

**HERITAGE AS RESISTANCE:  
PRESERVATION AND DECOLONIZATION  
IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN CITIES**

By

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*Dedicated to the heritage preservation activists,  
who have devoted themselves to a better urban future.*

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the product of my own work. This dissertation has not been previously accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the dissertation.

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(Desmond Hok-Man Sham)

**Abstract****HERITAGE AS RESISTANCE:  
PRESERVATION AND DECOLONIZATION IN SOUTHEAST  
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This dissertation is about Inter-Asia Cultural Studies and postcolonial studies, with cultural heritage as the subject of examination. It examines how postcolonial heritage preservation can function as an actual decolonization project, with specific reference to the Southeast Asian context, by articulating the relationship between the understanding of history, place-attachment and decolonization. The dissertation suggests that heritage needs to be understood in a trialectic relationship of time, space and identity and not in purely temporal or economic terms, such that the complexity and possibilities of cultural heritage can be articulated. It also argues for the importance of differentiating between depoliticized and radicalized versions of “collective memory”, where the latter provides the space for resistance. Elaborating on the “Inter-Asia” approach and on previous studies of “port cities” as cosmopolitan urban spaces closely related with each other long before the era of “global capitalism” and often marginalized in the nationalist discourses, this dissertation proposes and demonstrates how looking at port cities can be operative as “method”. This methodology allows different locales to become each other’s mutual reference point in an equal way, based on their common historical experiences. With examples mainly drawn from three former British colonial port cities in Southeast Asia—Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang—this dissertation articulates the following issues: (1) Colonial heritage: How is colonial heritage treated in postcolonial societies and how are nationalism and global capitalism implicated within the decision-making process? Why are anti-colonial nationalism and the demolition of colonial heritage not effective ways of decolonization? How might a decolonization process that challenges both nationalism and global capitalism be possible through the preservation of “colonial” heritage? (2) Heritage of port cities: How have heritage places and urban landscapes that embed the histories of port cities been treated in postcolonial societies? What are the ideologies represented behind these treatments?

What is the significance of the heritage of port cities for reflections on multiple vernacular modernities, multiculturalism, cultural hybridization and race relations in postcolonial societies? (3) Possibilities of cultural heritage as resistance: How is it possible for cultural heritage to operate as forms of resistance against displacement, neoliberalization and undemocratic decision-making processes? How can the “depoliticized” face of cultural heritage be used as the channel to smuggle in dissent from the dominant paradigm of society? By discussing these themes, the dissertation argues that critical negotiation with the histories embedded in heritage, place-based memory and sense of place associated with heritage, and the association of heritage with “right to city” are significant for the preservation of cultural heritage to function as a project of resistance and decolonization.

**Keywords:**

Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, postcolonial studies, decolonization, port cities as method, multiple vernacular modernities, heritage preservation, right to the city

## Note on Transliteration of Chinese terms

Although *Hanyu Pinyin* is the most widely-used standardized transliteration of Chinese terms, it is based on Mandarin pronunciation, which cannot represent the local linguistic customs for ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. In this dissertation, I will prioritize transliteration of the local Chinese languages. For Cantonese proper terms in Hong Kong, I will use *Jyutping* system, developed by Linguistic Society of Hong Kong, with tone indicators omitted. For Cantonese and Hokkien proper terms in Singapore and Malaysia, I will transliterate based on local preferences. Personal names will follow the people's preferences. *Hanyu Pinyin* of the transliterated Chinese terms will be provided in the Appendix I.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Concepts and Theories

In June 2013, the *Guardian* reported that the World Heritage Site (WHS) status of the Westminster WHS, London was at risk because the new developments on the other bank of the Thames would threaten the view from Westminster. To list just some of the ensuing readers' comments on the *Guardian* website: "UNESCO<sup>1</sup>, this is 21st century cosmopolitan city", "Since when has the *Guardian* been for 'heritage'?", "The removal of the Westminster [*sic.*] from the heritage list will make it seem less sacrilegious when it's bulldozed – post-revolution – to make way for a park and museum commemorating all those who suffered under its centuries-long draconian legislature".<sup>2</sup> The implication is that those in support of the preservation must be the stereotypical nostalgists, against "progress" and "development", and prone to embracing "ancient relics" and in favour of the monarchy. Does it follow that anti-monarchists should support high-rise developments to ruin the views from Westminster and bulldoze Westminster itself? The top-down model, preserving the heritage of elites to signify the power of monarchs and states is only one tradition of heritage preservation. There is another tradition of heritage preservation in which heritage preservation is a bottom-up process, a form of urban social movement<sup>3</sup>, prioritizing the preservation of vernacular buildings and urban landscapes alongside grand elite buildings. Heritage preservation in this tradition resists the displacement of communities and opens up possibilities for democratizing town planning practices. In this tradition, heritage preservation is not nostalgic for the past but is geared towards the present and the future. In other words, *this* eagerness for heritage is forward-looking.

As the British historian Raphael Samuel correctly suggests, "Historically, preservationism is a cause which owes at least as much to the Left as to the Right" (1994: 288). Returning to the readers' comments, if a "post-revolution" future means that the buildings that once represented the pre-revolutionary authority need to be bulldozed,

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization

<sup>2</sup> *Guardian*. "Westminster's world heritage status at risk as Unesco condemns plan for skyscrapers" <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2013/jun/09/westminster-world-heritage-status-risk> accessed on 30 June 2013.

<sup>3</sup> An "urban social movement" is a collective action that "consciously aimed at the transformation of the social interests and values embedded in the forms and functions of a historically given city" (Castells, 1983: xvi).

then how should ex-colonies deal with the architecture built by the former colonizers? Demolish them, which could also mean demolishing most if not all of the urban landscape? If the aforementioned logic of hostility to heritage preservation, as in the case of Westminster WHS, were to be applied to ex-colonies, it would imply that those who want to preserve the former colonizers' built heritage are nostalgic and yearning for the colonial past.

As someone who was born and raised in Hong Kong, a former British colony and now the Special Administrative Region under People's Republic of China (PRC), I am very sensitive to the accusation of "yearning for the colonial past". Certainly, there are people in former colonies who are emotionally attached to their former colonizers, and the poor performance of postcolonial governments might make people yearn for the colonial past. However, the accusation of "yearning for the colonial past" could also be manipulated by postcolonial ruling elites or their supporters to distract attention from many real problems. On the other hand, there are clear cases in which the preservation of colonial architecture is undertaken precisely in order to actively and critically engage with colonial history. In 2007, for example, when the activist group Local Action defended Queen's Pier in Hong Kong from demolition, they made it clear that this heritage preservation movement was a decolonization project. They demanded the preservation of the British colonial governors' landing pier for the sake of *also* preserving, in order to explore, the suppressed histories of local resistant movements in the colonial era (Chow 2007a, 2007b). The Preservation Movement of Queen's Pier is just an example of heritage-related controversies and bottom-up heritage preservation movements in Hong Kong in recent years. Civil society groups' concerns in these controversies are not limited to issues of architecture. These civil society groups are also concerned about the city's histories, urban spaces and decision-making processes. Many of these heritage preservation movements have tried to resist, as I will argue, different forms of colonialism.

The major concern of this dissertation is this: ***How can postcolonial heritage preservation be an actual decolonization project?*** In addressing this question, I will engage with the specific contexts of three former British colonial port cities in Southeast Asia, namely Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang. I must emphasize that I neither intend to create a theory for postcolonial heritage preservation, nor to use the case studies in

this dissertation to examine whether theories about heritage preservation generated in the West are applicable in other contexts. Rather, I position the dissertation in the field of Inter-Asia Cultural Studies (IACS), where the “decolonization” issue has been a defining concern (Chen 1998, 2006, 2010; Ching 2010). As Kuan-hsing Chen, founding co-executive editor of the journal *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies: Movement* (hereafter IACS journal) recalls, IACS reached a consensus that the “local” in the wider sense—ranging from a particular locale to the Asian region as a whole—is prioritized. IACS also aims at addressing “problems internal to the local formation” (Chen 2012: 46), amongst which the issues of colonialism, imperialism and neoliberalization can be counted. My dissertation is an Inter-Asia Cultural Studies and postcolonial project, which takes urban heritage preservation as my subject of examination. Nevertheless, to guide the arguments in the dissertation, this chapter introduces two intersecting theoretical discussions, which will be central to the discussion of case studies and scenarios throughout the subsequent chapters.

In the first of these theoretical discussions, I will argue that heritage preservation is best understood in terms of the “trialectic” relationship of time, space and identity. This is a refusal to submit to the binary time-space divide, which prioritizes time over space, or vice versa. In contrast to those cultural theorists who aim at explaining an increasing interest in heritage and “the past” in temporal terms, or in terms of the temporal dimension of memory (e.g. Huyssen 1995, 2003; Nora 2002), I borrow Henri Lefebvre’s concepts of time-space relation and the “trialectic”<sup>4</sup> to argue that understandings of time, space and identity necessarily influence one other. I argue that heritage also needs to be understood in terms of this trialectic relationship. In the second of these theoretical discussions I will differentiate between two kinds of “collective memory”, namely the depoliticized version of collective memory and the radicalized version of collective memory, which can sometimes be understood as a form of “counter-memory”. This differentiation is essential for assessing whether there is a possibility for a resistant cultural heritage, and whether heritage preservation can be an actual decolonization project. After these two discussions, of trialectic relations of time, space and identity and of the differentiation of two kinds of “collective memory”, I am going to give some background to the cities discussed in the dissertation, explain why

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<sup>4</sup> The term itself is Lefebvrian, rather than Lefebvre’s, as elaborated later in the chapter.

these cities were chosen and clarify how the data in the dissertation was collected. Then, I will engage in the methodological framework of “Inter-Asia Cultural Studies” and propose a methodology known as “port cities as method”. Finally I will outline each chapter of the dissertation. Before entering into these two intersecting discussions of theory, however, I need to define the two key concepts in this dissertation: “heritage preservation” and “postcolonial”.

## 1.1 Defining Key Concepts

### 1.1.1 Heritage preservation<sup>5</sup>

The word “heritage” originally refers to something one inherits from a deceased ancestor (Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge 2000: 1). Heritage, like history, is not equivalent to the past, but to a present use of the past. In contemporary international standards and guidelines for safeguarding heritage, this understanding of “heritage” is systematized into the categories of “natural heritage” and “cultural heritage”. According to UNESCO’s (1972) definition, “natural heritage” refers to the “natural features consisting of physical and biological formations” of “outstanding” “aesthetic or scientific” value: “geological and physiographical formations”, especially those inhabited by threatened species, and natural areas or sites with “science, conservation or natural beauty” (Article 2). In short, “natural heritage” is similar to J.E. Tunbridge and G.J. Ashworth’s (1996) understanding of “heritage landscape”. In contrast to this “non-artificial”, “natural” heritage, “cultural heritage” or “cultural property” emphasizes “human productions” such as monuments, buildings, archaeological sites, historic cities and folk culture (UNESCO 1972, 2003; Harrison 2008; Jokilehto 2005). In 1989, UNESCO and ICOMOS<sup>6</sup> expanded the definition of “cultural heritage”, originally limited to material artifacts and monumental relics, to include “the entire

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<sup>5</sup> This section aims at defining the meanings of “heritage” and “preservation” as used in this dissertation, and this dissertation’s basic standpoint on heritage preservation. It does not aim at outlining the historical development of heritage preservation and different camps in such development, or outlining different debates related to heritage preservation. See Jokilehto (1986), Samuel (1994), Boyer (1994), Hunter, eds. (1996), Yen (2005), Ip (2010), Harrison (2013), etc. for the development and different camps in the historical development of heritage preservation; Moore and Whelam, eds. (2007), Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge (2007), Graham and Howard, eds. (2008), Anico and Peralta, eds. (2009), etc. for heritage and identity; Ashworth and Tunbridge (1990), Boyer (1994), MacCannel (1999), Timothy and Boyd (2003), Porter and Salazar (2005), Smith (2009), Hitchcock, King and Parnwell, eds. (2010), etc. for the relationship between heritage and tourism.

<sup>6</sup> International Council on Monuments and Sites

corpus of material signs – either artistic or symbolic – handed on by the past to each culture and, therefore, to the whole of humankind” (quoted in Jokilehto 2005: 4 – 5), and again in 2003 to further include “intangible cultural heritage”, defined as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – and the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (2003 Convention, quoted in Jokilehto 2005: 43). In short, “cultural heritage” can be sub-categorized into “tangible cultural heritage” and “intangible cultural heritage”. “Tangible cultural heritage” is the more conventional sense of the term “cultural heritage” and is usually used to refer to material objects, like monuments, buildings, archaeological sites, paintings, sculptures, etc. (UNESCO 1972; Hafstein 2004). In Tunbridge and Ashworth’s categorization, tangible cultural heritage refers to those “relic[s] physical survival from the past” or “heritage places” (1996: 1). The more recent sub-category of “intangible cultural heritage” focuses on non-material aspects of cultural heritage such as traditions, folklore, orally-transmitted skills, craftsmanship, etc. In Tunbridge and Ashworth’s categorizations, “intangible cultural heritage” may include “heritage of everyday life”; indeed “all accumulated cultural and artistic productivity, frequently whether produced in the past or currently” (1996: 2).

While “cultural heritage” is categorized into the two sub-categories of the tangible and the intangible, these cannot and should not be treated as two separate and unrelated categories. Intangible cultural heritage can be rendered visible and material by (or may at least have its customary setting and context within) certain establishments which are themselves regarded as tangible cultural heritage. The threatening of the existence of tangible cultural heritage might also threaten the existence of intangible cultural heritage and vice versa (Bouchenaki 2003; Ito 2003).

It should be noted that the operational logic behind the conventional distinction between “natural heritage” and “cultural heritage” can be regarded as Eurocentric and colonialist. Especially in settlers’ societies, this assumption ignores the fact that indigenous people inhabit and create their culture within “natural landscapes” (Harrison 2008; Thomas 2002). However, since the focus of this dissertation will be on Southeast Asian cities, where one seldom has the chance to deal with “natural heritage”, and since a better set of categories has yet to be widely articulated, I will still use these recognized

terms, while bearing in mind that the values of certain “heritage sites” can be *both* “natural” and “cultural”. Archaeology, archives and artifacts in museums are not major concerns of this dissertation. Thus, unless otherwise stated, “heritage” in this dissertation refers to “built heritage”, including architectural heritage, historic monuments, historic buildings, groups of urban buildings, streetscapes, neighborhoods, historic districts, urban and cultural landscapes, settlements, landmarks, etc. Pierre Nora (1996a, 1996b) proposes the concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) to understand cultural heritage. According to Nora, a *lieu de mémoire* (site of memory) is “any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community” (1996a: xvii). In short, heritage constitutes the sites where cultural memory crystallizes. Yet, as I will elaborate in later part in this chapter, understanding heritage in terms of cultural memory alone is not enough.

“Preservation” and “conservation” are common terms referring to the safeguarding and protection of cultural heritage. Usually, preservation has a narrower meaning: “All actions taken to maintain an object in its existing condition, minimise the rate of change, and slow down further deterioration and / or prevent damage” (Community Museums Program 2009). Conservation encompasses “preservation” and involves careful management of assets for the use of future generations (*ibid.*). When dealing with built heritage, both terms are in use, and sometimes interchangeable, although “conservation” has a wider meaning. In this dissertation too, “preservation” and “conservation” are used interchangeably; however, when I construct my arguments, I use the term “postcolonial heritage preservation” instead of “postcolonial heritage conservation” to highlight the complexity whereby, in contexts where heritage contests with urban renewal or urban development, the question becomes that of whether the heritage can be “preserved”. If the heritage cannot be “preserved”, it is impossible to discuss its future use, i.e. how it may be “conserved”.

“Heritage preservation” as a public discourse and a public agendum was a project of modernity, and its birth coincided with the birth of modern nation-states (Ip 2010; Yen 2005; Hagen 2006; Boyer 1994). For instance, shortly after gaining its independence from the Ottoman Empire and having become a modern nation-state in 1830s, the Kingdom of Greece struggled to discover the relics and remains of ancient

Greek classical architecture, and restored and re-erected many destroyed ancient monuments linked to the “glorious past” of ancient Greece (Jokilehto 1986). Heritage preservation as a modern product does not mean that what is now known as “heritage preservation” did not exist in the pre-modern period. There were practices to deal with and protect heritage, but these were not systematic policies practiced in the public domain. Rather than existing as something collectively owned, “antiquities” were treated as belonging either to the private realm or to institutions (such as the Church, the royal or noble families) or were considered as merely something “out there”. It was the founding of modern nation states that gave rise to the understanding of “heritage” as something belonging to the “public” (Ip 2010). When modernity formalized and publicized “heritage”, it also made the issue of heritage preservation a “public”, or at least a “collective” issue, where public debates were possible. Meanwhile, the modern mode of thinking that bisects the past and the present is also intrinsic to many contemporary guidelines and legislation for preserving built heritage (Younés 2008).

As the original meaning of “heritage” suggests, the current, “collective” notion of heritage nevertheless has its group boundaries, such as the boundary of a social class or an ethnic group. Similar group boundaries also exist in “collective memory”, which will be discussed in later sections in this chapter. The question of “*whose heritage?*” is constantly at the centre of debates related to heritage preservation (Hall 2005). Modern nation-states select the national monuments, antiquities and relics in the museums as dominant *lieux de mémoire*. These dominant *lieux de mémoire* tend to conform with the state’s ideology (den Boer 2010; Ip 2010), and in many cases specific monuments today retain the privileged position accorded to them at the moment of the particular nation-state’s “modern” founding. The Westminster WHS is an example of this type of heritage; however, this does not mean that heritage preservation is necessarily associated with the nations, the states, or the nation-states. The fact that many of these preserved buildings exemplify the aesthetics of the ruling class rather than the vernacular does not mean that heritage preservation in itself is necessarily linked to the ruling class.

As Samuel (1994) suggests, heritage preservation was not dominated by the ruling elites. The newly-emerged urban middle class, liberals and radicals all contributed to the formation of heritage preservation policies and practices. Even in the post-war era, both leftists and rightists take part in heritage preservation initiatives. As

I will demonstrate in this dissertation, radicals have been widely and intensely involved in heritage preservation: for radical groups, the goals of heritage preservation might range from building a sense of community, to saving communities whose bulldozing is imminent. This dissertation follows the well-established understanding of *cultural heritage as a site of contest*, which different groups can make use of, and appropriate in different ways, ranging from preservation to erasure. And the ends of cultural heritage can be as divergent as the means: cultural heritage can be used to assert, defend or deny different claims of legitimacy, ownership or identity (e.g. Bender 1998; Bender and Wine red. 2001; Hall 2005; Moore and Whelan ed. 2007; Silverman ed. 2011). Heritage is a site of contest because it involves questions concerning *whose heritage is to be preserved* and *why, how and for whom heritage is preserved*. Thus heritage itself is neither essentially progressive nor reactionary. It is because heritage preservation is a site of contest, and not limited to its use by nation-states, governments and business elites that there exist the possibilities of heritage as a site of resistance. Although I focus on the preservation of built heritage and urban landscape in this dissertation, it does not mean that other forms of cultural heritage are not able to become sites of resistance. For instance, the preservation of artifacts and of intangible heritage such as folk practices of minority groups are often important to resist political and socio-cultural oppression (Simpson 1996; Kreps 2003). As I will argue in later chapters in the dissertation, the mobilization of discourses of intangible cultural heritage is also important for resisting displacement. I choose to focus on the preservation of built heritage and urban landscapes because they intersect with both cultural policy and urban policy. In the East and Southeast Asian contexts, the complexity of such intersections can be adequately witnessed in urban social movements, where demands for the preservation of built heritage are best understood as contestations over urban redevelopment projects and over the related phenomena of the privatization and militarization of public space .

Although the “origin” of heritage preservation is largely a legacy of Western modernity, it does not mean that heritage preservation is by essence “colonial”. For instance, Christina F Kreps (2003) uses the museum and the preservation of artifacts in the non-Western contexts to illustrate how museums are “contested terrain”. There are localized and non-Eurocentric practices in the non-Western context that are invested not only in “restoring a people’s right to and control over the management of their cultural heritage” but also in liberating people’s thinking from a Eurocentric view on

museum practices (Kreps 2003: 145). The institution of the “museum”, as a legacy of Western modernity, is indeed useful for local and marginal communities to narrate their stories. Thus, what needs to be challenged is not the museum *per se*, but the problematic and narrow-minded practices by which many museums have functioned. Similarly, although the preservation of built heritage in the Asian contexts is largely a colonial legacy, it has provided useful discourses and practices for reimagining histories and urban spaces, re-articulating local identities and resisting neoliberalization of urban spaces. In essence, heritage preservation is a site of contest. Thus, it is possible for heritage preservation to function as a decolonization project. What needs to be challenged is not heritage preservation *per se*, but, for instance, how “heritage” is defined, who can make claims to heritage, how the use of heritage is understood, etc. In a later section of this chapter, I will propose an understanding of heritage preservation in terms of trialectic relations of time, space and identity. I will also propose the differentiation of two versions of collective memory, which, I will argue, is helpful for analyzing whether certain heritage preservation projects and debates are conservative or radical.

### 1.1.2 Postcolonial

The term “postcolonial” has two layers of meaning. The first and primary meaning of “postcolonial” constitutes it as a political term referring to “regimes, and movements seeking liberation from colonialism, and the most important sense it conveyed was opposition to colonialism.” (Dirlik 2007: 66 – 67) Here, colonialism refers to formal political colonization, and postcolonial is used to describe anti-colonial struggles, movements, liberation from colonialism and the period after such struggles and liberation. It is a descriptive term that describes the time of the periods of, and after, the end of formal political colonization. However, colonialism not only operates as political and economic domination: the imposition of socio-cultural power relationships and frameworks of knowledge-production and thought, such as narratives of “development” and “modernization” based on Western modernity, have affected both the colonizers and colonized people (Chen, K. 2006, 2010; Guha 1988b; Venn 2006). Thus the second, analytical and critical meaning of “postcolonial”, as “resistance against the whole structure and mentality of colonialism”, and as akin to the meaning of “decolonization” (Sham 2009: 71). The analytical and critical meaning of “postcolonial” and “decolonization” describes the processes whereby a colonized

people re-think and reflect upon their relationships with their colonizers, relationships that are not only political and economic but also social and cultural.<sup>7</sup> Such processes require critical self-reflection, resistance to denial and, in the first instance, recognition of such relationships (Chen, K. 2006, 2010). Without change to the colonial structure and reflection upon political-economic and socio-cultural relationships, “anti-colonialism” cannot be regarded as decolonization.<sup>8</sup> Thus, to discover how postcolonial heritage preservation can function as a decolonizing project means asking about the ways heritage preservation in the postcolonial era can help the colonized people rethink, reflect upon and resist coloniality, in all of its political-economic and socio-cultural aspects .

Colonialism is not merely a political-economic process. It also provides a lens to understand the world based on a Eurocentric world view, and this legacy is still influential even after the end of formal colonialism. Eurocentrism refers to “the belief, implicit or otherwise, in the world historical significance of events believed to have developed endogenously within the cultural-geographical sphere of Europe” (Bhabra 2007: 5). The problem with Eurocentrism is that “Europe” or the “West” is perceived as “the ‘maker’ of universal history” (ibid. 2), or the “norm”, without the recognition that these very ideas or views were themselves “drawn from very particular intellectual and historical traditions that could not claim any universal validity” (Chakrabarty 2008: xiii).<sup>9</sup> One major example of an idea that Eurocentrism has tried to “universalize” is a particular European-centred/Western-centred conceptualization of modernity, quite often associated with the Enlightenment<sup>10</sup> As Naoki Sakai (1997, 2014) argues, the concept of “modernity” relies not only on the historical and temporal contrast with “pre-modern”, but also on the geopolitical contrast with the “non-modern” and the “non-

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<sup>7</sup> To avoid confusion, except as part of “postcolonial studies” and “postcolonial theory/theories”, in this dissertation, the term “postcolonial” refers to the temporal, descriptive perspective of the term, i.e., “after the colonial”. I will use the term “decolonization” to refer to the critical perspective of the term “postcolonial”.

<sup>8</sup> I will further elaborate why anti-colonialism is not an effective form of decolonization in Chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> Here, “Europe” does not necessarily equate to the whole European continent. Rather, it implies the European imperial nations which could disregard the internal diversities in Europe and exclude, for instance, the situations of Eastern Europe. Despite the fact that “Europe” as such could be distinguished from actually-existing Europe, the effect of Eurocentrism, based on an ideological-driven understanding of Europe, is real and cannot be undermined. In the post-war period, due to the weakening of traditional European powers and the rising influence of the United States, the United States has also been regarded as the centre, or “universal” marker. “Eurocentrism”, in this sense, would be more accurately called “Euro-American-centrism”. When I use the term “Eurocentrism”, I also imply “Euro-American-centrism”.

<sup>10</sup> This, however, does not imply that there is only a singular understanding of “modernity” in the West.

West". This serves a discursive project to create the "modern West" and "pre-modern" "non-West" binary, and "excludes the possibility of a simultaneous coexistence of the pre-modern West and the modern non-West" (Sakai 1997: 154). Yet, as Sakai argues, there is no "inherent reason" for the distinction by which West must be associated with the modern, and non-West with the pre-modern or non-modern "except for the fact that it definitely serves to establish the putative unity of the West" (ibid.). There are certainly internal diversities in the West. Yet with the establishment of a framework for understanding the relationship between the "West" and the "non-West", or the "Rest" (Hall 1992), what actually took place is regarded as less important. However the effect of such a framework and discourse is real. With the expansion of colonial empires, such a Eurocentric understanding of the world was brought to other parts of the World. . Colonialism introduced the singular, Eurocentric, linear understanding of time, modernity and modernization, which Couze Venn (1993, 2000, 2006) calls "occidentalism", as the model of social advancement. Occidentalism is not equivalent to how modernization took place in particular Western geopolitical contexts, but to how "a particular narrative of the subject and a particular narrative of history have been constituted", have become hegemonic and have thereby affected different societies throughout the world (Venn 2000: 2).

Modernity is related to both time and space, yet "occidentalism" misleads people into thinking of co-existing heterogeneity and multiplicity as merely a "historical queue", without recognizing the existence of different trajectories (Massey 2005: 62 – 71). In such narratives of modernity, time and space are split and the importance of spatiality is ignored. The co-existing modernities taking place in different places are mistaken as being merely at different temporal points of a singular modernity based on a Eurocentric understanding. As Sakai (1997, 2014) argues, the West relies on polarity to produce the unbalanced relationship between the West and the non-West. In this unbalanced relationship, the "West" represents "universality", understood as the most advanced particularity and the "universal" point of reference (or the "norm"), which in turn has the power to recognize others as a "particularity". By putting others at the passive and "particular" position, the West gains the active position and imagines itself as ubiquitous and having the ability to change. Occidentalism operates on this logic. By reducing co-existing modernities into merely different, less advanced temporal points in the historic queue of a singular, linear modernity, the West can claim to occupy the

most advanced position and to be the “norm” and universal reference point. The differences between the West and other geopolitical contexts are not understood as differences on the same plane, but as differences between “universal” and “particulars”. Under the hegemony of occidentalism, if the “pre-modern” “non-West” wants to modernize, it needs to follow the “universal” “norm” of the “modern West”. Thus, the non-West is put into a position that needs to constantly “catch up” with the West.

Postcolonial studies have duly criticized the Eurocentric, or “occidental”, discourse of “development”, which reduces the understanding of modernity to this singular, linear model. In many postcolonial societies, the desire of ruling elites and business elites to “catch up” with the Western countries in terms of economic development also reduces the understanding of modernities to this singular, occidental model (Gupta 1998; McEwan 2014; Venn 1993, 2000, 2006). In short, the desire for “catch up” makes postcolonial societies misidentify their vernacular modernities, failing to recognize them *as* forms of modernity, in the belief they should be “catching up” to “modernize” according to the singular occidental understanding of modernity.<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy that such a desire to “catch up” in terms of economic development is not purely “economic” but also part of the state’s ideology. For instance, in the Singaporean context, “catching up” in terms of economic development with the West, or using the West as the “norm” of economic development, is also the government’s nation-building ideology. In such a process, what existed and was once regarded as “modern” was forgotten. I will illustrate this phenomena more extensively in the case of Singapore in later chapters. For now, we can state that economic developmentalism<sup>12</sup>, backed by the state’s ideology, can work to internalize the occidental understanding of “modernity” in a postcolonial society, ignoring actually existing vernacular modernities, and the conditions by which societies become “modern”.

To deny the “West” and the modernity already existed in the non-Western contexts is not a good way to “decolonize the mind” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986) and to

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<sup>11</sup> In later chapters, I will illustrate how demolition of heritage can be a result of the contest between the occidental, developmentalism-as-modernity and vernacular modernities. I will also illustrate the role of ruling elites and other agents in postcolonial states in such processes, such as how the state makes economic developmentalism into the national ideology.

<sup>12</sup> Developmentalism is not the same as development, but “an ideological orientation characterized by the fetishization of development” (Dirlik 2014: 30).

counter the hegemonic occidentalist understanding of “modernity”. Merely criticizing the problem of occidentalism, and the problem of the “West” is also not enough as this would only reinforce the hegemonic centre as the focus. Thus, there is the need to de-universalize the West, or in Dipesh Chakrabarty’s words, to “provincialize Europe” (2008), and to point out that the occidentalist understanding of “modernity” is not the “norm” but merely one form of modernity. At the same time, there is also the need to recognize alternative modernities in the non-Western contexts other than the occidentalist one. There are concerns as to whether the notion of “alternative modernity” is truly helpful and empowering to marginal positions; or if the notion would open up still other problems (Knauff ed. 2002; Dirlik 2013). In “Thinking Modernity Historically: Is ‘Alternative Modernity’ the Answer?”, Arif Dirlik argues that “alternative modernity” has the intention of countering the hegemony of the ideological “Euro / American modernity” but fails to recognize its significance and constraints. He argues that current use of “alternative modernity” or “alternative modernities” in non-Western contexts often “remains bound to modern categories of nations and civilization”, with the potential to encourage other forms of hegemonic centrism (Dirlik 2013: 8). Dirlik believes that the notion of “modernity”, without adjective, is already sufficient to cover the complexity. He argues, instead of claiming alternative modernities, a project which has been manipulated as an “ideological cover of social inequality and political injustice” (ibid. 37) and has failed to offer real alternatives, it is more pragmatic to re-envision the concept of “modernity”, without ignoring the dark side of Euromodernity. If, he argues, the self-representation of modernity refers to progress, and improvement of humanity, it is better to re-conceptualize modernity “that opens up the universalist democratic promises of Euromodernity to recognition of values and practices in other histories in the construction of a new modernity” (ibid. 43).

Dirlik reminds us of the problems of “alternative” as predominantly associated with nations and civilizations: use of this adjective assumes a cultural homogeneity and is open to various manipulations by governments (Dirlik 2013: 37). I also agree with him in upholding some fundamental values such as social justice as universal and common pursuits. However, I am less convinced that “modernity” without any adjectives is sufficient to articulate the complexities at stake. Due to the hegemony of the occidentalist form of modernity, or the “imagined model of Euro / American modernity” (Dirlik 2013: 15) – which, as I will illustrate in later parts of the dissertation,

have also become the ideologies of certain postcolonial states – when one mentions “modernity”, it is often the concepts associated with occidentalism that one has in mind. In such a case, the “West” would be still regarded as the most advanced and the “norm”. Adjectives, thus, should be added not only to the “alternatives”, but also to the “norm”, i.e. the “West”. Doing so is a reminder that the perceived universal norm, or universal reference point, is actually a particular. This does not mean that “Western” modernity is to be ignored. Rather, it is to reduce the originally perceived “universal reference point” into merely one of the reference points, and opens up the possibility to multiply the reference points. As pointed out by Dirlik, “alternatives” should be based neither on nations and civilizations, nor on an abstract notion of the “non-West”. Rather, critical postcolonial theories need to recognize the existence of *multiple* alternative modernities resulting from different colonialities (King 2004). In other words, one needs to recognize that not all colonies’ experiences (or of, therefore, their modernities) are the same. The term “alternative”, understood without the complexities of this multiplicity in mind, would denote a mere difference from the “norm”, without situating that difference in a specific locale. My focus in this dissertation, therefore, is specific and situated versions of modernities that take place locally, vernacular modernities. Vernacular modernities are not abstract, universalizing models of “modernity” (such as occidentalism). Rather, vernacular modernities are “constituted through circuitous and multi-directional cultural traffic rather than simply emanating from the imperialist metropole” (Sang 2012: 60). The “modern” here refers quite often to how the local populations, in many cases quite diverse and multiethnic, thought, felt and believed that they became, or were becoming, modern. Although key aspects of the West or the Western model of “modernity” (or in some contexts, elements of the colonizers themselves) were found in vernacular claims to the “modern”, such usages of the term “modern” was not equivalent to the Western model. In other words, “it is thus both modern yet different from Europe or North America” (Venn 2006: 45). Vernacular modernities should not be mistaken as “belated” versions of a singular modernity model based on the West. There are many well-documented empirical cases of how people in different countries and cities, ranging from traditional elites, intellectuals, rising merchants to the less-educated general public, appropriated, imagined and experienced modernity, or more accurately, modernities in pre-World War II Asia.<sup>13</sup> For instance, the

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<sup>13</sup> These modernities could be repressed by discourses of modernity constructed in later period. David Der-wei Wang (1997), for instance, argues that the modernities expressed in late Qing fictions were

reformists in late Qing China and Meiji Japan tried to acquire and appropriate certain key aspects of the West, such as modern technology, without a total rejection of their traditions under threat from Western powers (Wang 1997; Dirlik 2013; Venn 2006). For urban populations in Japanese cities, Shanghai, Taihoku (now Taipei) and Penang in 1920s and 1930s, the concept of “modern” was quite often associated with the quest for everyday “modern lives” and patterns of consumption. The English term “modern” and the French term “*moderne*” was transliterated into Chinese in Shanghai and popularly associated with “novel” and “fashionable”, rather than Enlightenment understanding. In this association of “modern” with the quest for everyday “modern lives” and consumption, “modern” and “tradition” were not regarded as a pair in binary opposition. Rather, tradition could be embedded in the understanding of “modernity” (Harootunian 2000; Lee 1999, 2000; Lewis 2009; Sang 2012). In short, the “modernity” of these “vernacular modernities” was quite often about how the local populations thought, felt and believed that they were modernizing or became modern. The Western model of modernity had significant impact, but the modernities being perceived in these places were beyond the Western model.

The articulation of vernacular modernities in non-Western societies, countering the occidental model, should not imply that what took place was unproblematic. The actual content within the vernacular modernities in different places may still be criticized. However, the framework of vernacular modernities, together with a recognition of the Western model of modernity as merely one form amongst others, brings the spatial perspective of modernity back into picture, and thus breaks down the “modern West” and “pre-modern non-West” opposition. Vernacular modernities do not aim, like the occidental model, at becoming the “universal” norm, and nor do they constitute a pursuit of homogenizing forces. Rather, vernacular modernity acknowledges the importance of “local” as the place to construct modernity, or even contesting modernities; furthermore, it denotes the simultaneous process by which multiple locales reciprocally influence and determine one another. In this sense, the articulation of vernacular modernities could provide possible ways for different vernacular modernities to be in reference with each other, without the necessity of

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often repressed by the later-constructed May Fourth discourse of modernity, as the “traditional” elements of these fictions were regarded as “backwards” by the May Fourth discourse.

thinking through a “universal” model.<sup>14</sup>

What constrains many dominant postcolonial theories, or more accurately the application of these theories, is their failure to recognize the diversity of colonial experiences and of multiple vernacular modernities. This is also the reason that many East and Southeast Asian societies find that postcolonial theories fail to explain and articulate their contexts. As Singaporean sociologist and another founding co-executive editor of IACS journal Chua Beng Huat states in the introduction to the *Postcolonial Studies* special issue “Southeast Asia's absence in postcolonial studies” (2008), even though Southeast Asia is “one of the most colonized regions”, existing literatures of postcolonial studies have “bypassed” this region (Chua 2008: 231). Chua argues that in the “textbooks” of postcolonial studies, numerous examples have been drawn from South Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America while Southeast Asia has been little mentioned, if not ignored. In a later section of this chapter, I will develop a methodology called “port cities as method”, with the aim of overcoming this problem.

The validity of postcolonial studies should not be undermined in the era of neoliberal globalization. Colonialism does not merely refer to the conventional sense of political domination, military occupation and colony establishment; neoliberal globalization is the newest form of colonialism. As F. William Fisher and Thomas Ponniah argue,

Neoliberal globalization is [...] also the imposition of a monolithic thought that consolidates vertical forms of difference and prohibits the public from imagining diversity in egalitarian, horizontal terms. Capitalism, imperialism, monoculturalism, patriarchy, white supremacism, and the domination of biodiversity have coalesced under the current form of globalization. (2003:10)

Similarly, in urban politics, Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge (2005) argue that gentrification under neoliberalism is a form of “urban colonialism”, which privileges white male middle-class people, their aesthetics and cultural norms; although in the Asian context, the privileged “aesthetic and cultural aspects” are not always clearly

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<sup>14</sup> I will elaborate the concept of inter-references in later sections.

associated with white male middle-class. The clearer element of urban colonialism, I would argue, is “dispossession”. In the conventional form of colonialism, colonizers dispossessed the colonized people through coercion and other forces such as legislation. The colonized people were dispossessed, for instance, from their land and cultures. In neoliberal globalization, ordinary people are dispossessed due to privatization, financialization and commodification of almost everything (Harvey 2005). In spatial terms, this includes the privatization of public space<sup>15</sup> and commodification of the common people’s living space (Sham 2009). It is according to the logic of dispossession, I will argue, that neoliberalization is also a process of and a new form of colonization, though not necessarily by directly coercive forces. Although the ideologies of neoliberalism often advocate the “free market” and “marketization”, and demand the retreat of “state intervention” at local, national and global levels, the state actually takes an active role in neoliberalization, granting it a degree of legitimation. This ranges from the conventional form of using coercive force to crack down on opposition and the active creation of an environment favouring marketization and privatization, to the process of directly and indirectly setting up “private companies” in order to involve the global market (Harvey 2005; Wang, H. 2003, 2008; Chang 2010; Hui 2002). In short, although the major actors of this new form of colonialism, namely neoliberalization or neoliberal capitalism, are often corporations, states still have roles in it, and capital still has a “nationality” (Chang 2010: 74).

Neoliberal capitalism demands conceptualization beyond the conventional understandings of European colonialism, “neocolonialism” and “cultural imperialism”, all of which regard the “West” (mainly Western Europe and the United States) as the centre in a one-way domination. Despite the fact that several Western conglomerates still dominate in global markets, it is inaccurate to suggest these transnational or multinational corporations are necessarily “Western” ones, or to equate “global capital” as “Western capital” (Nkrumah 1965; Crane 2002). In short, the new “colonizers” are not necessarily from the West. Many Asian countries and companies have actively engaged in the process of neoliberal globalization, instead of being merely passive agents (Crane 2002). Kuan-hsing Chen (2006, 2010) argues that governments and

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<sup>15</sup> In this dissertation, the discussion of “public space” is associated with the concepts of “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1996; Mitchell 2003) and “spatial justice” (Soja 2010) rather than Habermasian notion of “public sphere” (Habermas 1989). In Chapter 2, I will discuss the complexity and different trajectories of “public space” in the colonial and Western contexts.

capitals of the more economically advanced countries in Asia, such as Taiwan, have internalized “imperial eyes” and reproduced the centre-periphery logic of the conventional form of colonialism: they want to become “sub-empires” and to “colonize” developing countries. Chen’s argument is by large valid. Yet, many of these Asian-based corporations, aided by their respective nation-states, have projected their desires beyond the locus of the less economically-advanced national markets to which their operations might otherwise have been limited. For instance, Temasek Holdings, fully-owned by the Singaporean government, not only operates various ranges of business in Singapore, but also holds assets across sectors in different part of the world (Haque 2004; Goldstein and Pananond 2008; Temasek Holdings 2014). Several Hong Kong-based real-estate developers, such as Cheung Kong owned by the Li Ka-shing family, New World Development controlled by the Cheng Yu-tung family and Henderson Land headed by Lee Shau-kee, not only shaped the built environment in Hong Kong but are also oligarchs in public utilities, telecommunications, public transport and retail businesses in Hong Kong itself, China and other parts of the world. The rise of these transnational ethnic Chinese-owned conglomerates in Hong Kong are not purely “business” issues, but closely related to the politics between Britain and PRC, the complex relationship between businesses and both governments and PRC’s intervention (Poon 2005, 2010; Feng 1996, 1997; Tsui, Ng and Yick 2012; Goodstadt 2009).<sup>16</sup>

In articulating neoliberalism as a form of colonialism and (drastic) gentrification as a form of urban colonialism – and sometimes heritage preservation *does* provoke drastic gentrification – I propose the concept of “urban (re-)colonization”. Re-colonizing practices, as I will illustrate in the dissertation, span tourism, real estate developments, urban renewal and the privatization and militarization of public space. The prefix “re-” does not imply that the new form of colonialism, namely neoliberalism, just repeats what the old colonizers did. Rather, the prefix “re-” suggests that the processes of colonization and dispossession can be multi-layered, and can happen more than once, or be transferred from one colonizer to another in similar or different forms. Thus, heritage preservation can partake in projects of “urban (re-)colonization” in the following ways:

- (a) Ideas of aesthetic value and of the historical significance of preservation are

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<sup>16</sup> I will illustrate this in later parts of the dissertation.

based on those of white people, the new middle classes or the colonizers (Atkinson and Bridge 2005);

- (b) The rights of ordinary people to use buildings or sites, and their cultural memories towards such “heritage” are dispossessed and excluded by and because of preservation and conservation projects;
- (c) Those buildings and sites that once belonged to the colonial power are not decolonized because of preservation. Such preservation simply becomes the process of transferring the buildings and sites to another situation that does not belong to the ordinary people either.

Thus, heritage preservation as decolonization project must also include the work of urban decolonization. As the major concern of this dissertation is how postcolonial heritage preservation can be an actual decolonization project, this must therefore include the question of how postcolonial (in the descriptive sense) heritage preservation can instantiate “postcoloniality” in the critical sense, as an act of decolonization, not only in terms of critical reflection upon coloniality, but also of urban decolonization.

## **1.2 Trialectic relations of time, space and identity**

As mentioned earlier, some dominant ways of thinking associated with heritage preservation are problematic or inadequate, notably the Eurocentric modernist temporal-spatial split, a division of time and space wherein the domination of “time” over “space” has led to the articulation of heritage preservation mainly in temporal terms. One major consequence is that heritage preservation has often been articulated in terms of “nostalgia” for the past and addressed predominantly via the temporal dimensions of memory. This tendency undermines certain forms of urban politics such as urban social movements’ use of “heritage” in resisting displacement and spatial injustice. It can lead to a de-contextualized and easily de-politicized understanding of “collective memory”, as I will explain in the next section of this chapter. Refusing to submit to the binary time-space split, I find some of Lefebvre’s theories very useful in constructing an understanding of what I call a trialectic relationship of time, space and identity. Here, “trialectic” refers to the fact that each aspect among the three “is in a relationship with the other two” (Shields 1999: 161). “Time” not only refers to duration of time and understanding of the past, present and future, but also to history and to the

temporal perspective of memory. “Space” is not regarded as something abstract, but is considered through a conceptual framework closer to human and cultural geography’s delineation of the pair-concepts of space and place, wherein the former is more free and open while the latter is more humanized or imbued with meaning (Tuan 1977; Cresswell 2004). Here, by “space” I am also referring to the spatial politics, power relationships, including political-economic and socio-cultural relationships, that are embedded in space and place. Furthermore, “space” includes concepts such as “public space”, “spatial justice” and “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1996; Mitchell 2003; Soja 2010; Harvey 2003, 2013). “Identity” is used as a broad descriptive term to include the theoretical concepts of “identity” and “subjectivity”. The difference between “identity” and “subjectivity” will be discussed in a later part of this chapter section. Again, I am not proposing to offer philosophical debates<sup>17</sup> on Lefebvre’s theories or the Lefebvrian understanding of heritage. My intention is rather to borrow those of Lefebvre’s insights that help to articulate some useful techniques for understanding heritage preservation, which may then be brought into dialogue with this dissertation’s major concern: that of *how postcolonial heritage preservation can function as an actual decolonization project*.

Modern European philosophy has been criticized for its conceptual rupture between time and space, and more acutely for the imbalance of this split, determined by the overwhelming importance granted to time and history. As argued by Michel Foucault, “time” has been the main subject for European philosophers since Immanuel Kant, while in contrast, “space” is largely tackled by political technology and scientific practice (Goonewardena *et al.*, eds. 2008). This imbalance has frequently led to the association of societies and social relationships with “time” or “historical development” rather than spatial terms. One major problem of such association is the reduction of multiple co-existing modernities to different temporal points of a singular, linear occidentalist modernity. To undo this imbalance and to rebalance the temporal (historical) and spatial (geographical) elements of thinking, some geographers such as Edward Soja are eager to see a “spatial turn”. Soja argues that in order to achieve this, one should aim for the temporal and strategic “privileging of the spatial perspective over all others”, “putting space first as the primary discursive and explanatory focus”

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<sup>17</sup> See Shields (1999), Elden (2004), Merrifield (2006), Goonewardena *et al.*, eds. (2008), Stanek (2011), Butler (2012), etc. for close readings and theoretical dialogues with Lefebvre.

(2010: 17). However, if one agrees that the time-space split is problematic, might not such a strategy, still based on this binary opposition, be equally problematic? As Soja acknowledges,

[...] *we are just as much spatial as temporal beings*, [...] our existential spatiality and temporality are essentially or ontologically coequal, equivalent in explanatory power and behavioral significance, interwoven in a mutually formative relation. Human life is in every sense spatio-temporal, geo-historical, without time or space, history or geography, being inherently privileged on its own.

(Soja 2010: 16)

In short, time (history) and space (geography, place) co-exist and are experienced together by human beings. Sense of time and sense of space mutually affect each other. People's sense of a place becomes more specific as time passes. The distance between two places is often measured in terms of time that one needs to take to travel (Tuan 1977). Even if one does not think in theoretical terms but in ordinary language, one says of something that happens that it "takes *place*". This means that time and space should be understood and articulated together, and not separated. To achieve this requires getting rid of the fundamental binary split between time and space, rather than merely attempting a strategic or temporal reversal of their hierarchical order. As Stuart Elden argues, "a privileging of geography and space is no solution." (2001: 3) Rather, there is a need to think of time and space together.

It is in this context I bring in Lefebvre's theories on time and space. Lefebvre does not privilege time over space, or vice versa. For Lefebvre, "time" and "space" are a pair of relational concepts and cannot be separated.<sup>18</sup> Neither time nor space should be treated as the "opposite" or "inferior" of the other. "Space" does not exist independently "in itself" but is "produced". Accordingly, "space" is "the synchronic order of social reality", while "time" "denotes the diachronic order and thus the historical process of social production" (Schmid 2008: 29). In his famous *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre argues that when space is evoked, it is within a specific temporal frame. There is always a history for every social space. Time, on the other

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<sup>18</sup> Elden (2001), Massey (2005), May and Thrift (2001), etc. also theorize ways to articulate time and space together.

hand, is apprehended and inscribed in space. If time or space is treated as isolated, he argues, they will become “empty abstraction” (1991: 12). As time and space are a pair of related concepts and cannot be treated separately, they need to be thought together. Change in temporal perspective is also a change in spatial perspective. Likewise, a change in spatial perspective is also a change in temporal perspective. The time-space dialectic, or more accurately the trialectic between time, space and something else, such as everyday life or energy, is central to many of Lefebvre’s works. For instance, in *The Urban Revolution*, he explains that the process of “urbanization” is “both spatial and temporal” as it “extends through space” (spatial) and “develops over time” (temporal) (Lefebvre 2003: 7). If time and space are interrelated and dialectic, then an understanding of time or space must mutually affect the understanding of the other. As mentioned earlier, “heritage preservation” is a product of modernity. The process of modernization and certain concepts created by modernization can also be used to demonstrate how, in an understanding of time and space, each affects the understanding of the other.

