THE STAR AND THE QUEEN.
DISSONANT HERITAGE AND THE CULTURE OF DISAPPEARANCE IN HONG KONG

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Abstract: Caught between its Chinese and British colonial history, Hong Kong's path to self-actualization is unsure without preserving its tangible and intangible heritage. This paper examines the region's several layers of heritage through the movement to preserve the Star and the Queen piers in 2007, using two theoretical frameworks, Abbas' culture of disappearance and Tunbridge's dissonant heritage. Despite the piers' demolition, their role is vital in understanding conflicting histories and decolonizing the region's identity.

Keywords: Heritage, Hong Kong, The Star and Queen Piers, Identity, Nostalgia

Introduction

After the 1997 handover to China, Hong Kong's path of uncertainty was translated from the population's anxiety into slow political and societal changes, whether in clear directives from China or via the legislation and measures proposed by the pro-establishment members in the Legislative Council. In this context, it is no surprise that Hong Kong, a place struggling to combine several layers of identity should encounter clashes between its conflicting narratives, given its post-colonial history and future integration into the mainland. Moreover, in addition to these two elements come Hong Kong's economic development and affluence, crucial for forming its local identity. Hence, this tension is visible and materialized in preserving local heritage, be it tangible or intangible, or the lack thereof. What can be more telling of a people's identification and responses to cultural heritage than the

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seeming lack of interest or public policy responsible for protecting heritage? Is there an authentic Hongkongese heritage, and, if so, why is a certain interpretation of heritage promoted over the others, for what purpose, and in whose interest?[1] There are several understandings of heritage, that of the Hongkongese people, of the British administration, and that of mainland China. Each narrative promotes the interest of the said group, and, although not excluding one another, they create spaces of dissonance. One example illustrating the dissonant heritage is the demolition of Hong Kong's central piers, Edinburgh Place Ferry Pier (the Star), and the Queen's Pier (the Queen) around 2007, due to land reclamation in Victoria Harbor.

This paper aims to shed light on the demolition of the two piers and the dialectics of heritage that resulted from this process. Regarding methodology, this study uses a qualitative method by applying Tunbridge's thesis of dissonant heritage as a filter of analysis on the Queen and Star movement.[2] The demolition process started in late 2006 and ended in early 2008, galvanizing the local community and resulting in protests aimed at preserving one understanding of the "Hong Kong way of life". This case study is worth taking into account when addressing the issue of creating dissonance between plural understandings of heritage and identity. To this end, this paper is divided into two chapters: the first one aims to provide the historical context that facilitated the creation of layered heritage, and the second one deals with the tangible and intangible heritage of Hong Kong around 2007. While the paper focuses on the two piers, it is not limited to this case study. Rather, its purpose is to create an encompassing understanding of heritage by providing additional information and examples of tangible and intangible heritage. Additionally, the timeframe in question is after the handover until the late 2000s, with a focus on 2007, when the demolition of the two piers took place.

Theoretical Framework. Identities and the Resulting Heritage Practices

After roughly 150 years of British colonialism, Hong Kong's anxieties about being returned to China in 1997 were appeased, to a certain extent, by the introduction of the "one country, two systems" approach, as stipulated in

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[1] Gregory Ashworth, Brian Graham, John E. Tunbridge, *Pluralising Pasts. Heritage, Identity and Place in Multicultural Societies*, London: Pluto Press, 2007, p. 41.

