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Removing a colonial anachronism - The decolonization of heritage in the 1970s Hong Kong

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Abstract

This article explores the decolonization of heritage politics in 1970s Hong Kong. It firstly revisits recent scholars' work on Hong Kong heritage politics and the transformation of Hong Kong's cultural identity. It shows how people's perceptions of their colonial heritage and history in Hong Kong have changed since the 1970s. Secondly, it outlines the city's cultural heritage policy framework after the 1967 Riots, inspired by the Cultural Revolution. It analyses how the colonial government intentionally rebranded the city's colonial heritage as an anachronism to justify its new narrative of Hong Kong and its cultural identity in the 1970s. It also employs the demolition of the former Kowloon Railway Station building in the 1970s as a case study to discuss how the colonial government decolonized local colonial structures through its new cultural heritage policy approach after the Riots. Finally, by employing the case study of the demolished Central Star Ferry Pier in the 2000s, this article argues there was a change in people's perceptions of the city's colonial history in the early postcolonial period of Hong Kong. A more active notion of Hong Kong's cultural identity is also being articulated in the uncertain future due to the city's recent rapid political and social changes influenced by the mainland authority.

Keywords: Hong Kong; heritage; colonialism; decolonization; identity

Introduction

Heritage is born to be political and is a selective process that symbolizes, recognizes, or denies certain political ideologies and cultural values. It has always been a delicate issue in postcolonial Hong Kong as it is complicated and publicized politically and socially. These debates concern the definition of local heritage, the boundaries of Hong Kong's cultural identity, and how heritage itself has helped to transform its hybrid cultural and social identity since Hong Kong was returned to China by Britain in 1997.

The relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China in the post-1997 era is tortuous to a certain extent. The Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the large-scale protests in 2019 against the extradition bill allowing suspects to be extradited to mainland China indicated substantial discrepancies in political and social values between both sides.³ There is an increasing academic discussion on how the city and its people review colonial history in the

¹ Pendlebury 2013, 709–27; Smith, L. 2009, 33–50.

² Chan, Y. W. and Lee 2017, 275–87; Ip 2018, 547–62; Lu 2016, 325; Ng, Mee Kam 2018, 495.

³ Holbig 2020, 325–37; Lowe and Tsang 2018, 556–71; Ortmann 2015, 32–50.

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post-1997 era. The controversies over the selection of local colonial heritage in postcolonial Hong Kong have recently sparked waves of debates on the reconstruction of Hong Kong's cultural identity and the repositioning of the city's colonial past under the mainland's emerging political influence.⁴

The past is now. To further explore the recent debates surrounding colonial heritage in Hong Kong, it is vital to understand how the concept of *heritage* was articulated in Hong Kong's colonial past when the then-colonial administration first adopted the territory's cultural heritage policy framework in the 1970s.

This paper suggests that the 1967 Riots, inspired by the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), played a critical role in motivating the colonial administration to conduct a series of social reforms, including the new heritage policy to reposition the image of the colonial government among the local Chinese population in the 1970s. It is argued that the reconstruction of Hong Kong's colonial history and cultural identity through heritage-making started in the 1970s, long before the handover in 1997. The colonial government deliberately minimized the colonial characteristics of Hong Kong by demolishing colonial heritage under the new cultural heritage policy implemented in the 1970s.

To a certain extent, this process of *self-decolonization* was a response to the emerging global political landscape of British decolonization after World War II, which was further exacerbated in the 1960s and 1970s. The colonial administration intended to improve the social well-being of the local Chinese people and eliminate the colonial features of the colonial administration. The aim was to diminish the local Chinese people's political and sentimental attachment to Communist China after the 1967 Riots.⁵ This article further argues that the then-colonial administration intended to reinforce British colonialism by *decolonizing* the colonial impression of Hong Kong. It aimed to *neutralize* Hong Kong as a thriving and modern commercial hub embedded with modern and traditional Chinese cultural characters and responded to the atmosphere of anticolonialism articulated in the 1967 Riots. More importantly, it intended to detach the local Chinese population from the political influence of Communist China's ideology of nationalism to maintain the colonial regime's long-term political stability and economic benefits in Hong Kong.

This article also centers on the *self-decolonization* approach adopted by the colonial administration in cultural heritage policy in the 1970s and the subsequent rise of the earliest local heritage movements to prevent colonial structures from being removed. It argues that while the then colonial administration was actively engaging in the removal of colonial structures such as the Kowloon Railway Station building and the old Hong Kong Club building in the 1970s, the civil advocacies surrounding the controversies over the demolition works were not popular among the majority of the local Chinese population. Indeed, the notion of preserving colonial heritage as an essential part of Hong Kong's history was generally embraced by only a few foreign and Chinese local elites. Without significant support from the local public, the local elite's heritage movements failed to save the colonial heritage such as the Kowloon Railway Station building from demolition in the 1970s. It is argued that most local Chinese populations were not passionate about conserving colonial heritage.

By contrast, the notion of branding Hong Kong as a modern and thriving commercial hub, intentionally publicized by the colonial administration, seemed more appealing to the public in the 1970s. Various stakeholders lacked a shared understanding of the city's colonial

⁴ Barber 2014, 1179–95; Henderson 2008, 540; Cheung, E. and Chan 2012, 176–89; Ho, L. K. 2020, 1–25; Kong 2007, 383–404; Lowe and Tsang 2018, 556–71.

⁵ Bickers and Yep 2009; Cheung, G. K. 2009.

⁶ England 2016; FCO 1978a, 1–2.

⁷ Chan, C. S. 2019, 321–32; FCO 1978d, 1–4.

history and the essential elements for articulating Hong Kong's identity. This article also explores and elaborates on these arguments in the colonial context in the post-Riots period through the case study of the demolition of the Kowloon Railway Station building in 1977.

The last section of this article discusses how the heritage movement in the 1970s is different from the one in Hong Kong's postcolonial era. It indicates a change in people's perceptions of the city's colonial history. The local population demonstrated a more enthusiastic and supportive attitude to heritage movements to protect particular colonial structures from demolition in the first two decades of the postcolonial period. Simultaneously, a more active but uncertain notion of Hong Kong's cultural identity was being articulated. It is argued that this articulation of Hong Kong's cultural identity will become a more delicate and politically sensitive issue in the near future. It is also uncertain how Hong Kong and its people will continue to reshape the interpretation of colonial heritage in the former British colony due to the city's recent political and social changes.