David Lowenthal (1985), for instance, argues that in pre-modern times people seldom differentiated the present from the past as sharply as they began to in modernity. Stated reasons for such a transformation in perception include the following well-known narratives of modernity: recently-built arcades used a completely different set of building materials; the numbers of strangers one met were much greater than people had experienced before modernization; people needed to adapt to highly unfamiliar environments. Such uncertainty towards the future made one yearn for the past, even though it might be an imaginary past. In this context, a new meaning of “nostalgia” emerged. “Nostalgia” no longer meant homesickness but yearning for the past. Lowenthal argues that modernization changes the environment so drastically that people begin to think of “the past” as something as different, “as a foreign country”. This clear differentiation between the present and the past, which modernity creates, is the basis of heritage preservation in modern times. People’s realization of the drastic pace of spatial change – evident not least in changing landscapes and other metamorphoses of the environment, and in the increasing numbers of strangers one met – affected their understanding of time: to restate, people began to experience and understand the present as something different from the past, thus allowing for the experience of yearning for the past. And this changed understanding of time also,

demonstrably, affected the understanding of space.

Besides the interrelated understanding of time and space, Lefebvre's other important concept for this dissertation is the "trialectic". Note that Lefebvre himself does not use the exact *term* "trialectic" but rather other terms such as "threefold dialectic", "dialectic of triplicate" (*dialectique de triplicité*, quoted in Shields 1999: 160), "dialectical relationship [...] within the triad" (1991: 39). Rather, it was other theorists such as Edward Soja (1996) and Rob Shields (1999) who came to name Lefebvre's development of dialectic as the "trialectic". In his work on the "trialectic", Lefebvre (1968) goes beyond the Hegelian and Marxist dialectic and develops the concept of dialectic in a way influenced by the circular Nietzschean models of *überwinden* ("overcoming") and the "eternal return". He emphasizes that dialectic should be understood in three terms rather than two. For Lefebvre, relations between two elements easily lead to binary oppositions, contrasts and antagonisms. If conventional understanding of the dialectic is in terms of "affirmation – negation – negation of the negation", Lefebvre emphasizes the possibilities of the "negation of the negation", which goes beyond affirmation-negation dualism, and can thereby break out again. For Lefebvre, the third term is not merely the result of the dialectic between the other two term; instead, the three terms affect one other. None of the three terms are prioritized, but each needs the other two to support itself and to create meaning. Furthermore, the "third term" is understood as "already there" in order for the "dialectic" to work. Thus, Lefebvre's "dialectic" is actually a "trialectic" (Lefebvre 1991; Shields 1999; Elden 2004; Goonewardena *et al.*, eds. 2008). The clearest example of how the Lefebvrian trialectic works is to be found in his model of the "spatial triad", in *The Production of Space* (1991), which consists of "spatial practice" (perceived space), "representation of space" (conceptualized or conceived space), and "spaces of representation" (lived space). All of these interact and interrelate in social spatializations. In the process of the production of space, Lefebvre argues, all of these three elements contribute differently, and their relationships are neither simple nor stable. Besides the "spatial triad", Lefebvre's use of three terms, constitutive of a "triadic analysis", as the basis of discussions is common: "space – time – energy" and "melody – harmony – rhythm" are two such groupings (Lefebvre 2004). Going back to the question of time and space and the understanding of a "third term" as "already there", the dialectic relationship of time and space would necessarily imply, and develop into,

a trialectic relationship of time, space, and something else. In Lefebvre's works, this "something else" is named as "energy" or "everyday life", amongst other formulations. What, then, is the "something else" in this dissertation, with its focus on heritage?

In the Lefebvrian trialectic, the "third term", to restate an important point, already exists. In the earlier discussion of time and space, I do not refer to abstract notions. Rather, I often refer to the "understanding" or "sense" of time and space in a social context. Thus, what already "exists there", in the understanding of time and space, is the "subject", "the agency of statements and acts" (Venn 2006: 78). Someone's identity, not in individualist terms but in group or collective terms, is informed by a particular understanding of time and space. Thus, one's sense of time and space often reinforces a sense of identity, which is also related closely to the concept of "collective memory" that I will discuss in the next section. Yet at the same time, a specific identity also reinforces the understanding of time and space. Taking the modern nation-state as an example, as Benedict Anderson (1983, 2006) argues, the "nation" is an "imagined political community"; no one in the nation can really know every other member, but one imagines that they are in communion. In order to sustain this "imagined community", the nation-state requires the invention of various traditions, such as national symbols and myths which can be said to have continuity with the historic past, and maps to represent and clearly define the national boundary so that people can imagine a "we" in the same nation (Hobsbawm 1983). Here time (history) and space (national boundary) shape and frame how one identifies with, or at least, how the state wants their nationals to identify with the nation-state. As discussed earlier, the relationship of time, space and identity is not simple and stable. It is not only that time and space affect how identity is negotiated; identity can also affect how time and space are negotiated in turn. The past is often non-coherent, chaotic and contingent. In order to create a common national identity, the nation-state needs individuals in the nation to forget many things (Renan 1996). Thus, in order to identify as a nation, history and what happened in the past must be reduced to one particular version. The narration of history, which is a selective reconstruction of the past according to a particular, often linear, perspective, is an essential part in many nation-building projects (Duara 1995; Wang, Q. E. 2001). Identity, as, in this context, the national identity, also implies one's perception of whether a certain piece of land belongs to the nation or not. In this sense, identity affects how time and space are understood. Thus, in the example of historical

narrative, the building of national identity narrates a particular version of how the national history and national boundaries (time and space) should be understood.

Until this point, the term “identity” has been used as a broad descriptive term, whose scope has also covered the associated ideas of agency and subjectivity. In order to propose a critical approach to articulating heritage preservation, however, identity politics, which is often understood as pertaining to a fixed “being” which operates in terms of being “not something”, i.e. of binary opposition, is inadequate. There is thus the need to differentiate “subjectivity” and “identity” in a critical analytical sense. Venn defines subjectivity as “the entity constituted as a position with regard to *real* processes and mechanisms of constitution of subjects generally”, in which “[t]he ‘who’ is the agent who takes responsibility for his or her action [...] and recognizes him or herself as the person who is answerable by reference to an ethical imperative or a demand from another” (2006:79, my emphasis). In short, subjectivity often requires the subject’s critical reflexivity. Law Wing Sang makes it even more explicit that the development of subjectivity requires one to resist servility, dependency and the tendencies of a docile subject. Social movements and democratization movements that provide spaces for one to be critically reflexive on these issues simultaneously constitute the very spaces in which subjectivity can emerge, spaces which are therefore essential for decolonization and for the development of a mature civil society (Law 2004a, 2004b; Hui, P. K. 2006). Identity, on the other hand, denotes “the *relational aspects* that qualify subjects in terms of categories [...] and thus in terms of acknowledged social relations and affiliation to groups”; the categories are “correlated to particular performative practices and routines of action [...] in which identities are instantiated” (Venn 2006: 79 – 80, my emphasis).

Subjectivity and identity are interrelated, but identity is not subjectivity. In truth, of course, it is difficult for people to escape totally from categories and group identities such as race, ethnic group, gender, sexuality, etc. Especially in public discourses and social movement mobilizations, “identity” and “subjectivity” are often bound in a seemingly inextricable manner. What is important, however, is whether the process of constructing these “identities” could help to constitute subjects that are critically reflexive within the power structures that determine a society. Are the constructions of these “identities” purely based on categorical notions? Do these notions of “identities” allow space for transformation, hybridization and critical reflection? Do the

constructions of these “identities” reinforce a dominant understanding or provide an alternative understanding of time and space? In other words, is the mobilization of identity constructive in creating a critical awareness and consciousness?

Heritage preservation movements often mobilize or construct “identities”. But what does the term “identities”, in relation to such movements, actually signify? As Castells remarks, “[N]o identity can be an essence, and no identity has, per se, progressive or regressive value, outside its historical context.” (2010: 8) Usually within the heritage preservation movement, the “local identity”, mobilized and constructed as a public discourse, would lead to critical reflections on history, political-economic and socio-cultural situations, as I will demonstrate in later chapters. In other words, there is an active engagement with, and reflection on, time and space; in due process, people also become subjects. This is what Castells describes as “project identity”, where social actors use the available cultural materials, here heritage, to “build a new identity that redefines their position in society and [...] seek the transformation of overall social structure.” (2010: 8) In this sense, “identity”, as used in these heritage preservation movements, indeed implies the creation of a critical subject, even though sometimes discourses of identity politics need to be strategically mobilized. I will come back to this point when I discuss the radical version of collective memory in the next chapter section.

To push Lefebvre’s reconfiguration of “dialectic” via “three terms” a step further, the so-called totalizing “analytical synthesis” of the Lefebvrian trialectic would lie in a fourth term (Shields 1999: 120). To apply this to this debate: “time”, “space” and “identity” are the three interrelated terms. Changing any one of these would affect the other two. “Heritage” is to be understood and to be analyzed as a “synthesis”, or “negation” of the negations among time – space – identity. The time – space – identity trialectic helps one to understand the reasons and operations for someone to preserve something. To discuss the time and space of heritage also implies a position of identity. As the process of the construction of identity is a site of contest – the question, for example, of *whose* version of identity is always at stake – heritage is therefore also a site of contest. As outlined earlier in this chapter, “decolonization” is resistance to the whole structure of coloniality and a process to allow the colonized people to critically reflect on colonial history, and colonial political-economic and socio-cultural

relationships. It is also a process to constitute reflexive subjects, without simply replacing a state's version of elitism with another one. Thus, beyond its understanding in purely temporal or economic terms, heritage preservation as a *decolonization* project could be understood as a process that helps one to critically reflect on one's relationship with time and space: heritage preservation is a process or a project that constitutes critical subjects.

### **1.3 Accessing Heritage: A Trace of Collective Memory: Depoliticized and Radicalized Versions**

The previous section demonstrated that this dissertation refuses to submit to the binary time-space split and argues that heritage should be understood and analyzed in terms of the trialectic relationship of time, space and identity. In this section, I will bring trialectic relations to bear on the understanding of collective memory, another notion closely related to heritage preservation, in order to distinguish between two versions of collective memory, namely the depoliticized and the radicalized versions. These distinctions are useful to help to articulate a postcolonial reading of collective memory and thus to clarify what is at stake in a postcolonial heritage preservation. "Memory" is not equivalent to the "past" or "history". The "past" cannot be narrated and articulated without the operation of "remembrance" and "forgetting". As Walter Benjamin suggests in his essay *On the Concept of History*, "To articulate the past does not mean to recognize 'how it was.' It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger." (2005: VI) In contrast to the view that "memory" is "subjective" while "history" is "objective", I take the stance that history is a particular version of such control of memory, such "remembrance" and "forgetting", in order to fulfill a particular understanding from the position "here-and-now" (Benjamin 2005; Samuel 1994). In general, even at the most local level, most states, from colonizers' to nation-states, want to monopolize assumptions about time and space, memory, history and the interpretation of the past (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy 2011). Ranajit Guha, for instance, criticizes the narration of Indian history as having been long dominated by "colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism" (1988b: 37), which try to explain the making of modern India as predominately the achievement of either the colonial rulers or nationalist elites. Alternative memories and interpretations of the past are either oppressed, ignored, or appropriated and subsumed into the state's version. Thus, to

uphold alternative versions of memories, to refuse to forget what the state or the dominant narrative demand be forgotten, is the act of a people that refuses such subsumption; and it is here that resistance can begin.

Here, “memory” is understood as not merely personal but as “collective memory”; this concept is largely traceable to Maurice Halbwachs’ landmark 1925 work *Social Frameworks of Memory*, a text largely forgotten until the 1970s and 1980s, and absent even today from many theoretical employments of “collective memory”<sup>19</sup> (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy 2011). Halbwachs, who incidentally supervised Lefebvre’s doctoral dissertation in the 1940s, articulates “memory” not as a merely individual phenomenon but as working in a specific group or social framework, in a particular *time* and *space*. He argues that individuals can only remember coherently and persistently in a group, i.e. a “collective” context or “social framework”, like family, religious and social groups. Neither the individuals nor the groups remember, but individuals *as* group members remember. He argues that memories hang together not because they are contiguous in time, but because they exist within the totality and relation of a group’s common thoughts. These memories are framed not only as the past but also as working within the present. They are also variable. Without the “group contexts” or “social frameworks” of memory, it is impossible for the individual to construct his or her memory. “Collective memory” does not go beyond the boundaries of the “group”, yet this does not mean that every individual in the group remembers the same things, or in the same way (Halbwachs 1980, 1992; Stanek 2011; Whitehead 2009). In constructing his theory of “collective memory”, Halbwachs emphasizes the importance of the spatial framework which allows the groups to “enclose and retrieve” the memory (Halbwachs 1980: 137). In short, for Halbwachs, “memory” has both temporal and spatial dimensions. The social frameworks tied to *what and how one recalls* (identity) are inevitably shaped by time and space, and at the same time themselves shape the understanding of time and space.

In contrast with some later applications of his theory, Halbwachs excludes “national memory” from the “essence” of “collective memory”. He believes that

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<sup>19</sup> See Gedi and Elam (1996), Erll and Nünning, eds. (2010), Rossington and Whitehead, eds. (2007), Whitehead (2009) Radstone and Schwarz, eds. (2010), Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy, eds. (2011), etc. for more on “memory studies”.

“collective memory” functions within more restricted groups. In other words, the Halbwachsian collective memory is the memory of various collectives rather than that of the state (Winter 2012). For Halbwachs, “collective memory” is not to be understood in singular terms; rather, individuals are situated in multiple “groups” or “social frameworks”. Thus, “collective memories” are also indicators of social differences (Hagen 2006; Marcel and Mucchielli 2010; Olick 2007, 2010). When nation-states become so dominant that they oppress or exclude alternative identifications and histories, Halbwachs’ notion of “collective memory” beyond nation-states might be where the possibility of resistance lies on. Whether this could become real resistance depends on whether this “collective memory” is a depoliticized or a radicalized one. Depoliticized does not mean apolitical. The interpretation of the past and its political-economic and socio-cultural relationships is political. Depoliticization operates through the mediation of ideas that purport to be “neutral” and not “political”, such as “culture” or “aesthetic”. Yet such supposedly “neutral” and apolitical terms can also be very political. Even what Nora (1996a, 1996b) names as “dominant *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory)” such as archives, anniversaries, national monuments, antiquities and relics in the museums, which are “extremely ideological, full of nationalism, and far from being neutral or free of value judgement” and which “were created, invented, or reworked to serve the nation-states” (den Boer 2010: 21), can be presented as “apolitical”. Their status as celebrations of history and power can be ignored, allowing these sites to be presented as something “grand” and “beautiful”, without touching the negative aspects of the past (Perry, Kong and Yeoh 1997). This can be called “depoliticized politics” (Wang, H. 2008). However, not only the ruling class and the elites manipulate depoliticization; resistance movements can also make use of seemingly “neutral” and “apolitical” notions such as memory, culture and heritage to smuggle in a more radical agenda.<sup>20</sup> I will return to this point when I discuss the radicalized version of collective memory further on in this chapter section and will propose how seemingly “depoliticized” notions of cultural heritage could be smuggling in more radical ideas that challenge dominant social paradigms and decision-making processes in Chapter 4. Thus, consideration of whether any version of “collective

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<sup>20</sup> “Radical” refers to progressive ideas and resistance to exploitation, oppression and control (Szeto 2004). Although the agents of radicalism are often non-state actors, the colonial and postcolonial states and their dominant ideologies are not the only exploitation and control that radicals want to resist. Throughout this dissertation, I will demonstrate how radicalism tries to resist colonialism, (ethno)nationalism, racism, global capitalism and historiography dominated by the elites. Not all of the exploitation and oppression are brought by state agents.

memory” is a depoliticized or a radicalized one should not be based on what notions are being used. Rather this should open into a deeper analysis, in which the trialectic relations of time – space – identity discussed before could be useful.

Besides the above-mentioned conscious depoliticization of dominant and national *lieux de mémoire*, there is an unconscious depoliticized, unarticulated, uncritical version of “collective memory” in popular use. This unarticulated and uncritical version of “collective memory” is synonymous with a de-politicized and de-historicized version of “nostalgia”, often a yearning for an ideal and mythical past, the so-called “good old days”, as symbolized by vintage cars, old popular songs and TV dramas. Here “old” is of course relative, and may mean as little as two decades ago. Generally, this usually happens because people are discontent with the present or uncertain about the future. This “nostalgia for the (ideal) past” seldom goes beyond such yearning and rarely spurs action to change social reality. However it can be easily appropriated by capitalists to commodify such yearning for the “memory industry” (Lowenthal 1985; Wong 2010; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy 2011). This happens because such yearning is usually for a past without pain. The uneasiness in the past, power relationships, issues of political-economy and the socio-cultural embedded in the space are ignored. A “memory” of the poor population can be sanitized for the enjoyment of the rich. The sanitization means that the social relationship embedded in the space is distorted. Thus, the “past” is also distorted for the sake of another group of people. This “memory industry” is easily recognizable in the sanitized preservation of vernacular architecture.

An example is a pawn shop in Hong Kong being converted into a high-end restaurant, and named “The Pawn”. In the now high-end restaurant, there are billboards and signs of pawn shops in Hong Kong. Originally, of course, pawn shops would not figure amongst the memories of the high-end restaurant goers. Pawn shops are places where the poor go when they are nearly broken. In the spatial layout, there is a wooden screen (*ze cau baan* 遮醜板, literally “board for covering up blemishes”) to make people feel less embarrassed (Pang and Lam 2005; Ma 2010; Ip 2010). However, when the pawn shop was converted into “The Pawn”, the socio-cultural relation embedded in the “space”, in its original context, is removed and distorted. Now, capital has re-colonized the space. The poor people who once used this space can no longer afford access and

thus are excluded. Those who can afford to are those who have not known the desperation and embarrassment of visiting a pawn shop. Indeed when they go into the high-end restaurant they do not feel embarrassed. When that socio-cultural relation embedded in the “space” is removed and distorted, the understanding of “time” and those “subjects” at the pawn shop / “The Pawn” also change. The “memory” and the past of the poor population, once more, are sanitized for the enjoyment of the rich. Such a depoliticized notion of “collective memory” is problematic because it is too easily commodified and thus de-contextualized. It happens mainly because the spatial politics are often either ignored, or consciously suppressed and thus the past is all too easily sanitized. For those visiting “The Pawn”, such a depoliticized, sanitized and commodified memory of the poor provides them with an “exotic” experience. This “exotic” experience, however, would not provide them any deeper understanding of the place, or of the living experience of the poor. Rather, the creation of this “exotic” experience can only be founded upon social distance (May 1996). Even though those who can afford to go there to experience it are not necessarily tourists, their way of seeing is not much different than the “tourist gaze” (Urry 1990, 2002). People have become tourists in the city in which they live. When the depoliticized collective memory is commodified and people are turned into tourists, the “exchange value” of time and space is prioritized. The right to go there is no more than an example of what Lefebvre (1996) regards as “pseudo-rights”, which cannot transform and renew the urban life. The over-emphasis on the temporal perspective of “memory”, to the neglect of the spatial perspective, makes room – particularly in the context of heritage – for the commodification of the past, but not for critical reflection.

In contrast to this depoliticized collective memory which does not provide space for critical reflections on history, spatial politics or identity, and is thus unlikely to make way for decolonizing heritage preservation projects, this dissertation wants to argue for the importance of radicalized collective memory, as something less likely to be abused than depoliticized collective memory. Radicalized collective memory is usually place-based memory and arouses an active engagement with history and place-attachment. Thus, it construes meaning to a place, and transforms collective memory into action. To illustrate radicalized collective memory, I will use the examples of the reconstruction of Warsaw Old Town and the practices of “community building”.

During the Nazi occupation in World War II, Warsaw was scheduled to be destroyed according to the Nazi plan. After the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, Warsaw was almost completely, systematically destroyed. Such acts by the Nazis were an attempt not only to “annihilate” the Poles through murder, but also to oppress their memories, through the destruction of architecture. Before the destruction of Warsaw, some prominent Varsovian architects and students had secretly prepared plans for the reconstruction of Warsaw; they documented many important buildings. After World War II, most of the destroyed Warsaw was rebuilt with new, modern and even Soviet-style buildings. Yet the historical centre or “Old Town” was reconstructed in its historical pre-war form. It was a deliberate choice for both the surviving Varsovians and the post-war Soviet regimes. For the surviving Varsovians, they needed to reconstruct the old town dating from centuries before the World War II to prove that they would not be defeated by the Nazis, and also as a form of “moral resistance” to the Soviets, symbolized by their architecture. The reconstruction of the “Old Town” symbolized the rebirth of the nation and a post-trauma recovery. From the Soviet government’s perspective, they needed to show the legitimacy of Soviet rule in Poland by relating themselves to the old Warsaw and Poland, and by downplaying their own responsibilities for the destruction of Warsaw.<sup>21</sup> They hoped that the reconstruction according to a pre-war style would transform the people’s perspective on the Soviets (Murawski 2009; Kane 2011). The process of reconstruction relied on the secretly-stored plans and drafts, and various archives, photographs and documents. The government also set up places to collect the inhabitants’ own old photos, postcards and memories of the cityscape (Kane 2011; Gu 2010; Wang, Z. 2012). Putting aside the state’s political agenda, the process of the reconstruction of Warsaw demonstrated Varsovians’ collective remembrance of the past, of how the city was. It was a process of active engagement with the history and the space. The result of this collective remembrance, together with other collective documentation efforts, became part of the reconstruction plan. It can be understood as, to a certain extent, a process of participatory planning. Although the post-war Soviet government had their own agenda for the reconstruction, one cannot conclude that the reconstruction was a merely top-

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<sup>21</sup> The Warsaw Uprising in 1944 aimed at driving out the Nazis and liberating Warsaw before the Soviet Red Army’s arrival. The Soviet did not support the Uprising. During the Uprising, the Soviet army near Warsaw was waiting in silence. They only entered Warsaw after many Varsovians were murdered and Warsaw was destroyed by the Nazis. Nowadays many Poles still do not regard the Soviet expulsion of the Nazis as “liberation” (Kane 2011; Tucker 2011).

down process. The Varsovians also actively demanded to engage in the reconstruction. The collective act of remembering how the city was became integral to the mobilization of the “participatory planning” process. In this sense, the “collective memory” was transformed into action and contributed in the formation of an identity: however one might dispute the actual processes involved, the project itself symbolized the forging of an identity in which the remembrance of pre-war Warsaw (and indeed Poland) was central.

As mentioned earlier, the state had important roles in the process of the collective remembrance and reconstruction of Warsaw Old Town. As the Old Town was destroyed by the Nazis, necessitating reconstruction, it was not, however, heritage preservation in the strict sense. To consider further bottom-up, radical mobilization of memory and heritage, which, in the process, constitute more critical and radical understandings of time, space and identity, “community building” is a good example, one which illustrates how and why radicalized collective memory is important. Some of the community-based heritage preservation movements discussed in later chapters in this dissertation can also be articulated within the tradition of community building. “Community building” is also known as “(progressive) community planning” (Angotti 2008), “community empowerment” (Craig and Mayo, eds. 1995), “community participation” (Nicholson and Schreiner 1973) or “community architecture” (Wates and Knevitt 1987). Related practices in Japan are known as *machizukuri* まちづくり<sup>22</sup> (Nishimura 2007; Sorensen and Funck, eds. 2009), and in Taiwan as 社區營造 (*shequ yingzao* in Mandarin, *siā-khu êng-chō* in Taiwanese Hokkien, *sa-ki in-co* in Taiwanese Hakka, literally “community building”) (Tseng 2007). The phenomenon of “community building” in different places may have very different backgrounds. It can be initiated as resistance to the threat of community displacement due to bulldozing, urban renewal projects or demolition of important landmarks; resistance to environmental threats; defending or asserting local identity being minimized by the nation; to revive a local economy, etc. Generally, “community building” projects start as urban social movements. Class compositions in these movements are often mixed, with both working-class and middle-class involvement.. Thus, conventional class analysis is not

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<sup>22</sup> The Japanese term *machizukuri* is combined with *machi* まち, a word with multiple meanings, from streets (*Kanji*: 街), or towns (*Kanji*: 町), or simply where people inhabit, and thus “community”; and *zukuri* づくり, which means “building” and “making”.

particularly useful in articulating these urban social movements and community building projects (Castells 1983; Samuel 1994; Hsia 2008b; Tseng 2007; Nishimura 2007). Here, “community” is not simply a group of people living in the same neighborhood or town. Rather, as Tseng Shu-cheng 曾旭正 (1997: 14 – 19) argues, a community should be understood as a neighbourhood with a sense of community, which includes social and psychological bonding, and needs to be built up; “community building” is a process intended to build up a “sense of community” among members, and between members and the environment, in the neighbourhood, through concrete actions. Accordingly, community building projects include projects satisfying the common needs of the people in the community: the making use of, digging up, revival and development of community histories and cultures; the protection and sustainable development of community environments and landscapes; the sustainable development of local products, etc. In other words, community building projects mobilize and reshape the community’s understandings of local histories and of the relations that arise between such understandings. Through such processes, the community actively engages with and re-articulates history and place, which reinforces their place-attachment and sense of community.

During such mobilizing and organizing processes, especially those which have emerged in resistance to bulldozing urban renewal projects and acts of community displacement, local histories and local collective memories, which are often suppressed by (nation-)states and undermined by developmentalists, become important resources to be mobilized for building up a sense of community. Castells calls this “resistance identity” that “[builds] trenches of resistance” and “project identity” that “redefines their position in society” (2010: 8). In the process, important buildings and landmarks, whether grand or vernacular in style, and which may have been, and continue to be ignored by the state, are collectively identified by the community as important *lieux de mémoire*. Quite often, the protection of these buildings and landmarks from demolition counts among the most vocal demands of such movements, and becomes central to the momentum of community building. The discovery of such (suppressed and dominated) collective community memories is important for making “place” meaningful and, building a “sense of community”. “Collective memory” helps the members of the community in identifying that they *are* “a community”, with common interests and experiences, which cannot be reduced in purely economic terms. A community identity

is thus created. This “sense of community” strengthens the community’s relationship with the place (place-attachment) and mobilizes its members to discover still more suppressed or ignored histories and memories. As the new sense of community actively engages with this new understanding of the histories and the environments, further bottom-up histories that may differ from the state’s top-down one are likely to emerge (Castells 2010; Hsia 2008a; Nishimura 2007). Thus, in community building, radicalized collective memory not only turns memory into action, serving as a resource for mobilization and community building, but also transforms one’s relations with time, space and identity. If such a transformation goes progressively and radically, it should be directed towards the radicalization of histories and the implementation of demands for spatial justice; moreover, it should catalyze the emergence of a more critical identity. Besides, memory, place attachment and sense of community are notions disassociated with “exchange value” and property regimes. The mobilization of the radicalized collective memory thus creates a possible resistance to the understanding of urban space purely in terms of ownership and property. Although the state might also attempt to depoliticize and de-radicalize such processes, such as by institutionalizing them without respecting their spirit, radicalized collective memory nonetheless holds more possibilities for movement in progressive and radical directions than depoliticized collective memory.

I have just illustrated the differences between depoliticized collective memory and radicalized collective memory. Depoliticized collective memory often forgets the spatial dimension of memory, and the role of the people attached to the “memory” is often passive, if not ignored. It is easily sanitized of pain and commodified. It does not challenge the state’s version of “progress” and historical development; it arouses a feeling of “the good old days” rather than transforming one into a more critical subject. In contrast, radicalized collective memory not only concerns the temporal perspective of memory, but also the spatial perspective and the people attached to it. Here, there is the active interpretation of space; the people attached to the memory are often active agents in the process of transforming memory into action. Thus, it has the potential to change the people involved into critical subjects. Radicalized collective memory does not mean replacing one state’s memory with another state’s memory, although the state’s version can also be appropriated. The state and capitalists, on the other hand, may also attempt to appropriate the once-suppressed and neglected collective memory;

thus, radicalized collective memory does not necessarily guarantee a critical and radical outcome. Nevertheless, it contributes to a diversified understanding of time, space and identity, creating the necessary conditions for more critical and radical subjects, where depoliticized collective memory is far less likely to do so. Whether radical collective memory can help to create radical subjects and radicalize the wider society must necessarily depend on the reflexivity of the subjects in question.

As discussed earlier, the “postcolonial” is also a critical self-reflexive process that requires one to reflect upon one’s relations with time (history) and space (the place and the social relationships); such reflection is necessary for critical and radical subjects. In this sense, radicalized collective memory, which creates more possibilities, makes the creation of a decolonizing subject more possible. Likewise, heritage preservation that mobilizes radicalized collective memory paves the way for decolonizing heritage preservation projects. This distinction between depoliticized collective memory and radicalized collective memory aids a more critical analysis of the operation of different heritage preservation projects. Alongside the understanding of heritage in terms of the trialectic relationship of time, space and identity, the differentiation of different versions of collective memory is central to this dissertation’s discussions of various actual scenarios of heritage preservation in selected cities, as I will outline in forthcoming sections.

#### **1.4 Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang: Background, Reasons for Selection and Methods of Data Collection**

In the previous sections, I laid out the dissertation’s major concern, the operative understanding of “heritage” and “decolonization”, and the dissertation’s guiding theoretical frameworks. As this dissertation is positioned in Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, and since the practice of inter-referencing will be carried out, this dissertation will not discuss heritage preservation city by city. Rather this dissertation will take a thematic approach. In the following chapters, the major research question of how postcolonial heritage preservation can function as a decolonization project will be illustrated via several thematic approaches. In each chapter, cases of particular local sites related to the specific theme will be read and interpreted, and the relationships between such local examples will be brought under discussion. In this section, I am going to briefly

introduce the background of the three Southeast Asian cities, Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang, from which the case studies that illustrate my argument are drawn, and I will discuss how data are collected. Note however, that the concerns of this dissertation are not limited to these three cities but are, I will argue, applicable to other postcolonial societies facing similar situations.

As introduced earlier, this dissertation was initiated by exigent local concerns in my hometown Hong Kong, and I rethink such local concerns by engaging with other “locales”. Hong Kong, now a Special Administrative Region (SAR) under the People’s Republic of China (PRC), is made up of three major parts: Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories, including the outlying islands. When I was in primary school, before the handover in 1997, I was taught that Hong Kong is located in Southeast Asia. Yet, after 1997, the imagined location of Hong Kong shifted northwards, to the southern tip of China; Hong Kong as part of Southeast Asia was seldom mentioned officially.<sup>23</sup> The problem of such a northward retraction is that it easily makes people forget Hong Kong’s relationship with Southeast Asia and other parts of Asia. In this dissertation, I still regard Hong Kong as part of Southeast Asia, as it has been understood historically and climatically.

Before the handover, Hong Kong was a British colony, functioning as a trading port similar to Singapore and Penang. The current territory known as “Hong Kong” was ceded and leased to Britain by the Qing government in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Endacott 1995). The British occupation of Hong Kong Island in 1841 is generally known as *hoi fau* 開埠, literally “opening of the port.” Hong Kong is an immigrant society, made up of immigrants not only from China, but also Southeast Asia and other parts of the world, since it was founded as a colonial port city. The majority of the population is ethnic Chinese, and although the non-Chinese population also contributed much to the building of the city and the defense of Hong Kong during wartime, they have long been treated as “others”.

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<sup>23</sup> For instance, in Hong Kong government’s Educational Television program about Hong Kong’s geography for Primary 4 students made in 2002, Hong Kong was described as a southern coastal city of China, rather than in Southeast Asia. The video can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPReT8fuvlk>

In the post-war period, even as the economic orientation of Hong Kong has gradually changed, the logic of developmentalism still dominates. The cultural policy of the colonial government in the 1950s and 1960s is generally described as that of “non-intervention” (Chin *et al.*, 1998). From its establishment, the PRC did not give up on retaining sovereignty of Hong Kong; Hong Kong was a place where both the Communists and *Kuomintang* struggled for support. The British colonial government understood that the close relationship between the Hong Kong “residents” and the two Chinese political parties would create chaos for them. Yet, in the eyes of Britain, Hong Kong could be used as a pawn for furthering British interests in negotiations with China. Thus, the British colonial government would encourage a depoliticized form of local belonging and projected a narrative of Hong Kong’s disciplined good citizens, but denied the possibility of self-government or that of an autonomous Hong Kong (Law 2014b; Sham 2009). The possibility of an independent postcolonial Hong Kong or of self-determination was denied by both the PRC and Britain. In the process of Sino-British negotiation about Hong Kong’s future, Hong Kong was also excluded. The 1997 handover did not make an end of colonialism and coloniality. Rather, the British, Chinese and the colonial governments all advocated and contributed to the political rhetoric of “stable transition”. In order to do so, these governments tried to reduce Hong Kong and Hong Kongers into an “economic success”, whose continued stability would be the foremost concern of its inhabitants. The doomed, passive “reunion” with China, rather than catalyzing an active self-determining future, meant only the further delay of the decolonization project in Hong Kong (Law 2009, 2014a, 2014b).

However, at the elite level, above the traditional Communist networks in Hong Kong, the PRC government also adopted from the British a colonial strategy of co-opting different collaborators, ranging from business elites, professionals and civil servants to rural village heads and even, allegedly, the triads. These collaborators, like their precedents, actively made use of their “loyalty”, which could shift from London to Beijing, to further their own interests.<sup>24</sup> Many ethnic Chinese developers replaced

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<sup>24</sup> In the process, some collaborators consciously and deliberately get rid of traits of the “disloyal” pasts (Law 2006, 2007, 2008). One of the examples is Donald Tsang Yam-kuen 曾蔭權, the second Chief Executive of Hong Kong SAR, who was a civil servant trained in the colonial government and conferred the Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (KBE). He deliberately dropped the “Sir” style and KBE order after the handover (Poole 1997; Landler 2001). I will elaborate more on collaborative colonialism in later sections and chapters.

their British counterparts and expanded in the 1980s and 1990s to become key players in global capitalism. Their expansion could be explained to a certain extent by the fact that they took part in this collaborative colonialism. However, these elites are not a unified group; there are conflicted interests among the collaborators, between the collaborators and Beijing and their different factions, between the collaborators and Hong Kong SAR government, and between the collaborators and the traditional Communist networks (Goodstadt 2009; Law 2009; Tsui, Ng and Yick 2012; Vines 1998). Thus, the “top-down” policy of Hong Kong government has often been, and is still often the result of conflicts, contests and negotiations between the state(s) and the collaborating elites; the traditional Communist networks would become but another actor in such negotiations after the handover. The result of all this, however, is that ordinary Hong Kong people are consistently excluded from the decision-making process regarding policies pertinent to them, despite the PRC’s discourse of “Hong Kong people running Hong Kong” (*gangren zhigang* 港人治港). In this sense, the handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China was indeed a transaction “between colonizers” (Chow 1992). The continuing problem, however, is the normalization and legitimation of injustice and colonial mentality in daily life, which Ho Kar-Yin (2012) calls “embedded coloniality”. This is a site that a decolonization project in Hong Kong needs to tackle.

Since the colonial government was afraid of arousing anything with links to Chinese nationalism and the “temporary lease territory” status of part of Hong Kong, it was not until the 1970s that Hong Kong's heritage preservation act, the Antiquities and Monument Ordinance, was passed, even though there had been lengthy discussions in the government beforehand. The relevant official bodies, the Antiquities and Monument Office (AMO) and the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) were founded in 1976 (Ip 2010; Public Records Office 1957 – 1971, 1971 – 1976). AMO is the government department tasked with enforcing the Ordinance, and providing policy and secretariat support to the statutory body (AAB) and the Antiquities Authority, which has the final determination of whether to declare a certain historical building as a “declared monument”, and is responsible for surveying and recording heritage buildings and archaeological sites. AAB members were appointed by the Governor before the handover and by the Chief Executive after the handover; they advise the Antiquities Authority on issues related to antiquities and monuments. AMO and AAB, however,

have not been empowered to deal with town planning issues and cannot stop the demolition of built heritage. Although AAB grades historic buildings into Grade I, Grade II and Grade III, none of these grades can protect the buildings from being demolished. Only the “declared monument” has legal status. While the grading of historical buildings rests upon the government-appointed AAB and the “Authority”, the background research is usually carried out by AMO. In general, AMO’s research is carried out professionally, although there are often limitations in their readings and interpretations. AMO’s research influences how AAB members grade certain buildings, also because a significant number of AAB members are purely politically-appointed with little related expertise. However, as AAB is the decision-making body, how AAB board members read AMO’s research is also crucial, especially in more “controversial” cases. How the government then reacts to the AAB grading is yet another issue.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the social atmosphere was not particularly favourable to heritage preservation; only a few concern groups and AAB members were fighting for the preservation of historical buildings (Chan 2010; Chui and Tsoi 2003). Heritage preservation became a more visible issue and arena of contest in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Two landmark urban social movements, the movements for alternative urban renewal in Lee Tung Street, and the Preservation Movement of Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier, represent new waves of concern for heritage preservation, differing from those of the 1970s and 1980s; these landmark movements have demanded a government response.

Besides Hong Kong, case studies in this dissertation will also be drawn from Singapore, now a city-state in Southeast Asia, which is often viewed as a comparative counterpart to Hong Kong, especially in policy studies (e.g. Ortmann 2010; Wong, T.H. 2002). The pre-colonial Singapore was a part of the Sultanate of Johore. In 1819, Stamford Raffles of the British East India Company (EIC), then Governor General of Bencoolen, came to an agreement with Temenggong Abdul Rahman and later signed a treaty with the Sultan Hessein that granted EIC the rights to set up trading ports in Singapore. In 1826, Singapore, Malacca and Penang were put under the same administration as the Straits Settlement, which later became a “crown colony” in 1867. Singapore was granted partial internal self-government in 1955 and full internal self-government in 1959. In 1963, Singapore merged with Malaya and became a state of the Federation of Malaysia. Due to the conflicted visions about the Federation between the

People's Action Party (PAP), the ruling party of Singapore, and United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the dominant party in the Federation of Malaysia, Singapore was expelled from Malaysia and forced to be independent in 1965 (Hsu 2005; Chua 1997).

The PAP has been the ruling party of Singapore since 1959, without interruption. Lee Kuan Yew served as the Prime Minister from 1959 to 1990. Even after he chose to step down from the post, he still served advisory posts in the Cabinet, and was still a Member of Parliament (MP) until his death in 2015. When PAP was formed, it was a loose coalition of the English-educated middle-class (such as Lee Kuan Yew) and Chinese-educated trade unionists and radicals (such as Lim Chin Siong). Yet the two groups were not only different in ideological terms, but also in their views of the merger with Malaya. Later, the left-wing members of the PAP were expelled and formed the *Barisan Sosialis* (Socialist Front) with some other trade unionists. In 1963, a number of *Barisan Sosialis* leaders and left-wing activists were, with support from the Malaya and British governments, accused as “communists”, arrested and detained without trial as part of Operation Coldstore, which took place before that year's election.. It is believed that the PAP government under Lee could eliminate the possible and credible opponents through arrest and detainment (Hong and Huang 2008; Hong 2015; Ortmann 2011; Bell and de-Shalit 2011). After the *Barisan Sosialis* boycotted the 1968 election, three years after Singapore was independent, there were no single oppositional MP until 1981 (Chua 1997). Even today, the number of oppositional MPs is still very limited in Singapore.

When Singapore achieved self-government, the PAP leaders did not think that Singapore would be an independent country. Rather, they were eager to merge with Malaya in the formation of Malaysia. The expulsion from Malaysia and forced independence of Singapore in 1965 was out of the PAP government's control and had been a trauma for two decades (Kong and Yeoh 2003; Hong 2015). Politically, Singapore now became an independent state and PAP needed to rethink and adjust to its position as a nation-state. Economically, the breaking away from Malaysia meant that Singapore was without a hinterland and thus without natural resources. A central concern for the PAP government has been the “survival” of Singapore, a concern that has structured, rationalized and legitimized their policies and practices. The PAP

government's choice of the path of developmentalist-capitalism, resulted, according to Chua Beng Huat, in "a centralized, rational public administration as the fundamental basis for an export-oriented industrialization programme, financed largely by multinational capitals" (1997: 13). The "national survival" and "economic development" discourses have, together, been translated into a perceived need for political stability and have, hence, legitimized the limitation of opposition. Unlike Hong Kong, the Singaporean government under PAP seldom rely on co-opting different collaborators, not even the business elites. Indeed, the state-owned transnational corporation Temasek Holdings has control over a significant number of corporations across different sectors in Singapore (Haque 2004). Thus, top-down policy implementation in Singapore is most often dictated by the state, rather than being the result of conflicts, contests and negotiations between the state and business elites.

Lily Kong and Brenda S.A. Yeoh summarize the state ideology of Singapore as "survival, discipline and pragmatism", recognizable in the "5Ms" of multiracialism, multilingualism, multiculturalism, multi-religiosity and meritocracy, and the discourse of "Asian Values and Communitarianism" (2003: 29 – 45). Policies, including heritage preservation, are implemented from the top down, in accordance with such ideologies. Before its independence, records of "interesting architecture" were kept in Singapore. The Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB), the statutory board responsible, was established in 1971 and several individual buildings were preserved as "national monuments". However, state policy in the early independence years was still dominated by "slum" clearances and the building of new towns, owing to the dominant ideologies of "pragmatism" and "survival" (Yeoh and Huang 2008). The Committee on Heritage Report of 1988 was a landmark policy report that has subsequently shaped and framed heritage preservation policy in Singapore. Following the report, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) also designated several historical districts taken to represent (the state's version of) "multiracialism" and "multiculturalism" (Teo and Huang 1995; Perry, Kong and Yeoh 1997; Kong and Yeoh, 2003; Yeoh and Huang 2008; Kong 2011).

Currently, several state agencies are responsible for heritage preservation in Singapore. The National Heritage Board (NHB), established in 1993, is responsible for the narration of Singapore stories and heritage education. It also operates several

national museums. In 2009, the PMB merged with NHB (National Heritage Board 2009). The PMB was then renamed as Preservation of Sites and Monuments (PSM) in 2013 “to reflect its enlarged role of preserving not only buildings and monuments, but also sites that commemorate Singapore's heritage” (Maryam Mokhtar 2013). The URA, the planning authority of Singapore, is also responsible for building and area conservation. The guidelines for conservation of various gazetted buildings<sup>25</sup> and conserved areas vary according to the type of area and the uniqueness of the individual building. For instance, the conservation guidelines are stricter in “Historic Districts” such as “Chinatown”, Kampong Glam and “Little India” than in the “Secondary Settlements” such as Jalan Besar, Joo Chiat and Geylang. In the Historic Districts, the “entire building envelope” must be retained and restored. In the Secondary Settlements, owners of the buildings are allowed to build a new rear extension, provided that it does not exceed the maximum height allowed in the designated area (Urban Redevelopment Authority 2014).

Although Singapore is characterized by its top-down policy implementation, this does not mean that the state has not faced significant challenges. Indeed, its unwillingness to engage with the public has created huge discontent. The designated “Historic Districts” have been criticized as reducing vibrant neighbourhoods to theme parks (Kong 2011). The demolition of the National Library in 2004 and the recent proposal to demolish Bukit Brown Cemetery to make way for a highway have been the largest heritage preservation-related debates and controversies in recent years. They also bring up issues like spatial justice in Singapore (Khoo 2010; Lim and Wong 2012).

As well as Hong Kong and Singapore, I will also draw case studies from Penang. Penang is now a state of Malaysia and consists of Pulau Pinang (Penang Island) and Sebearng Perai (formerly known as Province Wellesley in English). The pre-colonial Penang was part of the Sultanate of Kedah. In 1786, Francis Light of the EIC took over Penang Island. Light’s takeover of Penang was very important for British trade as it was much better located on the main trading route between India and China than Bencoolen (Nordin 2007). In 1826, with the Straits Settlements were formed, Penang served as its “capital” until Singapore took over this role in 1832. After World War II, the Straits

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<sup>25</sup> “Gazetted buildings” means the buildings designated for conservation in government gazette.

Settlements were dismantled. Penang then became part of the Malayan Union and later the Federation of Malaysia (Tan, L.E. 2009; Turnbull 2009).

The demography of Penang is more diversified than that of many Malaysian states. Until 2009, Chinese was the largest “race” in Penang. Unlike many other Malaysian states, Penang has no hereditary monarch. Politically, Penang and its capital and historic centre George Town have histories of rule by federal oppositional parties. In the early post-war period, George Town was consistently ruled by left-wing, oppositional coalitions until the dissolution of the municipal council (Tan, L.E. 2009). On the state level, the opposition party *Gerakan* also took Penang in the 1969 election. Penang was thus ruled by the opposition between 1969 and 1972, until *Gerakan* joined the federal ruling coalition *Barisan Nasional* (BN, “National Front”) in 1973. Since the 2008 election, Penang has been ruled by the opposition coalition *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR) (Phang 1978; Goh and Ooi 2010). As a “by-product” of the Control of Rent Ordinance of 1948, large numbers of old buildings (and thus the urban landscape) in the inner city of George Town were not disturbed for more than half a century. In 1986, an important heritage preservation NGO, Penang Heritage Trust (PHT) was founded. It had important roles in heritage preservation in Penang, ranging from research and consultation, including debates around the proper management of heritage tourism, to working on proposals for applying for World Heritage Status (WHS). The inner city of George Town, together with Malacca, was declared as having WHS in 2008 (Jenkins 2008).

Historically and geographically, Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang have some commonalities. Their sizes are similar; historically, they were all British colonial port cities, and the colonial era shaped much of the urban landscape in all three places. However, after World War II, they took different historical paths and quite different attitudes towards heritage preservation. After the split from Malaysia, the Singaporean government has focused on the project of nation-building, in which the state’s vision intersects with economic growth and development. Heritage preservation, for the government, operates closely with the state’s vision of nation-building, via its understanding of history, cultures and economic development. Penang, unlike Malacca, is hardly subject to the ruling coalition, or to the dominant ruling party UMNO’s narrative of nation-building. Rather, heritage preservation has long been the remit of

civil society groups.<sup>26</sup> Hong Kong was the last British colony in the region; “nation-building” has long been off the colonial government’s agenda. As in Penang, heritage preservation is more often initiated by non-governmental agencies. One also needs to bear in mind that the state’s version of nation-building is quite often different from the bottom-up building of cultural identity. This is due to the different understandings of time, space and identity that are in operation. How heritage preservation relates to urban renewal in these places also differs; finally, heritage preservation in each of these cities is affected by various international factors. Altogether, therefore, these three cities provide quite different scenarios for thinking about how projects of postcolonial heritage preservation can function as projects of decolonization.

I am originally from Hong Kong and have participated in some heritage preservation movements in various degrees and engaged in related research projects. I have been concerned throughout about the urban future of Hong Kong. I engage with Singapore and Penang as a way to answer my home-based concerns. Some preliminary research was carried out before the start of the PhD program. In the writing process, I have also travelled back to Hong Kong a few times for updates on the development of some heritage projects and movements. I have also conducted fieldwork in Singapore and Penang. I have spent around a year staying in Singapore, consulting related archival

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<sup>26</sup> I realize the notion of “civil society” is contested by some postcolonial and subaltern studies theorists such as Partha Chatterjee. Chatterjee argues that the notion of “civil society” fails to capture the conditions of the large number of people excluded from a “proper” understanding of civil society, which is “based on equality, autonomy, freedom of entry and exits, contract, deliberative procedures of decision-making, recognized rights and duties of members, and other such principles.” (2001: 172). In Hong Kong, I also witness some active agents in the civil society refuse the term “civil society” (*gung man se wui* 公民社會 in Cantonese), preferring the term *man gaan* 民間, roughly translated as “the people” or the “folk”. Thus, civil society groups are known as *man gaan* groups in Hong Kong. Another term being used in Hong Kong, to a lesser extent, to refer to the civil society is *jan man* 人民 (people), which is usually associated with participatory democracy such as *jan man kwai waak* 人民規劃 (“people’s planning”) (Ip 2010). Hesitation or refusal to use the term *gung man* 公民 (citizen) may be understood because of the term’s associations with liberal and deliberative democracy and the middle-class. Those who believe in radical democracy but do not identify as middle-class thus hesitate to use the term. The exclusion of migrant workers and minorities in the definition of “citizen” (*gung man*) can also explain hesitation to use the term *gung man se wui* (literally “citizen society”). The use of *man gaan* instead of *gung man* is probably influenced by the Taiwanese translation of “civil society” into *minjian shehui* 民間社會 (*minjian* society), where *man gaan* and *minjian* are the Cantonese and Mandarin of the same term (Chen, K. 2003). Manuel Castells’ (1983) understanding of “grassroots”, which transcends class (working and middle), gender and ethnic grouping can be a good equivalent to *man gaan / minjian*. Contexts discussed in this dissertation, however, are not as extreme as in e.g., India. The association of “civil society” with political rights, democratization, participation in decision-making process are also important and should not be given up. The Singaporean government, for instance, uses the term “civic society” instead of “civil society” to undermine the “civil rights” embedded in the term of “civil society” (Chua 2000). Thus, in this dissertation, I persist in using the term “civil society” as interchangeable with Castells’ understanding of the “grassroots”.

and library materials about heritage preservation in Singapore and Malaysia. During my stay in Singapore, I have taken part in several tours to the Bukit Brown Cemetery and volunteered in documenting the cemetery's graves. Personal networks with those involved in heritage preservation in Singapore were also established, allowing me to easily trace the development of these heritage projects even while I was staying in London to write my dissertation. Due to limited resources and sources of funding, my fieldwork in Penang was conducted in a less intense manner. I went to Penang for a few shorter fieldtrips to collect data and conduct interviews. The comparatively limited time I spent in Penang is reflected in the shorter length of the sections devoted to it.