[2] John Tunbridge and Gregory Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict*, Chichester: Wiley, 1996.

the Basic Law, granting Hongkongers the right to continue enjoying the freedoms they had during the colonial period. One cannot help but notice a degree of irony in the previous statement, for how can colonialism provide freedom? Here, freedom is understood as certain liberties contrasting the mainland communist system, most notably the freedom of speech, press, and association. In Hong Kong's situation, in economic terms, freedom means capitalism, which allowed for the development of Hong Kong's high standard of living and ostentatious consumption, as Ting comments that "Hong Kong's colonial legacy was perceived as a set of liberal frameworks facilitating capitalism", as well as criticizing the "mutual reinforcement of capitalism and colonial power".[3] Moreover, he objects to the common understanding of Hong Kong's identity as apolitical, resisting both colonialism and communism and focusing exclusively on economic development. Instead, he explains how, in the face of returning to China, Hongkongers were reluctant to create a strong identity due to "historical traumas of revolution, war, colonization on the one hand", and "political suppression, conceptual difficulty in articulating a sense of belonging outside the national-colonial framework" on the other hand.[4] The articulation of identity is paramount to ensuring heritage conservation, and raising the question of "what heritage is worth preserving and for what purpose?"

The fact that Hong Kong authorities prioritized economic growth over heritage preservation is well known, and there is merit in looking into some of the legal frameworks that facilitate overlooking the significance of local heritage. As a world financial hub, Hong Kong's necessity for economic stability and status should be understood in the context of the rise of China's megacities, which threatened Hong Kong's standing. This debate became even more apparent with the turnover of 1997 when Hong Kong's interpretation of heritage fluctuated between globalism and localism. Should Hong Kong become Asia's World City, as the Government tried to create this image, or should it tend to its local heritage? Bearing this question in mind, one can observe two distinct understandings, as illustrated by the speeches of David Lung at a conference on heritage and tourism, as well as the speech of

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[3] Chun Chun Ting. "The Star and the Queen: Heritage Conservation and the Emergence of a New Hong Kong Subject" in *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2013, pp. 99–100 [http://www.jstor.org/stable/43492534].

[4] *Ibidem*, p. 88.

Donald Tsang (2007), former Chief Executive. On the one hand, Lung states that:

> Should Hong Kong be developed into a world-class but faceless metropolis of the so-called 'global community' of the 21st century? Or should Hong Kong play an active role in *preserving its cultural heritage which will enable it to be identified as a unique and culturally significant part of the world* in the mode of New York, London, or Paris? … The successful long-term development of Hong Kong into a better place lies not only with the physical, economic, and technological 'glitters', but also with the *underlying cultural-heritage assets that will give Hong Kong its soul and identity*."[5] (emphasis added)

On the other hand, in his address, Donald Tsang states that:

> Our continued economic prosperity depends on new buildings being built and old ones replaced. But times have changed and people today are more attuned to heritage preservation. They no longer see urban developments as paramount, especially when the loss of heritage buildings is the price we pay for progress. Quite rightly, we have to strike a balance between development and conservation. (...) *The meteoric rise of many competing cities within the region, and especially those on the Mainland, means we must keep a firm grip on our competitive advantage*. This is a government responsibility. The community must understand that investment in infrastructure is vital if Hong Kong is to remain a dynamic and thriving world city.[6] (emphasis added)

This differentiation is emblematic of Hong Kong's approach to heritage, either as a symbol of its fluctuating cultural identity or as something that needs to be dealt with, to be managed to make space for "progress". The attitude of choosing to demolish and build from scratch, rather than conserve and preserve the old is also highlighted by Tsui when contrasting the way European cities deal with heritage, namely preserving, to the way Asian cities focus more on redevelopment than on restoration. Tsui gives more drastic examples, such as the hutongs, emblematic of Beijing, being

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[5] Donald Lung, "Is Heritage For Sale?", Proceedings of Heritage and Tourism: An International Conference, Leisure and Culture Services Department, Hong Kong, 1999.

[6] Donald Tsang, "Letter to Hong Kong: Heritage Preservation", KSAR Government, 2007 [https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200701/28/P200701260091.htm], May 28, 2024.

demolished to make room for larger streets and infrastructure[7]. Furthermore, Tsang's vocabulary highlights a business-minded, capitalist approach that views economic development as a prerequisite for survival, especially when competing with the mainland: he uses "replaced", rather than "restored" and talks about how "the loss of heritage is the price for progress". It is precisely this aim at "progress", always understood in economic terms, that caused the series of land reclamation projects in Hong Kong, affecting the Victoria Harbor and the two piers in question.