Colonial heritage and its past

The recent debate on Hong Kong's heritage has indicated that heritage is a testimonial of the power of the *past*. It is also a process of reconstructing the *past*, serving both present and future political and social proposes. The *past* was not simply the past but a reconstruction and reassemblage of various cultural and social elements.⁸

Zhu and Maggs further argued that heritage is an instrument of power while it is a process of value creation, modification, and negotiation between various stakeholders related to heritage. During the first decade of postcolonial Hong Kong, the local public, civil society, and the media demonstrated an enthusiastic attitude among the social movements opposing the demolition of colonial structures such as the Central Star Ferry and the Queen's Pier proposed by the SAR Government. An articulation of local civil activism was also associated with local heritage conservation controversies and heritage movements. Additionally, there is a more substantial reflection and expression of Hong Kong's local cultural identity, highlighting the uniqueness of Hong Kong's culture and history, including its colonial past, among scholars.

It is common to observe the postcolonial authority rearrange and reconstruct the colonial *past* to legitimatize new political and cultural discourses in the postcolonial territory. One example in the East Asia context was the "de-Japanisation" policy approach conducted by Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) government in post-WWII Taiwan. Taiwan was occupied and colonized by Japan in 1895. The Japanese colonial administration was eager to transform the people of Taiwan into "imperial" subjects of Japan by promoting the Kōminka (huangminhua; 巨民化) movement (1937–1945) in colonial Taiwan. Taiwanese society was significantly influenced by Japan politically, socially, and culturally during the period of Japanese occupation.

⁸ Lowenthal 2009; Harvey 2001, 319–38; Ashworth and Graham 2005.

⁹ Zhu and Maags 2020, 1–23

¹⁰ Henderson 2008, 540; Ku 2012, 5–22; Ng, Mee Kam et al. 2010, 411.

¹¹ Barber 2014, 1179–95; Wong, Y. C. and Chan 2017, 312–32; Ku 2012, 5–22; Lu 2016, 325; Ng, Mee-Kam 2014, 77–92.

¹² Ip 2020; Chan, Y. W. and Lee 2017, 275-287; Law 2018.

¹³ Hall and Tucker 2004, 1–24; Harrison and Hughes 2010, 234–69.

¹⁴ Ching 2001; Shih 2020, 279–302; Go and Lai 2019, 79–86.

¹⁵ Japan defeated the Qing Dynasty in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) in 1895. As a result, *The Treaty of Maguan (The Treaty of Shimonoseki)* was signed in 1895. Taiwan was ceded to Japan, and the Qing government was forced to recognize Korea's complete independence and autonomy according to the *Treaty*.

¹⁶ Ching 2001; Go and Lai 2019, 79–86; Logan and Reeves 2008; Amae 2011, 19–62.

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After WWII ended, Taiwan was handed over to the KMT government in 1945. The *new* KMT government intended to erase the "shameful" colonial history of the island by removing the colonial structures and banning the use of Japanese in Taiwan. As a political response to the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) in mainland China, the KMT Government launched the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement (*Zhonghua Wenhua Fuxing Yundong*; 中華文化復興運動) in 1966 to further legitimatize the KMT Government as a representative of "authentic" and "traditional" Chinese culture.¹⁷ It also accused the mainland's Communist regime of substantially destroying traditional Chinese culture in the context of the Cultural Revolution.

The cultural heritage policy approach adopted by the KMT Government in postcolonial Taiwan is a typical example of how the *past* was rearranged. The Japanese colonial memory was erased intentionally through the reinterpretation of colonial heritage by the postcolonial authority, with China becoming the territory's ruling power after the former colonizers.

The decolonization articulated in Taiwan after WWII was chiefly led by a postcolonial authority that succeeded the former colonial administration. This article argues that the experience of decolonization in Hong Kong differed from its counterparts in East Asia, such as Taiwan; it was initially articulated by the colonial administration during the colonial period. The British colonial administration intended to reposition Hong Kong's cultural and social values to diminish its colonial features through its cultural heritage policy framework. It was adopted in the tumultuous historical context of the Cultural Revolution in mainland China and the global wave of decolonization of the 1970s.

The Turning Point of Colonial Hong Kong: The Cultural Revolution and the 1967 Riots

Hong Kong experienced structural, political, and social changes in the 1970s after the 1967 Riots. The intense emotional affection for communist ideology demonstrated by the local leftists during the 1967 Riots, inspired by the Cultural Revolution in mainland China, stimulated the then-colonial government to re-examine the cultural and social policy of colonial Hong Kong. It aimed to depoliticize the local Chinese population and reduce their sentimental attachment to the Chinese nationalism propelled by Communist China.

This section accounts for Hong Kong's historical development of heritage policy and the political nature of local heritage issues in the 1970s. It is argued that the establishment of Hong Kong's cultural heritage policy in the 1970s was, to a great extent, the result of years of political instability caused by the 1967 Hong Kong Riots. It was a watershed of post-war Hong Kong history, motivated by the local leftists who Communist China ideologically influenced as the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) reached its climax.

After WWII, the influx of Chinese immigrants created substantial pressure on the city's underdeveloped social welfare system. ¹⁸ Most of them were not able to access sufficient social services. The labor-management relations in Hong Kong were described as "far from ideal." ¹⁹ The resentment towards the colonial government's neglect of local social services and labor rights accumulated intense hostility toward British colonial rule. ²⁰ Meanwhile, the strong ideology of Chinese nationalism propagandized the Cultural Revolution in mainland China. ²¹ It was influential among the local Chinese population who had suffered from the colonial government's poor social welfare service.

¹⁷ Wang 1987, 66–90; Chiang et al. 2017, 232–50.

¹⁸ Ho, P. 2018; Roberts 2017, 1–30; Mark 2017, 257–77.

¹⁹ Cooper 1970, 301.

²⁰ Zanier and Peruzzi 2017, 233–55; Cheung, G. K. 2009; Yep 2008, 122–39; Cooper 1970.

²¹ Yep 2012; Bickers and Yep 2009; Zanier and Peruzzi 2017, 233–55; Mark 2017, 257–77.