Participatory observations were carried out to understand recent heritage preservation movements and civil societies' engagements with heritage preservation in Hong Kong and Singapore. I have also conducted archival research at of private and public records at The National Archives of the United Kingdom, the Public Record Office of Hong Kong, the National Library and the National Archives of Singapore and Penang Heritage Trust to examine historical perspectives and the formation and changing nature of heritage preservation and related policies and practices. Moreover, library materials and old newspapers were also consulted for understanding the historical background, previous cases and public opinions. In order to grasp the bigger picture and attain more in-depth understanding of some previous heritage preservation advocacies – and to get a sense of their possible future development – I have also interviewed several active agents in heritage preservation in Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang.

### **1.5 Port Cities As Method<sup>27</sup>**

In the previous section where I outline the background of the three cities, in contrast to the post-handover Hong Kong SAR government and nation-state-based orientation, I reposition Hong Kong as part of Southeast Asia instead of merely as the southern tip of China. The repositioning of Hong Kong back into Southeast Asia re-

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<sup>27</sup> “Port cities as method” is derived from Kuan-hsing Chen’s “Asia as method” (2006, 2010), which is also inspired by Takeuchi Yoshimi’s 竹内好 1960 talk “Asia as method” (Takeuchi 2005, 2007) and Mizoguchi Yuzo’s 溝口雄三 *China as Method* (1999). Koyasu Nobukuni’s 子安宣邦 *Edo as method* (2000) is also inspired by Takeuchi.

establishes the linkage of Hong Kong and other cities in Southeast Asia and the wider Asia region, rather than privileging its relationship with China in the north. As Kwai-cheung Lo (2014a) correctly suggests repositioning Hong Kong back into Asia could open up the various possibilities of understanding Hong Kong beyond the confines of a nation-state boundary and the binary opposition of China and Britain. As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, I am positioning this dissertation as an intervention in IACS. One of the recognized starting points of IACS was the *Trajectories* Conferences held in Taiwan in 1992 and 1995 (Turner 2007). The Conferences gathered different Asian-based academic-activists to reflect upon “the histories and politics of cultural studies” and the “colonial questions”, which led to the contemporary rise and development of nationalism, and to investigate cultural production, cultural consumption and strategies of resistance in social movements in various locales in Asia. (Chen ed. 1998: xiii) It later developed into a refereed academic journal (IACS Journal). (Chen and Chua 2007) Since the *Trajectories* Conferences, local and regional political and historical situations have been the focus of IACS. These issues include the questions of colonialism and imperialism, nationalism and the different forms that resistance and social movements have taken or might take. IACS also aims at bridging academia and social movement activists through the attempt “to movementize scholarship” and “to theorize movements” (Chen 1998, 2006, 2012a; Chen and Chua 2007). As Kuan-hsing Chen, the founding co-executive editor of IACS journal states explicitly,

[Unless] the cultural imaginary we have been living with can be decolonized, the vicious circle of colonization, decolonization and recolonization will continue to move on. (Chen, K. 1998: 2)

This explains why the issue of decolonization is so important to the studies of different projects identified with IACS.

However, as I have argued in earlier sections, in order to be critical, postcolonial theories need to be sensitive of the existence of multiple colonialities and multiple vernacular modernities. In other words, the “colonized” cannot be reduced into a singular “rest” of the West.. Thus, postcolonial theories that are applicable to some colonial contexts may not necessarily be applicable to others. As Chua (2008) argues, Southeast Asia has been little studied, and much of the existing literature is based on

the experiences of other places, such as South Asia and Africa. The cases studied in this dissertation, however, are from former British colonial port cities in Southeast Asia. In this section, I am going to develop Kuan-hsing Chen's (2006, 2010) proposal of "Asia as method", a landmark text of the IACS project, and Shu-mei Shih's articulation of "Sinophone" as a network of production, alongside previous studies on port cities, to propose "port cities as method". "Port cities as method" is not only a methodological framework for this dissertation but also denotes a commitment to contributing to IACS by putting Hong Kong back into the Southeast Asian network and by emphasizing the significance of "locales" in knowledge-production. It is also an effort to push the limits of postcolonial studies, which, as stated, have largely excluded Southeast Asia thus far.

Despite being largely neglected within postcolonial studies, Southeast Asia is discussed in other established academic disciplines: in area studies such as Southeast Asian studies, and ethnic studies such as Overseas Chinese studies, and Nanyang<sup>28</sup> Chinese studies in particular. However, Southeast Asian studies and Overseas Chinese Studies also have their disciplinary limitations. Southeast Asian studies has the limitation of political boundaries; the current major academic associations, research centres and academic journals of Southeast Asian studies limit the boundary of "Southeast Asia" to the nations in the ASEAN. The European Association for South East Asian Studies (EuroSEAS, 2008), for example, states of itself that it is "a professional, non-profit organization for scholars engaged in the study of one or more South-East Asian countries, viz. Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, and the Philippines". Similarly, the *Journal for Southeast Asian Studies* (n.d.) specifies their own definition of the boundary of Southeast Asia as "Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, East Timor, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam". However, the boundary of Southeast Asia is not so clear cut. For instance, the culturally-linked Sri Lanka is often excluded in such definitions (Matteucci 2012). Historically and climatically, Hong Kong and Macau are situated in Southeast Asia but also excluded in Southeast Asian studies. The limitations of the political boundaries of Southeast Asian studies reflect the domination of nation-states in the process of knowledge production, even though the discipline of Southeast Asian Studies is supposed to be a "regional" or "area" study.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, ethnic

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<sup>28</sup> Nanyang 南洋, literally the "South Sea", is the Chinese term for Southeast Asia.

<sup>29</sup> The domination of "nation-states" in Southeast Asian studies also partly explains why Hong Kong

studies such as Overseas Chinese studies can go beyond the limitation of this arbitrary bounding. The umbrella term of “Chinese culture” is applicable from Southern China, through Taiwan, Hong Kon, and Macau to Southeast Asia; yet it too has the obvious limitation that, since “Chineseness” is the major defining factor, it cannot go beyond this ethnic boundary. Thus, beyond the national boundary lies the further boundary of ethnicity (Ang 2003; Shih 2013a, 2013b). While the incorporation of “Chinese studies” into the discussion of heritage preservation in Southeast Asia could easily become ethnocentric, area studies and ethnic studies, taken together, can bridge one another’s gaps and limitations. Postcolonial studies, with its supposedly critical edge, is capable of absorbing the strengths of both, and of bringing them into dialogue. In this way, postcolonial studies could be made relevant to Southeast Asia. It is in this context I mean to propose the re-thinking of “port cities as method”.

Overseas Chinese studies, i.e., studies of the Chinese (in) diaspora, encompass many different areas of research and knowledge production, including studies of how overseas Chinese communities preserve tangible and intangible “Chinese” cultural heritage. There is some debate as to whether the ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan are to be regarded as “overseas”, i.e., whether they fit the definition of “overseas Chinese” (Wang, G. 2013). Some scholars adopted the phrase “Chinese (in) diaspora” or “diasporic Chinese” when the study of different “diasporas” became popular in the 1990s. Yet this term too arouses numerous debates, due to the implication of “roots” and “rootlessness” (Tan, C. B. 2013). Ideally, the concept of “diaspora” should contribute to rethinking, problematizing and pushing the limits of history, national and ethnic boundaries and identity (Hall 1990; Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2005). However, in reality, the concept of “Chinese diaspora” and the studies of “overseas Chinese” have been highly influenced by the very notion and “measurement” of “Chineseness”.

Although the meaning of “Chineseness” differs according to context, the notion itself presumes there is a generalized “Chineseness” that can be used as a means of explanation, usually vis-à-vis “the West” (Ang 1998; Chow 1998). For instance, if the notion of “Chineseness” is brought into understanding heritage preservation, there is

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and Macau are excluded. These two places are not nation-states. The nation-state, China, is not located in Southeast Asia.

usually presumed to exist *a* “Chinese” culture and *a* “Chinese” way of understanding history and heritage. Outside China, questions of how “Chinese culture” or “Chinese civilization” is preserved might arise; such questions frequently presume, and operate according to, notions of “purity” and “degree”, such as whether the temple built by a certain group of overseas Chinese is “authentic” enough, or, conversely, whether “true” and “authentic” Chinese culture could rather only be found overseas after the Communists took over China. The latter position is quite explicitly held among some anti-Communist scholars such as the New Confucians and those advocating the concept of “Cultural China” in the 1990s. According to the conventional centre-periphery understanding, China proper represents the “centre”. However, when China proper is no longer ruled by a regime that one can identify with, when one is located outside the “centre”, the centre-periphery schema might make one feel unease. Unable to build a counter-regime to claim as an alternative “centre”, such thinkers are thus impelled to de-stabilize the centre-periphery order; not to get rid of the binary opposition, but to assert their own position as the “centre” instead. The notion of “Cultural China”, for instance, was proposed to go beyond the rigid definitions of Chinese as “belonging to the Han race, being born in China proper, speaking Mandarin, and observing ‘patriotic’ code of ethics” to include the overseas and “diasporic” Chinese (Tu 1994a: vii). “Cultural China” is seen as a way to invert the centre-periphery model, suggesting that the “periphery” position of “overseas Chinese” might become the new “centre” if only they can effectively construct a new sense of “Chineseness” (Bernards 2013a; Tu 1994b).

Using “Chineseness” as a theoretical framework and identification has been criticized by scholars such as Allen Chun (1996), Rey Chow (1998), Ien Ang (1998, 2001, 2003) and Shu-mei Shih (2013a, 2013b). As mentioned earlier, while what “Chineseness” signifies is variable and ambiguous according to the context, it is often, paradoxically, celebrated and described as a unified entity. Chun (1996) and Shih (2013a), on the other hand, assert that “the Chinese” are not a unified group.<sup>30</sup> The languages spoken, and the ideas of “China” and “Chineseness”, even amongst “the Chinese” are diverse. In Southeast Asia and the United States, for instance, “Chinese”

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<sup>30</sup> Similarly, “Malays” were not a unified and homogenous group either. The classification and identification of “Malay” have been products of colonialism and rise of Malay nationalism (Kahn 2006; Karim, eds. 2009).

is a racialized concept created by the government to include all the populations originated from China including Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka, Hailam, etc. Yet when “Chineseness” is considered as a theoretical framework, the assumption that there is a unified group of “ethnic Chinese” (or a “Chinese race”) and thus “Chinese culture”, without recognizing this diversity, ends up pointing into “oneness”. This is obviously problematic. Although “Cultural China” redefines the meaning of “ethnic Chinese” and the centre-periphery model, it nonetheless points to common ancestry and a shared cultural background. It fails to deal with the complexity of multiple “Chineseness” and multiple identifications. It also assumes a certain *Chinese* way, which is unproductive in articulating the actual, far more complex situation (Chun 1996; Chow 1998; Ang 1998, 2001).

Besides disregarding diversity, “Chineseness” as a theoretical framework often implies degree or spectrum of “Chineseness”, i.e. “how (not) Chinese it is” and “which is more (or less) Chinese” are often implied (Shih 2013b). This reinforces a centre-periphery model. The ensuing measurement of “how Chinese it is” is oriented toward a centre, regardless of where it is located. Informed by such essentializing logic, any hybrid, multicultural and multilingual influence would be regarded as not “authentic”. Place-based, local<sup>31</sup> and cross-cultural mutual influences among different Chinese communities, and among Chinese and other communities would be undermined by such ethnocentric “Chineseness”. Thus, not only occidentalism but also ethnocentric Chineseness, which ultimately produces discourses and different forms of China-exceptionalism and China-particularism, needs to be resisted. To put it

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<sup>31</sup> There are two understandings of the word “local”, with their respective Chinese notions. The first understanding of “local” “emphasizes the particular cultural/racial/ethnic identity of the people in the claiming of a place as essentially and rightfully belonging to a particular constituency”. (Sham 2009: 232) In Chinese languages, it is known as “本土” (*bun tou* in Cantonese, *pún-thó* in Hokkien and *bentu* in Mandarin), literally “(of) this soil (or piece of land)”. The other meaning of “local” emphasizes here and now, and focuses on “situated relations to a particular place irrespective of essentialist claims to ethnic or racial identity” (ibid.). In Chinese languages, it is known as “在地” (*zoi dei* in Cantonese, *chāi-tē* in Hokkien and *zaidi* in Mandarin), literally “at this place”. Both meanings of “local” can be resistant or can be manipulated according to the context. The first meaning, which emphasizes “originality” and “nativeness” is useful to resist powerful external forces such as imperialism and colonialism, especially in defending minority indigenous cultures. Yet this meaning can be manipulated by right-wing populists or fascists to oppose against new immigrants, regardless if they are in powerful or powerless positions. The second understanding of local, which emphasizes here and now and situatedness, can acknowledge the contributions of different migrant groups. However this understanding can also be manipulated by existing global capitalists, who claim that they are also “here and now”. Both understandings have strength and weakness. An open yet critical understanding of “local” needs to be considered contextually.

straightforwardly, approaches and theories contributing to non-ethnocentric, place-based, horizontal inter-local<sup>32</sup> mutual references that go beyond the centre-periphery binary are needed. For the purposes of this dissertation, for example, I need non-ethnocentric, place-based, horizontal inter-local theories so that I can let Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang function in an equal way, as each other's mutual references, without bringing in any pseudo-universal or exclusivist ethnocentric theoretical framework.

Kuan-hsing Chen's "Asia as method" (2006, 2010) and Shu-mei Shih's understanding of "Sinophone" as "the places of production" (2013a, 2013b) are inspiring. Chen, the co-founding editor of IACS journal and a key figure in the IACS project, has been consistently concerned about the political-economic and socio-cultural situation of Taiwan. Yet he believes that the understanding of Taiwan needs to be situated within the broader Asian context. Chen (2006, 2010) argues that imperialism, colonialism and the Cold War structure have been the three major dominating forces and have been internalized in many Asian societies.<sup>33</sup> Due to international divisions of labour, wealthier societies such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore are likely to have internalized "imperial eyes", leading them to look down upon less developed societies. Chen believes that to decolonize the cultural imaginary is the essential step in resisting different forms and waves of colonization. Yet, such a decolonization project cannot be fulfilled by merely critiquing the West because this would lead to a future being bounded by the object of criticism, namely the West itself.<sup>34</sup> (Chen, K. 1998, 2006, 2010).

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<sup>32</sup> "Inter-local" recognizes "local" as the site of knowledge production and not a closed system. The experiences of different "locals" can be each other's mutual reference, without the necessity to draw from an abstract "centre" such as the "West" or "Chineseness", based instead on common, grounded experiences.

<sup>33</sup> Kuan-hsing Chen (2006, 2010) puts much blame of "Cold War structure" on the US-led Capitalist Bloc. He makes a strong statement, "At this historically critical time, to de-cold war is to de-Americanize" (Chen, K. 2010: 120). The sentence "to de-cold war is to de-Americanize" is even bolded in the Chinese version (Chen, K. 2006: 186). Yet, this has underestimated the role of the so-called "Socialist Bloc". Law Wing Sang (2007) correctly points out that both the USA and their opponents, including Soviet Union and China, also had important roles in the creation of the Cold War Structure. Law argues, the reduction of Cold War into the United States would weaken the reflection upon the Cold War Structure.

<sup>34</sup> Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih also make similar criticism in their edited book *Minor Transnationalism* (2005). Lionnet and Shih argue, "Critiquing the center, when it stands as an end in itself, seems only to enhance it; the center remains the focus and the main object of study." (2005: 3) Similar to IACS, Lionnet and Shih also propose a shift from "vertical" referencing through the "centre" to "horizontal" networks among the "minors" or "marginal positions" without the necessary negation through the "centre".

To overcome such constraints, for Asian societies, Chen (2006, 2010) argues for needs to shift the focus back to Asia, to multiply the objects of identification, and to build alternative referencing frameworks from the West. He develops the Japanese scholars Takeuchi Yoshimi's 1960s talk "Asia as method" (2005, 2007) and Mizoguchi Yuzo's "China as method" (1999) to propose his version of "Asia as method". According to Chen (2012b: 320), when Takeuchi wrote "Asia as method", he encountered a situation widely shared by many "Third World people"<sup>35</sup>. The situation was that Japanese intellectuals often looked "upwards" at the West, and – in identifying with it – hoped that Japan would someday become equally "superior"; this upwards gaze, meanwhile, deliberately disregarded those regions with similar situations and problems as Japan. Yet Takeuchi disagreed with this attitude. Takeuchi (2005, 2007) argues that the path of modernization that Japan took since the Meiji Restoration was not the sole path for modernization in Asia. He found that there was at least another alternative path for modernization, that taken by China. For Takeuchi, the study of China was not an end in itself, but determined "a way to understand Japan, and consequently, the need for self-critique" (Chen, K. 2012b: 321). In the late 1980s, Mizoguchi Yuzo developed Takeuchi's still embryonic concept of "as method" and published *China as Method*, in which he responded to the tendency for post-war Japanese intellectuals to try to understand Japan through China. For Mizoguchi, the study of China is neither merely for knowledge of China nor merely for the self-development of Japanese people. Rather, "China as method" is a way to change the very process of knowledge-production and to effect a reciprocal relativizing of both the object of study and the subject-position, so that both can be understood differently. (Mizoguchi 1999; Chen, K. 2006, 2010; Lo 2014b) For Chen (2006, 2010, 2012b), the significance of Takeuchi's and Mizoguchi's "method" is to go beyond the West as the sole or major reference point, and thus to go beyond the West / East, progressive / backward binary opposition. Thus, the West will become only one reference point among a multiplicity. Chen argues that the inter-referencing among places with similar experiences can produce deeper understandings of both the self and the places one refers

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<sup>35</sup> Influenced by writer Chen Yingzhen 陳映真, Kuan-hsing Chen often explicitly identifies with the position of "Third World". Kuan-hsing Chen (2006, 2010) believes that the "Third World" identification could provide possibilities to overcome the problems of a closed system of "localism" and merely references to the West. This opens up the possibilities of seeing other "Third World" societies which have long been ignored in Taiwan.

to; in this case, other locales in Asia. According to Chen,

The potential of Asia as method is this: using the idea of Asia as an imaginary anchoring point, societies in Asia can become each other's points of reference, so that the understanding of the self may be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt. On this basis, the diverse historical experiences and rich social practices of Asia may be mobilized to provide alternative horizons and perspectives. This method of engagement, I believe, has the potential to advance a different understanding of world history.

(Chen, K. 2010: 212)

In short, “Asian as method” is an “Inter-Asia” inter-referencing approach, which – rather than merely referring to the West, or to the necessity of negation through the West – “allow[s] the different ‘locales’ in Asia [to] be each other’s reference point equally, articulating experiences and producing knowledge based on realities in societies” (Sham 2009: 244).

“Asia as method” is not an attempt to uphold Asia by denying the West. Rather, it is a process of multiplying reference points, of which the West would become but one. As Chua Beng Huat (2013, 2014) illustrates, many obstacles in the development of democracy and capitalism have been ironed out and overcome in the long process dating back to late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Meanwhile, the development of capitalist industrialization and modern democracy in many Asian countries took place after World War II. Due to the different trajectories of political and economic developments, using the West as the dominant, if not the sole, reference point and as the norm would result in an unequal relation, often putting Asia “200 years behind” the West in both political and economic developments. Such an unequal relationship would render Asian societies, in referencing the West as the norm, ceaselessly trapped in the will to “catch-up”. “Asia as method”, the inter-referencing among Asian societies, as Chua suggests, compares entities closer to each other and in a more equal power relationship. Thus, letting different “locales” in Asia become each other’s mutual reference points means shifting from merely taking the West as the dominant reference points. In Lionnet and Shih’s (2005) terms, reference “vertically” to the “centre” would give way to the existence of multiple reference points, conceived “horizontally”. Chua argues that Inter-Asia inter-

referencing goes beyond the conventional “comparative” methods, which “tend to compare different instances of a phenomenon along a set of substantively identifiable dimensions in order to establish a hierarchy of variables” “along a simplistic and reductionist continuum” (2014: 287 – 288). Chen’s “Asia as method”, and the IACS project, however, is a process of inter-referencing that opens up possibilities to transcend both positions, and aims at contributing to both academic and social movements.

Amongst Chen’s (2006, 2010) detailed proposed alternatives that allow “Asia as method” to be possible, one is the “Chinese International”, or in my preferred translation, “Sinophone International” network.<sup>36</sup> According to this model, the recognition of Chinese languages and of the societies using Chinese languages as international, could, through dialogue, allow the societies in these networks to become equal, mutual reference points. Using languages as the “common” base, this model goes beyond ethnocentric Chineseness and racialized Chinese identity, which often implies the central-periphery binary.

Similar to Chen’s “Sinophone International”, Shih also uses the Sinitic languages as the common ground of the network. Shih defines Sinophone as

a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness, where a historical process of heterogenizing and localizing of continental Chinese culture has been taking place for several centuries.

(Shih 2007: 4)

She further defines “Sinophone Studies” as the study of “the Sinitic-language communities and cultures outside China and ethnic minority communities and cultures within China where Mandarin is adopted or imposed” (Shih 2013a: 11). The “Sinophone” network is based on language rather than ethnicity and “Chineseness”.

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<sup>36</sup> “Chinese International” is used in Chen’s *Asia as Method: Toward De-Imperialization* (2010), the English version of the earlier published *Towards De-Imperialization: Asia as Method* (2006). In the Chinese version, the term used is *huawen guoji* 華文國際. *Huawen* means Chinese Language(s). Although the term can mean the plural form of Chinese languages that include all Sinitic languages from Mandarin to Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka, etc.; in the actual use, it is often referring to Mandarin. “Sinophone”, on the other hand, have already implied the diversity and heteroglossia of Chinese / Sinitic languages. Thus, I believe that Sinophone International is a more accurate translation.

Shih (2007, 2013a, 2013b) suggests that the “Sinophone” is place-based and sensitive to time. According to Shih, the fundamental differences between Sinophone Studies and “diaspora” studies are that the former is “place-based, everyday practice and experience”; it “constantly undergoes transformation that reflects local needs and conditions” and is not necessarily linked with “Chineseness” and contemporary China (Shih 2013b: 33). Thus, concerns can shift from the “oneness” that is named as “Chineseness” to the local. The cross-cultural elements of built heritage by overseas Chinese, for instance, need not be read as “less Chinese” or “more Chinese”, nor as “authentic” or not. Rather, more productive readings, such as of local versions of multicultural society, and of how different ethnic groups and cultures interact, are possible.

“Asia as method” and “Sinophone Studies” are inspirational in several ways. First, both can go beyond Eurocentrism and the assumptions of “Chinese exceptionalism”, “Chinese particularism” and the use of “Chineseness” as a theoretical framework and measurement, all of which are unproductive, as has been shown. Second, it also goes beyond the centre-periphery binary. Studies can instead be focused on local contexts and situations, rather than an abstract and distinct imaginary. Third, “Asia as method” and “Sinophone” do not stop at the critique of the “centre”. Rather, they shift the focus from regarding the “centre” as the dominant or sole reference point and target of critique, to the task of elaborating multiple referencing points by creating horizontal networks. In these networks, different locales can be each other’s mutual references in an equal way, unlike the centre-periphery hierarchy, without employing essentializing notions of ethnicity. The inter-referencing process among these locales not only provides insights in solving the problems of one’s own subject-position, but also transcend the different locales in these process. As Koichi Iwabuchi remarks, these inter-referencing “methods” are not just “a matter of academic research, but also of commitment to the advancement of people’s cross-border dialogue as mundane practice” (2014:55). These networks are not and should not in themselves constitute the end point, but can engender dialogue with other networks. For instance, “Asia as method” can be enter into dialogue with other Third World experiences while the “Sinophone” could enter into dialogue with other studies and networks such as the Francophone, the Anglophone, etc. Asia as method and Sinophone studies provide critical insights for refreshing and revitalizing postcolonial studies, allowing it to become relevant to

Southeast Asia. The concepts of “network” and of mutual references between societies based on “common” or “similar” experiences are the starting point for such projects. In Hong Kong, for instance, there are often circumstances in which landmark postcolonial theories fail to offer a critical explanation of the colonial experience (Lo 2012). I contend that one of the major problems is that the historical situations and the colonial experiences that produced these theories are unlike the Hong Kong situation and experience. Returning to Chua’s (2008) criticism of the absence of Southeast Asia in postcolonial studies and the issues of multiple colonialities and multiple modernities, we should note that, although many postcolonial theories are drawn from colonies in continental Africa and continental South Asia, one cannot forget there was not only one type of colony or one type of colonizer. The Portuguese Colonial Empire, for instance, was mainly made up of ports. They were not interested in colonizing large pieces of land, only ports and forts to secure their control of trade routes and flows. The colonial Dutch were similar (Gipouloux 2011). The British distinguished between their continental colonies and port cities. In India, their major colony in Asia, the British had different policies for the ports. In Southeast Asia, British Malaya was officially divided into different administrations. As before, the port cities such as Penang, Malacca and Singapore were under a different administration, called the “Straits Settlements”. Raffles, the “founder” of Singapore, made it clear that the objective for occupying Singapore was not for the territory but for trade (Basu, ed. 1985; Gipouloux 2011).

In 1976, an academic conference on “colonial port cities” was held at UC Santa Cruz to discuss “the nature of relationships between [port] city and hinterland”, “the role and character of mercantile elites” and urban morphology of colonial port cities (Basu, ed. 1985: x). This was the first conference to recognize “colonial port cities” as meaningful sites, deserving of further study. Some papers from the conference “Economy and Polity: Historical and Contemporary Studies of Some Southeast Asian States”, held in Yangon in 1998, were published as *Port Cities and Trade in Western Southeast Asia*. In this publication, scholars discussed the (semi-) autonomous port cities in western Southeast Asia, and the international maritime trade among these port cities before and after the Portuguese arrival in the region (Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University 1998). As Sunait Chutintaranond (1998) argues in the volume, those historical writings dominated by “centralist historical ideology” which write history from the perspective of central governments has often undermined the

“autonomous history” of the provincial port cities. Many pre-colonial port cities or regions in Southeast Asia were (semi-)autonomous entities; some were officially under the control of a monarch in the hinterland or continent, a set-up comparable to those of their counterparts in the Mediterranean and the Baltic. These maritime trade networks were extant even before the arrival of European powers in the region (Loh 2009; Li 2010; Gipouloux 2011). Under colonialism, because of their trading needs, colonizers set up different forms of administration in the colonial port cities. From the perspective of nation-states, these port cities are often regarded as periphery. Yet as Caroline Hein suggests, the “marginal position” or “the absence of centrality” makes it possible for port cities “to flourish within international frameworks” (Hein 2011: 15). Port cities are the nodal points in trade networks. Trade networks not only carry goods but also people, including cultures, religions and, sometimes, disease (Hein 2011; Home 2013). To push this thinking of the “trading network” a little further, “port cities” could also be understood as networks of mutual reference and knowledge production. The “maritime” or the “sea” is “limitless and unbounded” (Connery 1996: 289). Meanwhile, nation-states are often based on “exclusive possession of territory defined by formal boundaries” (Hamashita 2003: 17). In this sense, the “sea” and the “maritime” can be regarded as entities and as images that go beyond nation-states. Their historical experience as (colonial) port cities, urban spaces closely related with each other long before the era of “global capitalism” and often marginal in nationalist discourses, could be seen as the “common ground” among different locales, and could thus be one basis upon which to carry out an Inter-Asia referencing, or “Asia as method” approach. I name it “port cities as method”.

The importance of proposing “port cities as method” lies in visualizing a commitment to a mode of critical analysis that sees beyond the predominance of nation-states as the privileged sites of cultural activity and exchange, and in doing so realizes alternative possibilities. Despite the IACS project’s commitment of emphasizing inter-referencing among “locales” and moving beyond national boundaries, the “nation” still tends to dominate a number of analyses, and inter-referencing between “nations” is still quite common (Tae 2014). This study concerns the possibilities for heritage preservation to function as resistance, and does so by inter-referencing between three former colonial port cities in Southeast Asia; as such, and unlike those studies that remain bound by nation-states, it is a demonstration and actualization of IACS’

commitment to recognizing the “local” as the site of knowledge-production, in which social movements play a necessary role. The repositioning of Hong Kong into Southeast Asia and the emphasis on possibilities of inter-referencing between Hong Kong and other Southeast Asian locales – in this instance, Singapore and Penang – thus mark a significant realization of the IACS project. In the post-handover period, both the popular imagination and the state’s promotion of the political-geography of Hong Kong was directed northwards either through the discourse of “the relationship with (mainland) China” or by repositioning Hong Kong as “part of China”, imaginative acts which sidelined its relationship with other Southeast Asian cities. This imaginative recalibration of Hong Kong’s political geography in effect reduces the multiplicity of Hong Kong’s points of reference. My repositioning, however, would multiply the possible points of references for Hong Kong, and in doing so would multiply the possible points of references for other Southeast Asian cities. The repositioning of Hong Kong into Southeast Asia, and its cross-reference with other Southeast Asian “locales” (e.g. Penang) instead of “nation-states” (e.g. Malaysia) in effect challenges the nation-state’s domination and deepens inter-local referencing. Besides the three former British colonial port cities elaborated in this dissertation, “port cities as method” can also be applicable to other port cities, including colonial port cities and treaty ports such as Canton and Amoy in Southern China. By articulating these treaty ports within the networks of port cities, we can also multiply their reference points with other port cities instead of plotting their relationship “inwards” with China. Moreover, the concept of “X as method”, such as “Asia as method” and “China as method”, does not take the “X” as absolute. Rather, for instance, when Kuan-hsing Chen (2006, 2010) develops his version of “Asia as method” from Takeuchi (2005, 2007) and Mizoguchi (1999), he does so having already laid out the three problems through which “Asia” could function as a reference in the first place: namely imperialism, colonialism, and the Cold War structure. That is, when he argues for “Asia as method”, “Asia” itself is also problematized (Lo 2014b). Likewise, when I propose “port cities as method”, “port cities” are also problematized.

To propose “port cities as method” and to use “port cities” as the common ground for a network of mutual references, I have no intention to simplify or over-generalize the experiences of port cities, or to create *a* theory for port cities. Rather, I recognize the fact that even though port cities might be more closely related to each

other than to their respective hinterlands, they are not homogenous. Even so, in colonial port cities, some common and prominent features can still be highlighted. These features are also where “port cities” can be problematized. A prominent feature of port cities is that they are the cradle of what Law Wing Sang (2009) calls “collaborative colonialism”. Law uses the rises, the roles and activities of different “collaborators” in Hong Kong, including the middlemen and compradors, as examples to illustrate that the colonial situation in Hong Kong – an analysis which, I argue, ought to be extended to other sites with similar conditions – cannot be understood in a reductive model of unilateral domination by the colonizers. Rather, we should restate that the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized was not one of binary opposition. The terms “collaborators” and “compradors” should not be read as negative moral judgments or as insults. These people’s roles do not imply that they passively submitted to the colonizers or were merely “traitors” of “their” people. Law’s theory of “collaborative colonialism” brings back the complexity of colonial power and the people involved in it. The colonized, accordingly, were not always in a position of passive submission to the colonizers. Recognizing this demands an acceptance that simplistic nationalistic and anti-colonial discourses based on binary oppositions would prove unproductive. Rather, the complexities of colonial situations need to be studied critically. In colonial port cities, trade was the most important economic activity.. Thus, the colonial governments were often quite eager to attract traders. These traders included many Asian populations such as Parsee, Bugis, Baghdad Jews, Chinese, etc. These “local” or “indigenous” traders (from the colonizers’ perspective) were often the “middlemen” or “comprador class.” In other words, colonial port cities gave birth to the comprador class (Home 2013; Basu ed. 1985; Gipouloux 2011). The comprador class is a kind of “local” and “cosmopolitan” elite that collaborated with the colonizers. Their position might best be understood according to Guha’s (1988a) definition of the “subaltern”; those who, to a certain extent, are still “subordinated” in the racial and official hierarchies, yet were able to make use of their “in-between” position to pursue their own interests. Their relationships with colonial governments were often complicated, combining cooperation, rivalry and open conflicts (Law 2009; Gipouloux 2011). The comprador class often travelled within the region; it was not uncommon for them to have significant roles in several colonies in the region. There is thus a need for both postcolonial theories and the narration of colonial histories and colonialities to address the complexity of these issues. I will proceed with the discussion of collaborative colonialism, its

significance in making colonial port cities and its implications in for postcolonial reflections in Chapter 3.

Another prominent feature of colonial port cities is also the result of movement of people. Colonial port cities have been shaped by different ethnic groups, including merchants, elites, and workers of different ethnic backgrounds. These people may later have migrated or been transplanted into the hinterlands, but the port cities were their first points of contact. They were places where different languages, cultures, religious and ethnic groups met and interacted; this could be regarded as a form of cosmopolitanism.<sup>37</sup> I have no intention to romanticize this kind of cosmopolitanism as something harmonious; conflicts and violence were routine, yet it was through such processes of conflict, violence and hybridization that the port cities were built up. Port cities thus become a site to examine and contest cosmopolitanism. By cosmopolitanism, I am not referring to the Enlightenment claim of universality, or a substitute for the term “international” (Marcus 2001); rather, I mean a process in which both elites and workers from different backgrounds, ethnic groups and cultures took part, in which they continue to do so. This cosmopolitanism is where vernacular modernities take place. It is often open to contest, and falls somewhere in between what Homi Bhabha (2006) calls “global cosmopolitanism” and “vernacular cosmopolitanism”. Port cities are sites where hybridization takes place. This is different from simplified versions of multiculturalism that are prone to ignoring specific complexities and the multiplicity of ethnic groups. I will return to this point in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

In this dissertation, I am putting “port cities as method” into practice. To discover how postcolonial heritage preservation projects can be actual decolonization projects in Southeast Asian port cities, I am undertaking a study of heritage preservation in former colonial port cities, as nodal points in overlapping Sinophone networks. The histories of port cities are embedded and documented in the built heritage and urban landscapes. How heritage might be connected to a revitalization of postcolonial theories should also be considered, and the “alternative histories” being narrated is indeed important for decolonizing these places. Cosmopolitanism has an important role in the development of the histories and urban landscapes of these colonial port cities. As above,

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<sup>37</sup> Similar situations, such as the rise of the comprador class and the existence of a cosmopolitan population, also occurred in “treaty ports” in coastal China after mid-Qing.

I will devote Chapter 3 in this dissertation to a discussion of how their cosmopolitan heritage, as a significant feature of colonial port cities, is treated or ignored by these postcolonial cities. Through such a discursive reading, the ideology behind their relationship to their cosmopolitan heritage can be revealed.

## 1.6 Chapter Outline

This chapter functions as the introductory and theoretical chapter of the dissertation. I have defined the key concepts of the dissertation, those of “heritage preservation”, the “postcolonial” and “decolonization”, and stated the major research question, as that of how postcolonial heritage preservation can function as an actual decolonization project. I have also articulated those major theories which are central to the dissertation, namely the understanding of heritage in terms of the trialectic relations of time, space and identity, rather than in purely temporal or economic terms, and the necessity to differentiate between depoliticized and radicalized collective memory, where I argue that critical possibilities are inherent to radicalized collective memory. In contrast to the occidentalist understanding of modernity as a singular and linear term (or process) – which is internalized by many postcolonial states, especially in their desire to “catch up” in terms economic development – there exist multiple vernacular modernities, which, I argue, critical postcolonial theories also need to bear in mind. Following the postcolonial critique of occidentalism and Eurocentricism, and the critique of the abstract and essentialist notion of “Chineseness”, this dissertation aims at proposing and demonstrating methods for critical and horizontal mutual referencing. By developing upon models of “Inter-Asia” inter-referencing and upon previous studies of “port cities” as related, cosmopolitan urban spaces and are marginalized by nationalist discourse), I propose “port cities as method” as a theoretical methodology, and as the theoretical methodology of this dissertation. Thus in the following chapters I intend to discuss several themes closely related to the major research question, using the major theories central to this dissertation, as outlined above.

Chapter 2 is titled “Contesting the Colonial, the National and the Global”. It starts with the basic question that postcolonial societies necessarily need to face: how to deal with their colonial heritage? For colonial port cities, neither thinking that there is no pre-colonial past – that their history only started when the colonizer came – nor

obsessing over tracing the pre-colonial past can respond adequately to the complexity of history. The current urban and demographic landscapes, particularly their multiracial character, are results of both the pre-colonial past *and* colonialities. By applying Taiwanese sociologist Kang Chao's (1998) reading of Frederick Nietzsche, I am going to argue that anti-colonial nationalism and the demolition of colonial heritage as "revenge" is no more than the unproductive politics of *ressentiment*, and cannot therefore be regarded as an effective decolonization project. Chapter 2 will also question the relationship of colonialism, nationalism and global capitalism. Is nationalism necessarily the "opposite" of colonialism and is it necessarily against global capitalism? I am going to illustrate how nationalism and global capitalism are implicated within the decision-making process for the preservation or demolition of colonial heritage. Is preserving the colonial heritage necessarily nostalgic for the colonial past? How can a decolonization process that challenges both nationalism and global capitalism be possible through the preservation of "colonial" heritage?

Chapter 3 is titled "Heritage of Port Cities: Multiculturalism, Hybridity and Vernacular Modernities". It continues the above argument for "port cities as method" and views the heritage of these port cities as the primary site of study. This chapter argues that as multi-ethnic, multicultural and even cosmopolitan urban spaces where cultural hybridization has taken place, colonial port cities are paradigmatic sites in which to demonstrate multiple vernacular modernities. The complex histories of colonial port cities are often embedded in their urban landscapes and built heritage, which can challenge the ethnocentric point of view about history and space, in the city and the state; the simplified version of multiculturalism, and the monolithic, occidentalist understanding of modernity. Chapter 3 is going to question how heritage places and urban landscapes in which the histories of port cities are embedded have been treated in postcolonial societies. Do postcolonial societies actively preserve and engage, either positively or negatively, with the heritage of port cities? Or are sites of heritage in port cities abandoned, without active engagement, or are they even actively demolished? What are the ideologies motivating such treatments? What is the significance of the heritage of port cities for reflections on multiple vernacular modernities, multiculturalism, cultural hybridization and racial relationships in postcolonial societies?

Chapter 4 is titled “Radicalism through the ‘De-politicized’: Cultural Heritage as / and Social Movements”. It will discuss the possibilities of cultural heritage as resistance. In recent years, “culture-led urban regeneration” that makes use of (if not commodifies and exploits) culture, history and heritage to transform the urban (social) landscape in different cities, quite often lays the groundwork for what are ultimately mere real estate projects (Wang and Li 2011; Paddison and Miles, eds. 2007). Following Sharon Zukin’s (1982, 1987) criticism, some assert that culture heritage has become the force of gentrification: “culture as bulldozer” (Treasure Hill Commune 2006). Without denying that there are circumstances in which states and the business sector have made use of heritage to accumulate capital, I will bring the radical tradition of heritage preservation back onto the scene. I am going to ask how it is possible for cultural heritage to operate as a form, or forms, of resistance to displacement, neoliberalization and undemocratic decision-making processes. How can the “depoliticized” face of cultural heritage be used as a channel to smuggle in acts of dissent against the dominant paradigms of society? I argue that there is a need to re-negotiate the relationship between the seemingly binary modes of “cultural” and “political-economic” analysis and criticism. By going beyond the “culture – political economy” binary opposition, I am arguing that the mobilization of cultural heritage discourses is indeed important not only as a strategic tool for social movements but also for critical reflection about the urban future, conceived in terms of “right to the city”, rather than in the pervasive language of property regimes. In Chapter 4, I will also illustrate how heritage preservation movements can become the *de facto* social movements in situations where ordinary forms of social activism are less possible.

Chapter 5 is the concluding chapter of this dissertation, in which I will summarize my major arguments and argue for the dissertation’s significance. Ultimately, the dissertation argues that critical negotiation with the histories embedded in heritage, place-based memory, the sense of place associated with heritage, and the association of heritage with “right to the city” are significant and necessary for cultural heritage preservation to function as resistance and as an actual decolonizing project.

## Chapter 2

### Contesting the Colonial, the National and the Global

*I want to tell a story. The disappearance of these places represents the disappearance of what, which histories and whose histories. [...] It was 4 April 1966. When the Star Ferry wanted to raise the fares, Elsie Tu collected 40 000 signatures and still could not stop Star Ferry raising the fares. This man called So Sau-chung came out to protest and went on hunger strike. This witnessed the birth of civil society in Hong Kong. This witnessed the first time Hong Kong citizens, that is you and me, bravely came out to say no to the government. Then, in 1970, when English was the only official language of Hong Kong and Chinese was no better than the mud on earth, a group of students came out to fight for official status of Chinese language at Edinburgh Place just next to Queen's Pier. In 1971, there was the Protect Diaoyutai Movement. Besides demanding the protection of Diaoyutai, it was also because of the government's bad Public Order Ordinance that restricted the freedom of assembly, again, a group of youth and university students came out to protest. Where did they protest? At the same place. You can see Queen's Pier in the photo! [...] We were taught to believe that there is only one Hong Kong story, the history from small fishing village to financial centre. Our next generation really thinks that we used to fish and buy stocks nowadays; there are only two kinds of people in this city. In school we were not taught the other histories, the history from 1966 to preservation movement of Star Ferry Pier last year and of Queen's Pier this year. These are the histories of Hong Kong citizens bravely coming out to say no to injustice. [...] I want to remind everyone: now you can enjoy legal holidays and paid maternity leave because of these histories.*

--- Chu Hoi Dick, speech at Queen's Pier public forum<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Chu made this speech at a public forum at Queen's Pier on 29 July 2007. A video was made available on YouTube, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BKZ06mOUHI> (accessed on 4 April 2014).

In early 2014, an art exhibition at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum called “Long time no see, Victoria” showcased the work of 17 Hong Kong artists, about their memories of, sentiments toward and responses to Hong Kong’s past. Images and symbols of the colonial past, such as colonial architecture, the names of British monarchs, the Union Jack and the colonial flag consistently appeared in many of these artworks, but other, perhaps contradictory images and symbols were also to be found. The curator used a “letter” addressing to “Victoria” link the different artworks. When I visited the exhibition, I asked myself, “Why ‘Victoria’? What does ‘Victoria’ really signify?” When Hong Kongers talk about “the Queen”, or colloquially “*si tau po*” 事頭婆 (“female boss”), they refer to the current British monarch Elizabeth II rather than Victoria. Although Victoria Park is a local landmark, architecturally, there are very few Victorian buildings left in Hong Kong. Perhaps “Victoria” is far enough in the past for people to treat as an “empty signifier”; i.e., to project thoughts and sentiments upon, and to create a space for reflection, but unlikely to prompt accusations of a “yearning for the colonial past”. If the exhibition was called “Long Time No See, Elizabeth”, the implication would obviously be totally different. The name of the current British monarch could hardly be taken as empty signifier for people to project their desires, visions and thoughts about the city upon. Perhaps, too, here “Victoria” refers not merely to an era, but also to the city, as “City of Victoria” had indeed been the name of the capital of colonial Hong Kong, and as in the fiction of the notable Hong Kong writer Dung Kai-cheung.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, the letter to “Victoria” can be interpreted as a letter to “Hong Kong”. The artworks indeed reflect upon memories of, and relationships with the city, of which its colonial past is an inseparable and undeniable part. As the curator wrote,

Without memories, there will be no self. Our memories will not vanish; they will settle in the depths of my heart, calling out eternally in the stillness.

(Lo 2014)

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<sup>39</sup> In 1990s, Hong Kong writer Dung Kai-cheung published a fiction known as *Visible Cities* (1998). The Chinese title “V 城繁勝錄” means “Recording Prosperous V-City”; the “V-City” in the book itself is often reminiscent of Hong Kong. Here, “V-City” can be read as both “Visible City”, as the English title suggests, and “Victoria City”, as a metaphor for Hong Kong (Cheung 2001).

This exhibition, full of symbols of the colonial past, set shown in a public museum reminds me of an afternoon several months after the demolition of Queen's Pier. I was discussing it with a friend in a fast food shop in Central when a middle-aged lady interrupted. She soon began to tell us her stories and opinions about the city and its future. She did not oppose protection of Queen's Pier, but felt that protests and hunger-strikes were useless. She thought that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government wanted to demolish buildings with colonial characteristics, keeping only the Chinese temples. She also expressed her opinion that the British "brought excellent systems to their colonies." My friend and I could only remain silent. We knew that some of her comments were far from accurate and we could not agree. For instance, are Chinese temples in Hong Kong well-preserved? Did Britain really bring excellent systems to their colonies? However, her views were representative of those shared by many people of her generation and of similar background, who grew up in an era in which many of the colonial government's policies became more liberal. Thus, it would be unfair to regard her as merely nostalgic and yearning for the colonial past. For her, "the British" or "the colonial" represents a space into which she can project her ideas of, and desire for a situation "better" than the current situation, which upsets her. However, as her thinking seemed unable to go beyond a model of binary opposition, she insisted that the Hong Kong SAR government wanted to demolish the colonial buildings and keep only the Chinese temples, despite the fact that Government House, the former colonial governors' official residence, was still standing in the city and serving as the official residence of the Chief Executive, the head of the post-handover government. Likewise, while many of the activists participating in the movement to preserve Queen's Pier, a supposedly "colonial symbol", regarded the Preservation Movement as a movement to decolonize Hong Kong, they too were accused by Chinese nationalists of being "unpatriotic" and of "yearning for the colonial past". According to these nationalists, the pier represents a site of "national shame" and should thus be demolished (Hua 2007; So 2007).

Postcolonial societies' relationships with the colonial heritage<sup>40</sup>, i.e., that of their

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<sup>40</sup> "Colonial heritage" refers to the architectures and urban landscape planned by or for the colonizers, such as forts, colonial government, institutional and religious buildings, ceremonial structures and luxury hotels primarily catering the European elites (A. Ghafar Ahmad 1997).

built environment, as amongst the most visible of colonial symbols, have been ambiguous (Marschall 2008). On one hand, some societies regard the demolition of colonial heritage as anti-colonialism, restoring their “national prestige” and wiping out their “national shame” (Hsia 2000, 2002; Chen, Y. J. 2013). On the other hand, colonial heritage is well-preserved by some postcolonial states; local communities in other postcolonial societies might also request its preservation for different reasons. These reasons include recognizing the colonial heritage as an important part of their history; the formation of local identity, architectural interests, economic interests or any combination of these reasons (Harrison and Hughes 2010; Fisher 2004; Henderson 2004; Goh 2010; Royle 1997). As with their other heritage, postcolonial societies’ treatment of colonial heritage is also affected by global capital.

