



Liza Wing Man Kam

Reconfiguration of 'the Stars and the Queen'

A Quest for the Interrelationship between Architecture
and Civic Awareness in Post-colonial Hong Kong



Nomos

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Cover photo: Photo of the annihilated: The post-colonial government's intention to remove the colonial structure has drawn attention of the initially ignorant public to start reflecting on Hong Kong's past, present and the future through looking at these structures. Special gratitude to the independent photographer, Mr Tse Pak Chai.

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*To Kam Tin Po, Wong Wai Ha
and
Kam Wing Sze Elizabeth*

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and
Prof. Dr. Subrata Mitra,
who have been extremely inspiring*

The route has not been short, nor has it been painless. From the 2006's Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier movement, to the Anti-Expressed Railway Campaign defending the Choi Yuen Village in 2010, followed by the 2012's Anti-National Education Campaign, recently it was the Umbrella Movement in 2014. The Hong Kongers' quests shifted from being the interests for particular groups to a broader discussion on the way to a better society for everybody. For some of these Hong Kongers, 'civic awareness' has evolved itself into pursue of an ultimate ideology. This ideology, departing from but simultaneously echoing with the movement's objective, is woven into, and displayed, with the most fundamental elements of expression in the movements and the actions *per se*. The evolution process of the ideology involves a perpetual and profound reflection of individual's right and responsibility in society, proven by the Umbrella Movement. Yet, the process and the lesson for self-recognition and reflection have started far earlier than one could remember, or, imagine.

On the 19th Day of the Yellow Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong

Preface

This book examines how colonial space and architecture, and their treatment in a post-colonial setting in Hong Kong, transform, in parallel with the city dwellers' civic awareness. Three examples of colonial architecture, namely Star Ferry Pier, Queen's Pier and the former Hong Kong Legislative Council (LEGCO) Building are investigated. The two piers and their surrounding public space, the Edinburgh Place, was the site where colonial governors disembarked from their Royal yacht before their inauguration ceremony arriving at the colony, as well it was the spot which hosted the first wave of social movement in Hong Kong in the 1970s under the colonial rule. The two piers were demolished in 2006-07 despite the public's rather vigorous opposition, while the Legislative Council was relocated from its place of birth, i.e., the colonial neo-classical building, to a newly built complex in 2011. The attempt and success of the post-colonial authority to remove or transform the colonial space and architecture, as well as the public who were not motivated enough to take actions (and the weakness of the actions *per se* if there were any) when their site of memory is subjected to annihilation, is seen, in fact, as driven by the perpetual colonial legacy in different forms.

This book is therefore composed of three main layers of investigation. Firstly, it analyses how history education in the colonial Hong Kong had effectively cultivated an aloof population towards local history and civic affairs, with meticulously engineered, scheming and plotting pedagogical ideals that in its essence facilitated ruling and control. While history is never completed and memory can be sanctified over time, the concept of 'Les lieux de mémoire'¹ is verified with (and could have been relevant to) the two piers which narratives of the city had been continually woven into. The two removed piers are therefore, lost opportunities for the post-colonial population to learn about their civic rights and the possibilities from the past experiences with the 'lieu de mémoire' which has ceased to exist. The transformation and disappearance process of these three examined structures in the post-colonial Hong Kong became the interest of the second investigation. It aims at identifying the lost or realised opportunities for true public participation

1 Pierre Nora, *The Realms of Memory*, 1997

in the decision-making process during the transition of these examined heritage, and to consider the subtle increase in civic awareness that results from the transition process.

Considering the conflicts between the authority and the public regarding the demolition of the two piers, the third and main investigation of this book is therefore to decipher the multiple, interwoven but contradictory narratives of these piers. The denotations or connotations of the piers were either unknown and/or unclear to most of the Hong Kong natives, due to the nature of history education during the colonial era. These different denotations and connotations perceived by the colonial and post-colonial authority, the elder generation of citizens and younger members of the public from their various perspectives are interpreted, departing from the spatial theory of Lefebvre. This is enabled by observations, archival reviews and a series of narrative interviews with five elderly people and three young demonstrators who, in different levels, participated in the anti-demolition actions in the two piers incidents. The comparison of the narratives of the two aforementioned piers between the two age groups is aimed at visualising how far the memories associated with space and architecture could actually motivate citizens to take actions when their places with associated memory are to vanish. The changes in the aloofness of certain social groups, the increase in civic awareness and simultaneously the hindrance to the rise of this awareness are discussed. This hindrance is argued to be a lingering effect from the colonial mode of both history education and the government executives' accustomed obstinacy to the public's wishes.

Through understanding the texture of the phantom colonial legacy, it leads to a scrutiny of the entangled interrelation between history, historiography, identity (as citizens of the late/ post-/ new colonial city), architecture and public space, and civic awareness, based on empirical and theoretical studies.

Keywords: colonial space and architecture, post-colonial Hong Kong, colonial legacy, civic awareness, public participation, 'lieux de mémoire'², the production of space³, narratives

2 Pierre Nora, *The Realms of Memory*, 1997

3 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1974, 1991

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