The nature of the Riot was anticolonial.²² In April 1967, workers of an artificial flower factory initiated negotiations, demanding a better working environment and higher wages.²³ The pro-Communist union intervened in the dispute by organizing large-scale street demonstrations. The protest soon escalated into rioting while the demonstrators clashed violently with the police, as articulated by "Committee of All Circle for the Struggle against Persecution by the British Authorities in Hong Kong," a pro-Communist left-wing organization. Days of strikes, protests, and intermittent bomb attacks on the streets were organized. Fifty-one people died and more than 800 were injured during the riots.²⁴ The riots eventually ended in December 1967 and were considered the most severe political crisis for the colonial government.

The riots were a watershed in the city's post-war history and brought fundamental changes to the colonial administration. The colonial administration pinpointed that the riot revealed the gap between the local Chinese population and the colonial government.²⁵

A report prepared for the Secretary of State by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) concerning the long-term future of Hong Kong in the "post-riot era acknowledged that the British government 'left Hong Kong to grapple alone (without significant financial assistance) in the post-war years with the tremendous problems posed by the influx of refugees from China'." ²⁶ It also criticized the then colonial administration, which had shown "a lack of concern for Hong Kong interests and her special problems." ²⁷

In the 1972 Policy Address of the colonial government, the government described the inadequacy and poor housing conditions as "one of the major sources of friction and unhappiness between the government and population" Thus, the colonial government's urgent task was to improve the local Chinese population's quality of life. The aim was to re-establish their confidence in Hong Kong's future to prevent them from being ideologically influenced by Communist China. The loss of trust "could only too easily be generated by the successful exploitation of social and administrative problems by the Communists or an erosion of our [British] export market by overseas interests." It was suggested that "a successful and acceptable administrative government of its own" was essential for the long-term stable governance of the colonial government in Hong Kong.³⁰

Crawford Murray MacLehose (in the office between Nov 19, 1971 and May 8, 1982) was the first Hong Kong governor appointed after the 1967 Riots. He emphasized: "I pushed very hard to achieve quick expansion of social service and housing," as "it was also a necessary response to the riots of the Cultural Revolution, which had underlined the wide gap between colonial anachronism and modern aspirations." He also stated that "Hong Kong is the home of over 4 million [people] who have to a greater or lesser extent rejected China, a large proportion have not fully accepted Hong Kong."

The outbreak of the Cultural Revolution encouraged a new wave of immigration in the 1970s. However, many new arrivals still maintained active social and cultural connections with mainland China. They considered Hong Kong just a home away from home and a place

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<sup>22</sup> Zanier and Peruzzi 2017, 233–55; Cooper 1970.

<sup>23</sup> Bickers and Yep 2009; Mark 2017, 257–77.

<sup>24</sup> Cheung, G. K. 2009; Bickers and Yep 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Carroll 2010, 9–23; Zanier and Peruzzi 2017, 233–55; Mark 2014, 315–35.

<sup>26</sup> FCO 1970a.

<sup>27</sup> FCO 1970a.

<sup>28</sup> Hong Kong Government 1972, 2–3.

<sup>29</sup> FCO 1970b.

<sup>30</sup> Cooper 1970, 289.

<sup>31</sup> The Guardian 2000, 26, 26.

<sup>32</sup> The Guardian 2000, 26, 26.

<sup>33</sup> Yep and Lui 2010, 253; FCO 1971.
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to make a living.³⁴ Thus, the colonial government attempted to rebrand Hong Kong as "an entity to which they belong and the place they wish to live in instead of as a temporary shelter."³⁵ The colonial government shaped Hong Kong as a prosperous modern city, culturally and ideologically distinguishing it from mainland China. The colonial government attempted this by implementing radical changes to its social policies, including articulating a new cultural heritage policy framework.

It is also essential to address that it was not the first time the colonial administration attempted to depoliticize the Hong Kong Chinese to prevent them from nurturing a leftist bent. In the 1920s, the anticolonialism Seamen's Strike (1922) and the Canton-Hong Kong Strike (1925–26)³⁶ featured relatively radical Chinese nationalism ideologies endorsed by both the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In response to the strikes, the colonial government reformed the local Chinese education system by introducing Chinese government schools to replace schools initially hosted by Chinese unions and associations politically associated with either KMT or CCP and established the School of Chinese Studies at the University of Hong Kong.³⁷ It also banned all local Chinese associations tied with the mainland and imposed stricter propaganda control to stop the spread of anticolonialism ideology. However, when contrasting the 1967 Riots and the strikes in the 1920s, the scale of the 1967 Riots was larger and more intimate in its connection with the ideology of Chinese nationalism propagated by the Communist authority during the Cultural Revolution. Meanwhile, the social reform articulated by the colonial administration after the 1967 Riots was substantial and structural, significantly changing British Hong Kong's political and social context.

After the 1967 Riots, the British government recognized that Hong Kong "will eventually be returned to China." Moreover, Britain and China established full diplomatic relations in March 1972, while Hong Kong was removed from the United Nations List of Non-self-governing Territories in June 1972. Therefore, it was clear that Hong Kong was no longer a colony of Britain legally and technically, and it had to be handed back to China in the future.

It is suggested the making of a modern Hong Kong was also a long-term preparation for the British withdrawal from Hong Kong. ³⁹ The economic success of Hong Kong could ensure its status as the most crucial source of China's foreign exchange in the "post-Cultural Revolution" era. Additionally, the successful modernization of Hong Kong was important for Britain to "prolong confidence" in the people of Hong Kong to "gain all possible time for conditions to emerge in China in which a favorable negotiation would be possible."

³⁴ Lu 2009, 259.

³⁵ Yep and Lui 2010, 253; FCO 1971.

³⁶ The Seamen's Strike of 1922 was a strike motivated by Chinese seamen in Hong Kong and Guangzhou. The seamen demanded higher wages. However, British shipping companies such as Swire and Jardine rejected the seamen's requests. The Seamen's Union, which was politically associated with the then KMT government, led the strike when more than 30,000 seamen participated, suspending the daily trading between the pier and Canton and disrupting the day-to-day supply chain of the colony. The colonial government declared the strike illegal and enacted the Emergency Regulations Ordinance to stop the strike. The strike was ideologically supported by the KMT, which was an anti-British colonialism political event in nature (Share 2005, 601–24; Chan 2000, 1044–61).