After grasping the authorities' post-handover stance on heritage reclamation, one should dwell on the people's perception of space and identity. While it has already been mentioned that it is reductive to understand Hongkongers as just economically driven and that their apparent apathy regarding politics comes as a result of them being politically restricted during colonialism, it is time to examine how this lack of political involvement affects heritage protection. Lui observes that Hongkongers are not only obsessed with money but that older generations were not actively involved in protecting Hong Kong's heritage since they did not identify with it as their culture, rather seeing it as the heritage from the colonialism they opposed.[8] However, public perceptions changed over time, with the emergence of new generations for whom landmarks were not necessarily tied to a colonial history they experienced little of, and who began identifying with certain local structures they grew around. Moreover, other factors need to be considered, such as the political and economic context, as Ma points to the shift from conspicuous consumption to post-materialism in the early 2000s, especially due to the 2003 SARS epidemic, and its consequent economic crisis.[9] The CCP saw the crisis as an opportunity to pass the national security legislation, against which half a million people marched. This event served as an awakening for a local identity, rejecting both Beijing's policy, as well

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[7] Hilary Tsui, "The Demolition of Star Ferry Pier: Urban Reclamation versus Cultural Heritage in Hong Kong" in *Eurozine*, Oct. 29, 2007 [https://www.eurozine.com/the-demolition-of-star-ferry-pier/], 30 May 2024.

[8] Tai-lok Lui, "Xianggang zhimin shenghuo de 'lengjingyan" 香港殖民生 活的冷經驗 (The indifference in Hong Kong's colonial experience), *Bentu lunshu* no. 2, 2009, pp. 99-104, tr. Ting, 2013.

[9] See Ngok Ma, "The Rise of 'Anti-China' Sentiments in Hong Kong and the 2012 Legislative Council Elections" in *China Review*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2015, pp. 39–66 [www.jstor.org/stable/24291928], 19 May 2024.

as its proposed infrastructure projects.[10] On this note, other relevant examples arise of protesting for heritage preservation against economic or technological development, such as the 2010 movement seeking to protect Choi Yuen Village, by opposing the construction of a high-speed rail between Hong Kong and Guangzhou. It is worth noting that both this movement and those protesting for the preservation of the piers failed under the authorities' push for Tsang's concept of "progress". Hence, the early 2000s marked the emergence of a social collective mentality, eager to protect its heritage. But what heritage, more specifically? The colonial, the Chinese, or the recently formed local one?

It has already been mentioned that the Hong Kong identity, during the early 2000s, was layered, containing all three aforementioned layers.[11] Ting links the formation of identity to different practices when it comes to heritage preservation: "Colonialism and nationalism were rival discourses informing the practice of heritage preservation in Hong Kong."[12] Heritage is political and by reimagining the present via the past, one can shift the focus from Hong Kong as a colony, to Hong Kong as belonging to China, via its ethnic element. For instance, Wong comments on how, after the handover, the CCP used heritage to rekindle Hong Kong's belonging to the motherland, such as when the artifacts found on Chek Lap Kok Island when building the airport were used to reshape Hong Kong's identity into a mainland framework, based on a common history.[13] Another instance of reimagining the colonial past via mainland glasses is the preservation of the Flagstaff House, the oldest colonial building in HKSAR, which was turned into a museum of Chinese tea before the handover, announcing the shift in identity narratives and what the future would unfold for Hong Kong. Here, Tunbridge's thesis of 'dissonant cultural heritage' is relevant in articulating the tensions between the several layers encompassing the Hong Kong identity and how one might take precedence at the other's expense.[14]

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[10] *Ibidem*, pp. 44-50.

[11] See Marilynn Brewer, "Multiple Identities and Identity Transition: Implications for Hong Kong" in *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 23, 1999, pp. 187-197.