In this chapter, I am first going to argue why I do not regard the demolition of colonial heritage in the name of the “nation” as an effective decolonization project. Then, I will contrast two cases of dealing with colonial heritage – one top-down case in Singapore and one bottom-up case in Hong Kong – to arouse the issue of *whose* and *what kind* of identity is at stake in preserving, or demanding the preservation of, colonial heritage. Issues of “public space” and the “nation” will also be addressed in the discussion. I will question whether the “national” really provides an alternative to the “colonial”, or whether they might rather in fact share similar logic and blind spots. If the latter is the case, what are the alternatives to the “colonial” and the “national”? Besides contesting the “colonial”, I will move on to the issue of the “global”. Here, I am not going to debate whether the “global” actually means “Western” trends, institutions and guidelines and viewpoints on heritage. These debates are already well written in the literatures of heritage studies and tourism studies (e.g. Harrison ed. 2010; Harrison 2013; Smith 2006; Logan 2008; Hall and Tucker eds. 2004; Harrison and Hitchcock eds. 2005). Rather, I am focusing on the issue of “global capital”, which could be Asian-based, to illustrate the relationship between nation-states and global capital, *who* is appropriating global capital for *what reasons* and *how* global capital affects decision-making in dealing with colonial heritage

## **2.1 Demolition of Colonial Heritage in the Name of the “Nation”**

Although the primary concerns of colonizers establishing colonies were to

extract local resources and to accumulate wealth through trade, they needed to build infrastructures, facilities, settlements, towns and cities to fulfill such purposes. There were often variations in how colonists planned and built their settlements (Ross and Telkamp 1985; King 1985). Robert Home summarizes three co-existing and sometimes competing ideologies which influenced the urban landscapes of colonial settlements, namely: (i) the “ideology of state control” regarded the colonies “as an initiate by the state”, where colonial ruling elites used urban designs and buildings to “express their political authority”; (ii) the capitalist ideology which focused on wealth accumulation, resources extraction and production, and whose concomitant drive to minimize public expenditure “included municipal planning and administration”; and (iii) the “utopian” ideology which regarded the “colonial settlement as an opportunity to experiment with new forms of social organization” which “were less achievable at home” (Home 2013: 3 – 4). Typically, a “colonial city”<sup>41</sup> consists of a “colonial settlement” and “native quarters”. The former was occupied primarily by the colonizing forces, the colonial administration and institutions, their religious buildings and business establishments, while the latter was occupied by the colonized population including the migrants attracted to colonial port cities (King 1976), as I will elaborate in Chapter 3.

Although these contrasting colonial ideologies led to different urban landscapes, they share some commonalities. The colonizers generally treated land in colonies as “virgin”, the original landscapes and existing indigenous settlements as “primitive”. Thus, these lands could be occupied, modified, built over or ignored (Hsia 2000, 2002; King 1985). In short, to fulfil their colonial ideologies and their visions for urban landscapes, colonizers tended to drastically change the landscapes they encountered. In such process, the existing native “backward” architectures could be “erased” and scarified. For instance, in Seoul, the Japanese built the Government-General Building in a bullying and violent way that occupied the central yard of the existing Korean palace, visually repressing the existing landscape (King 1985; Hsia 2002; Hyun 2002). The creation of the colonial urban landscape is through the denial, erasure and destruction of existing landscapes in the colonies.

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<sup>41</sup> Anthony D. King defines a “colonial city” as the “urban area in the colonial society most typically characterised by the physical segregation of its ethnic, social and cultural component groups, which resulted from the processes of colonialism” (1976: 17).

After the colonizers left, it was not uncommon for postcolonial states, regardless of whether they are independent or those transferred to a so-called “motherland”, to build or name new “monuments” as the new “*lieux de mémoire*” for the citizens to identify with, as their European counterparts had done in the process of nation-building. Similar to their European counterparts, these newly independent states also wanted to use these new monuments to channel their visions of nation-building (Nora 1996a, 1996b; den Boer 2010). For instance, the Stadium Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur was purposely built for the proclamation of *merdeka* (independence) of Malaya from Britain, even though there was a *padang* (“field”) could be used for gathering people.<sup>42</sup> When Malaysia was founded in 1963<sup>43</sup>, the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (Supreme Ruler) listed eight architectures built in 1950s to 1960s as the symbolic bases for future citizenship (Lai, C.K. 2007). Singapore built its National Theatre and National Library to pre-empt a national identity even before Singapore gained full independence (Quek 2012). Together with creating new “heritage”, postcolonial societies also need to deal with their colonial heritage. As mentioned earlier, postcolonial societies’ relationship with the colonial heritage has been ambiguous. Some of these postcolonial states were eager to define their unique identity and establish their “postcolonial” or “post-independent” identity through getting rid of the “colonial symbols”. These “symbols” could range from statues and written tablets to individual architectures and whole landscapes. For instance, after a few decades of independence, the Korean government used the excuse of getting rid of symbols of Japanese occupation to demolish the Government-General Building in the 1990s. The building was regarded as a representation of “national shame” and the dark history that should be removed in order to rectify the national spirit. The demolition of this colonial architecture, especially by its visual “execution”, together with restoration of the pre-colonial dynastic palaces destroyed in the Japanese colonial period, was, in the state’s point of view, a way to express “patriotism” and “nationalism” (Hyun 2002; Yim 2003; Hsia 2002; Chen, Y.J. 2013). Such demolition is an act demonstrating both anti-colonialism and nationalism by the postcolonial state. The national identity is built upon the “undoing” the colonial history. It is understandable, after long decades of oppression and denial by the colonizers, that the colonized people

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<sup>42</sup> I owe this point to Nurul Azreen Azlan. The *padang* was renamed as Merdeka Square after the independence of Malaya, and is still used as the venue for the Independence Day Parade of Malaysia.

<sup>43</sup> The Federation of Malaya, when Malacca and Penang were part of it, became independent from Britain in 1957. In 1963, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak joined the Federation of Malay and formed Malaysia (Tan, T. Y. 2008).

wanted to reverse the order, and expressed their victory of anti-colonial struggle through the tearing down of colonial symbols, especially those statues obviously expressing colonial power. However, if decolonization refers to “decolonizing the mind” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986), a process to allow colonized people to critically re-think and reflect their relationships with the colonizers, while the demolition of colonial heritage could be referred as “anti-colonial”, it is not necessarily a “decolonization” project, especially when anti-colonialism and nationalism mingle together.

I do not regard the demolition of colonial heritage as necessarily a decolonization project also because the politics of *ressentiment* operates in such anti-colonial nationalism. The phrase “politics of *ressentiment*” is used by the Taiwanese sociologist Kang Chao 趙剛(1998), who develops Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1969, 2006, 2009) concept of *ressentiment* into a radical critique of the crisis of social movements and democratic movements in Taiwan in 1990s. Chao translates *ressentiment* into Chinese as *duhen* 妒恨, literally “envy-hatred” or “jealous-hatred”, to express the complexity of the psychology of *ressentiment*. In Nietzsche’s philosophy, *ressentiment* is linked with “slave morality”. The “slave” is the weak and oppressed, in a powerless position and, unlike the “master” or “noble”, incapable of “action” and “drive”. In order to fulfil the desire to “will” and to compensate the denial of true reaction, they develop a reaction-sentiment, a jealousy and hatred complex, namely *ressentiment*, towards the “master”. In short, *ressentiment* functions as “imaginary revenge” (Nietzsche 1969: 36). Such reaction is based on the moral-evil imagination. By imagining the oppressor as their “evil” enemies<sup>44</sup>, the “slaves”, i.e. the one who are pestered by *ressentiment*, then define their own position in opposition to the “evil” others (the “masters”) and thus as “moral”. By claiming their own position as a “moral” one, the people pestered by *ressentiment* can claim that it is a position they “will” to. They take their “revenge” towards these oppressors, now known to them as “evil”, by way of disapproving of them. For Nietzsche, this is only a reaction, not an action; it is passive rather than active (Nietzsche 1969, 2006, 2009; Chao 1998). Moreover, if one reads the psychology of *ressentiment* more carefully, those who deny their incapability to act, but claim that such a position is their “will”, might outwardly show their “hatred” of what they resent;

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<sup>44</sup> By “imagination”, I am not saying that there is no such thing as an “oppressor”, but referring to the oppressed imagining the oppressor as the “evil” one, instead there being a more critical and analytical relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed.

yet in their heart, they are jealous or envious of the position they imagine that the “evil” other possesses (Sham 2009).

According to Chao (1998), the social and democratic movements in 1990s Taiwan were dominated by the politics of *ressentiment*, characterised by the imagination of a “moral-evil” binary opposition and condemnation of the “evil” others. Chao argues that political practices constrained by the politics of *ressentiment* can only “explain the world in moral-evil framework and form revenge groups of hatred according to such framework” (1998: 241). Accordingly, the politics of *ressentiment* cannot bring true empowerment because the understanding of reality and political mobilization are based on a moral-evil binary opposition, instead of more complex political-economic and socio-cultural analysis. Mobilization based on the politics of *ressentiment*, which is a shortcut, a reductive way to understand the world, demands “revenge” rather than bringing real change to political-economic and socio-cultural structures. Under the politics of *ressentiment*, the oppressed’s revenge is exacted by taking the oppressor’s position, rather than changing the structure. As there is no imagining of changes to the structure, the possible future of subjectivities can only come from envy and hatred. Chao’s criticism of the politics of *ressentiment* is also valid for criticizing anti-colonial nationalism in which colonialism is not treated as a political-economic and socio-cultural problematic structure but, again, as the “evil” other. In the name of nationalism or anti-colonialism, the mobilized colonized people, now in a “moral” position, aim at replacing the colonizers, taking their positions instead of aiming at structural reforms and changes to mentalities and governmentalities. Thus, anti-colonial nationalism is no more than a form of the politics of *ressentiment*, which cannot go beyond the jealous-hatred complex, the moral-evil binary opposition and the imagination of revenge.

Returning to the issue of the demolition of colonial heritage: when the colonizers are regarded as an “evil” other and the demolition is treated as a form of revenge, the politics of *ressentiment* are in operation. The Korean government’s demolition of the Japanese Government-General Building is an obvious example. When the government announced they were to demolish the Government-General Building and rebuild the dynastic Gyeongbok Palace, they started with a praying ritual. In the ritual oath, the Japanese and their collaborators were described as “evil devils”. On the day they started the demolition of the Building, there was another ritual oath claiming the demolition as

the way “to settle dark history and to correct national spirits” (Hyun 2002). In other words, the government gave a moral position to the demolition of the colonial building. First, the government symbolically beheaded the building by removing its dome. Visually and symbolically, this act was revenge against the evil other in the name of nationalism. Meanwhile, dissenters that opposed the demolition of the building were barred from protesting and handing out leaflets nearby (Hyun 2002). A complex political-economic and socio-cultural relationship was reduced into a moral / us – evil / them binary opposition, and “revenge” against the colonial past in the name of nationalism, disallowing the expression of more complex histories.

Even in circumstances that the politics of *ressentiment* does not operate, or operates in less obvious ways, the demolition of colonial heritage in the name of nationalism often ignores multiple layers of histories and multiple meanings of space. In the Lefebvrian understanding of the “production of space”, social spatialization is the trialectic interaction of the “spatial triads”, namely “spatial practice” (perceived space), “representation of space” (conceptualized or conceived space) and “spaces of representation” (lived space) (Lefebvre 1991; Shields 1999; Elden 2004). The meanings of a space, building and landscape are not limited to those designated, top-down by states and urban planners but also by how people use, perceive, live through and understand such places. In colonial cities, it is not only about how the colonial administration and ruling elites designate the meanings of their urban landscapes, but also how these landscapes have been used, lived through and understood. As Hsia (2002) suggests, in colonial cities, suppression by colonial governments co-existed with opposition and resistance. Even if such resistance might not be as confrontational as political resistance, one should not ignore how the space has been used and understood by the colonized people. Colonial administrative buildings and statues can be perceived as “landmarks” and part of how city-dwellers remember the city and its landscape. It is impossible for one to reduce their meanings into merely a “colonial” one (Marschall 2008). Their demolition, due to their “colonial” trail alone, fails to recognize the complexity and multiplicity of their meanings. Such demolition does not contribute to reflection upon the complex histories of the colonial period and the formation of critical subjects. Rather, such demolition fixes a particular, reductive understanding of colonialism and the colonial period that requires getting rid of. Complexity and internal diversities are ignored.

More importantly, as mentioned earlier, when colonial governments built colonial cities, they overwrote the landscapes and disregarded the existing meanings of the place for the people. When postcolonial states demolish colonial heritage in the name of nationalism, they follow the similar logic, disregarding the meanings of the place for the people. Thus anti-colonial nationalism repeats the logic of colonialism. The postcolonial state's demolition of colonial heritage shares the same logic of the colonial government mistaking the place as a piece of "virgin land". After all, the history of colonialism exists; one cannot simply deny it or immediately demonize it without understanding its complexity and its bottom-up appropriation.

It is therefore hard for the demolition of colonial heritage in the name of anti-colonialism or nationalism, usually co-mingled, to succeed as a decolonization project because it fails to provide space for reflection upon colonialism and the conditions of modernities in colonies. This does not mean, however, that the preservation of colonial heritage would automatically constitute decolonization. Whether the preservation of colonial heritage could be a decolonization project depends on whether the process of preservation allows, and provides chances for, reflection upon colonialism and how the heritage is preserved and used after preservation.

## **2.2 Appropriating Colonial Heritage for Nation-Building and Global Capital: Singapore as example**

In the previous section, I argued that a postcolonial state's demolition of colonial heritage is hard to be called decolonization project. In contrast to demolition, the preservation of colonial heritage opens up possibilities to negotiate with the histories embedded in the place and with how such colonial heritage can be used. Yet whether such an appropriation of heritage preservation can be regarded as a decolonization project is inevitably affected by *who* is appropriating it and *why*. I will start by discussing the top-down approach, which can all too easily end up repeating the colonial mentality rather than opening up possibilities for decolonization.

An emphasis on postcolonial societies' attitude towards their colonial heritage

does not mean that “colonial” and “postcolonial” are two entirely distinct and binary periods. In post-war Southeast Asia, it is not uncommon for postcolonial states’ heritage preservation policies and practices to have been influenced by those of the former colonial governments. In Singapore, for instance, the formulation of heritage preservation began in late colonial period. When the British Council wanted to showcase historically important buildings and architectural monuments in the “Far East”, the colonial administration in Singapore began to provide a list. Around 30 structures were proposed for preservation in the 1958 *Master Plan Written Statement*, when Singapore was under internal self-government. The list was later revised in the early 1960s for occasions such as UNESCO’s campaign for safeguarding historic monuments and cultural properties, and in preparation for celebrating Malaysia’s National Day, during the period when Singapore was a state of Malaysia (Perry, Kong and Yeoh 1997; Public Relations Office 1954; Ministry of Culture 1962 – 1964, 1963 – 1964, 1963 – 1969). Although there was no formal heritage preservation legislation in the period immediately after independence, the list prepared in the colonial period had a great impact on the early days of heritage preservation legislation. There is a huge overlap between this list produced in the late colonial period and the gazetted monuments in the early years after the Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB) was founded (Perry, Kong and Yeoh 1997). In other words, the colonial administration provided a preliminary list of gazetted monuments for the postcolonial state. Similarly, in Hong Kong, the discussion of heritage preservation started in the colonial period in the late 1950s with the first legislation being passed in the 1970s, when Hong Kong was still a British colony. Even after the handover, the general framework of Hong Kong’s heritage preservation legislation had not changed much since that first legislation in the 1970s (Ip 2010; Chui and Tsoi 2003).

Here we come to the question of how the “colonial”, including colonial heritage, and its designation and legislation, has been appropriated and transformed in postcolonial societies. Some states have skilfully appropriated and transformed the former colonizers’ heritage into their own narratives of the nation and ongoing development. For instance, when postcolonial states occupied the former colonizers’ government offices and turned them into the postcolonial states’ government offices, they turned the colonizers’ landscape of power into the postcolonial states’ landscape of power (Hsia 2002). A number of questions pose themselves in such situations. Is this

kind of transformation a form of decolonization? Has the space been decolonized? When the notion of the “nation” is involved, *whose* nation and *whose* vision of the nation are being referred to? Is the postcolonial society still trapped in the binary opposition of the “colonial” and the new “national”? What are the relationships between the “national” and global capital? Is global capital here merely an “external force”? Are there some histories and people who continue to be excluded from this vision and version of the “nation”, such that the new nationalism is still repeating the logic of colonialism? To answer these questions, I will look to an example, and assess how Singapore’s PAP government appropriated their city’s colonial built heritage and urban landscape for the purposes of nation-building and attracting global capital.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, in the early years after Singapore became independent, heritage preservation was not the state’s major agenda. There was only piecemeal gazette of national monuments. It was not until the 1980s that the PAP government took a more active role in heritage preservation. Similar to many national and local governments’ cultural policy strategies, this process in Singapore also involved both the protection and enhancement of a certain version of “local” and the reframing of cultural heritage for tourists (Crane 2002). Two major forces, namely the nation-building agenda and the income from tourism, contributed to such change (Kong and Yeoh 2003; Teo and Huang 1995; Yeoh and Huang 2008). From the state’s viewpoint, although “Westernization” of the society brought rapid economic growth, it also created a “moral crisis”, weakening the “Asian” and “traditional” values of the society (Yeoh and Huang 2008; Kong and Yeoh 2003; Perry, Kong and Yeoh 1997). For instance, in 1988, the then-First Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong made a speech claiming:

We are part of a long Asian civilization and we should be proud of it. We should **not be assimilated by the West** and become a pseudo-Western society. We should be a nation that is **uniquely multiracial and Asian**, with each community proud of its **traditional culture and heritage**.

(Goh 1988: 15, my emphasis)

In short, the ruling elites wanted to forestall society’s becoming a “Western” one by upholding a vision of the nation based on “Asian” values, in which preserving cultural heritage has a role. The PAP government believes that letting the citizens know their

“roots” through cultural heritage “can balance [their] Asian values and Western influence.” (The Committee on Heritage 1988: 7) Yet the actual meanings of the “Western” and “Asian” remain arbitrary. Thus, the ruling elites could inject contents into this set of Western-Asian binary oppositions according to their needs.<sup>45</sup>

Consideration of international tourist income also motivated the state to preserve cultural heritage. In the 1970s, the tourism sector tried to promote Singapore’s “garden attraction and modern hotels” ; Singapore would be the destination of “instant Asia”, where several “Asian cultures” could be found at once. Yet these “instant Asia” experiences were not situated in the “historic districts” (Yeoh, Tan, Wang and Wong 2001: 4). There was rising concern about the lack of interest of tourists towards Singapore. For instance, in 1980, the then-Director of the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB)<sup>46</sup> expressed the complaints of many Western tourists that the luxury hotels and shopping complexes in Singapore “look[ed] very much like the hotels back home”. He recommended the preservation of whole city blocks “for both the tourists and the future generations” (*The Straits Times* 1980). The economic recession in the early- to mid-1980s led to a drop in the number of international tourists, prompting the state to readjust its tourist marketing strategies and to diversify tourist products. The cultural heritage of Singapore, including the colonial and “Asian” heritage of Singapore, became one of the products that the government wanted to market to international tourists (Yeoh, Tan, Wang and Wong 2001; Teo and Huang 1995). In short, the state began to take a more active role in heritage preservation and to designate conservation districts as the result of the dual forces of the national agenda for nation-building and of global capital.

The colonial heritage of Singapore played a significant part in both of the forces that shaped Singapore’s heritage preservation policies. From the nation-building point of view, the colonial past, i.e., the experiences of the people and the Singaporean

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<sup>45</sup> For instance, in the 1960s and 1970s, popular culture from the West was regarded to be associated with “unhealthy” decadent lifestyles while the “West” was associated with “excessive individualism”, in contrast to the “Asian”-associated “communitarianism”, “family above individual” that the state wanted to promote in the 1980s (Kong and Yeoh 2003; Bell and de-Shalit 2011). The substance of “multiracialism” and “multiculturalism”, which are also mobilized and associated with the “Asian” values, would be evaluated in Chapter 3.

<sup>46</sup> Now renamed as Singapore Tourism Board (STB)

society's living through the colonial administration, was considered as an essential part of the "political heritage" which "has shaped Singapore's development and made the nation what it is today"; thus as part of a "nation building heritage" (The Committee on Heritage 1988: 31). The state believed that they could narrate their version of the "Singapore story" using the colonial heritage. From the tourist promotion point of view, "colonial heritage" was one of the five themes of the international attraction of Singapore, according to the Ministry of Trade and Industry's *Tourism Product Development Plan* in 1986. Several colonial architectures were also recognized as potential tourist attractions (Teo and Huang 1995; Lee 2004). In short, the tourist promotion point of view believed that the colonial heritage could bring in tourist profits. Thus, the colonial landscape of Singapore was appropriated by the state to fulfill both the agendas for nation-building and increasing tourist income.

In order to fulfill these visions, the "Civic and Cultural District"<sup>47</sup>, a 105-hectare area in Central Area of Singapore, was designated and identified as one of the major "conservation areas"<sup>48</sup> (Urban Redevelopment Authority 1988). Historically, the area was the centre of colonial rule and the European population's social centre. It housed many colonial administrations and government offices such as the *Padang*, the Supreme Court, the Municipal Building; religious buildings primarily serving the European population, such as St Andrew's Cathedral and the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd; educational institutions with colonial origins such as Saint Joseph's Institution; cultural venues that originally primarily served the European population such as the Raffles Library and Museum; and monuments designated for the commemoration of events and people related to the British Empire such as Empress Place (Urban Redevelopment Authority 1988, 1995d; Goh 2005; Perry, Kong and Yeoh 1997; Collins, Erickson, Perrot and Sugaya 1987). Thus, the area now designated as "Civic and Cultural District" was similar to what King (1976) calls a "colonial urban settlement" within the "colonial city", although there were also institutions designated for colonial collaborators<sup>49</sup> of different ethnic groups, built by themselves for themselves, such as the Armenian

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<sup>47</sup> Similar to "Chinatown" and "Little India", the name "Civic and Cultural District" or "Civic District" did not exist until it was so-designated by the Singaporean government in the 1980s.

<sup>48</sup> Other includes "Chinatown", Kampong Glam and "Little India", which I will discuss in Chapter 3, and Emerald Hill, an area conventionally associated with the wealthy Peranakan population, and the Singapore River (Kong 2011; Perry, Kong and Yeoh 1997).

<sup>49</sup> I will discuss the history of collaborative colonialism embedded in the urban landscapes in colonial port cities in Chapter 3.

Church and Tao Nan School. Since Singapore became independent, the area has continued to serve as the seat of the post-independence government, although they may be housed in new buildings. New civic and cultural buildings such as the National Library and National Theatre have also been built in the area since Singapore was granted internal self-governance.

As Martin Perry, Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh argue, the post-independence PAP government asserted its political legitimacy not through a “wholesale removal of the colonial legacy on the landscape” but through the skillful appropriation and “reinvestment” of new meanings, namely “national and civic pride”, in the “superior” and grand colonial architecture without touching on the “negative connotations associated with the colonial past” (1997: 277 – 278). The designation of the conservation area “Civic and Cultural District”, adaptive reuse of vacated buildings and planning of several themed trails in the area such as “Ceremonial Route”, “Heritage Link” and “Historical Trails” provide examples of such “reinvestments”. The state suggests that their way of doing heritage preservation, to “maximize the historical wealth of natural and man-made assets and opportunities and to revitalize Singapore’s civic and cultural hub”, lets people “[go] on a trail that leads back in time [and trace] the rich colonial history of Singapore.” (Urban Redevelopment Authority 1988: Preface) By decontextualizing and hollowing out the content of the “colonial”, the colonial heritage is celebrated in terms of its architectural merit. Together with the other designated “ethnic enclaves”, conservation areas which I will discuss and evaluate in Chapter 3, the state could now easily put forward their vision of a multiracial and multicultural society and their corresponding vision of the economic success of Singapore.

Within the designated “Civic and Cultural District”, the several trails function to provide both locals and tourists with walking routes. As the Master Plan’s preface asks: “Fancy [...] hiking from the beginning of Orchard Road right down to Marina Square?” (Urban Redevelopment Authority 1988: Preface). The “Civic and Cultural District” is located between the Orchard Road shopping area and the Marina Centre shopping and convention area. In this sense, the trails use the Civic and Cultural District to bridge two areas primarily serving the purposes of global capital (Teo and Huang 1995). However, several major shopping malls and convention venues were actually

developed and managed by a company owned by the Singaporean government-owned transnational conglomerate Temasek Holdings: the state is also a key-player in the global market (Goldstein and Pananond 2008). Thus, the preservation of the colonial heritage and landscape does not contradict the state's nation-building vision; it also serves the interests of global capital, in which the nation-state is also a key player. What remain in question here is how the preserved colonial heritage is put to use, and whether such uses could be considered as decolonizing the colonial heritage.

The use of heritage spaces has a significant relationship to the question of whether the preservation of colonial heritage is a form of decolonization. The *Padang* in "Civic and Cultural District" serves to illustrate how the postcolonial preservation of a colonial heritage can fail to decolonize the space, instead inheriting and prolonging the colonial understanding of urban space. As mentioned earlier, the "Civic and Cultural District" was the area of both the seat of the colonial government and that for the social activities of the European population. Closely related to the "civic" is the concept of "public", although the two terms are not always interchangeable (Douglass, Ho and Ooi 2008). Since the colonial era, the colonial administration was built around the *Padang*, an open space in the city. Yet, whether this "open space" is equivalent to what is now generally known as "public space", which is associated with "right to the city", is questionable. There are several trajectories of "public space". The current popular understanding of "public space" which is associated with "right to the city" can be traced to the radicalization of Western publicly-owned or government-owned "civic space" such as public parks and plazas, which is often the result of the state's response to bottom-up contestations. Once these "civic spaces" were designated, they were not only where people spent their leisure time. Protests and rallies also took place there, even though this might not have been the state's original intention (Ooi, C. 2004; Douglass, Ho and Ooi 2008). The people's transformation of these "civic spaces" became the root of what is now understood as "publicness" and "right to the city". However, in the colonial context, "public space" such as *Padang* was not engendered in the "civic space" trajectory of Western states, but in a trajectory of "colonial public space". Rather than being the result of bottom-up contestations and negotiations, colonial public spaces were not designated for everyone, not even for the majority, in the colony. They were primarily planned to serve the colonial interests and a restricted number of people. Generally, in the colonial context, "public space" simply refers to

any piece of land owned or managed by the municipal administration. If there did exist pre-colonial indigenous settlements, here the concept of “public” was introduced by colonial administrations, imposing their role as “public guardians” in order to appropriate what had been practiced as “common”<sup>50</sup> in the pre-colonial era, such as the use of natural resources. The creation of “public” concepts of space or land by the colonial government would then translate into what is understood as “public” goods by the colonial administration. In short, the designation of colonial “public space” is a process of “privatization” or dispossession of the common by the colonial administration. Quite often, the colonial vision of the “public” is restricted to the colonizers and elites, and behaviour in these “public spaces” would then be regulated by the colonial municipal rules and orders (Glover 2007; Yeoh 1996). The *Padang* and Fort Canning (“Government Hill”, also designated as the Botanic Garden in early 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>51</sup>), two major “open spaces” in the colonial urban settlement of Singapore, are typical examples of “colonial public space”. These two pieces of land were reserved by the government as sites not to be built on, and formed the “central axis” of the centre of the whole colonial urban settlement (Ooi, G. L. 2004). These “open” and “public” spaces in colonial Singapore were planned as regulated open urban spaces (Lai, C.K. 2010). From the colonial government’s perspective, the “public” was interchangeable with the colonial administration and their vision. In Raffles’ plan, the best land in Singapore was to be allocated to the *Padang* and governmental use. The *Padang* was inherited and transformed from British India’s *maidan*: an open space for political, economic and civic life yet which also celebrated and demonstrated the political power and control of the state. This “open” space was surrounded by government offices<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> My use of the term “common” is a reference to the “common land” and “common rights” in pre-Enclosure England, which disassociates the use of land with land ownership. In pre-Enclosure England, common land was either individually or collectively owned, but the commoners, even though they did not own the land, had the rights to use the land (*profit à prendre*) (Neeson 1993). The concept is useful to articulate the disassociation of rights with land ownership and goes beyond the public (state) – private binary.

<sup>51</sup> Before the colonizer renamed it, Fort Canning or Government Hill was known as *Bukit Larangan* (“Forbidden Hill”), the site where the local kings lived and were buried in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In Stamford Raffles’ mind, Fort Canning was to be reserved as the Botanic Garden. He also built the first Government House there. Fort Canning was fortified and renamed as such in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Wan and Lau 2009; Ooi, G.L. 2004).

<sup>52</sup> Chee-Kien Lai (2010) traces the genealogy of the *Padang*. According to Lai, British Malaya’s *padang* originated from British India’s *maidan*. However, the word “*maidan*” (“*maydan*”) has a Persian root. In Persia and some Islamic cities, *maidan* refers to the formal square in the centre of the royal precinct. It was a site where state power was celebrated and other activities took place. In short, this genealogy shows how intrinsic this most important piece of colonial public space has traditionally been to celebrating the state’s power, its pedigree as a site of control.

(Powell 2004; Lai, C.K. 2010; Home 2013). When Raffles reserved the *Padang* for “public purposes”, he meant a mixture of social interaction, certain “public” activities of the elites, governmental uses and the Cantonment Plain. As the colony developed, the uses of the *Padang* evolved further. Various structures such as the Recreation Club, the Cricket Club, theatres and monuments were built in the periphery of, or near the *Padang*. Yet it was still mainly, if not exclusively, for the colonizers and the elites. In short, the *Padang* still functioned as a field or site for the colonial administration to view from the top down, an exclusive space for elites until World War II (Ooi, G. L. 2004; Wan and Lau 2009; Savage and Yeoh 2013; Lai, C.K. 2010).

As Home suggests, the colonial city was “a terrain of conflict and negotiation” (2013: 56). The colonial landscape was constructed by the colonizers but their visions for the use of public space were constantly challenged and resisted, even if not necessarily consciously so (Home 2013; Yeoh 1996; Ooi, G. L. 2004). Yet, it was not until the 1950s, in the late colonial period before Singapore became an independent nation-state, that the meaning of the *Padang* was contested when student movements and social protests took place there. The choice of using the *Padang* to contest the colonial government was both symbolic and practical. It was a large open field in front of the colonial government offices, the centre of the colonial administration, where people could gather. Thus, the meaning of this major public space in the city was rewritten in this decade, transformed from being the place where the head of the colonial administration reviewed the colonized from on high, to the place where the colonized made their demands known to the colonial administration. The “public space” symbolizing colonial power thus also became the site of bottom-up resistance (Ooi, G. L. 2004; Lai, C.K. 2010).

Besides being *the* site for protest in the late colonial period, the *Padang* was also the site where Singapore declared its independence. After Singapore became an independent state, the *Padang* became the venue for the National Day Parade in the early post-independent era.<sup>53</sup> Potentially, this could have been an act of subversion of the colonial symbolic order, to show that the space was no longer for colonial use but

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<sup>53</sup> National Day Parade in 1966 to 1974 were held in the *Padang*. Since 1975, it has been held in decentralized sites throughout the city-state, National Stadium, *the Padang* and more recently Marina Bay (Kong and Yeoh 1997; Lai, C.K. 2010).

had become a site for postcolonial citizens to demonstrate their civic pride. In this sense, when the *Padang* became the site of the National Day Parade of the postcolonial state, it had the potentiality of decolonizing the space, especially if civic pride were to have been articulated in terms of the idea of “active citizenship” that was embedded in the social protests at the *Padang* in the 1950s (Lai, C.K. 2010; Kong and Yeoh 1997; Ooi, G. L. 2004). However, with repetition, the National Day Parade has become a new ceremonial and spectacle ritual, and even though there are evolving and changing “themes”, the question arises of whose visions of the nation it serves. For instance, do these rituals recognize the collective contribution in nation-building or do they emphasize the importance of certain groups in the society? The National Day Parade aims at creating a sense of solidarity and encouraging the participation of citizens. Yet within the parade, the power of ruling elites is still emphasized, and forms of participation are highly regulated. The state’s ideology of pragmatism is also often found (Yeoh and Kong 1997; Ortmann 2009). Spatially speaking, National Day Parades largely reproduce the social hierarchy in the nation, wherein

ordinary citizens either in the galleries or on the parade-ground wait upon and / or are reviewed by the ruling elite represented by the president who officiates at the parade as well as the cabinet ministers and MPs who sit on the reviewing dais behind the president.

(Kong and Yeoh 1997: 228)

In other words, this effectively reproduced the scene of the colonial governor reviewing the colonized at the *Padang* in the colonial era.<sup>54</sup> The postcolonial ruling elites have replaced the colonizers but operate according to the same logic, and, when the National Day Parades are held at the *Padang*, this takes place in the “public space”. At the level of ceremonial use, the postcolonial nation-state reproduces the colonizer’s logic. Whether heritage preservation recognizes the “subversive” histories that have unfolded in public spaces – that is, the contested nature of such spaces – or whether it functions to repeat and retreat to the logic of the colonial concept of “public space” is central to the wider question of whether any form of heritage preservation can also be seen as a project of decolonization. As Ooi Giok Ling (2004) describes, state-designated “public

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<sup>54</sup> I note that there are occasions that some of the ruling elites sat in the crowd to demonstrate “togetherness” (Kong and Yeoh 1997). Yet this has been occasional rather than the norm.

space” in post-independent Singapore is often highly regulated. Peaceful assembly and demonstration, common uses of “public space” which give “public” a political meaning, are generally illegal without permit, unless they take place in the designated “Speaker’s Corner” at a particular park. “Public spaces” with historic significance in the Civic and Cultural District such as the *Padang* and Fort Canning are no exception (George 2000; Lee 2002; Han 2013). In this sense, heritage preservation and the designation of a conservation area in the former colonial centre reproduce the same logic of the colonizer controlling the urban landscape. Here, the “civic” does not refer to the “civic space” trajectory. Rather than opening up the possibilities of creating socio-politically active citizens which the social movements and the protest at the *Padang* potentiated in the 1950s, the “civic” is instead devoted to the regulated kind of “good citizen”. In the process of heritagization, “public space” is not decolonized. The imposition of a colonial public space is still demonstrated by the postcolonial state.

Besides the *Padang* and government offices, , there are also many cultural facilities in the conserved “Civic and Cultural District”. If the *Padang* symbolizes the postcolonial state’s repetition of the colonial understanding of “public space”, these cultural facilities help one question whether decolonization in spatial terms necessarily leads to effective decolonization projects. In the “Civic and Cultural District”, some of these cultural facilities, such as Raffles Library and Museum and Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall, were so designated during the colonial period while others were results of adaptive reuse of former colonial offices and other buildings in the area, a common practice since the 1980s. Many of these preserved heritage buildings were converted into different kind of museums, which is not uncommon in postcolonial societies. For instance, the Penang State Museum is housed in the former Penang Free School building while the National Museum of Taiwan Literature is housed in the former Tainan Prefecture Hall building (Khoo 2007; Hsu 2011). Historically, colonizers set up museums in colonies for displaying artifacts, plants and other objects of the natives and of the local regions. These museums mainly catered for the colonial need to study the “natives” or for other “scientific” research by the colonizing population and its elites. They may also have been used to “civilize” or “educate” the colonized population, in which the Eurocentric Enlightenment world order and the colonial mindset would be reproduced (Li 2005; Henderson 2005). Museums in former colonies established in postcolonial era are diverse. Some reproduce the framework and logic of colonial

museums; some use the museum to narrate the state's version of nation-building and history. Some are more community-based, addressing untold subaltern histories and repressed memories (Harrison and Hughes 2010; Marschall 2008). Nowadays, museums *per se* are commonly regarded as neutral. However their purposes and their modes of narration, including the histories that such modes repress, are not neutral. In terms of space, a public museum which is free of charge or charges a low entry fee is accessible to and created for the public, in contrast to the colonial offices and exclusive institutions from which ordinary people were excluded. Thus, preserving a former colonial office or an exclusive institution and transforming it into a public museum, as has been the case with the adaptive reuse of many heritage buildings in the Civic and Cultural District, is a form of spatial decolonization and urban decolonization. Yet to what extent these could be regarded as decolonization projects depends on the purposes of the museums and the narratives and ideology represented therein.

In the "Civic and Cultural District", major museums include the National Museum of Singapore (NMS), formerly the National History Museum, housed in the former Raffles' Library and Museum building, the Singapore Arts Museum (SAM) housed in the former Saint Joseph's Institution building, the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) housed in the Empress Place, the Peranakan Museum housed in the old Tao Nan School building and, most recently, the National Gallery Singapore, which is planned to open in 2015, housed in the former Supreme Court and City Hall buildings (Wan and Lau 2009; Henderson 2005; Ooi, C. 2010; Chan, Y. 2014; Yeoh and Huang 2008). As argued above, in terms of space, heritage preservation in the form of transforming a formerly exclusive building into a public museum could be seen as a project of urban decolonization; however, the purposes of, and narratives represented within such a museum are crucial in making this determination. As argued in Chapter 1, the making of a nation is based on remembering and forgetting of the past. Nation-states often require specific, linear and coherent narration of history for nation-building. The state searches for "useful" elements in the past and narrates them in a particular way to fulfil the nation-building project and the state ideology. In Singapore's case, as I will demonstrate, the state's ideologies, including those in favour of global capitalism, are embedded in the narration, primarily for nation-building purposes. Can-Seng Ooi summarizes how Singapore has been positioned in the narration of NMS, SAM and ACM. He argues that they try to narrate Singapore as a distinct place with its own unique

culture and identity; as a part of Southeast Asia which “offers a unique genre of art”, as “Asian” and as a society with “deep Asian roots” respectively (Ooi, C. 2010: 100). As the NMS is the museum narrating the Singapore story most explicitly, the one whose roots can be traced to, and which is housed at the once-exclusive colonial Raffles Museum, an analysis of its narrative of the nation and an interrogation of whose vision it represents could help to answer the question of whether this can be considered as decolonization.

NMS was originally positioned as a history museum, and later the vision of a “living museum” was added. Currently there are three permanent exhibitions, namely the “Singapore History Gallery”, the “Singapore Living Galleries” consisting of fashion, food, film, photograph, etc., and “Seen and Heard in Singapore”, on the changing of Singaporean ecologies (National Museum of Singapore n.d.). The current permanent exhibition in the “Singapore History Gallery” was curated after the 2006 renovation of NMS (Ooi, C. 2010). In contrast to many other history museums, display boards and detailed written descriptions are not in use. Rather, each visitor is given an audio device with which they listen to the “stories” narrated while they are walking through the gallery. The journey starts in pre-colonial Singapore. At the narration of the colonial era, the path is diverted into two. One follows the “major events” in the history of Singapore while the other follows the “story-telling” of lesser-known people. Visitors may choose to follow either one, and may switch paths at the end of a certain period. At the point of Singapore’s becoming an independent state, these two paths converge again.<sup>55</sup> In this narration, dominated by the state’s multiracial ideology, no specific ethnic group is given an obviously larger proportion of time or attention. On the surface, it is a fair narrative of the story of nation-building. Not only are “major events” of history narrated; ordinary people’s stories are also heard.

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<sup>55</sup> Description based on my visit to the exhibition in 2012.



Photo 2-A: The National Museum of Singapore, formerly Raffles Museum



Photo 2-B: Singapore Art Museum (SAM), housed in the former Saint Joseph's Institution Building

However, when one goes into the detail of the narration, it is not merely a chronological unfolding, but a story in which Singapore “progresses” from a “fishing village” to a “world city”. In other words, an occidentalist understanding of modernity is embedded in the state’s own nation-building narrative (Venn 1993, 2000, 2006). This singular, linear, occidentalist understanding of modernity is also translated into the language of “economic success” and global capitalism. As summarized by Can-Seng Ooi:

The visitor is shown how, during Singapore's colonial period, the island went through difficult times: poverty, social problems, racial conflicts, the Second [World War], the struggle for self-rule and the communist threat. Then in 1963 Singapore became part of Malaysia, but the merger ended dramatically in 1965. Fortunately, the viewer is told, economic successes came soon after Singapore's independence in 1965, thanks to actions of the efficient and effective People's Action Party [PAP] government.

(Ooi, C. 2010: 91 - 92)

This narrative chimes with what the Committee on Heritage (1988) understands as the major moments in the nation-building process, and can be understood as the state's implementation of the Committee's suggestions for the recognition of "nation-building heritage". As a major national museum operated by the National Heritage Board (NHB), which is responsible for narrating the Singapore story, the NMS permanent exhibition represents a dominant narration in line with the state's ideology. From the ruling elites' point of view, the Singapore Story is to be understood, as in the words of Lee Hsien Loong, as the story of "how Singapore succeeded against all odds to become a nation"<sup>56</sup> (quoted in Hong and Huang 2008: 31).

As Chua Beng Huat (1997) argues, "national survival" is the central ideology of PAP government and the dominant framework by which the PAP government legitimizes its policies. "National survival" discourse, according to Lily Kong and Brenda S.A. Yeoh (2003), is one of the key hegemonic tools for the state's pragmatism ideology, which can be translated into "economic success". In other words, "economic success" is not purely about "economy" and "business". Rather, the nation-state has a key role in it; "economic success" has also become a part of the nation-state's ideology, where a historical narration is required. In this sense, the narrative of the NMS' permanent exhibition on the history of Singapore emphasizes and re-emphasizes a survival discourse by describing Singapore as constantly "threatened", or in Lee's words, as existing – surviving – against "all odds". Although the postcolonial state wants to narrate a story of how the nation-state was built, paradoxically the colonial

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<sup>56</sup> See Appendix II.

narrative of “barren rock to metropolis” and the colonial perception of “modernity”, as a singular, linear model, are reproduced. The difference is that the ruling elites of the postcolonial state (PAP government) replace the former colonizers to become the narrative agency. Thus, although the space is decolonized in terms of access, the ideology has not been decolonized. The PAP government defines “survivalism” and “economic success” in a developmentalist way. Ordinary people’s voices are featured only when they can be subsumed into the state’s vision of nation-building. The contributions of the non-PAP government in the partial internal self-government era, for instance, are seldom articulated in the museum. In order to be decolonized, alternative models of modernities, narratives of nation-building beyond the survival and “progress” discourses, and contributions beyond those of the PAP ruling elites need to be addressed, as I will discuss in Chapter 3.

The way that the PAP government preserved the “Civic and Cultural District”, and the thematized historic districts to be discussed in the next chapter, are processes of “reframing” and “retooling” the urban landscape and cultural heritage, similar to many other national and local governments’ ways of responding to globalization and of attracting foreign tourists (Crane 2002). However, it is not simply a form of spectacularization and “Disneyfication” of heritage sites for city-branding and boosting tourist incomes (Crane 2002; Kwok and Low 2002; Saunders 2004). There are certainly symptoms of spectacularization and simplification of the past. However, in terms of explaining the government’s motivation, the repackaging of the past was not merely a rebranding of the city-state for global export. The state’s desire for nation-building was an equally exigent factor. I have used the conservation area of the “Civic and Cultural District” in Singapore as an example to demonstrate how the colonial landscape is appropriated by the postcolonial nation-state for both the nation-building agenda and for attracting global capital. Indeed, attracting global capital is not purely an economic issue but also part of the state’s nation-building project in the name of “survival” and “economic success”. The problem is that the state’s vision of “nation-building” repeats the colonial mentality, logic and view on modernity. The state’s vision of nation-building excludes those voices that could not be subsumed into the state’s narrative of history, or those that challenge it, such as those of the resistance movements which took place in the *Padang* in 1950s, which were not led by the PAP. When the locale becomes a “nation” and the state equates the “nation” and “decolonization” with the state’s

version of nation-building, the “local” is subsumed under the nation-building agenda, in which “national survival”, pragmatism and “economic success” dominate. The more complex subaltern histories are ignored or simplified in order to fulfill the state’s vision of the “nation”. The logic of colonialism is repeated. Indeed, the “Civic and Cultural District” is only one of the earliest conservation areas designated for the purpose of nation-building and boosting tourist income. In the same period, in keeping with the “multiracial” and “multicultural” ideologies of the state, each major “race” in Singapore was designated a thematicized “historic district”, as I will discuss in Chapter 3. The postcolonial state’s racial categories of “Chinese”, “Malay”, “Indian” and “Others” are rooted in colonial racial categories. The racial categories in the census of the Straits Settlements include “Chinese”, “Malay and Other Natives of Archipelago”, “Tamil and Other Natives of India”. Diverse groups are subsumed into one group, “Other”, in the colonial census (Hirschman 1986, 1987). The postcolonial state categorizes race, and its vision of the nation is based on these racial categories. Besides these racial categories, Raffles’ vision of planning Singapore based on ethnic enclaves was also appropriated by the postcolonial state. When Singapore designated the historic districts of “Chinatown”, Kampong Glam and “Little India” in the late 1980s, the colonial plan of racially segregated ethnic enclaves became a point of reference, even though significant boundary changes and transformations in actual living practices had taken place since the colonial period (Kong and Yeoh 2003; Yeoh 1996). In other words, colonial racial categories and models of race-based, segregated urban planning were appropriated by the postcolonial state to categorize the population into different races, and thus determined the state’s “multiracial” ideology and policies; this ideology manifested itself in the designation of different historic districts to celebrate the “multiracial” and “multicultural” society and to showcase Singapore to international tourists. The problem of the state’s version of “multiculturalism” and racialized representation of the urban landscape will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

The pragmatism ideology of Singapore is not only at issue in the state’s narrative. In practice, it also means that heritage preservation is calculated in terms of opportunity, cost and economic value (Bishop, Phillips and Yeo 2004). Except those reserved for governmental and cultural uses, the use of conserved buildings is generally given to those who can pay the rent. Thus, as Chapter 3 will show, many original residents have been displaced. In the “Civic and Cultural District”, the former Convent of the Holy

Infant Jesus (CHIJ), a Catholic nunnery and school, has been converted into the commercial complex CHIJMES, which includes an up-market restaurant (Kong 2011; Wan and Lau 2009). When the “city” area becomes a place mainly for commercial activities and tourist-oriented economies while the majority of the local population reside in the public estate towns in the “heartland”, the designation of thematic “conservation areas” in the “city” area turns the nationals into tourists, or at least endows them with a touristic gaze, in relation to what is supposed to be understood as the “national” heritage. In other words, because the logic of global capital operates behind heritage preservation, in the production of heritage, locals are effectively treated as tourists, which could distance them from identifying with heritage as *their own* heritage. It is also the logic of the global capital which determines the “city” area as exclusive, available only to those who can afford it. Thus, it results in another layer of urban re-colonization. In this sense, the postcolonial state’s desire for nation-building and for providing sites for the flux of global capital does not contest the “colonial” but repeats it.

### **2.3 Preserving Colonial Heritage for Decolonization: The Preservation Movement of Star Ferry and Queen’s Piers, Hong Kong as Example**

In the previous section, I used the example of Singapore to illustrate how the postcolonial state appropriates the colonial, including the colonial urban landscape, vision of “public space”, and even racial categories, as resources of nation-building and accumulating capital. The accumulation of capital is also a part of the state’s ideology. In such a process, as I have demonstrated, the top-down approach and the postcolonial state’s vision of the “nation” repeats the logic and the mentality of the colonizer. Subaltern histories, which encompass the potential for decolonizing space, are still repressed. The prime motivations of attracting global capital and accumulating capital drive out the local population, alienate and exclude the locals and turn those who can afford to stay into tourists. However, there could be an alternative and bottom-up response to the colonial landscape, which could decolonize the heritage through preservation and engagement with the subaltern histories embedded therein. Such a process could have the potential to prise open a fluid yet critical version of the “local”, one which is interlinked with decolonization, which challenges and provides an alternative to colonial, national and global capital. In this section, I am going to use a

bottom-up urban social movement in Hong Kong, the Preservation Movement of Star Ferry and Queen's Piers in 2006 – 2007, as an example to illustrate how a bottom-up approach of preservation of “colonial heritage”, one which addresses the resistant traditions embedded in the space, can open up possibilities for decolonization without falling into the trap of nationalistic discourse. As I will demonstrate, the colonial and nationalist logic concerning the same piece of landscape share the same understanding of the history of the place. While nationalist desires and the interests of global capital go hand in hand, the nationalist discourse can function as a “moral” shield for global capital. By contrast, a “localism” disassociated with nationalism creates a possibility for decolonization, resisting colonial, national and global capital. The movement to preserve “colonial heritage” *is* urban decolonization, as it resists both the privatization and militarization of public space.<sup>57</sup> In Hong Kong, since the colonial era and also after the handover, the state, in its various manifestations, has commonly held close relationships, or even explicit partnerships, with locally-based global business elites,; this tightness has perhaps been cemented by changing geopolitical factors. Precisely what the preservation movement tries to resist is such a long-term collaboration between different states (the colonial government, the post-handover Hong Kong SAR government and the PRC) and the main actors of global capital interests. Through the way this urban social movement articulates “the local”, I will demonstrate how such an understanding resists the trap of nativism and other forms of nationalism, but can instead lead to decolonization of the mind.