The Canton–Hong Kong strike between 1925 and 1926 was another anticolonialism political campaign in 1920s British Hong Kong and Canton. The KMT and CCP supported this strike. More than 250,000 Chinese left Hong Kong for Guangdong to paralyze the daily economic operation of British Hong Kong. The strike caused substantial financial losses to British merchants in Hong Kong. After these strikes, the British colonial government determined to distance the local Chinese population from the political influence of Chinese nationalism that emerged in China's mainland since the 1920s (Share 2005, 601–24; Chan 2000, 1044–61).

³⁷ Sweeting 2004.

³⁸ FCO 1970c.

³⁹ Zanier and Peruzzi 2017, 233–55; Roberts 2017, 1–30; Mark 2017, 257–77; Mark 2023.

⁴⁰ FCO 1971.

Making a new cultural heritage policy framework in the 1970s

In a global context, the concept of heritage was influential and significant in the 1970s. There was a substantial academic discussion on defining cultural heritage and international recognition of the cultural values of heritage. The enactment of the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* of UNESCO in 1972 demonstrated an emerging global awareness of the importance of cultural heritage.

However, as this paper suggested previously, heritage itself is political. After the Riots, the newly enacted cultural heritage policy in the 1970s was one of the main areas of the colonial government's social reforms. The core question for the then colonial administration was what kind of historical structure was appropriate and politically safe enough to be legally recognized as "heritage." The nature of the tumultuous 1967 Riots was anticolonial. The colonial administration had to be cautious when defining and constructing new and "official" heritage discourse for Hong Kong, considering its complex colonial status and intimate connection with mainland China. In this context, the new cultural heritage policy and other social policy reforms were expected to motivate the colony's modernization, benefiting the British government's long-term political and economic interests in Hong Kong. The social reform after the Riots observed the desire for economic modernity and "forgetting" colonial history. It is argued that an ideology of developmentalism was being articulated among the colonial government and the public to reconstruct Hong Kong as a modernized city featuring its economic achievements in the 1970s. Historically, the nature of Hong Kong's governance was still colonial, but the colonial government studiously disregarded it by making a new historical discourse for colonial Hong Kong.

One of the core elements of the new cultural heritage policy in the 1970s was the enactment of *The Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance of 1976* (the *Ordinance*). It was the first heritage legislation in colonial Hong Kong and a fundamental piece of its new cultural heritage policy framework. 41

A statutory body, the Antiquities Advisory Board ("the Board") – responsible for providing recommendations to the administration for selecting and listing monuments – was created in 1976 under the *Ordinance*. The Antiquities and Monuments Office was also established to provide executive support to the Board and deal with local antiquities and monuments. The board members are government-appointed academics, architects, heritage experts, and government officials. The values of historic structures or sites would be evaluated and discussed by the Board. The Board was responsible for providing recommendations regarding the declaration of the legal monuments. However, the suggestions provided by the Board were non-legally binding on the government. Therefore, the Governor could, technically, override the Board's decisions.⁴²

The *Ordinance* also stipulates that only objects and sites established or formed before 1800 could be eligible for listing as legally protected heritage "by default." Britain officially colonized Hong Kong in 1842. In this case, no colonial structures were suitable "automatically" for legal protection by the government under the *Ordinance*.

The colonial government suggested that the purpose of the legislation was to establish control over archaeological discoveries in Hong Kong and to ensure that the items of particular historical interest were preserved for the enjoyment of the community – the Legislative Council meeting dated Nov 3, 1971. They further explained that this *Ordinance*

⁴¹ Commonwealth Secretariat 1982, 1279; Legislative Council 1971, 216–20.

⁴² Commonwealth Secretariat 1982, 1279; Legislative Council 1971, 216–20.

⁴³ Legislative Council 1971, 181.

could "ensure that necessary developments are not held up for the preservation of antiquities of minor importance." ⁴⁴

In Hong Kong in the 1970s, "modern aspirations" were easily observed. 45 Many pre-WWII buildings were being replaced by new modern office buildings, hotels, and shopping complexes to "maximize" land values. The Central Business District (CBD) has continuously expanded since the mid-1960s, and new land was created through reclamation and urban redevelopment. 46

In this context, it is argued that the government attempted to establish a legal mechanism to endorse and legitimize its selection of "valuable heritage" and its decisions to remove "undesirable" historic structures, especially for those in major urban areas.

Many legal monuments declared in 1978 under the *Ordinance* were created in the Neolithic and ancient China periods. These examples included the Neolithic Rock Carving at Big Wave Bay (discovered in 1970 and declared the first-ever legal monument in 1978 according to the *Ordinance*) and the Tung Chung Fort (built in the twelfth century and declared as a monument in 1979). These declared monuments were all located in the non-urban areas of the New Territories and Lantau Island, with fewer property values than the core urban areas such as Central and Tsim Sha Tsui.

Since the end of the 1967 Riots, Hong Kong has been experiencing rapid industrialization and urbanization. The colonial government was willing to use new and modern buildings in major urban areas such as Central to "create a modern atmosphere for the city." As Rabushka commented, "The purpose of Hong Kong is to make money," and the city was "just one big bazaar." Thus, within this specific social context, it is sensible to argue that the ideology of developmentalism and modernity desire influenced the city's administration and its people in the 1970s, after the riots. 151

Therefore, the new heritage law ensured that necessary urban development plans would not be delayed by the heritage of "minor importance." 52 Therefore, it demonstrates that the government aimed to establish a clear legal framework to justify its local heritage selection by enacting the law. Colonial structures, usually built in urban locations with higher commercial values, would not "easily" be declared legal monuments to slow the rapid urban development process. This emerging local cultural heritage policy framework was, arguably, part of a wider package of social reforms in the post-riots period articulated by the then government to improve the living quality of the local Chinese population and boost their confidence in the city's future and the legitimacy of the colonial administration. These allround social reforms included the introduction of nine years of compulsory education, the "Ten-year Housing Programme" to provide public housing to the local population, and special needs allowances for older people. The new framework of local cultural heritage policy was serving an auxiliary role in demonstrating that the colonial government intended to develop Hong Kong as a modern city with economic achievements rather than just a colonial legacy in a less explicit way compared with other aspects of the administration's social reforms launched in the 1970s.53

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44 Legislative Council 1971, 181.
45 The Guardian, 2000, 26.
46 Lu 2009, 258-272; Ng, Mee Kam et al. 2010, 411.
47 Chow, C. S., and Teather 2003, 93–115; Lu 2009, 258–72.
48 Ho, P. 2018, 156.
49 Rabushka 1979, 5.
50 Rabushka 1979, 27.
51 Schiffer 1991, 188–209; Ip 2018, 547–62.
Legislative Council 1971, 181.
53 Cheung, G. K. 2009; Mark 2017, 257–77; Hampton 2016, 100–130.
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Removing a colonial anachronism: The case study of the former Kowloon Railway Station building

In addition to introducing the new heritage law, another core piece of the new cultural policy framework was replacing "unwanted colonial structures" with new and modern structures in the urban area. The former Kowloon Railway Station building was one of these examples.