[12] Ting, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

[13] Wang-chi Wong, 王宏志. *Lishi de chenzhong: cong Xianggang kan Zhongguo dalu de Xianggangshi lunshu* 历史的沉重：从香港看中国大陆 (The burden of History: a Hong Kong perspective on mainland Chinese narrative of Hong Kong history), Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2000. Tr. by Ting, 2013.

[14] Tunbridge, *op. cit*.

One last point to be addressed in the theoretical framework of identity and dissonant heritage is that of legislation. The preservation of heritage in Hong Kong is based on the *Antiquities and Monument Ordinance*, introduced in 1976 during the colonial period.[15] Therefore, it comes as no surprise that it prioritizes Eurocentric definitions of heritage, such as age and monumentality to the detriment of intangible heritage, more common to the Hong Kong way of living.[16] The scope of the ordinance is limited, as shall be seen in the case of the piers, since, as the name shows, it focuses on "antiquities", and "monuments". Considering that Hong Kong as a colony was less than 150 years old, what could be then interpreted as a "monument", or "antiquity"? Therefore, it is peculiar how one heritage, that of being Hongkongese, albeit layered, develops on the framework of another, that of colonialism. This is not only unsuitable, but it is prone to bringing tensions and contestation, such as in the 2007 protests.

Tangible and Intangible Heritage in 2007. The Star and Queen Movement

Having thus established the theoretical framework and the historical background of the heritage question in Hong Kong, as well as linking it to the issue of identity in the post-colonial period, it is now necessary to consider one pragmatic example of the management of heritage, the demolition of Star Ferry and the Queen's piers, as well as showing the limitations of the legal framework in place for protecting heritage. The construction and consequent demolition of the piers must be understood in the light of the Government's plans for land reclamation in Victoria Harbor. There have been successive land reclamation initiatives in the Harbor, which account for Hong Kong's overall economic success; on both sides of the Harbor, there is the Central District in which business flourishes, in addition to having some of the highest land prices not only in Hong Kong but in the world.[17] It is worth noticing that the placement of the piers in the heart of this Harbor would inevitably lead to their contestation, as their demolition

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[15] HKSAR Government, "Antiquities and Monument Ordinance", 1976 [https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/cap53?xpid=ID_1438403334919_003], 20 May 2024.

[16] Lachlan Barber, "(Re)Making Heritage Policy in Hong Kong: A Relational Politics of Global Knowledge and Local Innovation" in *Urban Studies*, vol. 51, no. 6, 2014, pp. 1179–95 [http://www.jstor.org/stable/26145785], 20 May 2024.

[17] Tsui, *op. cit*.

is necessary to make space for a more impressive skyline, among the skyscrapers of the Central District.

Both piers were built after World War Two, in the heart of the Central District, in the functionalist style, prioritizing practicality over architectural grandeur. The Edinburgh Place Ferry Pier, commonly known as Star Ferry Pier, was the most used in Hong Kong due to being the cheapest way of transportation between the island of Hong Kong and the Kowloon peninsula. Furthermore, the Queen's Pier was built for ceremonial purposes, such as the landing of colonial officials, British royals, or Governors, but was mostly used for leisure boats.[18] The piers represent a landmark for the locals in the collective memory as, for most of its history, Hong Kong thrived because of its geographical location as a port. Even before colonization, it was a meeting point for merchants, fishermen, and pirates. The functionality of the piers speaks to the locals as both tangible and intangible heritage since, on the one hand, the piers are relics of the past, and on the other, "commuter-style crossing of the harbour by ferry for a token fare, (is) arguably a defining feature of Hong Kong lifestyle shared by many".[19] Moreover, it is worth examining how the pier's structure is emblematic of Hong Kong, not territorially, but sociologically. For many, Hong Kong has been a place of transit, as the region witnessed waves of refugees after revolutions and wars, whether from China to the British colony or from the British colony to the Western world. Ting comments on the phenomenon of deterritorialization as a core element of the Hongkongese identity, especially after the exodus of the population before the handover. Hence, the instability of the piers as a means of transport, the idea of transit in itself is quintessential to the formation of Hongkongers, as an identity of migrants.[20]