Although Hong Kong has often been ranked as the “world's freest economy”, usually followed by Singapore, by the American conservative think-tank “Heritage Foundation”, both the colonial and SAR governments often actively collude with business interests (Poon 2010). The collusion is not limited to pro-business policies. Many business elites were also absorbed into decision-making bodies. In the colonial era, many Taipans, compradors and bankers were appointed members of the Legislative and Executive Councils (Feng 1996). The appointment and absorption of non-British business elites into the decision-making bodies can be seen as a form of collaborative colonialism, which was also later taken up by the PRC government, in addition to their traditional networks in Hong Kong. However, these business elites, as collaborators, did

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<sup>57</sup> Here, “public space” refers to the understanding of public space associated with “right to the city”.

not passively submit to the governments. Rather, they manipulated their “in-between” positions and “loyalty” (and disloyalty) between governments to make their fortunes. (Poon 2005, 2010; Goodstadt 2009; Law 2009; Tsui, Ng and Yick 2012). The Hong Kong economies have been dominated by several major conglomerates owned by a handful of families (Poon 2005, 2010; Studwell 2007). Top-down policies implemented in Hong Kong, thus were, and still are, often the results of contestations and negotiations between the ruling elites and business elites. I will use the rise of Li Ka-shing’s Cheung Kong Group<sup>58</sup> as an example to illustrate the tightness between the globalizing forces and both the colonial and PRC governments.

Cheung Kong (or CK Hutchison) is a leading real-estate developer in Hong Kong. Together with its sub-groups and affiliated groups such as Hutchison Whampoa and the A.S. Watson Group, it owns global assets and business operations such as public utilities, container ports and retail businesses in more than 50 countries. In Hong Kong, the group also operates telecommunication, supermarket and pharmacy chains, which dominate the markets in Hong Kong<sup>59</sup> (Poon 2005, 2010; Yun 2015). In the colonial period, the close relationship between the business sectors and the colonial government created a “pro-business” culture in the colonial government<sup>60</sup> (Goodstadt 2009). Until the 1960s, the largest business firms and those who could dominate the political landscape in Hong Kong were still British-owned, such as Butterfield and Swire, Jardine Matheson, Hutchison Whampoa, Wheelock Marden, and Hongkong Bank (now HSBC). Many of these companies held a lot of land in forms of wharfs and dockyards. However, this did not mean that these business elites would necessarily be loyal to the British and the colonial governments. There were also often conflicts between the Colonial Office in London and the colonial government in Hong Kong, which these business elites could seek to manipulate for their interests (Goodstadt 2009; Feng 1996). In the 1960s, when the regional geopolitics became less stable, many of these British

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<sup>58</sup> Cheung Kong and Hutchison Whampoa, both owned by Li Ka-shing, were restructured as CK Hutchison in 2015 (Yun 2015). When I used the term Cheung Kong, I describe the group and associated groups as a whole.

<sup>59</sup> This is a common practice of real-estate developers. For instance, Sun Hung Kai owned by the Kwok family and New World owned by the Cheng family also own telecommunication and public transport companies.

<sup>60</sup> This situation is still present. Without restriction of employment after retirement, many high-rank officials have joined the business sectors, including related companies of the developers. This has caused serious concerns about whether the officials had abused their powers in the government for exchanging future benefits (Poon 2010).

firm began to dis-invest in Hong Kong. Yet the ethnic Chinese businessmen used this as a chance to expand, especially those in real estate. Li was one of them. He began to acquire lands at a relatively low price and set up Cheung Kong in 1971. In the mid- to late-1970s, Li began to target the British firms, especially those with a lot of land. Cheung Kong gained control of Green Island Cement, with a plant in Hung Hom, and Hutchison Whampoa, which owned several dockyards throughout Hong Kong<sup>61</sup>. The plant and dockyards became land reserves of Cheung Kong and were later redeveloped into residential estates (Feng 1996, 1997; Poon 2005, 2010). Cheung Kong was also on good terms with, and even served as the board of director of, Hongkong Bank. Hongkong Bank was considered one of the most important nodes among the ruling elites and business elites in Hong Kong. Through different networks, by the 1980s, these rising corporations owned by local ethnic Chinese had already assumed important positions in shaping, if not determining, government policies (Tsui, Ng and Yick 2012).

Many of these rising corporations owned by local ethnic Chinese also played very skillfully between the governments. As mentioned earlier, the PRC government sought collaborators in Hong Kong, while these businessmen would make use of their “loyalty” to further their interests in China and Hong Kong. In 2010, a newspaper reported that, in the 1980s, the colonial government forged a deal with a joint venture of Cheung Kong and China Resources, a PRC state-owned corporation, proposing the development of a future new town. According to the deal, the colonial government would buy the land from the joint venture to develop the new town, consisting mainly of public housing, with the exception of the joint venture’s private development. The deal also forbade the provision of commercial facilities in the future town’s public estates, since these could compete with the private developments’ interests (Kwok 2010). This is an obvious example of how the government and business elites collaborated and created pro-business policies, at the cost of serving public interests. Yet this is also an example of the Hong Kong-based conglomerates making use of their relationship with the colonial government to help the PRC government expand capitalist projects. It could be argued that this is a way for the Hong Kong conglomerate to show their

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<sup>61</sup> Similar tactics were also used by other developers. For instance, Sun Hung Kai gained control of Kowloon Motor Bus Company, which also owned a lot of land in the form of bus depots, in the 1980s. Pao Yue-kong, who originally run transnational shipping business, transformed into a developer through acquiring Hong Kong and Kowloon Wharf and Godown Company Limited from Jardines Matheson and gained control of the British conglomerate Wheelock Marden (Poon 2005, 2010; Feng 1997).

“loyalty” to the PRC government, who bestowed the private companies with specific benefits in China and Hong Kong. After the Tiananmen Massacre, Li was among the first of the Hong Kong business elites who went to China to invest and equally showed their “confidence” towards Hong Kong, when foreign investments dropped in China and many Hong Kongers were so eager to emigrate to escape from future PRC rule.<sup>62</sup> Li was appointed to different positions by the PRC government and successfully bid for many projects whilst in the PRC. This was not uncommon for ethnic Chinese real-estate developers in Hong Kong by that period (Feng 1997). There are also widespread rumours that Li made use of his relationship with the PRC leaders to bear an influence on the decision-making processes of the Hong Kong SAR government; these allegations caused discontent amongst other developers in Hong Kong, who likewise attempted to use their PRC networks to influence policies<sup>63</sup> (Tsui, Ng and Yick 2012; Chan 2013).

In the discussion of the globalizing forces in Hong Kong, the roles of the PRC government and the corporations with which they were connected cannot be underestimated. The PRC not only has a nationalist agenda with regard to Hong Kong; it also wants to expand its capital investments in Hong Kong and, via Hong Kong, throughout the world. As Wang Hui (2003, 2008) illustrates, in contrast to the myth of the binary opposition of “planned economy” and “market economy”, the “marketization” or neoliberalization process in China has actually been a state-dominated policy designed to advance active participation in the global capitalist economy. It is a political project presented as “apolitical”. In the process of marketization and in the corresponding emphasis on “efficiency”, the redistribution of resources and property had – in the absence of any effective democratic procedures to hold such power in check – already created vast social inequality. Thus, the 1989 democratic movement, according to Wang, actually embodied the demand for democracy to oversee the process of the redistribution of resources; in this view, democratic participation would ensure fair reform. In this sense, the Tiananmen Massacre constituted a crackdown on the discontent aroused by social inequality. Wang thus identifies the neoliberal camp as “neo-authoritarian”: the “neoconservatives” in China, who used the state authority to

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<sup>62</sup> Ironically, Cheung Kong had a subsidiary in Canada at that time. Many of the buyers were migrants from Hong Kong who wanted to escape the future PRC rule (Poon 2005, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> One infamous example was the Cyberport controversy in 2000. Tung Chee-hwa, the then Chief Executive, decided to give Li’s younger son the residential development rights of the Cyberport, without open bid. This made other developers angry and attempted to protest to Beijing (Chan, P.M. 2013).

expand the market, even by bloody crackdown. In other words, if one compares this crackdown with the authoritarian, anti-democratic and neo-conservative nature of neoliberal regimes in other parts of the world, the PRC neoliberalization process is an enactment and enforcing of the *typical*, rather than a singular instance of an *exception* (Harvey 2005; Wang 2003, 2008). Although the specific interests of the ruling and business elites in Hong Kong and in the PRC may not always converge, they have in common a distrust of democracy and a desire to restrict decision-making processes to the elites.

After foregrounding the relationship between the colonial, the national and the global capital forces in Hong Kong, I am going to introduce the site of the Preservation Movement. Central has been the political and economic centre of Hong Kong since the colonial period. The headquarters of the colonial government, the military, major European firms and religious buildings of the European population were all located in Central. Ever since Hong Kong became a British colony, the waterfront of the area was continuously changing due to different reclamations. The Star Ferry Pier (officially known as “Edinburgh Place Pier”)<sup>64</sup> and Queen’s Pier<sup>65</sup> were two nearby piers built in the 1950s on Edinburgh Place, a piece of reclaimed land in Central adjacent to Victoria Harbour. Together with the City Hall opened in 1962<sup>66</sup> and the Star Ferry Multi-storey Car Park built in 1957, they formed the “Edinburgh Place Complex” (Wong, C. 2012; Heritage Watch 2009; Heron 13 May 2007; Chan 2001; Chai 2009). Unlike pre-war colonial architecture in Hong Kong and other British colonies – which was often built in styles celebrating the colonial power (although with adaptation into local or regional contexts), such as Neoclassical, Renaissance Revival or Gothic Revival – the post-war Edinburgh Place Complex was built according to less elaborate, modernist styles, which resulted in its being less valued in purely architectural, aesthetic terms (Owen, Roberts, Lung and Cheng 1999; Powell 2004; Chan 2001; Chai 2009). Matthew Turner (1995) argues that the post-war City Hall symbolized a farewell to traditional colonialism and

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<sup>64</sup> The Edinburgh Place Pier was the third Star Ferry Pier in Central connecting to Kowloon (Chan 2001).

<sup>65</sup> The Queen’s Pier at Edinburgh Place was the second Queen’s Pier. The first Queen’s Pier was built in 1920s and demolished in 1950s (*Ta Kung Pao* 1955).

<sup>66</sup> City Hall at Edinburgh Place is the second City Hall of Hong Kong. The more exclusive, first City Hall was built in 1860s and demolished in the 1930s and 1940s. Unlike in other cities, the current “City Hall” of Hong Kong is not a government office building, but a government-run civic and cultural facilities building (Hong Kong City Hall 1967).

Chinese traditions, and a creation of modern, civic promise. To what extent the post-war colonial government held a modern and civic promise is disputable,<sup>67</sup> although creating a sense of belonging to Hong Kong instead of towards any form of Chinese nationalism amongst Hong Kong “residents” was certainly in the interest of the colonial government<sup>68</sup> (Commission of Inquiry, Kowloon Disturbances 1966 [1967]; Hong Kong Governor 1956). In terms of public architecture and urban landscape, however, architects, who were “on tap but not on top” in the colonial administration (Home 2013: 56), consciously built accessible open public space in the city in order “to promote freedom of movement and a sense of unlimited space” (Heron 2007). They also consciously wished to distinguish their post-war public architecture from its pre-war exclusive counterpart (Wong, C. 2012). Before the piers ceased to be used in 2006 and 2007, Star Ferry Pier provided ferry services from Central to Kowloon Peninsula and its clock tower was recognized as a major landmark. Queen’s Pier was both a ceremonial and a public pier. Before the handover, when the colonial governors arrived at Hong Kong, they landed at Queen’s Pier, inspected the Guard of Honour at Edinburgh Place and took the oath at City Hall. When the British royal family visited Hong Kong, they also landed at Queen’s Pier. However, for most of the time, the pier was used as a public pier and a piece of urban public space (Chan 2001; Antiquities Advisory Board 2007).

The Preservation Movement of Star Ferry and Queen’s Piers could be regarded as two movements if one considered Star Ferry and Queen’s Piers as two individual piers. However, owing to the location of both piers, which are each part of the Edinburgh Place complex, and the fact that they were affected by the same reclamation project, the “two movements” were actually two elements of the same heritage preservation movement (the same core groups of activists and professionals were at the heart of each). According to Manuel Castells, urban social movements are “collective actions consciously aimed at the transformation of the social interests and values embedded in the forms and functions of a historically given city” (1983: xvi). The Preservation

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<sup>67</sup> For instance, Governor Mark Young’s political reform proposal to bring greater autonomy and democratization to Hong Kong was turned down by his successor Alexander Grantham in the 1950s (Tsang 2004).

<sup>68</sup> Chinese nationalism could either be politically affiliated to the Republic of China (ROC) ruled by the Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang* 國民黨 or KMT) or to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) ruled by the Communist Party.

Movement was not merely concerned with the sites in question, but also contested land use, social values and histories of the city, pursuing such concerns by mobilizing the public. Thus, the Preservation Movement was an urban social movement, in accordance with Castells' definition. This movement broke out in response to the government's reclamation project, its decision to demolish the two piers and part of Edinburgh Place, and their plans for the future land use of the site. The outbreak of the Preservation Movement could be traced to the reclamation of Victoria Harbour. Before the implementation of the Central Reclamation Phase III, which would demolish the Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier, the Antiquities Advisory Board had commissioned a heritage consultant to conduct a survey on the built heritage within the project area in 2000. The consultant listed the two piers and the City Hall, arguing that it "would likely raise public objection and dismay" if the government demolished the Star Ferry Pier (Chan 2001: 9). However, the government shelved the report. It was not until summer 2006 that the general public knew that the Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier would be demolished, after the new pseudo-Edwardian Star Ferry Pier several hundred meters away opened (Ku 2011, 2012; Ip 2010, 2011).

The news about the planned demolition of the Star Ferry Pier sparked public outcry and emotional sentiment in Hong Kong. Besides the many people who went there to take photos, there also began the first phase of the Preservation Movement. At the beginning of the movement, the tendency to use the structure's aesthetic value in order to justify its preservation was still dominant. At this phase, the major active agents were artists<sup>69</sup> and heritage-enthusiasts with professional backgrounds. The artists performed their artworks at the Star Ferry Pier and Edinburgh Place to arouse people's concern about the government's decision to demolish the pier (*Apple Daily* 2006). Although issues of collective memory, local history and place attachment were represented in these artworks, the responsibility for the discursive justification for preserving the Star Ferry Pier was mainly held by the heritage-enthusiasts with professional backgrounds. They petitioned the government. However, rather than emphasizing place-based memory and place-attachment, these petitions reproduced a popular discourse for the justification of heritage preservation in different parts of the

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<sup>69</sup> "Artist" combines the word "artist" and "activist". It stands for someone who is at the same an artist and social activist. An activist uses his or her artwork not for purely art's sake, but for or as a part of social activism (Amoore and Hall 2010).

world. They emphasized the Pier's aesthetic value and traced the noble history of the clock tower, which they discovered was the last mechanical turret clock in Hong Kong, and had been manufactured by the maker of Liberty Bell and Big Ben. Although they were also concerned about undemocratic town planning procedures, the main focus was still on the pier's architectural merit (SEE Network 2006; Chan and Tsui 2011). In short, in the first phase of the Preservation Movement, the atmosphere was that of nostalgia. There were also popularized notions of "collective memory" spread by the mass media, but presented in a depoliticized way. The dominant discursive justification for preservation was aesthetic value.

There are two major problems in using aesthetic value as the *dominant* justification for preservation. First, this could unconsciously repeat the elitist view of heritage preservation, where the noble and the grand are prioritized over the vernacular. Such biases in favour of elitist notions of "beauty" and grand, elaborate architectures are not uncommon (Atkinson and Bridge 2005; Perry, Kong and Yeoh 1997). Under the hierarchies of the aesthetic value, modernist styles and vernacular architectures are regularly undervalued. This could explain why attentions focused on the clock tower, where the "noble" history of the mechanical clock in the tower could be narrated. Via this narration, the heritage-enthusiast professionals argued that the Star Ferry Pier was not an "ordinary", but a valuable building. However, this unconsciously repeated the elite understanding of history and beauty. Second, a purely aesthetic discourse cannot channel issues that are disassociated with aesthetic value such as historical value, place-based memory and place-attachment. A place's historical value is defined by what has happened there, rather than its aesthetic value. Similarly, a site is regarded as a landmark and thus worthy of preservation because of how people have perceived and used the site, their memories of, and attachment to the site. The aesthetic may have an influence but is not the determining factor. In other words, historical value, place-based memory and place-attachment can be disassociated and independent from the architectural and aesthetic values of a site. When the emphasis in justifying the preservation of this site was on its aesthetic value, it obscured other important aspects of why the site was worth preserving.



Photo 2-C: An activist performing his work at the Star Ferry Pier in the last night of the pier's operation in November 2006. Every minute that he hung there represented a year of the pier's history.

In the first phase of the Preservation Movement, the dominant discursive justification for preservation was aesthetic value, as above. Although the notion of “collective memory” was popularized, its relation to the city’s history and spatial politics were not in the heritage preservation discourse. It was not until mid-December 2006 that there was a discursive turning point which made the historical value and socio-cultural significance of the site the focus of justifying its heritage preservation; this shift in emphasis is important if heritage preservation is to function as decolonization. After the Star Ferry Pier ceased to be used in November 2006, a sense of powerlessness existed in the movement. A large influx of people wishing to “bid farewell to” the pier, but without transforming this will into political and social action, was described by some activists as “filial descendants accompanying the last journey of the deceased ancestor” (Ip 2011: 129). It was not until 12 December 2006 when some activists, including some activists involved in previous activism, occupied the demolition site that this apparent powerlessness was altered. Although they were expelled the next day when the Legislative Council held a meeting with government officials concerning the Star Ferry Pier, the occupation was regarded as one of the major turning points of the

movement. Chow Sze-chung (2007a: 92 – 94) argues that the moment that one of the activists stood on top of the bulldozer and made it stop marked the beginning of “occupation” and the beginning of what he understands as a “truth-event”, following Slavoj Žižek’s interpretation of Alain Badiou’s concept: this moment, that is to say, could not be articulated and understood in terms of existing knowledge in Hong Kong. He suggests that the occupation “unconsciously stirred up the default relationship between people and land, history and governing” (Chow 2007a: 94). Ip Iam-chong (2011) argues that the moment the occupation empowered the activists was when they realized their action could actually bring change, in this case, a halt to demolition for a day. Both Chow and Ip regard the first occupation as a turning point in the Preservation Movement based on “action”.<sup>70</sup> I am not arguing that the occupation was not important; indeed it re-empowered the movement. However, on the discursive level, the turning point happened a few days later, when the activists started a hunger-strike outside the Star Ferry Pier demolition site and began to connect their action with So Sau-chung’s 蘇守忠 hunger-strike against the colonial government’s approval of the raising of the Star Ferry’s fare in 1966, which happened at the same place (A Group of Hong Kong Citizens 2006). This was the more influential turning point for the Preservation Movement, which brought socio-political and historical considerations into the heritage discourse, displacing a previously depoliticized understanding of memory, architectural and aesthetics.

Bringing history and the socio-political into the heritage preservation movement was important in enabling activists to begin to address issues beyond aesthetic value, and to radicalize collective memory. Although aesthetic value forms one plane of justification, it cannot channel issues disassociated with the aesthetic. When the activists started their hunger-strike, with reference to So’s hunger-strike that took place at the same site, they aroused issues and provoked discussions, beyond those of aesthetic value, about the history of the site and meaning of the place. As argued in Chapter 1, a radicalized version of collective memory, where sense of place, place-based memory and place-attachment are associated, enables the awareness of a local identity and the creation of critical subjects.<sup>71</sup> Going beyond aesthetic discourse to address historical,

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<sup>70</sup> My focus of this chapter will not be on the meaning of social actions. See Ip (2010, 2011) and Ku (2011) for more on discussing the “social action” in the Preservation Movement.

<sup>71</sup> In Chapter 4, I will discuss the significance of sense of place in terms of its relationship in resisting

political, and socio-cultural value makes activism possible. As the issue of urban space is drawn into the discussion, the significance of public space can be addressed. Even though the site in question was deemed to be of low aesthetic value, with which I do not agree, this was unrelated to the meaning of the place, which was the central justification for its preservation. Further to excavating points of justification for preservation beyond the framework of aesthetic value, the discursive turning point was also the moment that the “local”, and how the “local” was articulated, was brought into the Preservation Movement and its heritage discourse. The activists later formed a network called “Local Action”, who were also the main active agents in the preservation of Queen’s Pier. Local Action made clear that they aimed at decolonization, although Queen’s Pier was “colonial heritage” on the surface level (Chow 2011; Ip 2010, 2011). “Local” and “decolonization” became the two key terms in the Preservation Movement. I will go back to this point in later paragraphs. Queen’s Pier ceased to be used as a public pier by the end of April 2007. The activists of “Local Action” then started camping out there, held guided tours about the pier, and organized various actions and activities to arouse public concern. Unlike the Star Ferry Pier, which was not graded as a Historic Building or declared as a monument, Queen’s Pier was graded as a Grade I Historic Building by the Antiquities Advisory Board in May 2007 after huge advocacy efforts by professionals and activists. However, its Grade I Historic Building status, supposedly meaning that “every effort should be made to preserve if possible”, failed to stop the demolition of Queen’s Pier (Antiquities and Monuments Office 2014). After the brutal removal of the activists, Queen’s Pier was closed in August 2007 and the demolition soon started (Pang 2007; Sham 2009).



Photo 2-D: The “beheading” of Star Ferry Pier, December 2006



Photo 2-E: During the Preservation Movement of the Star Ferry and Queen’s Piers, civil society groups held different events there. This was a poetry and music day during the Preservation of Queen’s Pier. Here, a prominent newspaper editor was explaining the context of a news headline. The news was about a British royal family member’s visit to Hong Kong in 1966. The title used Cantonese and Toishanese puns to show disrespect to the British royal family.

Similar to the Singaporean case, the state's interlocking desire for nation-building and global capitalism has had a huge impact on the urban landscape. Unlike Singapore, in Hong Kong, the interlocking desire for accumulation of global capital and Chinese nationalism led to the demolition of the Star Ferry and Queen's Piers. As mentioned earlier, the piers were located in the project area of the Central Reclamation Phase III. As Ip (2010, 2011) argues, reclamation has been a common way for government and developers to create land for accumulating capital since the colonial era.<sup>72</sup> The Central and Wan Chai Reclamation, since the 1990s, was partly driven by the both the colonial government and SAR government's desire to strengthen Hong Kong's position as a global financial centre (Ip 2010, 2011; Ku 2011). The commercial office tower International Finance Centre (IFC), built on the reclaimed land of Central Reclamation Phase I, symbolizes not only global capitalism in Hong Kong but also how global capitalism *operates* in Hong Kong. IFC was developed jointly by three local-based transnational conglomerates owned by bosses who skillfully collaborated with both the colonial and the PRC governments<sup>73</sup>, on a piece of land created by a public-funded government-launched reclamation project, above a station of a now privatized railway system, with Hong Kong, PRC, regional and Western globalizing capital forces as main tenants<sup>74</sup>. In short, it is a tower where local global capitalist interests, PRC's globalizing capitalist projects, and the regional and Western transnational corporations meet, with the support and active involvement of the colonial and Hong Kong SAR governments. When it came to the case of the Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier, there was already a rising concern about reclamation and destruction of built heritage. The court decision of a previous judicial review also ruled that the government could only put forward reclamation at the Victoria Harbour when there was "overriding public need" (Loh, C. 2007). Thus, the government could no longer use land sale or other rationales explicitly connected with capital accumulation to justify the reclamation and demolition. Instead, the government resorted to justification by means of projected "public

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<sup>72</sup> This also makes the Edinburgh Place and Victoria Park as exceptional.

<sup>73</sup> IFC was a joint-development project by Sun Hung Kai, Henderson and Towngas. Henderson and Towngas were both owned by Lee Shau-kee, who is generally in good terms with the Kwok family who owned Sun Hung Kai (IFC Development Ltd 2012; Poon 2005, 2010).

<sup>74</sup> Main tenants of IFC include Hong Kong Monetary Authority, and many international banks (e.g. Commerzbank, BNP Paribas, Sumitomo Mitsui) developers (e.g. Henderson) and financial-related firms (e.g. China International Capital Corporation, Pine River Capital Management, Silverlake) (Hong Kong Monetary Authority 2014; Liu 2006).

interests”<sup>75</sup>, namely by building a road to solve traffic congestion and a railway tunnel. Yet the government’s rationales were quickly criticized by the professionals as unjustifiable. The government needed only to amend the routes and they could still have built the road and tunnel without demolishing the piers. Civil society groups discovered that a huge commercial development would be built at the reclaimed land between the piers (Chan and Tsui 2011). As with the demolition of many built heritage sites in Hong Kong and elsewhere, the reclamation and the demolition of the piers was for the sake of capital accumulation, especially local sites of global capitalism, since the road would serve the new commercial developments in the new waterfront. Since the Edinburgh Place complex was a public space on the waterfront which people were free to use, the demolition and replacement of public space with a commercial development would be a privatization of public space, re-colonizing an urban space with capital. As Lefebvre (1996) argues, the right to the city is not simply a “visiting right”. Although the public can “visit” the shopping malls, these malls are quite often under closed-circuit television and patrolled by private security guards. Political rights such as freedom of assembly and expression are often suspended in shopping malls, where one generally has the “pseudo-right” in terms of consumption (Godd 1993; Lefebvre 1996; Voyce 2006). If the colonial government constrained the public space by coercive force, then global capital privatizes public space and subsumes people under the logic of consumption.

However, the demolition of the Star Ferry Pier and Queen’s Pier, which would result in the isolation of the City Hall in Edinburgh Place, was motivated not only by global capital, but also by Chinese, or more accurately, by PRC’s, nationalism. The situation was made especially explicit when the focus of the Preservation Movement shifted to Queen’s Pier. Chinese nationalism was a politics of *ressentiment* expressed on two levels: first, in a desire to demolish colonial heritage and the traces of the colonial period as sites of “national shame”, and to accuse the Preservation Movement of being “unpatriotic” and “yearning for the colonial past”; second, to reconstruct the new waterfront with facilities representing PRC sovereignty over Hong Kong. As I will elaborate in Chapter 3, the colonial past of Hong Kong has been an uneasy part of the Chinese nationalist viewpoint. According to this viewpoint, Hong Kong needed to be re-Sinicized so that there could be a “reunion” with Chinese nationalism. According to

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<sup>75</sup> Christine Loh (2007) criticizes that “public interests” has not met the criteria of “overriding public need” and is a manipulation of the court rule.

this logic, Queen's Pier – from its name, architectural design and its colonial history as the site at which the colonial governors and the British royal family landed when they arrived at Hong Kong – represented the “national shame” of China. This “national shame” refers to China's defeat by imperialist forces and its being forced to sign “humiliating” treaties in the past, while Hong Kong's “reunion” with China in 1997 was taken to represent the “washing off the national shame of colonial rule” (So 2007; *The Sun* 2007a). At a ceremonial level, Queen's Pier not only functioned as the landing site of the governors and British royal family; the architectural design and location of Queen's Pier was also particularly symbolic. The pre-war Queen's Pier and the Queen Victoria statue formed an axis (Society of Hong Kong History ed. 2014: 198). This important feature was continued in the post-war Queen's Pier and Edinburgh Place. The colonial government instructed the architects who built the City Hall that the Dias, where the governor would inspect the Guard of Honour, and the entrance of the City Hall, where the governor would take the oath, needed to be formed as a clear axis with the centre of Queen's Pier, where the governor would land. In other words, the axis linking Queen's Pier, the Dias and the City Hall formed a ceremonial avenue of power (Heritage Watch 2009; Lam 2007). The demolition of Queen's Pier, then, was a clear act to destroy the colonial avenue of power, similar to the “beheading” of the Government-General Building by the Korean government in the 1990s. For Chinese nationalists, the demolition was an act of revenge for the “national shame”.

In terms of the urban landscape, Chinese nationalism was expressed not only in terms of the demolition of a colonial “relic” but also in the militarization of the newly reclaimed waterfront. Although the government argued that the demolition of the piers was for reclamation and road-building, the Preservation Movement discovered that the government had hidden the fact that they had decided to build a military berth for the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the PRC military, on the new waterfront. In the government's leaflets about the new waterfront, the government misled the public by hiding the traits of the future PLA Berth that had been planned and designed several years before. According to those government documents where the design of the PLA Berth *could* be found, there would be a fenced military zone and restricted military access<sup>76</sup> (Chu 2007a). In other words, the destruction of the piers not only led to

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<sup>76</sup> According to the agreements between Britain and China 1994, however, Hong Kong SAR government only needed to “reserve” space in Central waterfront for military docking but had no

privatization but also militarization of public space. From the PRC's viewpoint, stationing the PLA in Hong Kong was not open to compromise because it represented the PRC's sovereignty over Hong Kong (Qiang 2010). In other words, the PLA station in Hong Kong and the reservation of land for the PLA's military use fulfilled the demands of Chinese nationalism. In spatial terms, the PLA Booth and the PLA headquarter also forms an axis, similar to that of the pre-war Queen's Pier and the Queen's statue and that of the post-war Queen's Pier, the Dias and the City Hall. In other words, the PLA booth to PLA headquarter symbolizes a new avenue of power for nationalism. The demolition of the Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier for reclamation and the building of the PLA Berth, accordingly, would scrap the "colonial" site and the "colonial" avenue of power, symbolizing "national shame" and restore the "national dignity" by positioning a military pier symbolizing PRC sovereignty over Hong Kong and forming a "national" avenue of power. Yet this nationalist position ignored the complexity of Hong Kong and its historical development. With the new waterfront occupied by commercial developments and the PLA Berth, together with the existing IFC on its west, the existing PLA headquarter<sup>77</sup> behind the planned PLA Berth and the planned new government headquarter on its east, the whole Central waterfront would change from the "civic space" or public space that the Edinburgh Place complex once represented into a "global capital – military – government" complex (Szeto 2007). When the Preservation Movement was at its height in summer 2007, the government often avoided the issue of the PLA Berth, even though it was regarded as the core issue in justifying why Queen's Pier was to be demolished. In 2013, several years after Queen's Pier was demolished, the PLA Berth issue re-emerged when the government tried to apply for rezoning of the site in the waterfront as "military use" at the Town Planning Board (TPB). It was discovered that building of the Berth was nearly completed before the government applied for rezoning (Lai, A. 2013; Wong, D. 2013; Chu 2013). Even though there was huge opposition, the TPB still rezoned the area as "military use" in early 2014 (*House News* 2014). This rezoning is the actualization of militarization of the waterfront.

As argued in the previous section, "public space" has different trajectories. In the colonial context, "public space" usually merely meant land owned by the municipal

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responsibility to "build" a berth (Chu 2013).

<sup>77</sup> Before the handover, it was the British military headquarter in Hong Kong.

government, and the “public” was mainly restricted to the colonizer and the elites. For instance, the pre-war City Hall in Hong Kong, although built by “public subscription”, was generally intended for the elites (Chan 2001). However, the post-war, purpose-built Edinburgh Place complex was not in the trajectory of colonial public space but that of “civic space”, rather. Even though Queen’s Pier, the Dias and the City Hall forms a ceremonial “avenue power”, the Edinburgh Place complex not only provided space for the elites, but, as per the post-war City Hall’s self-positing pledge, was intended, “to serve the community as a whole, and not a privileged minority” (Hong Kong City Hall 1972). It is thus regarded as having been an important post-war “civic space” (Szeto 2007); instantiating the transformation of the meaning of “public space”, from merely a government-owned, to a more inclusive “civic space”. The resistance movements that took place in the Edinburgh Place complex further opened up the meaning of “public space”, to imply “rights to the city”. Yet when the government militarized the waterfront, fulfilling the vision of Chinese nationalism and built the government headquarter next to the PLA military headquarter, it repeated the early colonial logic of what “public space” is; repeating, too, the dispossession of the “commons” by coercive force. The only difference is that the Chinese military and the SAR government replaced the British military and the colonial government.

The problem of Chinese nationalism is that it repeats and reproduces the logic and understanding of history of colonialism. The Chinese nationalists regard the Edinburgh Place complex, especially Queen’s Pier, as a symbol of “national shame” because, in its design, they only recognize the colonial history of the site, namely that of the pier as the ceremonial pier where the Governors landed and assumed their posts, where the British royal family landed, and the ceremonial “avenue of power”. In order to regard the site as a symbol of “national shame”, the Chinese nationalists repeat the colonial logic of the history of the site, even though they posit themselves as the “opposite” of the colonial. Both fail to recognize that there were also social movements resisting colonial policies taking place there, as I will elaborate on later in this chapter. Furthermore, as Chinese nationalists could not, or would not go beyond the binary opposition of British colonialism and Chinese nationalism, it was inevitable they would come to regard the preservation movement as “colonial” and as a “yearning for the colonial past”, according to the nationalist logic equating anti-colonialism with celebrating Chinese nationalism and washing out the “national shame” with supporting

the demolition of Queen's Pier. In short, the subject position of Chinese nationalists makes them see only the "colonial" history and the "colonial" meaning of the place and fail to recognize any alternative. The complexity of history is reduced into a glory-shame binary opposition.

Beyond its repetition of the colonial logic and understanding of history, due to its failure to go beyond the binary opposition, Chinese nationalism also fails to recognize the complexity of local histories and identity formation, and the ways colonialism functioned at the local level. Kuan-hsing Chen's (2006, 2010) illustration of the disparities of historical memory between migrants from Mainland China to Taiwan after World War II (*waishengren* 外省人 or "mainlanders") and the local Taiwanese (*benshengren* 本省人) is also applicable in the Hong Kong context, to why the Chinese nationalists fail to see local history and complexity in Hong Kong. For the colonial powers, imperialism and colonialism took place at the same time. Yet when they arrived at the place where the imperial and colonial forces expanded, the actual effects, and thus the historical memories, were different. According to Chen, as China was not totally colonized, colonialism, the complexity of the actual colonial rule and the love-hate relationship with the colonizers that the local Taiwanese experienced were not part of the mainlanders' historical memory. Rather, the mainlanders only had memories of suffering under imperialism. Thus, while they might have been familiar with imperialism and anti-imperialism, they failed to recognize what colonialism actually was and actually meant. Similarly, in the Hong Kong context, the focus of Chinese nationalists is mainland China, which has experienced imperialism but not been colonized. Thus, colonialism and its complexity do not exist in the historical memory of China and the Chinese nationalists, except as evidence of how China suffered from imperialism and thus of the "national shame". From the Chinese nationalists' perspective, the imperialists and their collaborators are the "enemy" of the nation and there should not be any "positive" memory and emotional relationship with the "enemy". However, colonialism, rather than imperialism, characterizes the historical memory of Hong Kong. Any discussion using Hong Kong as subject position cannot escape from the experience of colonialism and its complexity, including both positive and negative relationships with the colonizer. In order to decolonize Hong Kong, there is a need to deal with the complexity of the colonial experience. Yet for the Chinese nationalists, such complexity is absent. For instance, in relation to the Preservation Movement,

commenters with Chinese nationalist positions quickly equated the Preservation Movement's "localization" position with "colonialization" and "de-Sinicization" (Hua 2007). But resisting the PRC's viewpoint does not necessarily mean accepting the colonial viewpoint. In this sense, Chinese nationalism fails to recognize the local experience of Hong Kong. Its being out of touch with colonialism, and the desire of washing out national shame reduces colonialism into the experience of suffering from imperialism and fails to create a decolonizing subject position for Hong Kong. The "washing out national shame" mentality is full of the politics of *ressentiment*, where revenge and hatred dominate. In short, Chinese nationalism destroys the possibility of a critical evaluation the colonial experiences. Thus, not only colonialism but also Chinese nationalism needs to be resisted in order to decolonize the mind.

There exists a myth that nationalism and global capitalism contradict each other; yet in reality this is often not the case. Rather, nationalism still plays an important role. Not only can one still trace the "nationality" of global capital, but nationalism or visions of "nation" are also still needed for disciplining citizens and for capital accumulation (Chang 2010; Harvey 2005, 2006). As argued earlier, PRC's active participation in the global capitalist economy is a state-dominated political project presented to be "apolitical" (Wang 2003, 2008). Hong Kong-based transnational corporations also collaborate with the PRC government to expand and to attack their competitors. The case study of Singapore in the previous section demonstrates how nation-building and desire for capital accumulation go hand in hand. Here, the "national" heritage discourse can be seen to have been mobilized as a disciplinary moral force, but not against capital accumulation. "Success" defined in terms of "economic development", i.e. capital accumulation, is embedded in Singapore's state version of national ideology. The state has made use of the colonial heritage to fulfill both its nation-building, and its capital-accumulation agendas. The Star Ferry and Queen's Pier case demonstrates another perspective; here, the demolition of "colonial" heritage was used both for fulfilling the nationalist agenda and the accumulation of capital. As argued earlier, in the new waterfront created by the demolition of the Star Ferry and Queen's Piers resulted in the recolonization of urban space by global capital and Chinese nationalism. Global capitalism and Chinese nationalism thus shared a common interest in removing the "obstacles", namely the Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier. At the discursive level, as nationalism seemed to have the moral appearance that capital-accumulation lacked,

developmentalists and opportunists easily manipulated the Chinese nationalist slogans and discourses to mask their agenda. For instance, on the day of the brutal removal of protestors at Queen's Pier, the local populist Chinese-language newspapers *Oriental Daily* and *The Sun*, owned by the same company, published the same editorial. This editorial stigmatized the protestors as people without "proper" jobs, or extremists; it denied there were any commercial interests behind the demolition and disregarded any historical value Queen's Pier might have. The editorial, furthermore, presented its point of view as that of concern for the future of Hong Kong and (Chinese) national prestige. The editorial ended with the following statement, rendered in an awkwardly nationalistic and "patriotic" tone:

They propose the preservation of the colonial culture and aim at "de-Sinicization" without concealing their agenda. [...] If the government continues to appease, it is not a moderate act but conspiring with them. This would only strengthen the pursuit for "de-Sinicization" and help them finish their conspiracy of anti-Communism in the banner of democracy. "The Queen has left Hong Kong. No piers should remain here." Hong Kong has already returned to China and should not let the brand of a colony remain. It cannot even tolerate people to go against the historical trend and promote "de-Sinicization" on the land of People's Republic of China. How do we face the collision of those people opposing China and those making Hong Kong unstable? Can the Hong Kong SAR government and its officials come forward to defend the dignity of the country and the nation? This is the time and the task to test whether the Hong Kong SAR government and its officials are loyal to the country and to the [PRC] central government!

(*Oriental Daily* 2007; *The Sun* 2007b)

The tone of the editorial is awkwardly nationalistic, resembling even the PRC's propaganda machine, evident in newspapers such as *People's Daily* and *Wen Wei Po*. It follows the nationalist logic that equates the letting-stand of the "brand of a colony", as it refers to Queen's Pier, with an unpatriotic violation of Chinese national dignity. The manipulation of nationalism in this editorial tries to shield that which they denied previously: that there were huge commercial interests behind the demolition. Yet at the same time that the commentators were using "nationalism" or "infrastructure" as the excuse to justify demolition, they were clearly afraid to touch on the militarization of

public space which was one of the major criticisms issuing from the Preservation Movement.

The Preservation Movement also demonstrated the evocation of a radicalized version of collective memory; such recognition of the subaltern histories embedded in a “colonial” heritage is important for decolonization. As mentioned earlier, the Preservation Movement experienced an important turning point in December 2006 when the activists connected their hunger strike in front of Star Ferry Pier with So’s hunger strike at the same place. This was the moment that the Preservation Movement started to re-articulate the understanding of the history of Hong Kong, and to articulate the Preservation Movement in terms of the tradition of local social movements. This in turn opened the way for the radicalized version of collective memory, arousing repressed memories of other resistance movements. The conscious mobilization of the terms “local” and “decolonization” together by the movement also provided alternatives to colonial, national and global capital. So’s hunger-strike against the fare increase on the Star Ferry and the later “Kowloon Disturbance” of 1966 were regarded as the rise of post-war local consciousness and as the pioneer of post-war local social movements in Hong Kong. Unlike the many conflicts, big and small, that were triggered in the previous decade by clashes between pro-Nationalist and pro-Communist groups, So’s hunger-strike was triggered by hardship and social injustice in Hong Kong, and challenged those wrong-doings of the colonial government that affected ordinary people’s livelihood (Hong Kong Governor 1956; Law 2006). As even the colonial government admitted in its report, “in contrast with the riots in 1956, there was almost a total absence of Communist – K.M.T. rivalries” (Commission on Inquiry on Kowloon Disturbances 1966 [1967]: 125). As Law Wing Sang (2006) argues, Star Ferry Pier was the “cradle” of local consciousness in Hong Kong; the movement against the fare increase on the Star Ferry in 1966 represented the birth of post-war social engagement on behalf of the local-born population.

In Hong Kong, there are multiple layers of, sometimes contradictory, meanings for the notions of “local” and “localisms”.<sup>78</sup> The colonial government wanted to promote a local sense of belonging to combat the influence of different forms of Chinese

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<sup>78</sup> I only listed two of them here. See Sham (2009) and Law (2014b) for more detailed elaborations of the various forms of “localism” in Hong Kong.

nationalism, from Nationalist to Communist, and to shape “good” or obedient “residents”.<sup>79</sup> Yet there was also another, more progressive and radical tradition of localism in Hong Kong, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. The identification of the local as such led to the emergence of concerns over social justice then and there. This gave birth to many social movements in Hong Kong in the 1960s and 1970s which were critical of both colonialism and capitalism. Their focus of concern was the social reality of Hong Kong, in contrast with the Chinese nationalists of that era whose focus was Mainland China (Sham 2009). When the local activists started to articulate the resonance of their hunger-strike with So’s, it symbolized the connection and contextualization of their own actions with and within the local tradition of social movement.

In the Preservation Movement, besides the architects and planners who initially attempted to justify the significance of the sites in terms of architectural importance and significance of the “official history”, the activists of “Local Action” disinterred the repressed, unofficial and subaltern histories embedded in the Edinburgh Place complex such as the social movements and protests that took place there, as articulated by the activist Chu Hoi Dick 朱凱迪 in his speech at the forum at Queen’s Pier, as quoted in the opening of this chapter. These social movements often targeted the social injustice that resulted from colonial policies such as discrimination against Chinese languages and restrictions of political freedom. The activists also skillfully avoided or undermined elements of Chinese nationalism. For instance, the 1971 Protect Diaoyutai Movement<sup>80</sup> was a pan-overseas Chinese nationalist movement. This was also why activists with anarchist tendencies initially avoided forming such movements (Szeto 2004, 2009; Ng

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<sup>79</sup> In Hong Kong, citizenship is referred as being (a) “resident”, a depoliticized term in contrast to “citizen” where political rights and duties are implied. In *Kowloon Disturbances 1966: Report of Commission of Inquiry*, the colonial government even makes the perceived connection between a sense of belonging and civic responsibility explicit by claiming, “[T]here is a need to develop civic consciousness and a responsibility to Hong Kong; a comparative lack of which may be explained by the absence of a strong feeling of identification” (Commission on Inquiry on Kowloon Disturbances 1966 [1967]: 127).

<sup>80</sup> The Diaoyutai Islands, as they are known in Mandarin, or Senkaku Islands, as they are known in Japanese, are groups of uninhabited rocks in the Pacific Island beneath where the sovereign rights to oil-rich reserves discovered underneath them were disputed by Japan, ROC and PRC. The “Protect Diaoyutai Movement” broke out in 1971 when the United States transferred the administration of Okinawa to Japan, and regarded Diaoyutai / Senkaku as part of Okinawa. Both ROC and PRC regarded the Diaoyutai as part of Taiwan, where ROC ruled and PRC claimed they had sovereignty. When the United States transferred Diaoyutai / Senkaku to Japan, it sparked a pan-Chinese nationalist movement, including many overseas Chinese, against American and Japanese imperialism (Szeto 2004, 2009).

1997). In the Preservation Movement, the activists focused on the later part of the Protect Diaoyutai Movement, when the focus had shifted from that of Chinese nationalism to protesting British colonial rule and its laws after the colonial police brutally suppressed their protests. In short, the activists of the Preservation Movement of Star Ferry and Queen's Pier had no interest in Chinese nationalism. Rather, they articulated their understanding of localism and decolonization in terms of the social movements triggered by the social realities of the local and of colonial rule. They were not merely concerned about protests that took place in the Edinburgh Place complex; rather, they contextualized these within the local social movement tradition. During the Preservation Movement, they invited veteran activists of the 1970s to share those social movement histories, which were often ignored or neglected in the official history, at the Edinburgh Place complex. Through this, they addressed an alternative understanding of history that challenged both colonialism and Chinese nationalism, recognizing the ceremonial function of Queen's Pier as only part of its history. Albeit the most recognized official history, the official and occidental version of the history of Hong Kong, "from fishing village to financial centre" is at the least incomplete, if not problematic. The Preservation Movement addressed the fact that there were suppressed histories of Hong Kong, just as there were untold subaltern histories embedded in the Edinburgh Place complex. These place-based memories relating to the site not only included memories of it as a visual landmark, but also repressed memories of the social movements in Hong Kong. Thus, although it was officially a "colonial" site, the histories of resistance movements which had been critical of colonialism were embedded there also. This challenged the absolute identification of anti-colonialism with (Chinese) nationalism by suggesting the possibility of effecting decolonization through the recognition of the histories of local resistance against colonial rule, without arousing Chinese nationalism. It gives a version of subaltern histories which both the colonial and nationalist narratives, focused solely on the official history, ignore. The subaltern histories also challenge the colonial linear and occidentalist narration of history, shared by the nationalist discourse (Law 2009). In short, the Preservation Movement decolonizes the history of a piece of apparently colonial heritage by emphasizing the suppressed subaltern histories which also happened there. Through this, they also decolonize the narrative of Hong Kong's (hi)story, establishing another narrative and understanding of its histories that has potential to create a critical and radical local consciousness.

Decolonization took place not only in temporal terms (history), but also in spatial terms by resisting urban re-colonization and decolonizing the concept of the “public”. As above, the fact there are different trajectories of “public space” and the “publicness” of “public space”, defined in terms associated with “right to the city” and spatial justice, rather than merely in terms of the not-privately-owned, is not to be taken for granted. Rather, such “publicness” is often under threat, and needs to be defended (Mitchell 2003). As mentioned earlier, when the Edinburgh Place complex was built, the architects consciously designed it as a more open space, accessible to the wider public. In contrast with the pre-war, exclusive colonial “public space” and gentlemen’s club, this effected a transformation of the concept of “public space”, from meaning simply colonial municipal land (colonial public space), to denoting a civic space, created for the wider public. The Preservation Movement took this transformation process as a resource to project and further radicalized what urban social space should be.