The former Kowloon Railway Station was located at Tsim Sha Tsui, the Kowloon-Canton Railway's southbound terminus. The station building and the clock tower were typical Edwardian-style structures, fully completed in 1916,⁵⁴ and an essential transportation hub to connect Hong Kong with mainland China. The colonial government proposed demolishing the railway station building to free up space for a new modern cultural complex in 1967. The railway business was moved to the new railway station in Hong Hum in 1975.⁵⁵ The remaining building and the clock tower's proposed removal work became controversial in local society and sparked one of the earliest heritage movements in Hong Kong. In 1978, the government claimed an essential and urgent need for a new cultural complex to enrich the Hong Kong people's cultural life. The former Station building was described as "useless" by the then governor MacLehose, who stated it should "make way for a superb new cultural centre."

Several local civil society groups (CSGs), such as the Hong Kong Heritage Society and The Conservancy Association, objected to the government's proposal. An organized heritage movement that aimed to stop the Station building's demolition was mobilized in 1977 by the newly born Hong Kong Heritage Society (the Society), the chief contributor of the movement.

The Society was founded in April 1977, and its aims are "to represent, express and encourage interest and involvement in Hong Kong's heritage," and "to express and respond to a. the need for continuity; b. sense of responsibility; [and] c. cultural identity and civic pride of the peoples of Hong Kong."⁵⁷

The Society aimed to encourage more active public participation in Hong Kong's heritage conservation. The founding chairman was David Russel, a professional architect. At the same time, Vice-chairman Peter Hodge was a Professor of Social Work at the University of Hong Kong. Before joining the Society, he had been involved in developing the local community service and welfare system. There were 14 members in its committee – half of whom were Chinese. The Society consisted of members of the local elite, a combination of English-speaking and local Chinese professionals, and experts in architecture, town planning, and academia. The colonial administration in Hong Kong described the Society as a "small, largely expatriate group founded a year ago with the aim of protecting the historic building and natural landmarks in Hong Kong at a time when an accelerating construction program seemed in danger of turning Hong Kong into a concrete jungle" to the FCO to justify its demolition plan of the Kowloon Railway Station building.

The Society petitioned Governor MacLehose to request the station building's preservation in 1977. They proposed integrating the new development plan for the cultural complex with the existing station structure instead of demolition. ⁶⁰ However, the Governor rejected the proposal as he argued it would not allow sufficient space for a modern auditorium and

⁵⁴ Chan, C. S. 2019, 321–32.

⁵⁵ Chan, C. S. 2019, 321–32.

⁵⁶ FCO 1978e, 1–2.

⁵⁷ Hong Kong Heritage Society 1977a, 1.

⁵⁸ FCO 1978c.

⁵⁹ FCO 1978b, 1.

⁶⁰ Hong Kong Heritage Society 1977b, 2–16.

would cause significant delay to the construction work. 61 In March 1978, the Society even sent its petition to the Queen. 62

In its petition, the Society repeatedly emphasized Hong Kong's material fabric was fundamental to constructing Hong Kong's cultural and social identity. Besides its architectural merits, it insisted that the former Kowloon Railway Station was also a significant cultural symbol of Hong Kong and its people. The Society pointed out that "this building is now [one] of very few left in Hong Kong, and it has historical/emotional/psychological significance to this community, even it is not an important architectural monument on worldwide assessment." It considered the station to be an essential element in the memory and history of Hong Kong and suggested that the people of Hong Kong were sentimental about their local history and culture. In a leaflet distributed to the public by the Society during the campaign, they stressed they aimed to protect both the "Chinese and the European" cultural heritage of Hong Kong, including both "old Chinese buildings and colonial [emphasis added] architecture."

The Society understood Hong Kong's heritage from an emotional perspective and showed a profound sentiment attached to the station, and the colony's history associated with it. However, the then-colonial administration interpreted the cultural values of the Kowloon Railway Station building differently. The colonial administration further argued in its letter sent to the FCO commenting on the issue of the Railway Station Building in 1978:

There is no real evidence that Hong Kong people are developing a sense of separate cultural heritage in a sense meant by the Society. Sentiment attached to Chinese culture and mainland China is strong, particularly among those who have not had a Western education. Among the better educated, there is a strong attraction toward modern things. The very little sentiment is attached to the former Kowloon-Canton Railway building, which is seen by many as an **anachronism** [emphasis added].⁶⁶

The colonial government in Hong Kong also interpreted the Hong Kong Heritage Society as a "small but vociferous organization with predominantly expatriate membership."⁶⁷ It implied that it only represented a small group of experts rather than the public, and had no significant emotional attachment to colonial buildings and their associated history. The central point of the dispute was that the colonial government and limited members of the local social elite (represented by the Society) had a different understanding of the values and narratives of Hong Kong heritage and Hong Kong identity. The colonial government rejected the Society's request to integrate the former station building into a new cultural complex.⁶⁸ It also stressed that there was "an urgent requirement for a modern cultural complex to be built on this piece of land [in Hong Kong]."⁶⁹ Thus, the government insisted that the Station building be demolished to remove space for the new cultural complex and associated modern facilities.⁷⁰ It claimed that these cultural facilities were "badly needed [facilities]

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61 FCO 1977, 1–3.
62 Hong Kong Heritage Society 1978, 1–5.
63 Hong Kong Heritage Society 1977b, 4.
64 Hong Kong Heritage Society 1977b, 3–4.
65 Hong Kong Heritage Society 1977a, 1.
66 FCO 1978d, 6.
67 FCO 1978e, 1.
68 FCO 1977, 1–3.
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 $^{^{70}}$ The whole structure of the Railway Station building, except the Clock tower (Figure 1) was eventually demolished in 1978.