The point mentioned above regarding the location of the piers in the central part of the business districts is worth further exploring, as this centrality bore witness to the development of Hong Kong. As the most frequent means of transport, in the heart of the Central district, locals understood the piers as a symbol of the city's stance as a world financial hub. What is to be understood as "locals"? As the piers were built in the 1950s,

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[18] Ting, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

[19] Sebastian Veg, "Cultural Heritage in Hong Kong, the Rise of Activism and the Contradictions of Identity" in *China Perspectives*, 2007/2, p. 47
[http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/1663], 10 May 2024.

[20] Ting, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

they came into being at the same time as the first generation of Chinese ethnics that started to identify themselves as Hongkongese, due to several factors. This generation came of age in the 1970s and 1980s when Hong Kong's financial success started differentiating itself from China, and the Hongkongese locals from their mainland counterparts. Moreover, Ting raises a crucial point in stating that "In a city with no public square, the place surrounded by the two piers, Edinburgh Place and Hong Kong City Hall, had been the de facto site for residents to gather and voice their political demands".[21] The space between the two piers acted, thus, as an agora,[22] and witnessed the formation of the Hong Kong people as a political subject.[23] According to Ping, one element separating the "Hong Kong local identity" from mainlanders is Hongkongers' sense of entitlement when it comes to politics, which is afforded due to the freedom of speech, association, and protest.[24] This space not only bore witness to the centralization of the Hong Kong people into an active political element but enabled it by providing a common space. To properly comprehend the considerable role of this space, one must explore some critical points in the history of Hong Kong. For instance, it is here that the riot of 1966 started, a catalyst for the political exercise of Hongkongers, when the student So Sao-Chung went on a hunger strike against the increase of 25% of the ferry fare, showing not only how important this means of transport was to the locals, but also catalyzing into general dissatisfaction with the colonial rule.[25] Moreover, the space between the piers acted as a protesting point for South Asian migrants asking for civil and social rights, as well as a place of opposition to the mainland authorities after the Tiananmen massacre in 1989. Hence, Tsui's argument is relevant in stating that the two piers, together with the space encompassing them, are a part of the collective memory of millions of Hongkongers as symbols of local, grassroots culture.[26]

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[21] *Ibidem*, p. 98.

[22] For more on the formation of identity around public spaces, see Wai-man Lam, *Understanding the Political Culture of Hong Kong: The Paradox of Activism and Depoliticization*, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2004.

[23] Ting, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

[24] Yew Chiew Ping, and Kwong Kin-ming, "Hong Kong Identity on the Rise" in *Asian Survey*, vol. 54, no. 6, 2014, pp. 1095 [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2014.54.6.1088], 20 May 2024.

[25] Ting, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

[26] Tsui, *op. cit.*

This framework of understanding the piers as both tangible and intangible heritage is necessary and serves as a comprehensive tool for interpreting the locals' response to the Government's plans to demolish them to create more space for urbanistic development, better said gentrification, via land reclamation. What accounts for the discrepancy between the public and the Government's understanding of heritage, and why did the authorities not consider the piers as heritage from a legal point of view? To answer this, one should consider both local and international legal frameworks for heritage preservation. On the one hand, the international framework via organizations such as UNESCO proved to be futile in protecting the piers. According to *the Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage* from 1972, no site from Hong Kong would qualify for protection, since UNESCO operates on a national level, favoring tangible heritage, as opposed to Hong Kong's intangible, way of living heritage.[27] Tsui raises this point as well, commenting on how the 150-year-old colonial history does not fit the criteria for enlisting monuments or sites in UNESCO, and it explains why, at the time of the Piers' debate, there were no Hong Kong sites enlisted in UNESCO.[28] On the other hand, it has already been discussed that the local legislation, the *Ordinance* passed during colonial times, is limitative both in scope and in the means of protecting cultural heritage. For instance, the Star Ferry Pier, forty-nine years old, was one year short of qualifying for the status of a monument, showing the limitation of the *Ordinance*. Moreover, from an architectural perspective, its functionalist style and aesthetic simplicity added to what the authorities decided to be a lack of importance, especially when contrasted with the new plans for the waterfront. Furthermore, in the case of the Queen's Pier, some interpretations disqualified its existence on the basis that it promotes colonial history, in addition to the fact that its age did not fit the fifty-year criteria for conservation. The idea of reconstructing the waterfront on the space occupied by the piers highlights the issue of urban redevelopment and privatization of public spaces, an urgent issue in Hong Kong's already gentrified and crowded market. In its attempt to secure Hong Kong's status as Asia's world city, the Government's plan includes building on the waterfront a colossal government office building, a military pier, a high-end

