness stems from its emergent identity. If identity is a concept that shifts and changes in the global city, what then, constitutes as
something that truly represents Hong Kong identity, and should that be the basis for heritage preservation decisions? What about other parts of occluded or overlooked histories, for example Hong Kong’s industrial heritage, and the experiences and contributions from non-dominant cultures and populations in modern day Hong Kong, including expatriates, non-Chinese immigrants, domestic workers and refugees?

Another remaining question that warrants further research is Hong Kong’s process of decolonization. Are processes of decolonization and local identity development possible while the city is facing global and national pressures? Is the recognition of intrinsic identity caused by or exacerbated by this situation? It would be illuminating to compare Hong Kong’s decolonization with other post-colonial and global cities to effectively guide globalizing development while maintaining and preserving cultural heritage. An obvious comparable case would be Singapore, a predominantly Chinese populace that no longer identifies as nationally Chinese. However, as aforementioned, Singapore is able to control its narrative, whereas Hong Kong’s reunification with China encroaches on this autonomy. In this sense, a comparison with Shanghai, a Chinese city geographically situated in China with a brief colonial association, may also provide insight on the identities associated with post-colonial urban cosmopolitanism within China. Taipei, on the other hand, with a self-actualized independent identity separate from the Mainland, upholds a self-recognition of rich and authentic Confucianist Chinese culture, heritage and values, while rejecting Mainland sociopolitical views. In-depth research comparing these
nuanced global and cultural cities and their trajectories in relation to place and identity would provide a comprehensive insight into the relative importance each city places on lasting cultural identity, the valuation of globalization and ultimately their respective places in the world.

7.4 Final Remarks

Since I began this paper with an explanation of my positionality, it is appropriate to conclude with a critical reflection of my experience in this research process. Since I first became interested in this topic in 2014, the landscapes and politics of Hong Kong has changed significantly, and so has my own perception of the city. I must admit to holding preconceived notions about Hong Kong, as I was intertwined with the city through a lived experience, albeit close at times and distant at times. I confronted those constructs as I tried to gain more knowledge from the literature and media articles. Time and again, I found myself asking whether I agreed with those arguments, whether they matched with my own understanding or if they challenged and changed my perceptions.

In the beginning, I was moved by the gaining concern for Hong Kong’s cultural practices and heritage, as they were also things that brought fond memories and nostalgia. I was also struck by the difference in political outlook amongst the young and the older generations in Hong Kong, as well as their affinity with China. Youth were portrayed as reckless political activists, while middle-aged working professionals wish for stability and status quo. As I delved deeper, I found even
more discrepancies and variations across Hong Kong society. These voices and views should not be overgeneralized as they contribute to a rich and diverse civil society. Hong Kong’s identity crisis will be key to how the Hong Kong story unfolds.
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