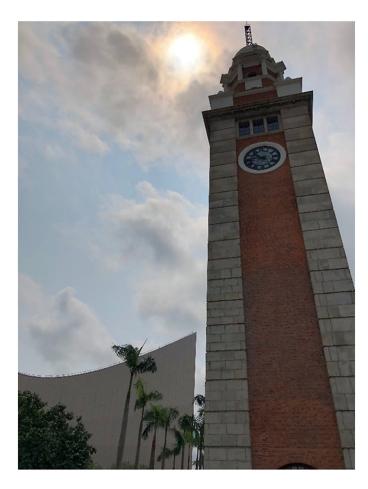


Figure 1. The Clock Tower (Right) and the Cultural Complex (Left) in 2020. Photo taken by the author.

which will enrich the community's life and the public 'have no particular affection for the old station'." 71

In the 1970s, there was an atmosphere of questioning the then colonial government's legitimacy among the younger Hong Kong-born Chinese, especially university students, 72 and a culture of depoliticization among the majority of the emerging local Chinese middle-class population. 73 They encouraged Chinese to be recognized as an official language in Hong Kong and supported China's claim in the 1970s to the sovereignty of the *Diaoyutai* Islands. 74

The history of modern Hong Kong has always been positioned as a history of colonial-ism.⁷⁵ It was also the colonial government's political and cultural approach because it wished to construct an identity separate from Communist China in the 1970s. However, the colonial administration worried that the emerging sentimental attachment to Chinese nationalism would further challenge the legitimacy of British colonial rule in Hong Kong. It worked hard to construct a "modernized" Hong Kong identity that featured the city's

⁷¹ FCO 1978e, 1.

⁷² Chan, S. H. 2018, 330–58; Mark 2017, 257–77; Zanier and Peruzzi 2017, 233–55; Mark 2014, 315–35.

⁷³ Mark 2014, 315–35.

⁷⁴ Chan, S. H. 2018, 330–58.

⁷⁵ Abbas 1997; Abbas 2000, 769–86.

modernity, prosperity, and stability rather than a sentimental notion of identity highlighting the colony's past. ⁷⁶ It is also argued that most local Hong Kong Chinese who migrated from mainland China had a "refugee mentality" (avoiding politics). Simultaneously, the post-war baby boomer generation embraced the "market mentality" (making money and avoiding politics). ⁷⁷ To a certain extent, many Chinese citizens living in Hong Kong did not seem emotionally attached to colonial buildings and their associated history; this social atmosphere helps explain why the campaign to stop the Kowloon Railway Station building, motivated by the Hong Kong Heritage Society, did not gain significant public support from the local Chinese population.

Compared with the heritage movements to stop the demolition of Central Star Ferry Pier (2006) and the Queen's Pier (2007) in early postcolonial Hong Kong, the scale of the postcolonial campaigns was much more considerable. The public also demonstrated a significantly higher degree of involvement, which included protests, hunger strikes, and physical conflict with the police force. The Kowloon Railway Station building campaign did not observe a similar public participation level in 1976 and 1977. The following section will further compare and contrast the heritage movements of two different eras.

The colonial past is connected to the present

Britain handed Hong Kong over to China as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) in 1997. In the first decade of the postcolonial period, heritage-making and conservation became a core social and political controversy in Hong Kong. These heritage politics debates also revealed an emerging nostalgia trend in colonial Hong Kong and the articulation of Hong Kong's new cultural identity and social value. In the second half of the 2000s, Hong Kong witnessed several social movements against the demolition of colonial structures proposed by the government. Some were developed as severe confrontations between the protesters and the police. One of the most significant examples was the campaign to preserve the Central Star Ferry Pier in 2006, which attracted attention from local concern groups, NGOs, the media, and the public. It is argued that a particular set of identifiable and sentimental heritage values of the Central Star has been accumulated along with the campaigns. The Pier symbolized political resistance to power inequality between the authority and the public in urban planning and the government's hegemonic power.

The Central Star Ferry Pier is located at Central, one of the Central Business Districts of Hong Kong. The city's CBD and the Star Ferry were the only means of public transportation connecting both sides of Victoria Harbour before the Cross Harbour Tunnel opened in 1972. The government proposed to remove it for a new reclamation project in 2006. The project was opposed by various local civil society groups and activists; it also attracted considerable attention from the local media and the public. The project was opposed by various local civil society groups and activists; it also attracted considerable attention from the local media and the public.

Major local media, such as the *South China Morning Post*, interviewed individuals to talk about their memories and experiences associated with the Pier.⁸⁰ The Pier was initially branded as a part of people's sentimental collective memory by the various local civil society groups and the media.⁸¹ For example, the *South China Morning Post* highlighted how a fifty-year-old retiree, Mrs Cheng, "tried hard to hold her tears." Simultaneously, she recalled the

⁷⁶ Mark 2023; Mok, F. 2023.

⁷⁷ Mark 2014, 331.

⁷⁸ HKSAR Government 2001; Ng, Mee Kam et al. 2010, 411; Ku 2012, 5–22.

⁷⁹ Chen and Szeto 2017, 69–82; Ng, Mee Kam et al. 2010, 411; Yang 2007, 485–98.

⁸⁰ Lai 2006a, 4; Lai 2006b, 3; Chow, V. 2006, 5; Lai 2006e, 1.

⁸¹ Lai 2006d, 4; Ku 2012, 5–22; Yang 2007, 485–98; Chow, V. 2006, 5; Lai 2006c, 4.

"many romantic trips" she had taken there with her late husband⁸² while reporting the campaign to preserve the Central Star Ferry. Mrs Chan, who was in her 70s, was also interviewed by the *South China Morning Post*, and she emotionally commented that the demolition of the Pier "was like a mother leaving her son." The media coverage focused on people's experiences and memories connected to the Central Star Ferry Pier. The local media attempted to construct a sentimental and emotional feeling surrounding the pier and aggregate individual emotions and memories of the pier as a form of "collective memory." It helped to justify the legitimacy of Pier's conservation movement and encourage more active public engagement.

By contrast, the media coverage of the campaign protecting the former Kowloon Railway Station building was much more limited, especially for the local Chinese newspaper. Most Chinese news reports focused on the railway station building's proposed redevelopment plan featuring a new and modern cultural center and museum for public use. No massive protest was observed to stand against the demolition of the railway station building. Furthermore, the colonial administration repeatedly emphasized to the local media that it was essential to remove the railway station building. The building's retention would slow down the construction progress of new cultural facilities urgently requested by the public. Compared with the heritage movements articulated for preserving the Central Star Ferry Pier in 2006 and the Queen's Pier in 2007, the campaign for saving the railway station building was generally restricted to a limited number of social elites, and the concept of preserving colonial-style structures was not popular among the majority of the local Chinese population.