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[27] UNESCO, "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage", 1972 [http://whc.unesco.org/?cid=175], 28 May 2024.

[28] Tsui, *op. cit*.

shopping mall, and a greenbelt for leisure and tourism.[29] This could prompt a class interpretation, alongside the issue of privatizing public spaces: by creating exclusive, consumerist spaces instead of unpretentious, functional spaces for the working class, the Government excludes low-income workers.[30]

Bearing in mind these two interpretations, that of the piers as a link between past and present, as well as that of open, inclusive space for workers regardless of class, it is now time to consider in depth the response of the local community. After the news that the Government planned to demolish the Star Ferry Pier in late 2006, the local community came together to protest what they considered their heritage. The protesters delayed the demolition by organizing hunger strikes, candlelight vigils, and breaking into the demolition site, yet could not stop the inevitable. On the last day of the Star being functional, around 150,000 people gathered for a last crossing of the harbor, in a nostalgic mood,[31] portraying the nostalgia resulting from Abbas's culture of disappearance. The activists, although loosely organized, gathered around the piers and formed the "Local Action" initiative. Just months later, their attention was drawn to the Queen's pier, while the movement protecting the piers was called "the Star and Queen movement", and lasted for months. More specifically, the occupation of the Queen's Pier lasted for 97 days and encompassed several means of protest, from hunger strikes to artistic workshops dedicated to the heritage, poetry reading events, and public demonstrations, as well as some extreme means, as one protester wrote banners with his blood.[32] Nonetheless, it is critical to examine the role of the Queen's Pier in the discursive practices of heritage in a post-colonial society. Ting notes that although the Queen's Pier is a symbol of colonialism for some, via this movement it became a place of actualization for the people's political conviction, highlighting its role as a public space that offers the background for creating a "common ownership (of historical narratives) and destiny".[33] The two sites represent one way via which Hongkongers can

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[29] Ting, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

[30] Vaudine England, "Protesters Fight to Save Historic Hong Kong Pier" in *The Guardian*, 2007 [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jun/18/china.international], 29 May 2024.

[31] Tsui, *op. cit*.

[32] YouTube, "Protests to Stop Demolition of Queen's Ferry Pier", uploaded by AP Archive, Jul 21, 2015 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PiUtPj5kUWU], 29 May 2024.

[33] Ting, 2013, p. 83.

reflect on their history and create their future; the idea of contestation is necessary, as it has as a prerequisite for the existence of the heritage site contested.

An example of actively rereading history is how protesters, accompanied by several other groups, activists, and locals, organized a symbolic crossing of the harbor via the Queen's Pier and called it "People's Landing at Queen's Pier", reclaiming, hence, ownership of the space, and negating colonial readings of the pier.[34] The inclusiveness of the crowd, going beyond the "Hong Kong locals" to abode seekers from the mainland, and to South Asian migrants and workers, is illustrated in the banner carried by protesters, reading "We are all migrants!"[35] This attitude redefines the Hongkonger identity beyond previous constraints of history, language, and culture, and goes to the idea of striving for a better life while contributing to the development of Hong Kong.