Although civic space is more inclusive than colonial public space, it does not mean that everyone enjoys an equal right to access and use it. In practice, there is often the implicit or explicit exclusion of “undesirable” members and “non-members” of society, such as homeless people, ethnic minorities and migrant workers, even though they do not impose any threat to other users. Thus, “publicness” and “openness” needed to be defined by people’s activities; contestation of, and defense against, the loss of such openness. This process turned the “civic space” to a more open and inclusive “public space” (Low, Taplin and Scheld 2005; Hou 2010; Douglas, Ho and Ooi 2008). While Edinburgh Place Complex was reserved as a civic space by the colonial architects and planners, it was ordinary people’s use of the space, including as the site of social movements, that turned it into an open and inclusive public space, which people could freely use, access and in which they could express political demands. In other words, this value of the space is based on its use-value, rather than its exchange value or its role in demonstrating the state’s power. Many urban scholars argue that major threats to public space come from neoliberalism, which tends toward privatizing urban public space, increasing surveillance and over-regulation of public space (Mitchell 2003; Low, Taplin and Scheld 2005; Hou 2010). The demolition of the piers not only destroyed a *de facto* open and inclusive public space, whose publicness resulted from bottom-up

actions; after the demolition, the waterfront was privatized and militarized. This destruction of public space was for the sake of global capital and Chinese nationalism. In this sense, even land is owned by the state, its “publicness” cannot be guaranteed. As such, “publicness” is not about who owns the land, but about the public’s right to use the land. It can thus be argued that guarantees of “public” instead of “private” ownership do not extend to protecting the use-value of the space. Here, “publicness” can be understood in terms of common rights, which are disassociated with ownership. In contrast to treasuring its use-value, those responsible for the demolition viewed the space in terms of exchange value and state power. The state regards “public” ownership as the meaning the state’s private ownership instead of the “common”. Thus, the state regards itself as having the right to transfer the space for privatization and militarization. Privatization and militarization dispossess the “common” and thus are forms of spatial re-colonization. Thus, the urban social movement that tried to stop the demolition, to preserve the piers in-situ and have the piers and thus the Edinburgh Place complex remain a public space, whose use-value as such is treasured, is already an urban social movement resisting urban re-colonization.

The Preservation Movement not only resisted resisting urban re-colonization, but also provides an example of further decolonizing “public space” by addressing the right to the city. The right to the city is not simply “visiting” rights, as for privatized space often presented as “accessible” for people to visit (Lefebvre 1996). It is not merely an individual right, but rights in collective terms. As David Harvey explicitly states, the right to the city is “a right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts’ desire” (2013: 4). The demand for urban space to be open and public, where political rights can be exercised and use value is treasured, is such collective rights. However, “publicness” is not limited to political rights. Lefebvre (1996) argues that the modern idea of “city” is based on the ancient Greek concept of “free citizens”, which in fact excludes many people also living in the city but who fall outside the definition of “free citizens”. Using Lefebvre’s argument, it can be thus understood how and why the colonial “public space” was often exclusive. In the colonial context, the colonized people were generally excluded from the definition of those “free citizens” who were entitled to such rights. Although many people are entitled to be within the idea of “city”, minority others and marginal groups, such as racial minorities, less-privileged new immigrants, migrant workers, sexual minorities, etc., are often formally or informally excluded. In Hong

Kong, besides the Han-Chinese racism, many local ethnic Chinese have also internalized and re-produced the colonial racial hierarchy based on skin colour and “degree of development”. These two forms of racism do not conflict with each other and even mingled together in Hong Kong<sup>81</sup> (Ku 2005; Chen, K. 2005). Non-white racial minorities and migrant workers from Southeast Asia have constantly been treated as minoritarian others, and excluded, even though they may have been living in Hong Kong for a long time or even several generations (Lo 2008; Erni and Leung 2014). Yet since the 1980s, Central has often been the area where migrant domestic workers (“foreign domestic helpers”), mainly from the Philippines, spent their Sundays. Their appropriation of the urban space in the central business district has resisted the dominant order of public space and the city and created “insurgent public space” (Hou 2010; Tillu 2011). The publicness, openness and inclusiveness of a public space is not to be taken for granted, but is rather a result of contestation. The Preservation Movement recognized that the migrant workers who had been using the pier were important in the history of the making of public space, as defined not in terms of control, but in terms of the right to the city. Thus, “Local Action” organized a workshop with migrant workers using Queen’s Pier to listen to their stories of the urban space and conducted a survey about how the change, and the demolition of the piers would affect them (Chu 2007b). In short, similar to the social movements which happened there, these oppressed and repressed histories and insurgent use of the space became a major part of why the piers were considered important and why they should not be demolished. This constituted not only the recognition of these minority others, but the holding of their right to the city as significant; even as central to an understanding of what constitutes the “local”.

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<sup>81</sup> Prior to the arrivals of Europeans, in traditional China, Han-Chinese often regarded themselves as the centre of the civilization. The non-Han-Chinese were regarded as inferior, less civilized, barbarian, and were often dehumanized. When the Europeans first arrived at China, they were regarded as merely other “barbarians” and “devils”. Yet in the late Qing period, and after China was defeated by European powers in war, some changes emerged. Some reformist thinkers began to adopt European concepts of “social Darwinism” and even “scientific racism” and produced their own classification and ranking of different “races”. In such process, the “white race” was re-imagined also as a superior race. The “yellow race”, of which the Chinese was counted, was considered as a superior race but under threat. Yet, races with darker skin colours were still considered as inferior, a judgement often “justified” in “scientific” racist terms. Such racial discourses were popularized in the late Qing and early Republican era (Dikötter 1994). In the Hong Kong context, as Ku Hok-bun 古學斌 (2005) argues, Han-Chinese racism is often a hybrid form of modern Han-Chinese racism, which has adopted the racial hierarchy discourses, and prejudice against places of “less developed”. Ku quotes Fred Chiu’s 丘延亮 argument that there actually exists a hierarchy in the discourses of dehumanization of “others”. The more “superior” others such as Europeans are called “ghosts” or “devil” while the “inferior” others are known as animals.

In early 2007, when Queen's Pier still functioned as a public pier, "Local Action" performed a highly symbolic act intended to decolonize the history and the space of Queen's Pier. They hired a boat and named it "The Local". On board "The Local", besides activists, there were people largely excluded or marginalized in the city, be it by race and/or class, such as migrant workers, new immigrants, community members displaced by urban renewal projects, workers, etc. Then, "The Local" traveled from Tsim Sha Tsui to Queen's Pier and the people aboard "The Local" landed at Queen's Pier. This was to symbolize that it was no longer the colonizers landing at Queen's Pier and walking through the ceremonial avenue of power, but the "local" (Ku 2011; Ip 2010, 2011; Chen, Y.C. 2013). As above here, the "local" included those often marginalized or even excluded according to the conventional understanding of "citizenship" and idea of the "city". In other words, those who live in the city but are often not considered as "local" were included here as "local". Recognizing their rights to the city is to recognize and include those who were excluded or marginalized in the definition of "citizenship". As Liette Gilbert and Mustafa Dikeç argue,

The right to the city, or what Lefebvre also referred to as the right to urban life, is a claim upon society rather than a simple claim to territorial affiliation. For Lefebvre, the urban is not simply limited to the boundaries of a city, but includes its social system. Hence the right to the city is a claim for the recognition of the urban as the (re)producer of social relations of power, and the right to participation in it.

(Gilbert and Dikeç 2008: 254)

In other words, the right to the city can draw those who are excluded in terms of "citizenship", or as "free citizens", to participate in the urban life. In putting the right to the city, especially that of those who are excluded or marginalized, at the centre of a defence of public space – one which is also a piece of colonial heritage – the power structure of the space is transformed. The "public space" is no longer where the colonial government celebrates its power and for its ceremonial use; it is not even merely a civic space and ordinary public space which people can freely enjoy. It is now public space as the site to demonstrate the right to the city of those who have been excluded and marginalized in the colonial era and then by the dominant social system. This form of "publicness" is not realized due to ownership by the "public", as represented by the state; it is realized through contestation and recognition of right to the city. Anti-

privatization of public space is not merely against turning a “public”-owned space into a “private”-owned space; it is also against threats to the right to the city *after* privatization. Thus, the Preservation Movement is also decolonizing the meaning of public space. Instead of land reclamation for militarization and global capital, the Preservation Movement is a reclamation of the city by ordinary people and those who are excluded and marginalized. Resistance and decolonization are thus possible in relation to the preservation of “colonial” heritage when the “right to the city”, including that of those who are often not included, is recognized. Through this, the concept of “public space” itself is also decolonized.

For the Preservation Movement, especially for “Local Action”, the local is inseparable from decolonization, hence inseparable from the decolonization of the history embedded in a piece of supposedly “colonial heritage” and the historical narration of Hong Kong, without falling into the trap of Chinese nationalism. It is inseparable, also, from resistance to urban re-colonization according to the desires of both Chinese nationalism and global capitalism; from the decolonization of the concept of public space, and from identification with the marginal and excluded in the city. The “local” is not defined in terms of “blood”, ethnic group or nativism. Rather, it is a resistance identity, where marginalized groups “building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from” those which are dominant; it is also project identity which redefines social positioning and “seek[s] the transformation of overall social structure” (Castells 2010: 8). Thus, in the process of the making of a local identity, there is both openness and value judgment which identifies the resistant tradition. This “local identity” is open yet critical. It is not based on attacking “foreigners” or the reductive nativist logic of “who comes first”, without concern for power relationships. A conscious openness towards the less privileged, new immigrants and migrant workers, and the identification of the oppressed constitutes the understanding of the “local” as that which has been constantly ignored and marginalized by colonialism. Nationalism is not an alternative as it shares same logic as colonialism, and has not changed its structure. The openness and criticality integral to this understanding of the “local”, its constant mindfulness of decolonization where self-reflection is the emphasis, ensures that the “localism” embedded in the preservation movement also avoids looping into a form of (ethno-)nationalism, which would reduce the complexity of the local conditions, as seen in the state’s nation-building agenda in

Singapore. In other words, a “localism” that is closely connected with the idea and practice of decolonization provides offers possibilities for reflection, an awareness of complexity and potentializing the construction of a critical subject. Such localism, closely linked with decolonization, creates a critical local awareness and consciousness, and is resistant to colonialism, nationalism based on ethnocentric ideas and *ressentiment* politics, and to the logic of understanding the local in terms of global capitalism.

## 2.4 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the colonial heritage which postcolonial societies cannot avoid, their relationship with anti-colonial nationalism, postcolonial nation-building and global capitalism. The “national” and the “global” can both be forces for either the preservation or the demolition of “colonial” heritage. As demonstrated in this chapter, the demolition of a piece of colonial heritage in the name of anti-colonial nationalism, as the “washing out” of a symbol of national shame, is problematic. As put forward in Chapter 1, heritage is in a trialectic relationship with time, space and identity. The anti-colonial nationalist reading of “colonial” heritage repeats the logic of colonialism and fails to recognize the alternative histories that happened and are thus embedded in the same place. The anti-colonial nationalist agenda of demolishing colonial heritage is *ressentiment* politics, which takes revenge on the urban landscape, the most visible symbol of colonialism, without changing the colonial structure; subaltern histories are still ignored. Moreover, nationalism’s lack of reflexivity but seemingly “moral” position is easily manipulated by global capitalism to mask the desire for capital accumulation.

Regardless of whether postcolonial societies demolish their colonial heritage in the name of nationalism or appropriate it as “national” heritage, the problem of *whose* vision of the “nation” persists. When mobilizing “nationalism”, it is most often the elites’ or the state’s version of the “nation” mobilized, wherein the complexity of both the colonial context and era and the current conditions are often reduced. Whenever they cannot be subsumed into the elites’ or the state’s version and vision of the “nation”, the repressed histories of the colonial context and era remain repressed. Such nationalisms and understandings of the “nation” do not allow for the decolonization of the mind. Global capitalism, as even more “flexible” than nationalism, is not necessarily

associated with either demolition or preservation. Rather, both demolition and preservation provide opportunities for the accumulation of capital, which in both cases would result in urban re-colonization. Thus, decolonization takes place in both temporal (history and historical narration) and spatial terms. It is not uncommon for colonial governments to build “public open space” to demonstrate their power and to reserve such sites for their exclusive definition of the “public”. Yet the production of the meaning of space is not merely effected by how it has been designated, top-down, but also by its being contested, bottom-up. The use of colonially-designated “public space” as the site for resistance movements and even just their everyday use subverted power relationships and turned these sites into public spaces associated with the right to the city. When colonial “public space” becomes the site where the right to the city is addressed, it decolonizes the meaning of public space and open up a more critical understanding of the colonial conditions and the local.

As demonstrated in the case studies in this chapter, the “local” has been the site of knowledge production and contestation. A critical, reflexive understanding of the local is closely related to decolonization and the making of a critical subject. The complexity of the history, political-economy and socio-cultural relationships embedded in the local needs to be critically engaged with, analyzed and reflected upon. However (as demonstrated in the exhibition in the National Museum of Singapore, for example), many postcolonial states reproduce a reductive, developmentalist narration of history; a linear, occidentalist understanding of modernity that ignores the complexity of colonial conditions. Anti-colonial nationalism and Chinese nationalism which has little interest in the colonial conditions of the “lost territories” are not much better. Thus, the critical examination of the local conditions of modernities, how the colonial era has shaped their urban demographics and cultural composition, and how their postcolonial societies respond to them, is essential for decolonization. I will address these issues further in Chapter 3. In this chapter, although I have discussed both top-down and bottom-up responses to the “colonial”, my discussions of the “nation” and the “global” have focused on the top-down version, i.e. the state’s vision of the “nation” and nationalism, and the desire for capital accumulation. I have demonstrated how the national and the global can be problematic. However, as they are of such central importance to heritage preservation, perhaps they also provide a legitimate discourse for bottom-up appropriation. I will examine this issue in the next two chapters.



## Chapter 3

### Heritage of Port Cities: Multiculturalism, Hybridity and Vernacular Modernities

*For migrants, [...] place of death is important because it often becomes the site of burial. Tombstones abroad acknowledge the shift in allegiance—from origins to destinations—that migrants take whole lifetimes or more to come to terms with. [...] Graves, while they are endpoints for migrants, are beginnings for their descendants, marking the truth of their presence in a land. For many diasporas, then, graves are significant places. [...] Graves provide a ready point of return in a world where origins keep moving on.*

----Engseng Ho (2006: 3)

It was, as usual, a hot and humid day when I first visited Bukit Brown Cemetery in Singapore. The cemetery tour was organized by a group of concerned citizens, heritage-lovers and researchers who called themselves “Brownies”. I joined several tours guided by different Brownies. On these tours, the Brownies not only introduced the planned-to-be demolished cemetery but also guided people to different tombs, drawing their attention to the characteristics and special features of some of the important ones. Besides the most spectacular Ong Sam Leong 王三龍<sup>82</sup> and family’s tombs, another highlight of these tours was the Sikh guard sculptures in the cemeteries. Besides joining these tours, I also volunteered in documenting some tombs that would be exhumed soon. The more I went to Bukit Brown Cemetery<sup>83</sup>, the more I saw it as an important heritage site in Singapore. Perhaps affected by the experience of Bukit Brown Cemetery, I began to visit cemeteries in other places, such as Bukit Cina Cemetery in Malacca, and the cemeteries in Hong Kong’s Happy Valley. What, I ask myself, is my interest in the cemetery? I have also visited cemeteries in Western countries; I visited

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<sup>82</sup> See Appendix II

<sup>83</sup> What is now known as “Bukit Brown Cemetery” is a cemetery cluster, including Bukit Brown Municipal Cemetery. Unless otherwise stated, “Bukit Brown” or “Bukit Brown Cemetery” refers to the whole cemetery cluster. *Bukit* is the Malay word for hill.

the final resting places of Oscar Wilde and Charles Baudelaire in Paris, those of Ezra Pound and Joseph Brodsky in Venice, yet the experience of visiting these Asian cemeteries is quite different. When I visit cemeteries in the West, I usually have an intention in mind of visiting particular celebrities' graves. Yet back in Asia, unlike their counterparts in the West, most of the cemeteries I have visited have not been promoted as tourist destinations, at least not on the level with their Western counterparts. When I walk in *these* cemeteries, I seldom have an intention to visit particular tombs. Rather, I treat the entire cemetery as a whole landscape. I find that I am more interested in the diversity and complexity of ethnic groups, in cultural identification and the personal and group histories that are documented on the tombstones and other features. The histories of port cities and their people are embedded in these cemeteries, just as they are in the cities' other "urban" landscapes and built heritage. As the opening quotation in this chapter of Engseng Ho (2006) suggests, for migrants, gravesites at the migration destination also mark the "beginning of their descendants". Indeed, not only their graves; urban landscapes also mark the existence of migrants and the beginning of their new lives, as well as embodying the histories of the port cities. However, recall what I have argued in Chapter 1, time, space and identity form a trialectic relationship with one another. The different understanding of identity will affect their understanding of history and the meaning of a place. When governments approach these landscapes in which the histories of port cities are embedded, or simply the "heritage of port cities", they may feel uneasy at the prospect of its contradicting their national or city narrative, which might lead them to either ignore it, destroy it, or reinterpret it.

In this chapter, I will illustrate how the heritage of port cities have been been treated in different former colonial port cities. Through this, I also demonstrate the proposed "port cities as method", which allows different places to conduct inter-reference through the common experience as port city. In Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang, it is unfair to say that there is no pre-colonial (port) history in these places. Hong Kong, for example, functioned as the outer port of Canton no later than 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. When Portugal expanded their maritime trade routes, they wanted to occupy Hong Kong for precisely this reason. It was only after they failed to do so that they occupied Macau (Lo *et al.*, 1963). The founding of these places as colonial port cities was undoubtedly essential in the development and shaping their urban and demographic

landscapes.<sup>84</sup> This, however, does not mean that the urban landscapes of the colonial port cities developed exactly according to the colonizers' plan. Rather, the colonizers' policies brought different ethnic groups to settle in their colonial port cities, and the presence of these people from different backgrounds contributed to the emergence of modernities there. As argued in Chapter 2, anti-colonial nationalism is problematic, in that it repeats the logic of colonialism and operates in terms of reductive, moral-evil *ressentiment* politics. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the urban spaces of colonial port cities should not be understood in reductive, binary opposition terms, just as the relationship between their colonizers and the colonized was not that of a fixed binary opposition. A more critical reflection on colonialism and coloniality, of a kind that goes beyond the binary opposition on which *ressentiment* politics and anti-colonial nationalism are based, is required. Similarly, there is also a need to recognize that such vernacular modernities were "constituted through circuitous and multi-directional cultural traffic rather than simply emanating from the imperialist metropole" (Sang 2012: 60). Although key aspects of the West or Western modernity were appropriated, the vernacular modernities and their trajectories were different from those of the Western model. In many contexts, the influences are actually multi-flows. What constitutes as "modernity" is the feeling of being modern by the people in the specific contexts. Thus, "tradition" and "modern" are not necessarily in binary opposition. The content of different vernacular modernities can still be criticized but one should not regard them as "not modern", or a "belated" modernity using the occidentalist model as the universal norm. In colonial port cities, the process of the hybridization of culture also emerged because of the existence of such diverse demographics and cultures (Venn 2006). In other words, the colonial founding of these port cities may have created the frameworks or possibilities for, but did not directly *make* these "vernacular modernities". As argued in Chapter 1, "decolonization" should be a critical process, allowing the colonized people to re-think and reflect on their relationships with the colonizers. It also necessitates the recognition of the existence of multiple vernacular modernities, instead of only a singular Western or occidentalist model. As these port cities are the sites where vernacular modernities take place to emerge, so that their histories are embedded in

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<sup>84</sup> For some other port cities in South East Asia and Southeastern coastal China not discussed in this dissertation, such as Srivijaya, Malacca, Hà Tiên, Canton (now Guangzhou 廣州), Chinchew (now Quanzhou 泉州), the landscapes were, or had been multiethnic even before the expansion of European powers due to their communities of traders from different places (Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University. 1998; Gipouloux 2011; Li 2010; Widodo 2011).

these landscapes, the question of how postcolonial societies deal with the heritage of port cities coincides with the important question of how vernacular modernities, their cosmopolitan, multicultural and hybrid landscapes, are understood and responded to.

Before going into studying the actual cases, this chapter will first theorize how “multiculturalism”, “hybridity” and “cosmopolitanism” are understood. Then, I will continue these discussions in relation to different scenarios. First, I will take Singapore as an example to illustrate how, there, the state ideology of multiracialism and multiculturalism, which is a rigid, categorical understanding of race, culture, language and religion, works to simplify the far more complex, *actually existing* multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism of these port cities. Then, I will use Bukit Brown Cemetery to illustrate the contest between two forms of modernity: that of the actually existing vernacular modernities in question and the occidentalist conception of modernity. In Singapore for example, I will argue, the government is replacing the existing vernacular modernity<sup>85</sup> with the state’s vision of progress and development which is operating in the logic of “occidentalism” (Venn 1993, 2000, 2006). In contrast to its counterpart in Singapore, the Hong Kong government does not uphold “multiculturalism” as its state ideology. It cannot deny multiculturalism either; however, the existence there of non-Western and non-Chinese heritage contradicts the government’s tendency toward re-Sinicization, their chosen way to attempt to subsume Hong Kong into the Chinese nation-building narrative. The way that the Hong Kong government treats its port city heritage, I would argue, is that of what Ackbar Abbas calls “reverse hallucination”, which means “not seeing what is there” (1997:6). Both “getting rid of” and “not seeing” the heritage of port cities constitute varying degrees of denial. These are not positive ways to engage with the heritage of port cities, I will argue, and cannot create critical subjects. In the final part of this chapter, I will address how Penang’s more positive engagement with its port city heritage, partly due to the value of WHS (World Heritage Status), suggests some possible ways to critically engage with the issues of multiculturalism, hybridity and vernacular modernities.

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<sup>85</sup> There are multiple vernacular modernities extant in the world. I use the term “vernacular modernity” to address a particular version of vernacular modernities that takes place under specific conditions. The use of the singular does not imply there is only a singular, universalizing model of modernity.

### 3.1 Positioning Multiculturalism, Hybridity and Cosmopolitanism

In the globalized era, societies tend to be plural in terms of race, ethnic groups and cultures. Historically, as nodal points in maritime trade networks and places where people of different ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds reside, port cities tend to be multi-ethnic sites where different cultures interact. If a place has been “plural” or “multicultural”, the issues of relationships and interactions among these cultures necessarily arise. Whether one agrees with “multiculturalism” or not, the “multicultural” conditions were already there. To analyze the treatment of the *de facto* multicultural heritage of these port cities is also to analyze how multicultural conditions are understood and responded to there.

Many scholars have already pointed out that “multiculturalism” is an “umbrella” term describing different kinds of attitudes and policy approaches, from pluralistic to separatist; from non-weighting cultural relativism to positing intellectual sameness across races, to emphasizing the differences and critical possibilities (e.g. Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge 2007; McLaren 1994; Berlant and Warner 1994; Chicago Cultural Studies Group 1992; Goh 2014). I am not going to repeat these arguments here. Generally speaking, multiculturalism arises as an alternative route to monoculturalism and the obsession with assimilating “minor” cultures (Goldberg 1994). However, multiculturalism can also risk losing their critical edge when it comes to a form of casual “political correctness” or a simplified “cultural relativism”, which may result in turning a blind eye to injustice in the name of “cultural differences” (Werbner 1997; Scott 1992; Laclau 1992). Although “multiculturalism” does not guarantee anything, simply giving up multiculturalism is not a way out. There is a need to develop more critical understandings and approaches to “multiculturalism”, “multicultural” or “plural” society, rather than merely paying lip-service or looping in the “language game”. Critical versions of multiculturalism need not only to acknowledge differences and diversity, but also, as Peter McLaren argues, “refuse to see culture as nonconflictual, harmonious and consensual” (1994: 53). The *de facto* multicultural heritage of port cities is also characterized by processes of contestations and negotiations. Paying attention to how one approaches it could help to rethink approaches to multicultural conditions.

Together with the “multicultural” condition that different cultures co-exist in port cities, there has also been the hybridization of cultures. As argued in Chapter 1, the maritime trading networks not only carry people and goods but also cultures, including religions; ways to understand the world, architectural typologies, etc. As Johannes Widodo correctly points out, as they are located on the maritime trade route, the coastal cities of Southeast Asia

[...] [have] been very open towards the various cultural influxes. These cultures were then transplanted, adopted, absorbed and nurtured locally, then expressed into unique but yet closely linked culture, language, architecture, and artifacts. The settlements are formed by complex layers of various cultures, ideologies, economies, and ecosystems, and manifested in the hybrid urban morphology and architectural typologies. Here cultural and geographical ‘boundary’ is always blurring, overlapping, or intersecting, and has never been clearly defined.

(Widodo 2009: 79)

In short, the co-existence of different cultures (multiculturality) and blurring of boundaries between different cultures to develop new forms of culture (hybridization) coincide. Many postcolonial theorists celebrate hybridity and hybridization and regard it as resistance to sameness, purity and other essentializing notions. Homi Bhabha (2006), for instance, takes the stance that hybridity has the subversive ability to strike back at colonial domination. Yet, there is also the criticism that “hybridity” can become merely a marketable term that loses its critical edge, when it is appropriated by capitalism (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2005; Hutnyk 1997). Similar to “multiculturalism”, therefore, the term “hybridity” does not guarantee anything. As I have argued elsewhere, there is a need to differentiate between “rhetorical hybridity” and “critical hybridity”. “Rhetorical hybridity” is an uncritical, simple, banal form of “hybridity”, which regards “hybridity” as trendy and fashionable without critical reflection. “Critical hybridity” is open, contextualized, critical, reflexive and does not take hybridity as “a superficial gesture or an empty and hollow slogan, but as an attitude that aims at practice.” (Sham 2009: 326). In Hong Kong, for example, rhetorical hybridity may be found in those government promotions that describe Hong Kong as “East meets West”, which Abbas (1997) criticizes as a cliché. In contrast, critical hybridity is an attitude more concerned with process. Ultimately, critical hybridity is “a self-conscious, general *principle*

extended to human society in general and the generating of the same kind of dynamic multiplicity that characterizes the chaos-world” (Britton 1999: 16).

Bearing in mind the differences between these two kinds of hybridity helps one better articulate the heritage of port cities and the ways in which they are understood and responded to. As Widodo points out, the hybridization of culture in these port cities takes place as an organic process locally, rather than as a selective top-down imposition, which is quite different to the process at work in those many cases that treat “hybridity” as merely a fashionable, marketable term. Roger Tourmson argues that celebrating hybridity is “voluntary amnesia” (Kraidy 2005: 68). However, if hybridization is an organic process takes place locally, acknowledging this should not be understood as “amnesia” or even forgetting the inequalities of the past. Rather, to critically engage with, and acknowledge the process of hybridization is a refusal to believe that either an imagined homeland far away or cultural purity is the solution. One needs to acknowledge things that happen, and transform “here”, locally. Whether or not this is a forgetting of power relationships depends on how one articulates such a process. Besides, upholding a principle of “hybridity” or hybridization does not mean being “totally open”, without restriction, if one recalls that the hybridization process should emphasize how different cultures may adopt and interact organically at the local level. Thus, the influx of a single culture without any negotiation at the local level should not be understood in terms of hybridity but as “cultural imperialism”. Critical hybridization can be open yet still critical.

As before, culture should not be understood as nonconflictual, harmonious and consensual. In Southeast Asian port cities, when different cultures met, there were conflicts, co-existence and intercultural exchange. This was not a process without the operation of power relationships either. As argued in Chapter 1, collaborative colonialism also took place. While in the long run, co-existing and hybridizing multiethnic landscapes were created by the negotiation and contestation among different ethnic groups, such processes should not be idealized – as presented in tourist brochures – as “harmonious”, albeit that, as a way of living together, tolerance has generally been the norm. (Tay and Goh 2003). There are also hybrid architecture styles to which patrons from different ethnic groups have contributed (Widodo 2009). In the process, both the “international” and the “local” combine to shape the modernities of

colonial port cities (Ooi, K. B. 2010). Such *de facto* multicultural and hybridized vibrancy and tolerance are regarded by many scholars as “cosmopolitan” (e.g. Kahn 2006; Ooi, K. B. 2010; Widodo 2009, 2011). Similar to “multiculturalism” and “hybridity”, “cosmopolitanism” is also a disputed term, subject to many different understandings. Bhabha (2006) differentiates between the “global cosmopolitanism” which is celebrated in the era of neoliberal capitalism, and resistant, “vernacular cosmopolitanism”. Accordingly, “global cosmopolitanism” “celebrates a world of plural cultures and peoples located at the periphery, so long as they produce healthy profit margins within metropolitan societies” (Bhabha 2006: xiv). The “diversity” of migrants is welcome only if they bring profits. Such “global cosmopolitanism” tends to pay less attention to persistent inequality. In contrast, “vernacular cosmopolitanism” emerges from the less well-off and minorities. It does not measure “global progress” from the perspective of profit to metropolitan societies, but “from the minoritarian perspectives” (ibid. xvi). It is more concerned with difference-in-equality and “works towards the shared goals of democratic rule” (ibid. xviii).

I posit the “cosmopolitanism” of colonial port cities somewhere between the two forms of cosmopolitanism defined by Bhabha. From the perspective of colonizers, the establishment of colonial port cities and the admission of diverse migrants, regardless of social status, was ultimately for the benefit of their “metropolitan societies”. Yet for the migrant traders and labourers concerned, the multiethnic port city was the place where they lived, no matter whether permanently or temporarily. Sensitivity towards different cultures was a necessity to be able to live together. In this sense, the *actually existing* cosmopolitanism of the colonial port cities refers not only to the fact that the space there was generally open to people of different backgrounds, allowing different cultures to interact and be nurtured, but also towards the mutual sensitivity of the people residing there, the potential for tolerance of differences and the ability to adapt. In fact, the *actually existing* and *de facto* multiculturalism, hybridity and cosmopolitanism of the port cities, in all their complexities, are quite often minimized, racialized, ignored and sidetracked by states for various reasons. The rediscovery of these complex attitudes and conditions as embedded in the heritage can provide possibilities for better understanding the past, reflecting upon history, space and who “we” are. As such, this may be one of the possible starting points for a project of actual decolonization.

### 3.2 Racializing Multicultural and Hybridized Landscapes: Historic Districts in Singapore

When the British founded their colonial port cities, the primary objective was the accumulation of wealth from trade. Therefore, in contrast with other kinds of colonies, the colonial authorities were most eager to attract traders from different places. Subsequently, whether by the traders or the colonizers, labourers were also brought or attracted there. As Thomas Metcalf suggests

A colonial port city basically consisted of diverse peoples who were in some measure or another recruited, if not by the colonial power then by mercantile or other agents of colonial power; they had, of course, to be engaged in overseas trade with a metropolis.

(Basu ed. 1985: 84)

In other words, since their inception, colonial port cities had been expected to be ethnically diverse. In planning a colonial city, the British tended to physically segregate different ethnic groups into a “colonial urban settlement” occupied by the British and/or other Europeans, and other so-called “indigenous settlements” or “native quarters” (King 1976). In colonial port cities the so-called “indigenous” or “native quarters” were further complicated by the co-existence of different non-European groups. The planned ethnic segregation was therefore based on the colonial administration’s understanding of how many major “races” or ethnic groups there were. Their definitions of different races and ethnic groups were often fairly arbitrary, and the internal dynamics and differences of each “group” were consequently undermined.

Taking Singapore as an example, when Stamford Raffles prepared the racial segregation scheme in Singapore, he identified six main groups, namely Europeans, Chinese, Malays, Chulias (Indians), Arabs and Bugis. The location of each group was allocated according to his understanding of their social status, and the Jackson Plan (1822) was drafted accordingly. However, although the colonizer had constructed the framework of the urban landscape, it was often challenged by the settlers, such that the actual, eventual urban landscape was indeed the result of conflicts and negotiations

(Home 2013). Although there tended to be ethnic and racial concentration of the newly-arrived migrants, loosely according to the design of the Jackson Plan; there were also numerous situations in which people did not stay within their designated “ethnic enclaves”, as well as overlapping and mixing the living landscapes of different ethnic groups. Furthermore, each so-called “race” was often fragmented into many sub-groups (Yeoh 1996). In short, actual living patterns were far more complex than the original plan.

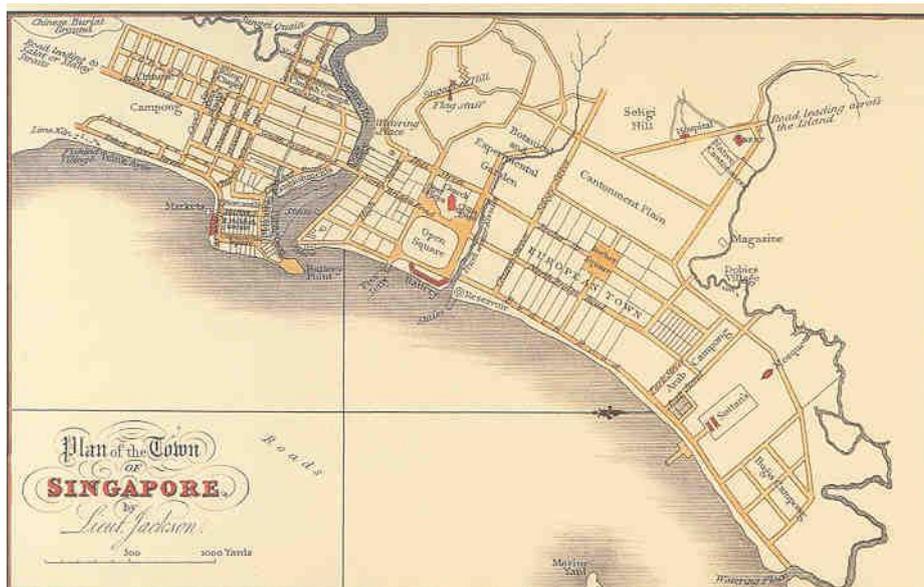


Photo 3-A: “Jackson Plan” 1822. In this original plan for the town planning of Singapore, there were clear boundaries for different ethnic enclaves, which were different from the later, actual living landscape.

Regardless of this emergent complexity, the early colonial plan of segregated “ethnic enclaves” was appropriated by the postcolonial state to create themed conservation areas. As discussed in Chapter 2, in the 1980s, as they began to develop more thorough heritage preservation policies, the Singaporean government felt that there was a need to reclaim the “Asian roots” of Singapore for the purposes of nation-building and increasing tourist incomes. In the process, the colonial plan for segregated “ethnic enclaves” was appropriated. In the Committee on Heritage Report 1988, the Committee identified “multi-cultural heritage” as a key category of Singapore’s heritage. Accordingly, “multicultural heritage” was said to be “expressed in the lifestyles customs and traditions of the different ethnic communities” and to have “developed distinct Singaporean characteristics evolving from great Asian traditions”. It was ultimately said to have contributed to the making of a “supra-communal identity”

(The Committee on Heritage 1988: 28). Elsewhere in the same report, the Committee was hesitation over the implications of “multi-cultural heritage”, especially its potential to contradict their vision of nation-building. It nonetheless attempted to justify such category. According to the Committee,

Management of our multi-cultural heritage [...] can be particularly problematic because of its association with primordial sentiments of ethnicity, language and religion, which in many new states have vitiated the formation of civic loyalties for nation building. We have spent, and still expend, time and resources reconciling the conflicting pulls of our **multi-cultural ethnic heritage**. Active promotion of our multi-cultural heritage, the Committee recognized, can heighten awareness of **particular cultural identities**. The Committee on Heritage [believes] that there are common grounds within **the core values of the diverse cultures** in Singapore which can be identified as the basis of solidarity and of progress.

(The Committee on Heritage 1988: 40 – 41, my emphasis)

From the above quotation, one can see how “multi-cultural heritage” as understood by the Committee resonates with the Singaporean 4Ms (multiracialism, multilingualism, multiculturalism and multireligiosity) ideology (Kong and Yeoh 2003).

According to this ideology, each citizen is racially categorized as “Chinese”, “Malay”, “Indian” or “Other”. Someone’s (paternal) “racial” descent is supposed to define his or her “culture” (quite usually oversimplified), and “language” is defined by an imposed, racialized “mother tongue” regardless what one’s actual mother tongue is (Chua 1998). Rather than acknowledging the complexity and diversity of different ethnic groups, the Singaporean government uses the rigid Chinese – Malay – Indian – Other (CMIO) categories and assumes that someone’s race defines his or her culture, language and even religion. This essentialist correlation of one’s assumed “race” with one’s behaviour essentializes differences and excludes the alternative possibilities of not conforming to such racialized stereotypes, even though this frequently took place historically. For instance, many Peranakan Chinese were historically quite fluent in Malay, some even regarding it as (one of) their mother-tongue(s). Yet according to the rigid CMIO category, a Peranakan Chinese descendant is defined and recorded as “Chinese” and Mandarin is imposed on them at school as their “mother-tongue”, even

though Malay might be their most familiar language at home (Teo 2013). In this context, although the Committee has emphasized the need to research the commonalities of shared “core” values, in practice, the state interprets “multi-cultural heritage” as clearly separable into racially-based categories in its daily operations. According to this “clear”, rigid system of categorization, different races have “particular cultural identities”. According to this logic solidarity was made possible because these groups are said to share “common core values”, which the Committee suggests are those of “traditional family unity and social structure”, the so-called “Asian values” according to the state’s definition. In other words, it is this commonality of “cultures” and “values” between the correspondent “races” that make solidarity and nation-building possible.

When these racialized understandings of culture and heritage were actualized into heritage preservation planning, three themed “historic districts” or “ethnic quarters”, namely “Chinatown”, Kampong Glam and “Little India”, were respectively designated as the historical “ethnic enclaves” of the Chinese, Malay-Muslims and Indians. In the process of the preservation of these “historic districts” since the 1980s, the state phased out the Rent Control Act which prevented landlords of pre-1947 houses from expelling tenants for redevelopment. A similar Rent Control Act was also to be found in Malaysia. Rent control was originally intended “to protect tenants from unreasonable rent increases arising from housing shortages caused by the ravages of World War Two” (Chua 1989: 23). Since landlords could not easily displace the tenants in these old buildings for redevelopment, the policy incidentally prevented many old buildings in the city area from being demolished. According to the supporters of phasing out rent control, the extremely low rent de-motivated landlords to repair and renovate, so that many of these buildings were in poor condition. Yet, instead of raising the controlled rent to a more up-to-date level but one that would still protect the tenants, the state chose to phase out rent control completely (Kong 2011). Many landlords and developers seized on this opportunity to evict poor tenants and “upgrade” the façades of these heritage buildings. Meanwhile, the state gave a free hand to the “market”, with the exception of preferences to certain ethnic “themes” and “moral guardians”<sup>86</sup>. As a result, in a break with the past, rather than by organic evolution, those businesses that could

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<sup>86</sup> For instance, Bugis Street was a red light district with many transvestites in post-war Singapore. The state gave a free hand to private developers to “revitalize” the area into a shopping mall. When the management of the shopping mall attempted to employ transvestites as customer relations officer, the state banned it to do so in the name of “moral guardian” (Neoh 1997).

afford to pay higher rents, such as offices, food and beverage shops, and shops selling products favoured by tourists displaced the original tenants of these conserved “historic districts”(Neoh 1997; Kong and Yeoh 2003). The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), in charge of urban planning in Singapore, made it clear that apart from restoring and preserving the physical environment, their planned objectives were “to retain traditional traders and activities while consolidating the area with new, compatible ones” and “to introduce appropriate new features to further enhance the identity of the place” (Urban Redevelopment Authority 1988: 46). In all of these plans, the original “residents” are conspicuously absent. In other words, these conservation plans may have themed “historic districts” in terms of ethnicity but ethnicity as displayed, rather than as lived.



Photo 3-B: Keong Saik Road in Bukit Pasoh, “Chinatown” in October 2011. It was a red-light district in the 1960s. Now, after the designation of “Historic Districts”, bars, cafes, galleries have become the dominant businesses.



Photo 3-C: The pedestrianized Bussaroah Street (Sept 2012), branded as “Bussaroah Mall”, in Kampong Glam. In the 1980s, the street was predominantly residential. After the designation of “historic districts”, the Street was pedestrianized and re-zoned as commercial use in the 1990s (Tantow 2009). Now, the tenants are predominantly retail shops, food and beverages. The premises above the shops are no longer occupied by residents but by businesses.

The designated “historical districts” represent a racialized and an idealized and simplified understanding of the three major “races” in Singapore, namely Chinese, Malay (Malay-Muslim) and Indians; even their boundaries and names are arbitrary. I follow Imran bin Tajudeen’s definition of the term “racialization”, to mean a form of “(mis)representation [which] reflects various [...] prejudices [and] racial policies”. In the application of such problematic, purely racial categories, any “multiethnic involvement in the production” and their complex history are undermined (Imran 2012:213). Such a racialization process is a product of both the state and elements of the private sector including landlords and business. In the following paragraphs, I will mainly use “Chinatown” as example, but will also occasionally include Kampong Glam

and “Little India” to illustrate how such racialization occurred.

“Chinatown” is an arbitrary name applied by URA and Singapore’s tourism promotion agency, the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB, later renamed the Singapore Tourism Board [STB]). In URA’s Chinatown Conservation Plan (1988), “Chinatown” covered 23 hectares of land, including the areas of Kreta Ayer<sup>87</sup>, Telok Ayer, Tanjong Pagar, Bukit Pasoh and Ann Siang Hill. The area had not generally been referred to as “Chinatown” before URA and the STPB’s so naming it. It was either referred to by specific road names or place names, or simply referred as *Tua Poh* 大坡 (“Bigger Town”) by older generations of ethnic Chinese (Wong, C. S. 2012). Similarly, “Little India” is also a name applied arbitrarily by URA and the STPB; there was even not a designated Indian enclave in the colonial government plan in the area now known as “Little India”. Even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the area’s residents were predominantly Indian, the area was not then called “Little India” (Urban Redevelopment Authority 1995c). Rather, people used more specific names such as Serangoon and Tekka to refer to more specific areas.<sup>88</sup> In the West, names such as “Chinatown” or “Little India” could perhaps be seen as representing the resistance of ethnic minorities. In the context of Southeast Asia, however, where these populations are not “minority”, and in Singapore in particular, where the Chinese population is in fact the majority, these names are problematic, not only in the way that they distort the histories of the place and its pattern of settlement but also in the way that they tend to self-orientalize for the tourists. Following Singapore’s trend, Penang also created a “Little India”<sup>89</sup> and Malacca also tried to rebrand a “Little India”. Yet, all these “Little Indias” have in fact been multiethnic landscapes (*Sin Chew Daily* 2010; Ou Young Sun 2013).

Historically, in the so-called “Chinatown” area, the so-called different “dialect” groups, or more accurately different “ethnic groups” within the so-called “Chinese

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<sup>87</sup> Kreta Ayer means “water cart”. For the Chinese population, they call Kreta Ayer by the correspondent Chinese name, “牛車水”, literally “bullock water cart”, read as *Ngau Cheh Shui* in Cantonese, *Gu Chia Chui* in Hokkien or *Niu Che Shui* in Mandarin. “Kreta Ayer” or “牛車水” is just a part of the so-called “Chinatown”. However, when the Singapore Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) opened a station called “Chinatown”, the correspondent Chinese name of the station became “牛車水” (*Niu Che Shui*). This lead to younger people mixing up the two names (Wong, C. S. 2012; Imran 2012).

<sup>88</sup> I owe this point to Lai Chee Kien.

<sup>89</sup> I owe this point to Tan Yeow Wooi.

race”<sup>90</sup>, each had their own areas of concentration and monopolized particular trades, which was quite common for the Chinese populations of Southeast Asian port cities (Yeoh 1996). Which territories were held by which of these different ethnic groups could be seen from the locations of their temples, which primarily held the functions of clan associations (*kongsi* 公司 or *huay kuan* 會館) and the informal governance of particular ethnic groups, and by the colloquial street names. For instance, the Thian Hock Keng Temple 天福宮 was the centre of the Hokkien people; Wak Hai Cheng Bio (also Yueh Hai Ching Temple 粵海清廟) was a Teochew temple with Cantonese patrons, managed by the Teochew clan association Ngee Ann Kongsi 義安公司. All of these are examples of how the ethnic Chinese in the “Chinatown” area consisted of diverse groups. One may even say that there were different “towns” within “Chinatown”. Even in the pan-Chinese associations, there were agreements on the proportions of different groups represented in their management (Lim, Lim, Guan, Chow eds. 1986). Meanwhile, there were also, noticeably, non-Chinese living and building houses in the nowadays so-called “Chinatown” area. The most notable examples are the Masjid Jamae (Chulia Mosque) and Sri Mariamman Temple, which indicate the presence of a Chulia (Tamil) Muslim and a Tamil Hindu community respectively (Imran 2012).

Tay Kheng Soon and Robbie B. H. Goh suggest, the area is characterized by a social mix that they call “a Malayan sort of mix”, one which is “not quite melting pot but melding” (2003: 25). They argue that the area shares many commonalities with its counterparts in Malacca, Penang, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, and even Rangoon, Colombia, Bombay and Calcutta. Such kinds of “internally” divided, multiethnic living environments were also found in Kampong Glam, “Little India” and many other parts of Singapore. There are streets or *kampongs*<sup>91</sup> in which particular groups of “Malay”, such as the Bugis or Javanese, were concentrated. Many Chinese clan associations could

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<sup>90</sup> In Singapore and Malaysia, different Chinese groups speaking different languages are usually known as “dialect groups”. This is based on the understanding dominant in Mainland China, Singapore and Malaysia, of different Sinitic languages, such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, etc., as Chinese “dialects”. However, from a postcolonial point of view, this is very problematic. Linguistically, many spoken Sinitic languages are not mutually intelligible; they are thus more like different “languages”. Defining them as “dialects” rather than as languages politically and culturally degrades their importance (Groves 2008). Thus, although people in Singapore and Malaysia colloquially call these languages “dialects”, here I have chosen to use the term “languages” or put quotation marks around the word “dialect(s)”. I will describe different so-called “dialect groups” as “ethnic groups”.

<sup>91</sup> Although there is a tendency to regard “*kampong*” as “Malay rural village”, the word “*kampong*” should be more accurately be understood as “compound”, “settlement” or “quarter”, not necessarily “Malay” or “rural” (Imran 2005, 2012; Lubis 2009).

be found in the “Little India” area (Urban Redevelopment Authority 1995c; Imran 2005).

When a racialized, themed “ethnic enclave”, known as the “Chinatown” “historic district” was created, these heterogeneous histories and spatial patterns were undermined. The history of internal dynamics and antagonism symbolized by the different Chinese temples were seldom told. Rather than acknowledging the area as a multiethnic, heterogeneous one, the presence of Masjid Jamae and Sri Mariamman Temple were taken as symbolic of religious and cultural tolerance, for having a mosque standing at the heart of a “Chinese” neighborhood (Imran 2012). Such re-interpretation is a denial of the urban landscape’s multiethnicity. Cultural tolerance, in this particular reading, is not demonstrated by the co-existence of different ethnic groups and their religious buildings in the *same* area, but by the existence, and tolerance, of *others* in “*my*” area. To fulfil the state’s ideology, the whole history of “Chinatown” was re-invented and the space was sanitized. The early Chinese immigrants’ histories were to be re-interpreted in terms of their having been “hardworking”, “pioneering spirit”, etc. (Yeoh and Kong 2003). The “Chinatown Heritage Centre”, or in Chinese *Niu Che Shui Yuanmao Guan* 牛車水原貌館 (The Museum of Original Faces of Kreta Ayer / “Chinatown”), located in a shophouse in “Chinatown”, tries to narrate the area’s “original faces” (*yuanmao* 原貌). The narration is basically about the tough lives of Chinese migrants, a narrative framing which is highly compatible with the state’s “progress” ideology. As Imran (2012) argues, because of the racialized representation in operation, the stories of non-Chinese people are not told in the museum, even though the “Chinatown” area was originally a multiethnic landscape.

In 1995, URA (1995a, 1995b, 1995c) renewed the conservation plans for “Chinatown”, Kampong Glam and “Little India”. In the objectives of conservation, there are clear signals of further racialization:

- (b) To improve the general physical environment to introduce appropriate new features to **further enhance the identity of the area**.
- (c) To retain and enhance **ethnic-based activities** where consolidating the area with new and compatible activities.