However, the social movement to save the Star Ferry Pier from removal was not only a demonstration of the public nostalgia and sentimental attachment toward the colonial past and legacy, it had been further transformed as a symbol of political and strategic resistance to the government's hegemonic power in local urban planning and its dominating ideology of developmentalism.

Several activists argued that the Central Star Ferry Pier was a significant part of Hong Kong people's memory and social history.⁸⁷ The Ferry Pier was considered a vital living public space associated with So Sau-Chung's hunger strike to protest a ferry fare increase in 1966.⁸⁸ The pier's colonial structure was gradually rebranded to symbolize people's political resistance to the administration. The campaign was both a protest to stop the pier's demolition and a political movement to address the local civil society's resistance to prodevelopmentalism urban renewal projects.⁸⁹

Activists even broke into the closed pier and rolled down banners that stated "Stop! People Participate in Urban Planning" from the top of the pier's clock tower, and a series of confrontations between the onsite protesters and the police force were also observed. The Central Star Ferry Pier example indicated that colonial heritage had been employed to revitalize people's memory of colonial history and demonstrated various views and political discontent.

⁸² Chow, V. 2006, 5.

⁸³ Chow, V. 2006, 5.

⁸⁴ Asprey 2006, 4; Ku 2012, 5–22; Mok, D. et al. 2006, 1; Ng, Mee Kam et al. 2010, 411.

⁸⁵ The Kung Sheung Evening News 1973, 7; The Kung Sheung Evening News 1975, 1; The Kung Sheung Evening News 1977a, 1; The Kung Sheung Evening News 1977b, 2.

⁸⁶ The Kung Sheung Evening News 1973, 7; The Kung Sheung Evening News 1975, 1; The Kung Sheung Evening News 1977a, 1; The Kung Sheung Evening News 1977b, 2.

⁸⁷ Chen and Szeto 2017, 69–82; Ku 2012, 5–22; Ng, Mee Kam et al. 2010, 411; Yang 2007, 485–98.

⁸⁸ Chun 2013, 80–129; Ng, Mee Kam et al. 2010, 411; Ku 2012, 5–22.

⁸⁹ Ku 2012, 5-22; Chun 2013, 80-129; Ng, Mee Kam et al. 2010, 411.

⁹⁰ But 2006, 4; Lai 2006e, 1; Lai 2006a, 4; Wu 2006, 6.

Compared with the movement to stop the demolition of the Kowloon Railway Station building, the campaign staged in respect of the Star Ferry Pier influenced the local public much more. The local media, legislative councilors, and heritage professionals criticized the destruction of the Central Star Ferry Pier. 91 Furthermore, besides collecting public signatures onsite and sending petitions to the colonial authority, the activists developed a variety of means to express their concerns and arguments, such as hunger strikes, sit-in campaigns, and even direct confrontations with the police force. They were more radical but were conspicuous among the public. One of the activists, Chan Kin-Fai, stressed in a local newspaper: "My participation in the Star Ferry movement is a continuation of my concern for Hong Kong's cultural development and the problems caused by the development model."92 It is argued that the movement to save the Star Ferry Pier was transformed as a political agency to reflect the then-urban planning approach of the government and demand more democratic elements in the planning process. It is far beyond a campaign to "preserve" nostalgic colonial history; indeed, it has been repositioned as a political and social resistance strategy. The movement that occurred in the 1970s could not achieve this level of ideological transformation and political mobilization.

The active civic participation in the movement to preserve the Pier reflected the fact that public awareness of colonial heritage conservation had been significantly raised. It also demonstrated that local civil society groups and activists strategically employed colonial heritage to assemble new social and cultural heritage values, and successfully drew public attention. A trend of active civic engagement through social movement emerged. 93

In short, the movement to save the pier connected the public and the colonial history of Hong Kong by emphasizing that it was an iconic landmark from the colonial legacy. This nostalgic colonial notion stresses the intimate historical connection between the pier and the history of local social movements. To a large extent, the public was more passionate and positive toward the colonial notion attached to the historical structures than in the 1970s. However, this article recognizes the heritage movement in the 1970s was still crucial for the ongoing transformation of the city's notion of colonial heritage because the postcolonial heritage movement represents an ideological departure from the heritage movements of colonial Hong Kong in the 1970s.

Hong Kong's cultural identity has been galvanized for decades since the 1970s. The contemporary heritage movements also further empowered the "massification" of local civic resistance to the administration that reached one of its climaxes during the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and has brought consequential effects to the recent social and political changes in Hong Kong.⁹⁴

Conclusion: The political dynamics of creating Hong Kong's heritage and cultural identity in the 1970s, and its future

The local Chinese population has not proactively supported the campaign to save the colonial-style railway building in the 1970s. It was, to a large extent, a result of what the colonial administration intended to achieve. As mentioned, the government was committed to constructing a modernized, progressive, and prosperous city that embraced its traditional Chinese culture, contradicting the ideological paradigm promoted by the then-communist regime. The colonial government eventually began demolition, but the iconic clock tower

⁹¹ Lai 2006a, 4.

⁹² Ku 2012, 14.

⁹³ Chun 2013, 80–129; Ku 2012, 5–22.

⁹⁴ Chen and Szeto 2015, 436–53; Cheung, P. S. 2016, 141–64; Ho, L. K. 2020, 1–25; Lu 2016, 325; Wong, Yiu Chung and Chan 2017, 312–32.

was preserved as a memorial landmark of the former station in 1978. The new cultural complex opened in 1989. The railway building case revealed Hong Kong's political and cultural identity paradox between Chinese nationality, colonialism, and modernity. Since the end of the 1967 Riots, Hong Kong has continuously struggled with this identity dilemma by asking questions about its cultural identity. This paradox was also a repercussion of China and Britain's cultural and political rivalry in the unique historical background of the Cold War and China's Reform and Openness policy in the 1970s.