Lastly, one more point needs to be addressed to properly comprehend the activists' response to the demolition of the piers, by providing an example with a similar reaction to the disappearance of other tangible or intangible sites or practices defined as heritage. Other than the aforementioned Choi Yuen Tsuen village, other examples of nostalgia at the destruction of grassroots culture include the demolition of the Lee Tung 'Wedding Card' Street in 2007, the Fishball Revolution of 2016, which aimed at protecting the street vendors, a symbol of Hong Kong style of living, as well as intangible heritage practices, such as the protection of English and Cantonese used as official languages, both threatened by the push for Mandarin. These examples, although not correlated at first glance, relate to Abbas' theory of the politics of disappearance:

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[34] England, *op. cit.*

[35] Ting, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

> The change in status of culture in Hong Kong can be described as follows: from reverse hallucination, which sees only desert, to a culture of disappearance, whose appearance is posited on the imminence of its disappearance.[36]

Abbas proclaims that, before the handover, Hong Kong could not see culture and identity as coming from itself, but rather coming from the outside, either from the mainland or from Great Britain, calling it "a cultural desert". After the handover, Hong Kong became preoccupied with the nostalgia of losing its culture, despite being unable to articulate what that culture meant. In turn, the spaces formerly occupied by the two piers become embedded with nostalgia, and the idea of local identity, despite the lack of the heritage to support that identity.[37] Blacker further develops this idea: "All these places have become magnified as the objects of a vast nostalgia that elevates them to the status of *lieux de mémoire* whose potency, following the laws of nostalgia, lies in the fact that they are no longer."[38] Despite Blacker's affirmation referring to the patrimony in Eastern Europe, this observation applies just as much to Hong Kong and explains the nostalgia surrounding the piers and their disappearance. Moreover, this understanding of nostalgia in creating one's identity in the absence of tangible heritage is supported by Steward, who calls nostalgia a "sadness without subject".[39]

Conclusion

After providing the theoretical framework for analyzing the demolition of the two piers, it becomes evident that Hongkongers' identity is not only layered but that each layer is connected to different forms of heritage, whether tangible or intangible. At first glance, it could be argued that the age and the aesthetics of the two piers did not mark them as noteworthy heritage according to the legal framework of heritage management of

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[36] Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, NED-New edition, vol. 2, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 7 [http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttshbm], 29 May 2024.

[37] *Ibidem*, pp. 63-90.

[38] Uilleam Blacker, "Living among the Ghosts of Others: Urban Postmemory in Eastern Europe", in Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind, Julie Fedor (eds.), *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, New York: Palgrave, 2013, p. 174.

[39] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984, p. 23.

Hong Kong, hence, their demolition was not only justifiable but expected considering the inevitability of economic development. However, this paper has proved that not only is the legislation in a place unsuitable for marking the status of heritage sites in a post-colonial society, but that the authorities' approach to heritage does not address the intangible value of sites such as the piers. Instead, it commodifies it in a neoliberal approach that prioritizes the privatization of public spaces for profit. The piers represented not only a place of transit physically, but metaphorically, thus, they are representative of a local community formed mostly of immigrants and the descendants of refugees from the mainland.

Moreover, Hongkongers' reaction is emblematic not only of an actively involved community but also of people trying to secure an identity by linking it to the familiar, even though in doing so they have to reread their legacy, namely colonialism. The public's reaction to the demolition denotes the coming of age of a generation ready to stand up for itself and reclaim ownership of their collective destiny, looking into the future while relying on their past. This generation would depart from the conspicuous consumption that characterized Hong Kong to post-materialism, regaining their political agency and protesting as seen in 2014 and 2019.

Lastly, while the Piers' chapter is closed with their demolition, future research should focus on new forms of identity creation via Hong Kong's cultural heritage. As the region becomes increasingly integrated into the mainland and loses its uniqueness, historical sites as well as intangible cultural practices should be conserved. This is increasingly relevant through the lens of Hong Kong's economic development where businesses and land reclamation take precedence over its patrimony. How heritage can be used as a tool for decolonizing collective memory is a question still unanswered in this case, as the region goes from one colonizing force to another.

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