(Urban Redevelopment Authority 1995a: 91, my emphasis)

From the above aims, URA made it clear that in each of these racialized historic districts, they wanted to further enhance the racialized “identity” and the “ethnic-based activities” in these areas. They also provided lists of examples of “ethnic-based activities”, such as the selling of tea, medicine, grocery and porcelain in “Chinatown”; the selling of batiks, sarongs and carpets in the “Malay-Muslim district” Kampong-Glam; and the selling of sarees, electrical goods and jewellery in “Little India” (Urban Redevelopment Authority 1995a, 1995b, 1995c). The lists of examples are quite arbitrary, essentializing the differences between “races”. Why was the selling of tea exclusively regarded as an “ethnic-based activity” for the Chinese, while the Indians also made, and make tea? In the hawker centres in Singapore, stalls selling *teh tarik* (literally “pulled tea”) are quite often operated by Tamil-Muslims. Why was selling batiks and sarongs regarded as an “ethnic-based activity” for the Malay-Muslims, when these have been made and worn by various ethnic groups in the region? If the selling of tea, porcelain, batiks, sarongs and sarees can be argued as being the “traditional” “crafts” of certain ethnic groups, then how about the sale of modern goods such as electrical goods and jewellery being defined as Indian “ethnic-based activities”? URA did not provide any justification. Here, the history (time) and culture embedded in the place (space) are disciplined and reinvented according to a racialized theme. Not only have the actual cosmopolitan outlooks and landscapes been undermined, the state adds arbitrary, fictional elements to fulfil their racialized imagination, rather than responding to local realities and experiences. As Tay and Goh (2003) suggest, this imaginary “Chinatown” is not about Singapore or the region, but is rather derived from a version of an imagined China, while forgetting the actual multiethnic landscape and its cosmopolitan elements.

The racialization of the once multiethnic and hybrid urban landscape according to the state’s understanding of “multi-cultural heritage” is a good illustration of the problems inherent to the Singaporean state’s version of the 4Ms ideology. As argued earlier, the rigid CMIO categories fail to acknowledge the complexity and diversity of different ethnic groups and essentialize, rather, the relationship of one’s race with one’s language, culture and behaviour. Differences are emphasized and essentialized. There is no place for thinking beyond stereotypes and categories; the “historic districts” are designated in a similarly stereotypical and categorical manner. The road signs in these “historic districts” are bilingual (English with the correspondent “racial” language) and

rendered with racialized visual (mis)representation.<sup>92</sup> These formal arrangements of “multiracial” “multicultural” representation re-emphasize the differences of different “races”, which ironically contradicts the government policy of encouraging intercultural interaction (Goh 2014). After the former residential tenants were expelled by the phasing out of rent control policies, the local Singaporeans became “tourists” in their hometown to “experience” these racialized landscapes. Meanwhile, many differences and diversities have been put aside, if not eradicated, in the process of forming these categories. Processes of interaction between ethnic groups, such as hybridization, are ignored in the state’s version of multiracialism and multiculturalism.

In criticizing the problem of Singaporean “multiracialism” and “multiculturalism”, I am not arguing against multiculturalism *per se*. As argued earlier, even the most banal form of multiculturalism, which may be no more than “political correctness”, is still better than monoculturalism, fantasies of assimilation and obsession with a single pure culture, when nowadays people are living in plural societies. My concern is with how to take more critical approaches towards multiculturalism. According to this concern, the Singaporean state’s version of “multiracialism” “multiculturalism”, which essentializes and racializes differences, is problematic and unproductive. Again, I am not suggesting that “difference” is not important; in the context of unfair power relationships, “Respect for the Other includes respect for the ‘opacity’ of the Other’s difference, which resists one’s attempt to assimilate or objectify it.” (Britton 1999: 18). Any critical engagement with the heritage of port cities and the histories embedded therein must be undertaken with all these questions – of “ethnicities”, of “difference”, the “plural”, the “multicultural”, and “intercultural relations” – in mind. As suggested, the *de facto* “multiculturalism” and “cosmopolitanism” extant in these port cities are much more complex than, and not as racialized and essentialized as, for instance, Singapore’s state version of multiculturalism. As Tay and Goh suggest, there emerged a specifically “Malayan modernity”, defined by “their cosmopolitan Samaritan spirits, their multi-cultural sensibilities, and love of the land”, which “was part of an earlier Asian Renaissance of modernizing values” (2003: 22). I take this as a form of vernacular modernity. The problem of the racialization of the multicultural and hybridized landscapes of port cities,

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<sup>92</sup> For instance, lotus and pagoda were found in signs in “Little India” and “Chinatown” respectively (Kong and Yeoh 2003: 127).

such as the “historic districts” in Singapore, is that it fails to recognize such complexities that could help in rethinking how critical multiculturalism and inter-ethnic relationships can work in practice.

### **3.3 Bukit Brown Cemetery: Vernacular Modernity Threatened by Occidentalism**

In the previous section, I illustrated how the designation of historic districts in Singapore represents how the state and private sector racialized a once-multiethnic landscape through “heritage preservation”. The problem of racialization is its simplification of the complexity of actually existing multiculturalism, cultural hybridization and cosmopolitanism, all of which are important for understanding the conditions of vernacular modernities. This problem occurs in places where the state and/or business sectors try to use reductive racial categorization to appropriate a multiethnic urban landscape. If the designation of these historic districts represents racialization of urban landscapes, Bukit Brown Cemetery could represent a not-yet-racialized landscape. Although it is a “Chinese” cemetery, the diversity of the Chinese, the multiethnic traits and cosmopolitan histories of Singapore are embedded in Bukit Brown Cemetery. In other words, the emergence and evolution of vernacular modernity in the colonial port city are embedded in the cemetery.

In 2011, the Singaporean government announced that parts of Bukit Brown Cemetery would be exhumed to make way for an eight-lane road that would cut through the cemetery. The remaining parts of the cemetery would also be given over to residential developments. Due to the historical, cultural and ecological significance of the cemetery, concerned citizens and civil society groups demanded the preservation of the cemetery, or at least parts of it, and for it to be turned into a “heritage park”. On the surface, it might seem to have been another so-called “development versus preservation” debate (or a debate of “striking the balance between development and heritage preservation”), concerning spaces for “the living versus the dead” (Lim, J. 2011c). Besides endorsing the heritage preservation and environmentalist groups’ notion that Bukit Brown Cemetery is also a “space for the living”<sup>93</sup>, however, I argue that the issue at stake is that of a contestation between two kinds of modernity: the vernacular

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<sup>93</sup> “Spaces for the Living” was the title for an open forum on Bukit Brown Cemetery organized by the Singapore Heritage Society (SHS) on 19 November 2011.

modernity, of which “Malayan modernity” is one example, and the occidentalist developmentalism-as-modernity, by which latter the former is threatened. The articulation of Bukit Brown Cemetery in terms of vernacular modernity is important because, as I will elaborate further, it suggests that an understanding of “tradition” and cultural heritage beyond the binary opposition of pre-modern and modern is possible. To demand the preservation of Bukit Brown Cemetery and to oppose the government’s decision for its demolition is not a demand made against modernity *per se*. Rather, it is a stance that recognizes and defends a vernacular modernity, one which emerged and evolved locally and regionally, against the threat of the reductive discourse and practice of “progress” and “economic success” of the postcolonial PAP government, which operates through an occidentalist, developmentalism-as-modernity logic.

Before proceeding with a discussion of how Bukit Brown Cemetery is a place where the vernacular modernity of Singapore is embedded, and how the PAP government’s decision to demolish the cemetery constitutes a threat to a vernacular modernity by developmentalism-as-modernity, I first need to outline the historical background of Bukit Brown Cemetery itself. The area now known as “Bukit Brown Cemetery” is a “cemetery cluster” consisting of several “cemetery hills”<sup>94</sup>, including *Seh Ong Sua* 姓王山 (“Ong Clan’s Hill”)<sup>95</sup>, *Lau Sua* 老山 (“Old Hill”), *Kopi Sua* 咖啡山 (“Coffee Hill”)<sup>96</sup> and Bukit Brown (Hui 2012a). The whole cluster is larger than 200 hectares with some 100 to 200 thousand tombs. It is said to be the largest Chinese cemetery outside China (Tan, K. Y. L. 2011; Ho, H. C. 2011, 2012; Lim, R. 2012; Chong and Chua 2014). Many of these “hills” were once “private” or “communal” cemeteries belonging to different clans or communities; *Seh Ong Sua* was the Ong clan’s cemetery, for example. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the British colonial government had no interest in creating cemeteries for the ethnic Chinese populations. Cemeteries, similar to the temples mentioned in the previous section, were also the “territories” of different ethnic groups and their respective communal and clan associations. The communal

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<sup>94</sup> Sinophone communities in Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia usually call the cemetery hill *ngee sua* 義山 in Hokkien or by the respective pronunciation in other Sinitic languages. In the naming of such cemetery hills, the words *Teng / Theng* 亭 (Pavilion) and *Sua / San* 山 (Hill) are often found.

<sup>95</sup> also known as *Thai Whan Sua* 太原山

<sup>96</sup> *Kopi Sua* is also the local Chinese (Hokkien) name for the whole cemetery cluster. *Kopi* is the Malay word for coffee.

organizations of different ethnic groups acquired and managed land in different parts of Singapore to build their own cemeteries to bury their fellows. The generic term *ngee sua* (*ngee* 義 meaning righteous or voluntary and denoting the morality of “ought to do”) represents the fact that these cemeteries constituted an act of communal mutual aid within the group. Kwong Wai Siew Peck San Theng 廣惠肇碧山亭, for example, was a Cantonese cemetery; Heng San Teng 恒山亭 was the Hokkien burial ground, and also the precedent of Hokkien Huay Kuan (Zeng and Chuang, 2000; Lim *et al.*, eds. 1986; Tan, K. Y. L. 2011; Hui 2011). Each of these cemeteries usually belonged to a single ethnic group. Different private and communal cemeteries represented the diversity of ethnic groups that migrated to the colonial port cities, a reality that challenges a singular, imagined notion of the “ethnic Chinese”. Among these migrants, these better-off people who could afford to build very large and elaborate tombs would often do so. *Fengshui* was often the most important consideration for people planning their own or their ancestors’ tombs.

In 1906, due to the then-existing private and communal cemeteries becoming overcrowded, an English-educated Chinese elite, Lim Boon Keng 林文慶, proposed that the government should plan a municipal cemetery for the entire Chinese population (Hui 2012a). Although his proposal was not taken up immediately, the colonial government later acquired the land of *Seh Ong Sua*, and opened Bukit Brown Municipal Cemetery in 1922. In the very beginning, the Chinese population refused to be buried there because government regulations such as strict plot size meant that some of their preferences, including *fengshui* considerations, might have needed to be sacrificed. This dissatisfaction, especially that of the more wealthy Chinese population, led to the amendment of these strict rules, so it became possible for the better-off, at least, to apply for bigger plots. The burial ground was closed in 1973 when the government adopted the policy of cremating the dead (Loh, K. S. 2012; McKenzie 2011; Hui 2012a). Beside the cemeteries, there was also a racially-mixed *kampong* (settlement). Many of the *kampong*’s economic activities were related to the cemetery. Although the *kampong* residents have since been resettled on public housing estates elsewhere, some still regularly return to Bukit Brown during the tomb-sweeping *Cheng Beng* (*Qing Ming*) Festival 清明節 to continue their tomb-keeping duty (Loh, K.S. 2012; Yong 2011).

Bukit Brown Cemetery serves not only as cemeteries, but also as a nature reserve and outdoor recreation area.<sup>97</sup> (Ho, H. C. 2011, 2012) When the Singaporean government planned the MRT Circle Line, they built the shell of a “Bukit Brown” station nearby, to be opened, it was said, when the area got built up. The station is not yet open, even though the whole line, including the Extension, has been in operation since 2012. In May 2011, the planning authority URA announced that Bukit Brown would be redeveloped for housing, although no timeframe was mentioned (Lim, J. 2011a). This immediately sparked an online signature campaign urging the preservation of Bukit Brown Cemetery; nonetheless, the URA made it quite clear that they did not have the intention of preserving it (Lim, J. 2011b, 2011c). On 12 September 2011, the Land Transport Authority (LTA) announced that they would build a “dual four-lane road” through Bukit Brown Cemetery “[to] alleviate the congestion currently experienced along Lornie Road and the Pan-Island Expressway (PIE) during peak hours and to cater to expected growth in future traffic demand” (Land Transport Authority 2011). This road construction plan was a top-down plan, and was announced without any consultation process. It has since been exposed that even members of the Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB)<sup>98</sup>, the national authority advising on heritage preservation, only knew of the plan twelve hours before the announcement.<sup>99</sup>

The government’s plan to build a road cutting through the cemetery and to redevelop the site in the long run disappointed NGOs such as Nature Society (Singapore) (NSS), Singapore Heritage Society (SHS), Asia Paranormal Investigators (API) and many other concerned citizens and non-citizens. A network of concerned people colloquially known as “Brownies” was also formed. NSS and SHS published position papers to the government to propose alternatives. Although SHS did not agree with the proposal, they recommended an anthropologist in the service of URA and LTA to document all graves due to be affected by the road construction. The documentation

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<sup>97</sup> As the dissertation is not focused on environmental conservation, I will not go into details about the ecological importance of Bukit Brown Cemetery. For details, readers may refer to Ho Hua Chew (2011, 2012) and as the position paper by Nature Society (Singapore) (NSS) <<http://www.nss.org.sg/documents/Nature%20Society's%20Position%20on%20Bukit%20Brown.pdf>>, accessed on 16 October 2013

<sup>98</sup> PMB is now renamed as Preservation of Sites & Monuments (PSM). In 2006, when Ong Sam Leong’s tomb was discovered, PMB stated that they have been “keeping watch on the Bukit Brown cemetery and will act if and when it is threatened by redevelopment” (Au Yong 2006).

<sup>99</sup> This was exposed in the public forum *Space of the Living: A Discussion on Bukit Brown Cemetery* held in November 2011.

took place from late 2011 to mid-2012; in the end, around 4000 graves were required to be exhumed (Chia 2013). In August 2013, the tender to build the road was awarded by LTA (Heng 2013a). In October 2013, a New York-based non-profit group, the World Monuments Fund listed Bukit Brown Cemetery in their 2014 World Monuments Watch, stating that Bukit Brown is a “place of significance”, in terms of cultural heritage, which is “at risk from the forces of nature and the impact of social, political, and economic change” (World Monuments Fund 2013).

After briefly outlining the history of the cemetery, I will go back to the issue of vernacular modernities. As argued earlier, in colonial port cities, the local conditions of change, or of becoming “modern”, were shaped by the multiethnic environment and the combining and hybridizing of different cultural elements, not merely by the external colonial forces (Venn 2006). In Singapore, the condition of vernacular modernity, or what Tay and Goh call “Malayan modernity”, was highly related to the local multiethnic, cosmopolitan environment and to cultural hybridization. Similar to other colonial port cities, different ethnic groups migrated to Singapore, and their interactions shaped the condition of vernacular modernity there. Thus, understanding different races and ethnic groups in rigid categorical terms, as represented in the racialized historic districts in the previous section, fails to articulate the condition of vernacular modernity. In the following paragraphs, I will argue and illustrate how this vernacular modernity, far more complex than the racialized representation, is embedded in the landscapes of Bukit Brown Cemetery. In order to reflect upon colonial history and coloniality, there is a need for critical engagement with this vernacular modernity.

In contrast to the racialized category of “Chinese” that neglects “internal” differences and the process of how different ethnic groups hybridize, Bukit Brown Cemetery provides a valuable insight. It is a cemetery for Chinese population made up of different ethnic groups. Although the graves of richer people were most often mentioned in the demands for preservation, the rich and poor alike were buried there. In other words, Bukit Brown Cemetery as a whole is more ethnically-diversified than a communal-based cemetery. There are graves of Hokkien, Teochew, Hakka, etc. There are different tomb styles, unlike in the single-ethnic group cemeteries (Lai, C.K. 2012a, 2012b, 2013). Yet even this recognition can be regarded as an over-simplified explanation for understanding the modes of self- and group-identification of the people

buried there. Although ethnicity would be closely related to one's identification, they were not always synonymous. An crucial marker of identity for the Chinese population who live and are buried outside China proper, is the common practice of having one's (paternal) "origin" or "ancestral home" (*jiguan* 籍貫) written on the top of one's tombstone. What is fascinating about Bukit Brown Cemetery is the diverse ways in which a person's "origin" or "ancestral home" might be identified. People may include the province (*sheng* 省, e.g. Hokkien [Fujian]福建), prefectures (*fu* 府 or *zhou* 州, e.g. Chinchew [Quanzhou]泉州), county (*xian* 縣, e.g. Tung Ann [Tong'an]同安), township (*xiang* 鄉 or *zhen* 鎮), village (*chun* 村) or a combination of these. How one writes the "ancestral home" represents someone's identification and the boundary of such identification.

As Allen Chun (1996) suggests, before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese population residing outside China proper usually addressed their places of origin as *tangshan* 唐山 (literally the mountain of Tang) and their mother tongue *tanghua* 唐話 (literally the language of Tang) but they do not mean the whole of China and the official Chinese language respectively. Their understanding of *Tang* ("China") was often limited to a certain region or boundary with which they could identify, even though they might claim to be the subject of, or loyal to the Chinese imperial court. The complexity of "Chinese identities" can be observed from reading the many ways in which ancestral home is described on tombstones. Association with a larger group, such as province or prefecture, whether for political, economic or social reasons may not, however, be represented on tombstones. One may argue that if the plot of the land belonged to the Hokkien group, there was no need for them to mark the provincial identifier "Hokkien" on the tombstones. However, the absence of such an identifier could alternatively, or additionally, be explained by the existence of a more intimate identification, occurring at county or village levels. In short, there remain spaces of ambiguity in the identification of people buried in the cemetery, reflecting the multiple identities that have existed throughout the making and evolution of the colonial port city. This provides a lens through which to understand what the "Chinese" were and how they self-identified, in contrast to the simplified and racialized designation of "Chinatown" and the rigid categorization and essentialization of one's ethnic group, culture and identification.



Photo 3-D: A Hokkien-style tomb, belongs to a lady whose husband was originally from Longxi County 龍溪. From her naming convention, she might be a Peranakan. The English names of her and her descendants are also found on the tomb's arms (*mushou* 墓手 or *qushou* 曲手).



Photo 3-E: A less elaborate Hokkien style tomb. Here, the ancestral place is given in detail, including the county, township and the village.

The marking of ancestral place on a tombstone represents that person's ethnic or so-called "homeland" identification. Apart from the diversity in tomb shapes and

inscriptions of ancestral place, terms such as *Huang Qing* 皇清 (The Grand Qing), *Minguo* 民國 (The Republic), *Zhonghua* 中華 (Chinese), *Zhonghua Minguo* 中華民國 (Republic of China) are also found on tombstones to illustrate that the one in the grave was a “Chinese” (Qing, Republic of China, etc.) national<sup>100</sup> (Lee 2012). Although such demarcations indicates one’s relationship with “China”, or more accurately one’s “homeland” in China, it is inaccurate to over-emphasize the “Chineseness” or loyalty to the interchangeable terms of “China” and “homeland” this inscription represents. As Chun (1996) argues, claims to a sense of “Chineseness” did not prohibit or contradict one’s assimilation into the local society. I would argue that, similar to the couplets in many *huay kuans* (clan associations), many tombs’ inscriptions indicate discernible tensions between the local and the “homeland”: this tension is a product, I will argue, of a process of localization. Taking into consideration the fact that the larger and decorative tombs in the Bukit Brown Cemeteries belong to wealthier people, one surmises that they could have afforded, had they wished, to be buried in China. In other words, it was their *choice* to have been buried in Singapore. As Ho (2006) suggests, the graves of migrants also mark starting points for their descendants. The deliberate act of choosing to have themselves buried in Singapore instead of shipping their bodies to the “ancestral place” in China could be seen as a form of localization. The two couplets on the tomb of Tan Ean Kiam 陳延謙, a Tung Ann Huay Kuan 同安會館 leader, is the best example to illustrate how tensions between connection to the homeland and localization make themselves apparent in the cemetery. He decided upon two couplets before his death: one of them indicates that the tomb was intended for him and his wife, and the name of his hometown, Tung Ann, is included.<sup>101</sup> The other one suggests that he regards the place where he died as his home.<sup>102</sup> (Lai, C.K. 2012a; Chia 2011) In the reburial tomb of Fang Shan 方珊 who passed away in the 1830s, the ancestral place is interestingly marked as *Sin Chew* 星洲, a Chinese reference to Singapore. However, *Huang Qing* was also stated as Fang Shan’s “nationality” (Wu and Yang n.d.). Thus,

<sup>100</sup> The demarcation of a “nationality” on the tomb does not necessarily represent political loyalty. Sometimes, the “nationality” is added to ensure that the numbers of characters on tombstones fall onto a lucky one (Ong 2001). Anti-Manchurianism can be seen on those tombs using self-created reign eras rather than the Qing ones. Some Qing-loyalists also refused using the Republican era on their tombs (Lim 2012).

<sup>101</sup> The couplet reads, “同衾成一夢，安土好長眠” (Be one dream in the same bed. Peaceful soil is good for eternal rest). The first characters of both part of the couplet are Tung Ann.

<sup>102</sup> The couplet reads, “埋骨何須故里，蓋棺便是吾廬” (Why need to be buried in the homeland? My home is where my coffin closes.)

merely emphasizing these people's relationship with the "homeland" or their "local consciousness" would be too simplified. As Chun (1996) argues, ethnicities and identities were not always equal to each other. In Southeast Asia, many Peranakan Chinese who were already well assimilated into the local population still identified themselves as "Chinese". This suggests grounds upon which both the categorical and essentializing understanding of ethnic groups, cultural practices and identities, as well as the understanding of the "local" and the "homeland" as terms in binary opposition – upon all of which various forms of nationalist mobilization often rely – may be rejected.

Besides living in a multiethnic environment, the process of localization is that in which the interaction of different ethnic group takes place. As discussed earlier, Bukit Brown Cemetery is a cemetery cluster where various ethnic groups of the Chinese population were buried. Thus, unlike in those single ethnic group's cemeteries, or cemeteries in China proper, tombs of different styles co-exist. There is also hybridization of tomb-styles, which is regarded as a decisively local characteristic (Lai, C.K. 2012a, 2012b, 2013). Another important local feature characteristic of Bukit Brown Cemetery is the many human sculptures, most notably the Sikh guards. During the Qing Dynasty, such tomb sculptures symbolized the social status of the dead. Only officials (Mandarins) of certain high ranks were entitled to have such human sculptures as tomb-guards (Chen, S. 2007). From the mid-Qing period, although many wealthy ethnic Chinese merchants in Singapore bought official titles from the Qing government for various reasons<sup>103</sup>, such purchased titles were often not high enough to entitle a person to have a human sculpture guarding their tomb. There are, nevertheless, many human guard-sculptures to be found in Bukit Brown Cemetery. From an orthodox perspective, this was a violation of the rituals (Lee 2012); however I view this as an act of local adaptation that could not have happened in China, where it would lead to serious punishment. Looking in detail at these human sculptures, one finds that they not only represent a local adaptation, but also hybridization and the influence of the multiethnic environment typical of Singapore, and port cities like it. Many of these human sculpture guards are not the "traditional" ones found in China, but uniformed Indian guards, the

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<sup>103</sup> Many people believe that these rich businessmen purchased titles from the Qing government to glorify their ancestors and families, and to fulfil their own desire to be the official gentry. Not to deny such reason, I would further argue that it was also practical for such people to purchase official titles from the Qing government so that they could strengthen their positions as community leaders, and thus continue to be regarded as "respectable men" by the colonial government. This could help to sustain their positions as collaborators.

Sikh (Punjabi) ones being the most noticeable. Similar Sikh guards can also be found in Khoo Kongsi in Penang (Lai, C.K. 2012a, 2012b, 2013; McKenzie 2011; Sharp 2012). This needs to be understood in the context of port cities like Singapore and Penang. After Singapore and Penang came under British rule, Indians were recruited to become policemen and guards. Many wealthy *towkays* 頭家 (literally “heads of households”, usually referred to bosses) recruited them to be the guards of their companies. In the daily experience of many wealthy Chinese, Indians and especially Sikhs were considered to be the most trustworthy guards. Thus, when these wealthy merchants built sculptures of guards to safeguard their tombs, which also symbolized the fortune of their descendants, they chose to have Indian guard sculptures (Lee 2012; McKenzie 2011). This represents an early stage of how different ethnic groups interacted in a colonial port city, which would have not happened without migration. There was also a hybridized local adaptation of a tomb-style and aesthetic originating in China. These features reveal that the relationships of different ethnic groups and cultures in a colonial port city, embedded in the cemetery, were not strictly categorical, nor did they merely co-exist without interaction; rather, the colonial port city was a site where local adaptation and cultural hybridization took place. Without such interaction, the condition of the local, vernacular modernity would have been different. In this sense, the articulation and reflection of vernacular modernity cannot be separated from cultural hybridization and the local adaptation process.



Photo 3-F: Sikh guard sculpture at Khoo Kongsi, Penang



Photo 3-G: A close-up of a Sikh guard in Bukit Brown Cemetery



Photo3-H: The Indian guard sculpture at Ong Sam Leong's tomb, Bukit Brown Cemetery



Photo 3-1: This tomb in Bukit Brown Cemetery is guarded by two Sikh guard sculptures. These two painted-“guards” and often been seen as “landmarks” and a “must-see” on Bukit Brown Cemetery tours. “Patrol the city” (*xuncheng* 巡城) and “Guard the family” (*shoufu* 守府) were written on the two guards respectively.

Bukit Brown Cemetery accommodated new burials for around 100 years until its closure in the 1970s. Compared with the now “common practice” of cremation, the practices of burying the dead and the building of tombs may be regarded as something “old” or “traditional”, yet this “tradition” is not “pre-modern”. Modern techniques and elements are often to be found in tombs. Thus, the “traditional” and the “modern”, as embedded in the cemetery, are not terms paired in binary opposition to one another. As argued earlier, there is not merely one singular and linear modernity that takes the “West” as its standard, but rather the co-existence of multiple vernacular modernities. Although many “Western” elements may still be perceived as a demarcation of “the modern”, vernacular modernities emphasize the multi-directional cultural traffic and interactions at the local level. In other words, a “tradition” based on a vernacular modernity is not a “pre-modern” one. Traditions can also be “modern”, where the understanding of modernity is based on vernacular modernity. Thus, the demand for preservation and the rediscovery of stories embedded in the cemetery are not rejections of “the modern”. Rather, these constitute a recognition and embrace of the vernacular modernity which took place at the local level.

Besides the sculptures of guards with guns, there are many other elements in the

cemetery that can be read as part of the creation of a vernacular modernity. In general, Chinese obsequies made reference to the living. Tomb decorations also made reference to temples and other architectures which were contemporary when the dead were still living (Lee 2012; Chen, S. 2007). As Lai Chee Kien (2012a, 2012b 2013) points out, graves were regarded as one's home or dwelling place after one passes away. Thus, in Bukit Brown Cemetery, many elements of tombs, such as sculptures and decorative materials, bear notable similarities to the domestic architecture and decoration of the respective period. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, decorative ceramic tiles widely used in suburban houses in Victorian Britain and Europe were regarded as "trendy" and "modern" in Singapore, even though the use of tiles in the West can be traced back to the pre-modern era; many better-off households, many of them Peranakan families, used these tiles in their houses. These tiles, sometimes loosely known as "Peranakan tiles", are found incorporated as decorative features on many tombs in Bukit Brown Cemetery (McKenzie 2011; Davison and Tettoni 2010; Rojak Librarian 2013; Lai, C.K. 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Cho 2013). Here, although the "Western" elements were regarded as "modern" and "trendy", they were not regarded as the "modern" "norm" to replace "tradition". There was not a formula equating "the West" with "modern", and as "the norm", driving this fashion. Rather, this feeling of being modern was a local adaptation of tradition, forming a hybridized, modern tradition which was nurtured locally. In other words, tradition / modern and the colony / metropolitan are not pairs of terms in binary opposition. Here, the forms and materials used for the tombs include regional elements alongside Western ones which would be seen as "the modern"; yet this understanding of "modern" was formed locally, rather than according to a "universal" understanding. In other words, at stake is not a Eurocentric arrangement of the modern West as the "universal norm" and the pre-modern non-West as the "particular", which only becomes modern by following the "norm" (Sakai 1997). In short, the architectural and material features of Bukit Brown Cemetery should not be understood in purely aesthetic terms. Rather, they can be articulated in the context of formation and evolution of the vernacular modernity in Singapore.



Photo 3-J: Decorative ceramic tiles at Oon Chim Neo's tomb



Photo 3-K: *Kang Ha Pheng Sim Kok* 江夏平心閣, a very elaborate shophouse in Singapore, built in the 1920s that features decorative ceramic tiles and relief sculptures of Sikh guards.

The vernacular modernity and port city heritage embedded in the cemetery is not limited to the tombs' architectural elements. More importantly, the cemetery is the final resting place of people of different classes. It is true that this is a “Chinese” cemetery, which may not fully represent the multiethnicity of Singapore; it is equally true that, in the argument for preserving Bukit Brown Cemetery, the elites are often

highlighted in conformance with mainstream (dominant) heritage preservation discourse. Lai (2012a, 2013) argues that people buried in Bukit Brown Cemetery migrated to Singapore, after it became a colonial port city, from different parts of the region; not only from China, but also from Malacca and Sumatra. People using the port city of Singapore as one of the bases from which to build up the maritime trade network and other business networks in the region were also buried there. Materials used to build tombs were shipped there using these maritime networks. If one traces the history of Singapore's development as a port city, it is a nodal point in the maritime network not only between India and China, but also in the Nusantara. In contrast to the populist, racialized imagined association of maritime trade solely with the "Chinese", Imran (2005) demonstrates the existence of a port town of "Malay" merchants from different parts of Nusantara in the Gelam-Rochor-Kallang area, which preceded Raffle's plan for a merchant's town along the Singapore River, where the "Chinese" were later to dominate the economic activity. That "Malay" port town's maritime trade activities continued to exist until mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. To go beyond the racialized imagination and understanding of heritage, Bukit Brown Cemetery is far from being an exclusively Singaporean "Chinese" heritage site. Rather, in articulating the biographies of people buried in Bukit Brown Cemetery, their social networks and material culture, one can begin to see a bigger picture in terms of the maritime network, of how this network shaped the development of the port cities, and of Singapore in particular. This picture manifests itself not least in the vernacular modernity shaped there.

As a colonial port city, collaborative colonialism had a significant role in shaping the conditions of vernacular modernity in Singapore. As argued in Chapter 1, Law Wing Sang's (2008, 2009) theory of "collaborative colonialism" should not be confined merely to Hong Kong. In the context of Hong Kong, where Law's theory originated<sup>104</sup>, Law says that:

[...] a certain tacit collaborative contract between the British colonizers and the Chinese elites in Hong Kong had underpinned the city's colonial rule. Hence, Hong Kong's colonial situation cannot be understood by a simplistic or stereotypical model of colonialism that describes a uni-directional domination of the natives imposed by

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<sup>104</sup> I will go back to the discussion in the context of Hong Kong in the next section in this chapter.

the intruding imperialist.

(Law 2008: 527)

Law argues that in such a situation, colonial domination was not maintained solely by the colonizers, but also by the local “native” collaborators. Here, similar to the formation of vernacular modernities in these places, it is not merely about the existence of the colonizers but how the locals adapted to, and negotiated with them. The relationship between the colonizers and colonized was not simply that of a binary opposition. Rather, these “collaborators”, such as the compradors, middlemen or clan’s headmen often had double or multiple identities and (dis-)loyalties. They often played strategically with their different identities and loyalties in order to “place themselves between two competing imperial systems and to maneuver” pathways for their own advancements (Law 2009: 101). Without the existence of these groups of collaborators, the conditions of modernity in these places would be very different. The comprador class and the “middlemen” have been important features in colonial port cities, not limited to Hong Kong. Hui Po-keung (1999) argues that many multilingual “overseas” Chinese were chosen as collaborators by Europeans.<sup>105</sup> In fact, the strategic recruitment of merchants from different ethnic groups, not limited to the Chinese, into these coastal or port cities meant that there were also collaborators from various ethnic groups, quite often multilingual, without whom the history of these places would be entirely different.<sup>106</sup>

In Singapore, many of the compradors, middlemen and clan headmen who played these roles as “collaborators” are buried in Bukit Brown Cemetery. Here, the term “collaborators” does not imply any negative moral judgment, such as the

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<sup>105</sup> I will go back to this argument in the next section’s discussion of Hong Kong.

<sup>106</sup> I fully realize the existence of non-ethnic Chinese collaborators in Singapore and Penang, including the “Malay” and other ethnic groups, and thus their significance in fully understanding the complexities of histories in these cities. For instance, in Singapore, the Bugis people (now classified as “Malay”), originally from Sulawesi in present day Indonesia, were an important trader in the Malay Archipelago. They also strategically made use of their position in between the Dutch, the British and local rulers in the region to prosper. When Stamford Raffles founded Singapore, he initially thought the Bugis were the major middlemen for trading in the Malay Archipelago and he granted them special privileges (Dick *et al.* 2002). There were also representatives of the Bugis appointed in the town committee in early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Imran 2005). Khoo Salma Nasution’s recent book also gives a detailed account of the Chulia communities, including many elites, in Penang (Khoo 2014). Due to the scope of the dissertation and the constraints in my language abilities, I am not able to discuss the roles of collaborators from all ethnic backgrounds and how built heritage and urban landscape associated with their histories are treated. This demands future research.

nationalistic blaming of “traitors”, which would easily fall into a righteous-evil binarism and could not provide critical reflections on coloniality. Rather, I use it as a moral-neutral descriptive term. As above, these collaborators played on their different identities and loyalties. Indeed, as before, many leaders of various different ethnic Chinese groups in Singapore and other Southeast Asian societies purchased official titles from the Qing government and were appointed to different positions by the colonial government. Some of them even got titles from other countries in the region, some of which are also inscribed on their tombstones. The most obvious example is the tomb of Tan Kim Cheng 陳金鐘<sup>107</sup>, whose “nationality” is marked on the on the tombstone as *Huang Qing*, while his official titles are marked on the tombstone as issuing from the Qing government, the Siam government and the British colonial government. Without such collaborators, the colonial rule could not have functioned, and the establishment of these vibrant and commercially active port cities would have been impossible.



Photo 3-L: Close-up of tombstone of Tan Kim Cheng’s grave. Transcription of the middle part of the tombstone is as follow:

漳	誥授資政大夫賞戴花翎候補道	
	皇清顯考	諱金鐘陳公
澄	大暹國欽差大臣大英國甲必丹	

<sup>107</sup> See Appendix II

As Law and John Carroll (2005) point out, the colonizers needed these elites to collaborate with them; yet the acts of collaboration also created these elites. More importantly, collaborators were not passively figures, manipulated by the colonizers. Rather, they actively made use of their roles and played with different identities. As argued earlier, vernacular modernities were products of contestations and negotiations between “the West” and the local adaptations of different ethnic groups, elites and grassroots communities. Without these collaborators, the modern conditions of the colonial port cities would be very different. The thinking of collaborative colonialism allows for a more accurate and critical understanding of relationships between the colonizers and the colonized, not in terms of a binary opposition. The strategic manipulation of the multiple loyalties and disloyalties of the collaborators make a binary opposition such as that between “us” and “them” impossible. As argued in Chapter 2, anti-colonial nationalism operates within a logic of *ressentiment* politics that reduces complexity into a “moral-evil” binary opposition, which cannot adequately articulate complex social conditions. The naming and blaming of the collaborators as “traitors”, as in typical anti-colonial nationalistic discourses (or, conversely regarding them as Chinese “patriots”, because of their contributions to China), fails to explain the complexity of, and thus cannot provide a critical reflection upon, colonial conditions. Moreover, many of these collaborators were sensitive to their multiethnic and multicultural environments and indeed played important philanthropic roles. As discussed earlier, the “cosmopolitan Samaritan spirit” and “multi-cultural sensibility” are important features of what Tay and Goh call “Malayan modernity” (2003: 22), which I regard as a specific vernacular modernity. In this sense, Bukit Brown Cemetery is a place where the history of collaborative colonialism and a resulting vernacular modernity are embedded. Ignoring either the collaborators, the colonial power or the specific conditions of this vernacular modernity would lead to a breakdown of critical reflection on this coloniality.

To sum up, Bukit Brown Cemetery, despite its being a primarily “Chinese” cemetery cluster, is embedded with the history of Singapore as a (colonial) port city: it demonstrates the diversity and complexity of “Chinese” ethnicities and identities and the multiethnic environments of Singapore, and records the history of collaborative colonialism. All of the above contributed to the specific conditions of vernacular

modernity in Singapore. In this sense, the cemetery should not be read as a racialized “Chinese” heritage site, an interpretation that would lead to a simplification of its historical and cultural significance. Rather, Bukit Brown Cemetery presents a more complex version of multiculturalism than the state’s version. As writer Alfian Sa’at (2013) suggests, it is a space of “dialogue between histories, between the Nanyang and the Nusantara, between the past and the future, the living and the dead”. He further argues that demolition of Bukit Brown would prohibit opportunities to consider questions concerning the contestation of heritage, and the possibility of having a “common heritage” in Singapore.

Since Singapore was founded as a colonial port city, the government has been very eager to control the built environment, from the planned racial segregation of the urban landscape to a desire to control that landscapes’ “sanitation” and “order” (Yeoh 1996). Such eagerness for intervention and control of the built environment has been inherited by the postcolonial state (George 2000; Comaroff 2007). The treatment of cemeteries is no exception. As Brenda S. A. Yeoh (1996) argues, the colonial government regarded the “unsystematic” burial grounds for the ethnic Chinese, in contrast to the “orderly-arranged” Western cemeteries, as a “nuisance”, “unhygienic” and “hazardous to public health”. They were thus often placed at the outskirts of the city. Exhumation and relocation of graves and cemeteries in the process of urban development and expansion was common. A significant number of graves, including the above-mentioned Tan Kim Cheng’s, were relocated to Bukit Brown Cemetery. Such discursive and operative practices in relation to Chinese burial grounds were continued and reproduced by the postcolonial state, which is also very eager to control the urban landscape. Burial grounds and cemeteries, especially those which were not “orderly-arranged”, failed to conform with the state’s desire for control and, furthermore, were regarded as unable to generate economic profit.

As argued in Chapter 2, development in Singapore concerns not only business interests. Rather, “economic success” is part of the PAP government’s nation-building ideology. The PAP government has ruled Singapore since 1959 without interruption. After the boycott of 1968 general election by *Barisan Sosialis* (Socialist Front), founded by former left-wing members who had been expelled from PAP and some trade unionists, there was no single member of parliament (MP) from oppositional parties

until 1981 (Chua 1997). Even now, there are few opposition MPs in the parliament. Unlike in neighbouring countries, PAP leaders neither led anti-colonial revolutions<sup>108</sup> nor were they affiliated with traditional indigenous rulers<sup>109</sup>: they could not easily claim to have the “natural” legitimacy to rule from the beginning of independence (Chua 2013, 2014). Before Singapore’s independence, PAP did not think about Singapore’s becoming an independent country, but, in Singapore’s founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew’s (1962) term, “battled” to merge with Malaya. The expulsion from Malaysia and forced independence in 1965 was traumatic for the PAP government. In the first two decades after independence, the PAP government did not even know how to teach the history of Singapore to its population (Kong and Yeoh 2003; Hong 2015).

The sudden separation from Malaysia had political, economic and socio-cultural effects. Politically, beyond PAP’s control, Singapore became an independent state, and PAP needed to re-adjust its nation-building strategy. Economically, the breaking away from Malaysia meant that Singapore was without a hinterland and thus practically devoid of natural resources. Socio-culturally, “Malaya”, and “Malayan modernity”, became something the PAP leaders did not know how to deal with and wanted to avoid. In this context, the PAP government chose a developmentalist-capitalist path: “rationality” according to such principles became the watchword of the government, if not the national ideology. The citizens were, as they still are, constantly reminded about “national survival” or the threat to it (Bell and de-Shalit 2011; Chua 1997; Hong 2015; Kong and Yeoh 2003; Tay and Goh 2003). As Lily Kong and Brenda S. A. Yeoh argue, “national survival” has been a dominant discourse used by the PAP government, one that draws the entire population – here I would add, the living and dead – into “participating fully in the economic development programs, contributing to the industrialization of the country, subscribing to the ‘compelling logic of a capitalist economy.’” (2003: 31). Accordingly, the PAP government’s “pragmatic”, that is “rational and scientific principals” (Chan and Evers 1973: 317), and the country’s “economic development” are regarded as “necessary” for “national survival”. Under these dominant discourses and the myth of so-called “meritocracy”, the states’ ruling elites present themselves as those who know what is best for the nation, whilst “citizens

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<sup>108</sup> In contrast to the Communist Party of Vietnam or Sukarno and Suharto, first and second presidents of Indonesia.

<sup>109</sup> In contrast to the Tunku Abdul Rahman, the chief minister of the Federation of Malaya and the first Prime Minister of Malaysia, who was from the Kedah royal family (Cheah 2014: 56).

are urged to identify with the national policies” (Francesch-Huidobro 2008: 108). “Citizen participation” in the Singaporean context does not mean participation in decision-making, but in implementation of top-down policy. Under such conditions, “national survival” and “economic development” have become interchangeable terms in the hegemonic discourse in which the PAP government constantly engages. “Economic development” and economic success, often translated into GDP, have become the primary objects of “national pride”, as advocated by the PAP government, and the sites where the PAP both claims its legitimacy and legitimizes its actions (Goh 1985; Hong 2015; Kong and Yeoh 2003). “National survival” and capitalist-developmentalism first means catching up with the Western standard. The trauma after expulsion from Malaysia also hastened a rejection of Malaya in the planning and building of landscapes, both in the government elites and amongst some professionals. Tay and Goh argue that the transformation of the urban landscape, including the demolition of its Malayan features and the building of new towers modelled on those of Western skylines, was not only about (economic) progress but also “vengeance” (2003: 15). The PAP government fetishizes development, which is the sole standard for that which is “modern”. This is developmentalism-as-modernity, based on a linear and singular understanding of an imagined universal, hierarchical understanding of “modernity”, the model of the (imagined) modern(izing) West. In this sense, the PAP government’s developmentalism-as-modernity is also a form of occidentalism, but with the desire for Singapore, under PAP, to be “the most advanced” country; Singapore, in this imagined trajectory, would have “the ability to change and rationalize its social institution” (Sakai 1997: 158), and to become itself a universal reference point, at least for its perceivedly “less advanced” neighbours.<sup>110</sup> In this sense, what makes PAP occidentalist is not only its developmentalism-as-modernity ideology, but also its will to become a universal point of reference. In the implementation of this desire, vernacular modernities at odds with the state’s modernity discourse have been repressed. The racialization of former multiethnic landscapes is one mode of repression; the demolition of the Bukit Brown Cemetery, a symbol of vernacular modernity in

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<sup>110</sup> Singapore is eager to export the “Singapore Model”. In its school website, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at National University of Singapore, which trained quite a number of (future) government officials in Asian countries, posted a featured article in a local Chinese newspaper and remarked, “There was an article on how the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at NUS has attracted students from all over the world who are keen to learn about the Singapore model.” <<http://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/news/learning-about-the-singapore-model-at-the-lee-kuan-yew-school-of-public-policy/>> accessed on 9 April 2015.

Singapore, is another.

With the state ideologies of “survivalism”, “pragmatism”, the “rational” use of land and the desire to control the land through top-down implementations of order, burial grounds were regarded as “obstacles” to “national interests” and “national development”. According to this ideology, the primary concerns of planning should be “economic growth” and “efficiency” (Kong and Yeoh 2003; Tan and Yeoh 2002). Under the state’s “pragmatism” and its desire for the “rational” use of land, not only “Chinese” cemeteries were targeted; the cemeteries of different ethnic groups such as that of the multicultural Bidadari, and the Jewish Cemetery were also exhumed and demolished in the name of development (Tan ed. 2011). Such expressions of a “pragmatic” and “rational” ideology find ironic expression in the following lines of the brochure of theatre production *Boom* (2012):

In this country, what is more precious? Sand or gold?

Who is more important? Who pays taxes? Living or dead?

It is only natural that we should optimize our most precious resource.

Why should the living have to suffer for the dead.

(Sight Lines Productions 2012: 6)

As argued earlier, the general positioning of the demolition of Bukit Brown Cemetery as an issue of “living versus dead”, “preservation versus development”, “traditional versus modern” is problematic and unproductive. Such binary oppositions lead to the misidentification of heritage preservation as a mere yearning for the past (in opposition to the “modern”) that would hinder any sort of “development” (a term, of course, that is not up for negotiation in such contexts). Preservation is codified as caring nothing about people’s lives (as if heritage preservation is not something to be enjoyed by the living), and thus, as ignoring the need for “survival”, as “irrational” and not “practical”. In short, such binary thinking favours the state’s “pragmatic” and “rational” ideology, which would continuously put heritage preservation out of the picture, except for those very “efficient” and “pragmatic” projects such as the thematicization of “Chinatown”, Kampong Glam and “Little India”. The application of such binary thinking to heritage preservation fails to address the more critical problems of ideology and the top-down process of decision-making. When Bidadari was exhumed in the early

2000s for residential development, critics already pointed out that even if Bidadari was not exhumed, there was still enough land for residential use in the area (Tan, K.Y. L. 2011). Similarly, in the Bukit Brown Cemetery debate, alternative ways to solve the traffic congestion were proposed by the NGOs. There was no shortage of land suitable for residential development in Singapore. As many argued, if the government really needed land for later residential redevelopment, the nearby Singapore Island Country Club and other golf courses island-wide would be alternative choices (Liew 2011; Aw 2012). Besides, Singapore had no shortage of residential properties, given the fact that new residential building was taking place island-wide. The real issue, indeed, ought to have been that of whether these residential developments were affordable one or not; were they public housing estates, or luxury private “condos”? This is an issue of spatial justice<sup>111</sup> (Lim and Wong 2012; Soja 2010).

As Z'ming Cik (2013) summarizes, beyond the clichéd dilemmas of the “living versus the dead”, the Bukit Brown issue is also “a question of ‘public value’”. He states critically that “[an] 8-lane highway may make good business sense if the objective is to attract higher demands for car traffic. But it is a road of no return where environmental costs and the loss in heritage are concerned”; he thus suggests an urgent re-think of what the notion of “progress” really means. The demand for the preservation of Bukit Brown Cemetery and the articulation of the debate as a question of “public value” prove important in that they provide alternative understandings of “land” and cultural heritage, beyond purely economic terms. Rather, they demand consideration in relation to social values, histories, environments and people’s place-attachment. They call into question neoliberal ideas about urban spaces, as I shall elaborate in Chapter 4.

In the context of this dominant ideology of “pragmatism” and the “rational” use of land (which often translates into a reductive understanding of economic development), conveying Bukit Brown Cemetery’s significance as a site evidencing a vernacular modernity and the traditions built upon that vernacular modernity is important. This goes beyond the reductive “living versus dead”, “preservation versus development” or “tradition versus modern” binaries. Rather, the issue is actually a contest between two kinds of modernity: a “vernacular modernity” which the

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<sup>111</sup> I will go back to this point in Chapter 4.

preservation could manifest and sustain, and an occidentalist, developmentalism-as-modernity ideology of the PAP government, which finds translation into “economic development”.

The rituals which accompanied the exhumation of those tombs in Bukit Brown Cemetery affected by the road construction illustrate how the state’s version of modernity, developmentalism-as-modernity, functions.<sup>112</sup> The general public usually lack knowledge about funerary and related rituals, and depend on the “expertise” of advisors, such as Taoist priests, funerary middlemen and caretakers. In practice, people usually follow these experts’ suggestions; thus, the government had the chance to influence the public through these experts. When Singapore moved toward cremation, such funeral experts were approached by the government to promote this practice (Kong and Yeoh 2003). In the ritual of exhumation in Bukit Brown, the Taoist priests led the family members and descendants of the deceased to pray to the earth deity, and then pray and chant to “inform” the deceased when and where to move. I note that in this process, there was no *poah poe* 跋杯<sup>113</sup> included, a common method to communicate with gods, deities and ancestors to ask if they are happy with something. I have consulted several Taoist masters in Taiwan and Malaysia, and they had different opinions on whether *poah poe* is necessary when tombs are to be exhumed. Yet I note that in the Singaporean context, *poah poe* is carried out during tomb-sweeping to ask whether the ancestors are satisfied. The exhumation of graves and to move the ancestors to another place is supposed to be a bigger issue than whether the ancestors are satisfied during tomb-sweeping. Yet, in a process which affected the “livelihood” and final resting places of the ancestors, there was no consultation with them through *poah poe*. This failure to consult the affected populations of the underworld runs in parallel with the lack of public consultation in the world of the living. Thus continues the government’s top-down policy, in the worlds of both the living and the deceased.