Governor MacLehose (in office between 1971 and 1982) suggested that "there is also a need to secure the active confidence of the population" while "we [the colonial government] cannot aim at national loyalty, but civic pride might be a useful substitute." It was vital to understand that the colonial government had played an active and critical role in fostering the local cultural identity of Hong Kong and its people. It was clear that it aimed to distance the local Chinese population from the Communist ideologies. Besides making the local heritage policy framework, the colonial government organized many civic campaigns, such as introducing the Clean Hong Kong Campaign featuring the mascot "Rubbish Bug," or *Lap Sap Chung* in Chinese, and the Festival of Hong Kong to promote a localized sense of civic pride after the 1967 Riots. The improvement in the living standards of the local Chinese population and the rapid economic development of Hong Kong further fostered the civic pride of the people of Hong Kong.

For the British government, it was also essential to construct a prosperous and stable modern Hong Kong to protect Britain's long-term political and trading benefits. ⁹⁷ MacLehose, the then-governor, argued in 1972 that the "external future of Hong Kong" should be separate from its "internal future." The colonial government's duty was to ensure that Hong Kong would still have its unique economic and political advantages for both China and Britain. It would encourage the Chinese government to "accept the continuing existence of the Colony" to maximize its commercial interests in Hong Kong. ⁹⁹ In this case, Britain would have more time to negotiate and prepare an "orderly withdrawal" from Hong Kong. ¹⁰⁰

In other words, the social reforms articulated in the 1970s, including the assemblage of the city's cultural heritage policy, should be understood in the larger context of international politics. It is sensible to argue that these social reforms were motivated by the then left-wing Labour Government to enhance British bargaining power in the forthcoming negotiations with China over Hong Kong's future.¹⁰¹

After the 1967 Riots, the colonial government aimed to improve the living quality of local Chinese to regain their support and trust. The colonial government rebranded itself as a government for the people. This set of circumstances encouraged the government to enact a new heritage law and cultural heritage policy as part of its rebranding as a modern city that featured in its economic success. This trend of radically improving Hong Kong's social welfare policy in the 1970s echoed Britain's then-Labour Government's pro-left-wing political and financial ideology.

It is argued that Hong Kong's "economic progress and administrative autonomy" paved the way for "de jure decolonization." Therefore, the colonial government sought to

 ⁹⁵ Law 2018; Fung 2004, 399—414; Chen and Szeto 2015, 436—53; Veg 2017, 323—7.
 ⁹⁶ FCO 1971 cited in Yep & Lui, 2010, 253.
 ⁹⁷ Zanier and Peruzzi 2017, 233–55; Mark 2017, 257–77; Mark 2014, 315–35; Roberts 2017, 1–30.

⁹⁸ FCO 1972.

⁹⁹ FCO 1970c.

¹⁰⁰ FCO 1970c.

¹⁰¹ Mark 2017, 257–77.

¹⁰² Mark 2014, 334.

avoid the terms and ideologies associated with colonialism to protect Britain's long-term political benefits. Besides, the new cultural heritage policy would help rebrand Hong Kong as a modern and economically successful international city rather than just a British colony. It would benefit Britain's economic interests more, and this "depoliticized" and "decolonized" position would be more acceptable to the then-Chinese government. The colonial government also encouraged the making of a new and hybrid cultural identity ¹⁰³ among the local Chinese population. ¹⁰⁴ This hybrid cultural identity encompasses modern and traditional Chinese cultural heritage. It was expected to be distinguished from the Communist nationalism narrative in the 1970s, and distanced from Hong Kong's colonial history.

In the case of preserving the former Kowloon Railway Station building, the colonial government intended to create a new, modern, and advanced Hong Kong without the historical "burdens" of colonialism. The colonial past was perceived as an anachronism and needed to be forgotten. The demolition of the former Kowloon Railway Station building and the construction of the new Cultural Complex project were seen as a policy tool to rebrand Hong Kong as an economically prosperous city and construct its modern urban imaginary. The notion of colonialism in Hong Kong was intentionally avoided, as the colonial government did not wish to remind the local Chinese population about the city's colonial past.

This hybridity of cultural identity was further developed in the following decades. ¹⁰⁵ This notion of hybrid cultural identity suggests that Hong Kong is embedded with a modern and international outlook and "inherited" traditional Chinese cultural heritage. It is a mixture of both modern and classic characters. However, this fantasy of hybridity lacks philosophical, ideological, and theoretical support to a certain extent. Local sociologist, Lui Tai-Lok, argued that this notion of Hong Kong's cultural identity was anemic and powerless, not backed by a well-articulated and systematic discourse. In short, to a certain extent, the nature of Hong Kong's cultural identity has been smoggy and indefinite since the 1970s. ¹⁰⁶

As the deadline of 1997 approached, the triangular relationship between mainland China, Hong Kong, and Britain became more complicated and delicate. The new challenge was how the city could maintain and represent its cultural features under mainland China's emerging cultural and political influence in the postcolonial era.

Several heritage movements aimed at preserving colonial structures, such as the former Central Star Ferry, in the first decade of the postcolonial era. However, the once-forgotten colonial past has been reimagined in Hong Kong's postcolonial period. The discussion of Hong Kong's cultural identity has become popular among the local population, especially among the younger generation who did not experience its colonial past. The Umbrella Movement of 2014 and the recent large-scale protests against the extradition bills in 2019 brought radical social and political changes to Hong Kong and its society. These changes are ongoing and structural; it is still uncertain how the local cultural heritage policy and politics will be changed under the emerging economic influence and political pressure from the mainland. The search for this hybrid cultural identity of Hong Kong may become more challenging and complicated for Hong Kong and its people in the near future.

¹⁰³ Smith, I. K. E. and Leavy 2008.

¹⁰⁴ Cheng 2016, 383–406; Fung 2004, 399–414.

¹⁰⁵ Fung 2004, 399–414; Cheng 2016, 383–406.

¹⁰⁶ Lui 2017, 478–86; Yep and Lui 2010, 249–72.

¹⁰⁷ Lee et al. 2019, 1–32; Veg 2017, 323–47; Lowe and Tsang 2018, 556–71.

¹⁰⁸ Ku 2020, 111–17; Fong 2020, 68–90; Ip 2020; Ho, L. K. 2020, 1–25; Lee et al. 2019, 1–32

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Cite this article: Fok, Yeung Yeung. 2024. "Removing a colonial anachronism - The *decolonization* of heritage in the 1970s Hong Kong." *International Journal of Cultural Property* 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0940739124000109