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<sup>112</sup> The description of the process is based on the video documentation of Dr Hui Yew-Foong; the interpretation is mine.

<sup>113</sup> *Poah poe*, or *zhi jiao* 擲筊 in Mandarin, is a method by which to ask gods, deities and ancestors direct questions. There are two divining blocks known as *poe* in Hokkien or *jiao* in Mandarin. The one praying for advice needs to hold the two *poe* together and drop them on the floor when he or she is seeking advice. From the sides of the *poe*, the querent may know whether the god, deity or ancestor is happy (yes), angry (no), or thinks it is a joke (laughing or no comment) (Tan, S.B. 1988).

As argued above, the PAP government's occidentalist, developmentalism-as-modernity understands modernity as a singular and linear form and relies on repressing and denying contesting vernacular modernities. In terms of historical narratives, the PAP government also regularly monopolizes their interpretation, to the extent that they have restricted access to many supposedly public records. With the PAP's monopolizing of historical narratives, which takes place under the auspices of an "if-not" "commonsense", the PAP government could easily claim rationalist imperatives as legitimations for their actions, to which the public would have no archival recourse (Loh, K. S. 2007; Hong 2015). As the historians Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli (2008: 31) point out, Singapore's (official) national history is to a large extent "the Lee Kuan Yew story", which means that the long-serving Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's numerous memoirs and narratives have become the dominant story of Singapore's history. Thus, discourses of "survival" and linear "progress" are injected into the narration of national history. In the dominant narrative, as represented by the National Museum of Singapore, amongst other places, Singaporean history is simplified as a linear development from the colonial period, through the Japanese occupation, the end of colonial rule to a culmination in the nation's post-independence economic success. During the narration of this process, different enemies are described as "threatening" the "survival" of Singapore (Hong and Huang 2008). In this version of events, the state justifies itself in preventing, through top-down policy, any threat to the survival of Singapore; state policy, similarly, is presented as *the* reason behind the nation's "economic success". The state's historical narrative and its understanding of modernity are problematic and reductive. They repeat the logic of the occidentalist, singular and linear understanding of modernity. In this singular and linear occidentalist model, developmentalism-as-modernity, there is assumed to be a clear definition of what can be modern, and when it can be so, subjected to the turns of the "Lee Kuan Yew story". Contesting vernacular modernities, in such a story, need to be repressed. However, the existence of traces of these contesting vernacular modernities, such as a landscape in which the particular vernacular modernity of a particular place is embedded, can challenge the PAP's developmentalism-as-modernity ideology.

The existence of Bukit Brown Cemetery, or more accurately, the vernacular modernity and the alternative historical narrative embedded there, challenges – I argue

– the state’s version of developmentalism-as-modernity and the historical narrative supporting such discourse. First, many of these histories precede PAP’s assumption of power; the people buried in the cemetery contributed to modernity, in ways that lie beyond or even challenge the state’s version. Histories, as embedded in Bukit Brown Cemetery, are not linear, not without complexity, and may be troublesome or disruptive. Unlike developmentalism-as-modernity, the vernacular modernity embedded in Bukit Brown Cemetery neither falls within a clear, occidentalist definition of the “modern” nor manifests itself in a singular and linear way. In this sense, the contest between two forms of modernities, the vernacular one and the developmentalist, runs in parallel with the question of how to understand the interpretation of history and the use of space. From the state’s occidentalist and developmentalist point of view, I argue, the existence of Bukit Brown Cemetery, and the impossibility of racializing and taming the history embedded therein, challenges the dominant notion of modernity, the state’s survival discourse, its understanding of race and ethnicity and its version of the national history. In this sense, to demolish the cemetery is not only about the road, “economic development” or profits, but would symbolize and indeed actualize the destruction of a contesting vernacular modernity and an alternative understanding of history. If Bukit Brown Cemetery, or at least as much of it as possible, could be saved from demolition, this would potentially allow for the complexity of ethnicities, identities, histories, colonialities, and modernities embedded in it to be re-negotiated, opening up possibilities for critical reflection upon such a singular index of diversity. This could, in turn, challenge the colonial paradigm of knowledge-production exemplified in an uncritical “modernity”, which the postcolonial state has reproduced. Through challenging the singular, linear and occidentalist understanding of modernity and through recognizing the existence of vernacular modernities, one can begin to critically engage and reflect upon coloniality and the conditions of modernity. This would be the start of a decolonization project.

### **3.4 Not “Seeing” the Heritage of Port City in Hong Kong: Reverse Hallucination**

In the previous section, I argued that the Singaporean government’s plan to demolish Bukit Brown Cemetery serves as an example of how demolition of heritage of port city is, on top of profit-making, a threat of existing vernacular modernity by developmentalism. In this section, I will discuss Hong Kong’s port city heritage,

including its multicultural heritage as represented by several cemeteries in Happy Valley and various non-Western and non-Chinese religious buildings which are also embedded with Hong Kong's vernacular modernity and the complexity of ethnicity since Hong Kong became a colonial port city. The port city heritage of Hong Kong also challenges the post-handover state's version of "Hong Kong story", which is a China-centric narrative aiming at re-Sinicizing Hong Kong. The government cannot officially deny "multiculturalism", although it is not the state's ideology, and the government needs these "multicultural" add-ons for tourism promotion. Thus, although the government has not demolished such sites, while some of them are even graded as "Historic Buildings", they are not actively engaged with as "heritage". In other words, the port city heritage sites of Hong Kong are there, but are not recognized as such. This is what Abbas (1997: 6) calls "reverse hallucination". Yet such reverse hallucination is a symptom not only of the post-handover government's aims to re-Sinicize Hong Kong, but also of some right-wing localists' drive to undermine the ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. On the surface, the projection of "reverse hallucination" towards Hong Kong's port city heritage seems to be different from outright demolition. However, both approaches share a common attitude of avoiding "uneasy" histories, which contradict the state's ideologies or mainstream perceptions of history, urban space and identity. I argue that if the heritage of port cities and the (uneasy) histories embedded there are critically engaged with, this provides space for critical reflection upon Hong Kong's histories; on ways in which "cosmopolitan" and "multiculturalism" can be understood, and racial relationships in Hong Kong.

Similar to Singapore and Penang, Hong Kong was also a British colonial port city, which secured the trading route from India to China. Although Hong Kong is generally regarded as a "Chinese" city, there are a number of ethnic groups other than the "Chinese" and "Europeans", such as Eurasians, Parsees, Indian Muslims, Sikhs, Baghdadi Jews, and Armenians, etc., resulting from Hong Kong's founding as a colonial port city. During the early colonial period and into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, these people were mainly merchants, troops and civil servants (Gipouloux 2011; Carroll 2007; White 1994). Hong Kong was "a meeting point for the country traders and the local commercial networks" (Gipouloux 2011: 161). Unlike the planned-for racial segregation of Singapore, the planning of Hong Kong was more "laissez-faire". There was racial segregation and discriminatory zoning such as the reservation of the Peak

for Europeans and the exclusion of Chinese and Indians from European elites' "gentlemen's clubs", but not in the form of planned "enclaves" for different ethnic groups (Lai, L.W.C. 2011; Carroll 2007; Home 2013). The only exception might be the designation of the early cemeteries, based on religious segregation, although they were still close to each other. As argued earlier, the conditions of vernacular modernities in colonial port cities were largely related to the existence of different ethnic groups and the collaborators such as compradors and middlemen from various ethnic groups. As François Gipouloux (2011) argues, the relationship between these merchants and the colonial government was often a combination of co-operation, rivalry and open conflict. In Hong Kong and the nearby Canton, for instance, the English and Scottish merchants' opium re-exportation often relied on the Parsee traders' network, who performed even better as brokers than European traders. After opium was banned in China, Parsees continued to migrate to Hong Kong, and many made their fortunes in real-estates transactions there. Indeed, many famous Western *hongs* 行 (companies) had non-European and non-Chinese partners and compradors, who contributed a lot to the economy, and by making financial donations in Hong Kong.

The histories of Hong Kong as a colonial port city are embedded, for instance, in its cemeteries and diverse religious buildings, which represent the multiethnic population since Hong Kong became a colonial port city. Hong Kong's cosmopolitanism, since the colonial period, is more complex than the "East meets West" cliché, and consists of populations hardly "seen" in the "Asian's World City" slogan. A key historical dimension of port cities, the existence of colonial collaborators, can be seen in the institutions they set up. Unlike Singapore, "multiculturalism" is not an official ideology of Hong Kong. Thus, Hong Kong has not officially created the category of "multicultural heritage". On the Hong Kong Tourism Board website, for instance, the description of "culture and heritage" is no more than "Chinese" and the "colonial":

Taoist temples and Edwardian edifices nestle between skyscrapers, people trade on international markets and light incense to bodhisattvas, vestiges of Chinese clan heritage and European colonial history sit side by side — discover the people and

places that shaped Hong Kong.<sup>114</sup>

The above quotes in the Tourism Board website clearly shows how the government officially regards the “heritage of Hong Kong” to consist of the “Chinese” and the “European” colonial only. The neglect of the non-Chinese and non-European (non-British) heritage is even more obvious in the list of “historical sites” on the same website.<sup>115</sup> There are only two sub-categories, the “Chinese” and the “colonial”. The non-Chinese and non-European heritage of Hong Kong, such as that of Indians of different religious backgrounds, is only listed in “other places of worship” on the website, even though many of these important religious buildings, such as Jamia Mosque and Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple, are recognized as historical, and listed as “Historic Buildings”. Nevertheless, on an official website responsible for Hong Kong’s “city branding”, built heritage sites in which the multiethnic and multicultural histories of the port city are embedded are excluded from the categories of the “heritage” of Hong Kong. This regardless of the fact that the people going to these religious places are also Hong Kong citizens, many of whose families have resided in Hong Kong for several generations.



Photo 3-M: Jamia Mosque (Jamia Masjid) in Central, the oldest mosque in Hong Kong

<sup>114</sup> Hong Kong Tourism Board. “Culture & Heritage” <http://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/see-do/culture-heritage/index.jsp> accessed on 6 Nov 2013

<sup>115</sup> Hong Kong Tourism Board website <http://www.discoverhongkong.com>

Similar “neglect” can also be seen in the cemeteries in Happy Valley. As suggested above, the graves of migrants also marked the starting point of their descendants. The cemeteries where different migrants are buried can offer the most visible signs of their presences in the past. In Happy Valley, there are several cemeteries for different religious groups. They are the Muslim Cemetery opened in 1870, St Michael Catholic Cemetery opened in 1848, the Hong Kong Cemetery (formerly the Protestant Graveyard and then the Colonial Cemetery) opened in 1845, which became a public cemetery in the 1900s, the Parsee Cemetery opened in 1852, and the Hindu Cemetery, with a Hindu temple, opened in 1888. A Jewish Cemetery opened in 1855 is also within walking distance in Happy Valley (White 1994; Lim, P. 2011; Ting 2008; Nicolson 2010).

Soon after the British had occupied Hong Kong, as the death toll of British troops and civilians increased, the original Protestant and Catholic burial grounds near the military camp filled up very quickly. Happy Valley, which was outside the City of Victoria, was chosen as the site to build new cemeteries. (Nicolson 2010; Lim, P. 2011; Bard 1997). The Protestant Graveyard (now Hong Kong Cemetery) and the Catholic Cemetery were the first two cemeteries in Happy Valley. In contrast to Bukit Brown Cemetery in Singapore, these two cemeteries were designed by and for the burial of the Europeans. The layouts of the cemeteries thus followed a combination of grid layout and “cemetery garden” which was popular in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Nicolson 2010). After the other cemeteries in Happy Valley were opened, all the major religious groups’ designated burial grounds were in Happy Valley with the exception that the non-Christian Chinese majority’s designated burial ground was in the current Po Yan Street area, where the Tung Wah Hospital is located. Before that, the majority of the Chinese population, especially labourers from China, were either taken care of by their clan associations or simply buried in the hillside, which was considered as a “nuisance” by the colonial government (Lim, P. 2011; Ting 2008). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Hong Kong Cemetery became a “public cemetery” instead of merely a Protestant or British cemetery. In principle, people of different ethnic groups and religious backgrounds could and still can be buried there, although many of the non-Christian Chinese elite tended to choose to be buried at the Chinese Permanent Cemetery at Aberdeen (Ting 2008). All the cemeteries in Happy Valley are still in use to the present day. Despite their long histories, none of the cemeteries are graded as “Historic

Buildings” or declared as “monuments”, except individual structures such as gateways, chapels and pavilions (Antiquities and Monuments Office 2012). In September 2013, Hong Kong Cemetery was listed as pending discussion about grading it. Yet to this moment, no grading has been given (Antiquities and Monuments Office 2013). I will return to analyze this in a later part of this section, after illustrating how these cemeteries are an important part of Hong Kong’s “port city heritage”, and how such histories are embedded in these cemeteries.

Similar to Bukit Brown Cemetery in Singapore, the significance of the cemeteries in Happy Valley is not in terms of individual tombs or structures, but in terms of the whole landscape. It is all the cemeteries in Happy Valley, taken together, which demonstrate the multiethnic demography and cosmopolitanism of Hong Kong since it was founded as a colonial port city. The chronicles of the establishment of different cemeteries and the designation of zones can be understood in terms of how the colonial government in the 19<sup>th</sup> century viewed the “importance” of different groups. The Protestants, which religious group the majority of the British military, their families and civilians belonged to, were the first to have designated cemeteries. The earliest graves and memorials usually belong to the military men who died in the Opium War and during the early years of the occupation of Hong Kong. Following the Protestants, the Catholics cemetery was designated. In the early colonial period, besides the Protestants, Catholic missionaries and businessmen from Catholic European countries such as Portugal took on an important role in Hong Kong (Chang 2011).

The conventional understanding of a “colonial society” usually regards “Europeans” as the only major player. According to this conventional imagination, the importance of other ethnic groups is undermined. What people usually refer to as the “colonial” heritage is the European heritage, yet the history of the designation of cemeteries in Hong Kong tells another story. The Parsee Zoroastrian cemetery was the third to be designated, just a few years after the Protestant and Catholic Cemeteries were opened, in spite of their small population numbers. The Parsee Cemetery was opened even before the Chinese majority burial ground was designated. The designation of the Parsee Cemetery symbolized the Parsees’ influence in the early colonial era. As above, the Parsees were very prominent and influential merchants and middlemen in the region, even shaping how the British traded there. Despite their

complicated relationship with the British, their influence on the commercial activities and urban development of Hong Kong cannot be underestimated. In early colonial Hong Kong, the bidding at land auctions was often between the British and Parsees. In the 1860s, three of the thirteen board members of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (now HSBC) were Parsees, while seventeen among the seventy-three business firms in Hong Kong were owned by Parsees. The cross-harbour Star Ferry was founded by a Parsee businessman, Dorabjee Nowrojee, in the 1880s (Gipouloux 2011; White 1994; Chu 2005; Plüss 2005; Ho 2006; Chang 2011). Other prominent figures<sup>116</sup> buried in the Parsee Cemetery include Hormusjee Naorojee Mody<sup>117</sup>, who migrated to Hong Kong around 1860 and was most famous for contributing to the establishment of the University of Hong Kong, and Hormusjee Ruttonjee, founder of the first brewery in Hong Kong and the father of Jehangir Hormusjee Ruttonjee, who contributed to the building of Ruttonjee Hospital (Chang 2011; White 1994; Plüss 2005).

Many other prominent figures who contributed to, and shaped the development of Hong Kong are buried in other cemeteries in Happy Valley. For instance, members of the prominent Baghdadi-Jewish Sassoon and Kadoorie families are to be found in the Jewish Cemetery. The Sassoons migrated to China and Hong Kong from Bombay and were famously amongst the founding directors of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporations. The Kadoories migrated to Shanghai and then Hong Kong from Bombay and at first served as assistants to the Sassoons. They were famous for founding the luxury hotel Peninsular Hong Kong and co-founding the electricity company China Light & Power Company Syndicate (now CLP Group) (White 1994; Leventhal 1999; Ting ed. 2010). The Armenian merchant Catchick Paul Chater, a broker who migrated from Calcutta to Hong Kong in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the founder of many major corporations and an Executive and Legislative Councillor, well-known for his initiation of the Praya Reclamation, was buried in Hong Kong Cemetery along with his family members (Lim, P. 2011; Nicolson 2010; Ting 2008).

Unlike in Chapter 2, in the above narrative, I have not challenged the

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<sup>116</sup> Some of the graves are located through *Find A Grave* website. <http://www.findagrave.com/> accessed on 9 November 2013

<sup>117</sup> Mody's tombstone inscribes "He made Hongkong his home for 50 years" and his contribution to the founding of the University of Hong Kong. This represents how he (or his descendents) wanted him to be remembered.

conventional historic narrative from the elites' perspective. Indeed, it rather conforms to the ideology of elites as “founding fathers”. Yet even from this limited perspective of focusing on the elites, the background of the “founding fathers” of the colonial port city was very multiethnic and even cosmopolitan. They were not limited to Europeans and the ethnic Chinese; and these cosmopolitan founding fathers finally rested in the cemetery cluster in Happy Valley. To extend the concern beyond the elites, to less prominent figures and the emergent middle classes whose members are also buried in the Happy Valley cemeteries, the cosmopolitan history of Hong Kong can be seen even more clearly. There are some 400 Japanese graves in Hong Kong Cemetery, mainly those of Japanese civilians buried before World War II. These graves belong to Japanese businessmen, employees of trading firms and prostitutes. These graves evidence the existence of a Japanese community in Hong Kong from the early colonial period to World War II. Yet due to post-war anti-Japanese sentiments, the Japanese presence in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia before World War II is now often either underplayed, or these people are generally treated as having been somehow involved in imperialistic acts (Lim, P. 2011; Ng 2005).



Photo 3-N: Hormusjee Narojee Mody's tomb in Parsee Cemetery. The tombstone describes how Mody “made Hong Kong his home for 50 years” and founded the University of Hong Kong.



Photo 3-O: Japanese tombs in Hong Kong Cemetery

In short, the multiethnic and cosmopolitan histories of Hong Kong are embedded in the Happy Valley cemetery cluster in at least two levels. The first is in which these cemeteries of different religions, representing the existence of different religions in Hong Kong, co-exist closely with one another. The second is the diversity of ethnic groups that have lived in, and contributed to the development of, Hong Kong since the colonial period. In short, the Happy Valley cemetery cluster represents a *de facto* cosmopolitanism in Hong Kong, which has shaped Hong Kong's vernacular modernity, and quite different from the government's characterization of Hong Kong as "cosmopolitan" and their branding of Hong Kong as "Asia's World City" (Hong Kong Government 2002). "Asia's World City" and "cosmopolitan", in the government's terms, are often no more than the "East meets West" cliché. For instance, in the "Introducing Hong Kong" section of Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in London's website, the "cosmopolitan" character of Hong Kong is described like this:

A city of 6.8 million people, Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan metropolis where old tradition blends perfectly with Western culture and post-modern trends. [...] While the waves of Western culture have long arrived on the shores of Hong Kong, traditional values are still held by many Chinese people. Worshipping of ancestors lives side by side with a night out in an Irish pub in the fashionable area in Central, Hong Kong's main business district.

(Hong Kong Government 2013)

The "cosmopolitan", according to such discourse, is often interchangeable with "the

West” and Western expatriates. The non-Western and non-Chinese ethnicities and cultures are often ignored in the description, regardless the fact that they have existed in and contributed to Hong Kong for a long time. Beyond the “Western” and the “Chinese”, Hong Kong’s most cosmopolitan, multiethnic and multicultural heritage and characteristics have not been translated into the state’s version of “cosmopolitan”. Similar to Singapore’s state version of “multiculturalism”, Hong Kong’s state version of “cosmopolitanism”, as “Asia’s World City”, is largely unrelated to the *actually existing* multicultural and cosmopolitan environment, as emergent from Hong Kong’s history as a port city, and embedded in its built heritage.

The cosmopolitanism embedded in the Happy Valley cemetery cluster also includes the diversity of the majority ethnicity, the ethnic Chinese. In contrast to the popular imagination, the early Chinese elites (“collaborators”) in Hong Kong were not a single group with a single background. Amongst them were merchants risen from traditionally “unrespectable” backgrounds, such as Tanka smugglers, merchants from the coastal area of Southeast China, Western- or missionary-educated Chinese, etc. (Carroll 2005; Law 2009). A significant number of very influential “Chinese” compradors were in fact Eurasians, or ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia and their descendants. In the Happy Valley cemetery cluster, ethnic Chinese were buried in Hong Kong Cemetery, St Michael Catholic Cemetery and Muslim Cemetery. As argued earlier, even merely focusing on the elites, compradors and middlemen, the background of the ethnic Chinese since early colonial period, was evidently much diversified. This diversity is also embedded in these cemeteries, even though many prominent ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong chose to be buried in Aberdeen after the opening there of the Chinese Permanent Cemetery.

Taking Hong Kong Cemetery as an example, as recorded by Patricia Lim (2011: 495), from 1891, when the first ethnic Chinese may be ascertained to have been buried in Hong Kong Cemetery, to 1970, there were around 197 ethnic Chinese buried there. Both St Michael Catholic Cemetery and the Muslim Cemetery are religious cemeteries, and only Hong Kong Cemetery is a public cemetery. Before the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, only ethnic Chinese who were British nationals, many of them Christians, were allowed to be buried in Hong Kong Cemetery (then Colonial Cemetery). These British-Chinese included ladies married to Europeans or Chinese; ordinary Chinese Christians; civil

servants, professionals, businessmen, compradors and middlemen (Ting 2008; Lim, P. 2011). In colonial Hong Kong, the ethnic Chinese collaborating with the British had diverse backgrounds. Those buried in Happy Valley had mainly received an English education. As suggested above, in contrast to the general belief, not all of them were migrants to Hong Kong born in China or descendants of such migrants. Among those buried in Hong Kong Cemetery, for instance, the prominent brothers, the tycoon Robert Hotung 何東 and Ho Fook 何福 were born of a Dutch merchant father and a Chinese mother. They were the compradors of the firm of Jardine, Matheson and Co., and were appointed positions by the government. Despite his Eurasian background, Hotung is often claimed to have been “the first Chinese to have a house on the peak” (Choa 2000: 151). The famous revolutionary Yeung Ku-wan 楊衢雲 was born in either Hong Kong or Fumun (Humen 虎門); his father was a Hokkien, raised and educated in Penang, who later migrated to Hong Kong. Wan Tsing-kai’s background fitted more closely with the typical “Cantonese-Hong Konger” background. He was born in Toi Shan 台山 and migrated to Hong Kong for business, where he was also later baptized. Choa Leep-chee 蔡立志, a prominent businessman and Chinese leader, was a Hokkien born in Malacca and educated in the Straits Settlement. He migrated to Hong Kong in the 1870s and became the comprador of Jardine, Matheson and Co., following his uncle Choa Chee-bee’s 蔡紫微 career path (Lim, P. 2011; Ting 2008; Smith 1985). Indeed, quite a number of prominent members of the Chinese elites of the early colonial period migrated to Hong Kong from the Straits Settlements; the Choas and Yeung’s father were just a few examples,<sup>118</sup> whose English-educated background and their eagerness to have their children receive an English education made them closer to the ruling elites (Carroll 2006). They definitely cannot be taken to represent the whole of the ethnic Chinese population, nor even the whole picture of the Chinese elites; yet their background also illustrates the multiethnic environment of Hong Kong. The migration history of the ethnic Chinese has been a complex story and should not be simplified.

Towards a better comprehension of the history related to the ethnic Chinese collaborators in the colonial port city, I will bring in another built heritage in Hong

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<sup>118</sup> Another example, not buried in Happy Valley, is Ng Choy 伍才 (also known as Wu Ting-fang 伍廷芳), the first appointed ethnic Chinese unofficial member of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong in 1880. Ng was born in Malacca. His father-in-law Hoh Fuk Tong 何福堂, the first ethnic Chinese Protestant priest in Hong Kong, was also educated in Malacca (Lau 2011).

Kong: Man Mo Temple. Man Mo Temple represents another group of ethnic Chinese collaborators than the English-educated ones buried in Happy Valley; from before their rise, even. Man Mo Temple was built in 1847 in Sheung Wan, the then-“Chinese” neighborhood in the City of Victoria, by two powerful businessmen, Loo Achi 盧亞貴 and Tam Achoy 譚亞財 who arose from “unrespectable” or humble backgrounds. Loo was a Tanka who powerfully controlled many pirates and had collaborated with the British since the Opium War; Tam was a dockyard foreman in Singapore where he had migrated earlier, in violation of the Qing’s ruling. In traditional Chinese society, Loo and Tam could not have climbed to the “respectable” gentry class. Yet the opening of Hong Kong as a colonial port city made it possible for them to fill the gap in the elites by strategically manipulating their own in-betweenness. Their contribution in establishing Man Mo Temple and serving as temple committee members symbolized the leadership positions among ethnic Chinese then (Carroll 2005; Law 2009; Sinn 1989; Hui 1999). Similar to its counterparts in other port cities, such as Thian Hock Keng Temple in Singapore, Cheng Hoon Teng 青雲亭 in Malacca and Kong Hock Keong 廣福宮 in Penang, Man Mo Temple was never a “purely” religious site. Rather, it was also the site of a semi-autonomous organization and informal ethnic Chinese government (Carroll 2005). It not only dealt with “internal” ethnic Chinese affairs in Hong Kong, but also acted as an informal link between the colony and the Qing government, somewhat like an informal “embassy”. According to E. J. Eitel, the Man Mo Temple Committee

[...] secretly controlled native [ethnic Chinese] affairs, acted as commercial arbitrators, arranged for the due reception of mandarins passing through the Colony, negotiated the sale of [Qing] official titles, and formed an unofficial link between the Chinese residents of [British colonial] Hongkong and the [Qing’s] Canton Authorities.

(Eitel 1983: 282)

Man Mo Temple’s leaders and other ethnic Chinese collaborators should not be understood merely in terms of the rising Chinese elites’ submission to, or, of their rise having been fostered by, indirect British rule, as the conventional Chinese nationalist narrative (such as that of Qiang Shigong 強世功 (2010)), highly informed by *ressentiment* politics, would have it understood. In fact, these collaborators were not

passive. They skillfully and strategically manipulated their position of in-betweenness, their own and others' double loyalties and disloyalties. They understood very well that they could be mistrusted by both the Qing and British governments. Similar to their counterparts in Singapore and Penang, they also purchased official titles from the Qing government to strengthen their positions, so that they could be "useful", and still be regarded as holding a "respectable" position. Man Mo Temple's role and its leaders' strategies were inherited by its successors Tung Wah Hospital, even though some of the leaders of Tung Wah Hospital were English-educated.

Unlike the cemeteries in Happy Valley, Man Mo Temple was declared as a "monument" in 2010. As I will argue, however, the designation of Man Mo Temple as a "declared monument" does not automatically equate to the government's recognizing and actively engaging the port city histories embedded in it, especially this strategic manipulation of the in-between position by those belonging to the Temple. In a document issued by the Development Bureau<sup>119</sup> to the Legislative Council about the declaration of historical buildings in 2010, the history of Man Mo Temple was recorded in the appendix in some detail. In the main document, or "brief", however, the Temple's historical significance was summarized as follows; observe how its history of informal government, as well as its maintenance of informal links between the colony and the Qing government disappears:

The Man Mo Temple reflects the traditional social and religious practices of the Chinese community in Hong Kong. It has become a tradition for the Directors of TWGHs and community representatives to congregate at the temple for the annual Autumn Sacrificial Rites to pay homage to Man Cheong and Mo Ti and to pray for the prosperity of Hong Kong. The temple is now a renowned attraction for both locals and non-locals.

(Development Bureau 2010: 3)

Similarly, outside Man Mo Temple, the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) has erected a billboard to introduce Man Mo Temple, which also undermines its role in

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<sup>119</sup> According to the *Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance* (Cap. 53), the power to declare a monuments rests with the "Authority" "after consultation with the Board and with the approval of the Chief Executive" (Cap.53 s.3) and "Authority" "means the Secretary for Development" (Cap 53 s.2).

informal governance. The historical “community value” of the temple, according to the billboard (below) is that “Kung Sor [Communal Hall] was used as a meeting place and for resolving matters related to the Chinese community in the area”.

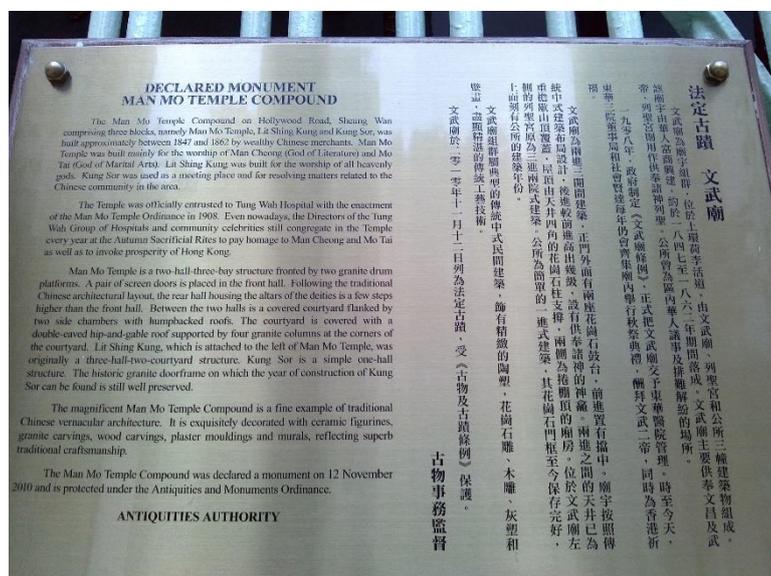


Photo 3-P: The board outside Man Mo Temple erected by AMO. The Temple’s informal governmental role is undermined by the reductive description of its having been a “meeting place” used for “resolving matters” in the area. (Courtesy of Loretta Ho)

The complex histories embedded in Hong Kong’s cemetery clusters – the conditions of modernity shaped by Hong Kong’s multiethnic populations, including ethnic Chinese from complex backgrounds – might perhaps explain why the cemetery clusters have not been graded, why their history has not been actively engaged with by the government. There are cemetery tours organized by NGOs and private groups, but no governmental or even semi-official brochures have yet been published on the Happy Valley cemetery cluster. The complexity of collaborative colonialism might well explain why the historical significance of Man Mo Temple, even as a declared monument, is not actively engaged with. The post-handover government has a tendency to treat Hong Kong as a “Chinese” city. A dominant agenda of the state is to “re-Sinicize” Hong Kong. In the dominant discourse, “handover” is known as “return” or “reunion” (回歸, *wui gwai* in Cantonese or *huigui* in Mandarin). In official and nationalistic terms, this “reunion” not only means the “reunion” of the land, i.e., that Hong Kong is “returned” to China, but also the people’s “reunion” with China, or more accurately the PRC, with both minds and hearts (*renxin huigui* 人心回歸) (*People’s Daily Overseas*

*Edition* 2012). According to the PRC nationalistic logic, as made explicit by Qiang,

The “two systems” in “one country” do not differ in political and economic system, but differs in mind, in language that carries the mind and in heart expressed by the mind and language.

(Qiang 2010: 22, my translation)

This nationalistic narrative of “return” and “reunion” needs to be understood in the context of how the nationalistic position understands colonial Hong Kong and Macau. Accordingly, Hong Kong and Macau are regarded as Chinese territories “since time immemorial” (*zi gu yilai*自古以來) (Qiang 2010: 234), which were, for a time, occupied by Britain and Portugal respectively. The “solution”, accordingly, was that to be “within Chinese sovereignty” (ibid. 138) and Hong Kong and Macau should not be allowed to be independent. From this perspective, the Chinese reclamation of Hong Kong and Macau was regarded as “washing away the shame of the nations” (ibid. 26). According to this logic, as argued in Chapter 2, what actually happened in Hong Kong during the colonial period is not their concern. Regardless of the reality in Hong Kong, their assumption is that Hong Kong people are necessarily “Chinese”, both in terms of ethnicity and nationality; any identification beyond this would be unacceptable. Yet the reality is that Hong Kong has experienced a different path than China, and many Hong Kong people have different forms of identification other than the PRC nationalistic one. Thus, to make Hong Kong people to be “reunion with China / PRC with both minds and hearts”, and to re-Sinicize Hong Kong become a major task in the nationalistic agenda. In short, re-Sinicization is a nation-building project, where the “nation” here refers to PRC, which requires that Hong Kong be subsumed by this nationalistic logic.

The post-handover Hong Kong SAR government carried through with this re-Sinicization agenda. As argued in previous chapters, nation-building projects are often backed up by historical narratives. For instance, in 1998, the Education Department already regarded teaching “Hong Kong history” in “Chinese History” curriculum as important for increasing “the understanding of relationship between Mainland China and Hong Kong” and “sense of belonging towards the nation” (Humanities Unit, Curriculum Development Institute, Education Department 1998: 3). Joseph Ting, then the Chief Curator of Hong Kong Museum of History, made it explicit that the teaching

of Hong Kong history within the Chinese History curriculum was to make sure each student “correctly understands that Hong Kong is a part of China” (ibid.: 14), and that, although Hong Kong was not under the Chinese government’s administration, “the relationship was still close” (p.18). According to this line of interpretation, to define the “history” and “geographical position” of Hong Kong is to assume and define Hong Kong citizens as, homogeneously, “Chinese nationals”; even though, in reality, Hong Kong citizenship (“permanent residentship”) has no relationship with nationality, and a significant number of Hong Kong citizens are either non-ethnic Chinese or non-Chinese nationals (Leung and Tang 2012). Except for the colonizers, who should already have left Hong Kong by 1997, the “ideal” way, according to the nationalistic logic, is to narrate all Hong Kong citizens as Chinese nationals; even though one is locally-born, he or she is a descendant of immigrants from China. As demonstrated earlier, although many of Hong Kong’s citizens *are* descendants of Chinese immigrants, there are many exceptions; including many of Hong Kong’s “founding fathers”.

Bringing “re-Sinicization” and *renxin huigui* (the reunion of minds and hearts) into consideration of how Hong Kong history should “ideally” be read, one can better understand the treatment of the cemetery cluster in Happy Valley. Similarly, this also sheds light on why Man Mo Temple’s role of informal governance and its function as the unofficial link between the colony and the Qing authority are undermined in the official discourse, even while the Temple is a declared monument. The “ideal” historical narration is a linear and homogenous one. Yet, the state cannot escape Hong Kong’s colonial past and colonial legacy, nor the “West”; these are taken as resources to brand Hong Kong as an “international” city where “East meets West”. In terms of city branding, the existence of colonial architecture and Western influences is important for showing that Hong Kong is not just another “Chinese city” (Teather and Chow 2003). As discussed in the Singaporean context in Chapter 2, the “grand” style of colonial architecture is often appropriated by postcolonial states, without touching on their political implication. Even in the Chinese nationalistic historiography, the British is not absent in the narrative; the difference between the pro-PRC narrative and pro-British narrative is the “roles” of Britain (Law 2009).

The existence of the British can be subsumed into the nationalistic historical narrative. What actually interrupts and confounds the narrative of Hong Kong as a

“Chinese” territory occupied by Britain is the existence and evidence of contributions to its history and the conditions of its modernity made by those other than the British (or the “West”) and the ethnic Chinese. The different ethnicities of those buried in the Happy Valley cemetery cluster and the histories of their contributions to Hong Kong since it became a colonial port city challenge that “smooth” historical narration, and thus also the re-Sinicization and *renxin huigui* which are backed up by this version. The Hong Kong government cannot openly deny “multiculturalism” even though multiculturalism is not its state policy. “Multiculturalism” is paid lip-service, and the term is still commonly found in descriptions of Hong Kong, for instance, in tourist promotions; although what “multiculturalism” actually means can be very abstract. In a document entitled “Proposed Historical Themes” (2009) prepared by AMO, adopted by the Expert Assessment Panel, and presented for discussion by Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) members, colonial-era rules, political, economic and social development and Hong Kong’s links with China are still the major themes. In this document, under the theme of “Social Development of the Colony”, there is the sub-theme “Cultural Diversity and Non-Chinese Communities”. Similarly, under the theme of “Hong Kong in Post-war Years”, there is the sub-theme “Cultural Diversities” (Antiquities Advisory Board 2009).

As introduced in Chapter 1, with the exception of more “controversial” cases, such as that of Queen’s Pier, AMO’s research generally highly influences how AAB members grade certain buildings; but how the government reacts to the AAB grading is another issue. Since the government cannot openly deny multiculturalism, and since also these religious buildings are not located in places where there is “development” pressure and it is uncontroversial to call them “historical”, demolishing them or openly challenging their grading, as happened with Queen’s Pier, would nonetheless open a Pandora’s Box. If the government planned to demolish this built heritage, its historical value and the complexity of history embedded within it would have to be openly discussed and debated. Thus, many of these religious buildings are graded as historical buildings. Some of the low gradings, such as the Grade III Historic Building status awarded to Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple, can be blamed on the limited vision of AMO and AAB. Similarly, the fact that only individual buildings in the Happy Valley cemetery cluster, rather than any or all of these cemeteries as a whole, are graded as historical buildings can be blamed on their limited vision. According to *Antiquities and*

*Monuments Ordinance*, declared monument and historic building status are not limited to individual buildings or structures, but can be “a place, building, site or structure” (Cap 53 s 2). However, in reality, no “places” and “sites” have yet been graded or declared as monuments so far. The fact that the AAB has not yet graded any cemetery in Happy Valley can be attributed to the following of “routine” practices. According to Chan Tin Kuen (2013), AMO understands that some individual buildings in the cemeteries were already graded and thus leads to their not putting whole cemeteries to the AAB for their consideration. However, this lack of vision unfortunately corresponds to the state’s historical narration. The complex histories of the different ethnic groups’ contribution to Hong Kong and to shaping the conditions of its modernity are embedded in these cemeteries and religious buildings but not “seen” or actively engaged with. The state is pathetic about their existence, but demolishing them would create further problems that the state cannot bear. The way the states treat them is thus by “reverse hallucination”: not seeing them, i.e., pretending not to see them, even though they are there.

Similarly, for the state’s re-Sinicization project, the ideal narrative of the ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong is to emphasize their unbroken links with China. A major “rediscovery” used to emphasize the connection between Hong Kong and China is Hong Kong’s role in modern Chinese revolution, even though Hong Kong was then under the colonial rule. Even before the handover, the Central and Western District Council launched the Dr. Sun Yat-sen Historical Trail, which marked the spots related to Sun’s activities in Hong Kong and other events related to the 1911 Chinese revolution. However, as many of the original places had already been demolished, there is “little left to see” (Cheng 2011). After the handover, as part of the re-Sinicization program, Hong Kong’s contribution to the modern Chinese revolution has been further emphasized in terms of historical education and heritage preservation (Ting 1998). It is inevitable that the traces of Hong Kong’s relationship with the 1911 Chinese revolution and traces of Sun in Hong Kong would be treasured by the state, because they are in accord with the re-Sinicization agenda. The “high tide” of this treatment was the transformation of Kom Tong Hall 甘棠第, former residence of tycoon Ho Kom Tong 何甘棠, into a public Dr. Sun Yat-sen Museum, even though there was no direct relationship between Ho and Sun. The conservation and adaptive reuse of Kom Tong Hall into Dr. Sun Yat-sen Museum was justified on the grounds that since the area in

which the Hall is located is where Sun's revolutionary activities mainly took place, it could thus be incorporated into the Dr. Sun Yat-sen Historical Trail (Lu 2009). Ting, who advocates the teaching of Hong Kong history in the Chinese History curriculum to help students to understand the relationship between Hong Kong and China, was a key figure behind the museum. According to the museum's official website, the museum gives an overview of "Hong Kong's vital role in reform movements and revolutionary activities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries" and "highlights Dr Sun's intimate connections with Hong Kong" (Dr. Sun Yat-sen Museum 2013). The conservation of the Hall as a museum goes very closely with the re-Sinicization project. The historical significance of the 1911 Chinese revolution is so influential that heritage preservation groups also make use of histories related to Sun and the revolution for arguing for more careful heritage preservation. For instance, when heritage activists urged for the exclusion from sale of the land of, and the proper conservation of the former police married quarters in Hollywood Road, one of the reasons given was that there were archaeological signs that the site was that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Government Central School, which Sun had attended. (Ng 2007; Centre for Architectural Heritage Research 2011)

Until very recently, the historical narrative of Hong Kong's role in the 1911 Chinese revolution was focused on Sun's activities in Hong Kong. Beyond Sun, the concern for other (long-forgotten) revolutionaries only started very recently. In 2011, after a petition from Yeung Ku-wan's family members and historians, an information plaque was finally installed next to Yeung's nameless grave in Hong Kong Cemetery, although the grave was neither graded as a historic building nor declared as monument (Heaver 2013). Only Yeung's relationship with the revolution, as a co-founder of *Foo Yan Man Ser* 輔仁文社 (Literary Society for the Promotion of Benevolence) and *Hsing Chung Hui* 興中會 (Revive China Society), the revolutionary attempts he participated in and his assassination by the Qing agent, are inscribed on the plaque (Hong Kong Government 2011). There is no trace of his having been a descendant of "overseas" Chinese, of his work in Hong Kong; nor of the reason that Yeung, not Sun was the first president of *Hsing Chung Hui*. Such selective "forgetting" is also a form of "reverse hallucination". Beyond his part in revolution, these other identities, are another Pandora's Box. To touch on them (like touching on the backgrounds of the other members of the Chinese elites buried in the cemeteries in Happy Valley) would be to

expose the diversity and complexity ethnic Chinese migration. The simplistic nationalistic narrative of “one’s ancestor is from China” would be challenged. The fact that Yeung’s work as a comprador, which provided him with better networks and a higher social position than Sun, made him a better choice than the then-unknown Sun to be the first President of *Hsing Chung Hui* is a challenge to the nationalistic narrative centered around Sun. The nationalistic narratives are heavily based on binary oppositions, wherein revolutionaries and “supporters” of revolutions are often equated with “patriots”, while compradors and collaborators are quite often equated with “traitors”. The combination of “revolutionary” and “comprador” in one and the same person would contradict and confound this; the nationalistic discourse cannot account for how someone could be a “patriot” and “traitor” at the same time. Thus, the narrative can only remain “valid” by “forgetting” and “not seeing” some part of the background of the same person. According to this logic, in order to fulfil the ideal, nationalistic historical narrative of Hong Kong’s close links with China without touching on the question of this contradiction, the narration of Yeung’s background must only focus on his revolutionary activity. It is the same simplistic narration that explains why, even though it is a declared monument, the story of Man Mo Temple’s role in the informal governance of ethnic Chinese in the colonies and its unofficially linking the colony and the Qing authority is undermined. The nationalistic narration is based on simplistic binary oppositions, an “either-or”, without allowing for any position in between. One was either actively a patriot or submitted to the colonial rule. Yet the role of Man Mo Temple represents a self-made autonomous position, similar to the that of the “overseas” Chinese communities in Singapore and Penang; not only outside the colonial government, which the nationalistic discourse would have no problem absorbing and could even represent as an anti-colonial position, but also outside the Qing, or the “Chinese”, authority. Thus, in this and other such situations, the government opts to project “reverse hallucination” towards this embarrassing history: declaring it as a monument without facing the “embarrassment”.



Photo 3-Q: The nameless grave of Yeung Ku-wan in Hong Kong Cemetery. The information plaque was installed in 2011

Not only can the nationalistic agenda of the state not “see” the multicultural and cosmopolitan port city heritage, such “reverse hallucination” is also a symptom of a certain form of right-wing localism, represented by Chin Wan 陳雲, who has written several books to advocate “ethnic politics” (Chin 2011, 2013, 2014). Chin also uses his Facebook page to offer commentary and mobilize (online) opinion, which is quite influential among some factions of right-wing localists in Hong Kong.<sup>120</sup> Chin’s (2011, 2013) main arguments may be summarized as follows: since China has been ruled by the Communist Party, Chinese culture and civilization has been destroyed in China. In the face of China’s colonial and imperial forces, including political domination, capital and population, Hong Kong should leave the “evil” China behind, give up on the “illusion” of building a democratic China, and make use of its position to forge Hong Kong into an autonomous, but not independent, city-state (*sing bong* 城邦 in Cantonese).<sup>121</sup> In short, according to Chin’s slogan: “Forget China. Hong Kong comes

<sup>120</sup> Chin’s Facebook status is gathered at the website “Wan Chin Facebook Wall Concise Backup” <http://wan-chin.appspot.com> accessed on 16 Nov 2013.

<sup>121</sup> In academia, in the English language, Hong Kong has been described as a modern city-state by many scholars (e.g. Ortmann 2010; Sing 2004; McGee 1973). Yet Chin’s chosen word of *sing bong* (*chengbang* in Mandarin) is generally used in the Chinese language to describe the ancient Greek states, whereas the modern city-state is usually not translated as *sing bong* / *chengbang*.

first.” (Chin 2011: 16) He argues that pan-democrats in Hong Kong have been infected by “Chinese Love Flower Poison” 中國情花毒<sup>122</sup>, which would “[make] use of your goodwill and push you to death” (Chin 2012), and, consequently, they cannot put Hong Kong first; which, he says, harms Hong Kong very much. Instead, Chin says, the Hong Kong city-state should ultimately join Macau, Taiwan and Mainland China to form a “Chinese Confederation” (中華邦聯 *Zung Waa Bong Lyun* in Cantonese or *Zhonghua Banglian* in Mandarin). In order to develop the Hong Kong city-state, Chin advocates “*Realpolitik*”, “ethnic politics” and “local interests” rather than what he calls “universal values”, which includes values such as tolerance, multiculturalism, concern for minorities and social justice. In defining the cultural position of the “ethnic Hong Kongers”, Chin argues that “true” Chinese (華夏, *Waa Haa* in Cantonese, *Huaxia* in Mandarin, literally “illustrious and grand”) civilization is no longer in China but kept, inherited and advocated in Hong Kong. Accordingly, he says, Hong Kongers are the remnants (Cantonese: *wai man*; Mandarin: *yimin* 遺民) who have maintained and inherited both orthodox Chinese civilization and the British system and principles of honour. Hong Kong, as distinct from China, should make use of the remnants of traditional Chinese culture to revive the (Han) Chinese civilization, and commandeer the system inherited from the British to build up “a proto-Chinese modern city-state”, with the ultimate aim of joining the “Chinese Confederation”. In other words, although Chin and the forms of right-wing localism he represents agree on the “autonomous” position of Hong Kong, they share the same problem as the nationalists of not seeing the histories and cultures of Hong Kong beyond those of the ethnic Chinese and the British / Europeans.

In an interview, Chin generally equates the mainstream “remnants” with the ethnic Chinese left by the British in Hong Kong. He defines “mainstream” as “ethnic Chinese’s folk and culture and foreigners who totally adopt such culture”. Thus ethnic minority cultures that cannot be assimilated into ethnic Chinese culture are excluded from his definition of the “mainstream” culture of the Hong Kong “city-state”, regardless that they could have existed there since the early days of colonial Hong Kong

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<sup>122</sup> “Love Flower” is a fictional poisonous plant in Louis Cha’s 金庸 novel *The Return of the Condor Heroes* 神鵰俠侶 (also known as *The Giant Eagle and its Companion*, 1976). When someone is suffering from “Love Flower Poison”, it feels very painful whenever he or she is thinking about the crush or lover, and the poison will spread throughout the body.

(Ho and Lam 2013). Although Chin criticizes “Cultural China” as “fantasy” that “could revive Chinese civilization in China” (2011: 175 – 176), and as a form of what he calls “Chinese Love Flower Poison” (2013), his positioning of Hong Kong as the remnants of Chinese civilization is nevertheless another form of “Cultural China”. The major difference is that while other “Cultural China” scholars believe that the “centre” of Chinese culture or civilization is “overseas”, Chin argues that Hong Kong is the place to preserve “Chinese civilization”. Like the adherents of “Cultural China” (as discussed in Chapter 1), Chin believes in orthodox “Chineseness”, in the name of “Chinese civilization” or *Waa Haa*, and a hierarchy of culture; he fails to recognize the multiple layers and hybridization of different cultures in Hong Kong at the local level. His definition of Hong Kong as the carrier of, and the place to revive “Chinese civilization” is accompanied by a constant marginalization of non-ethnic Chinese and non-European cultures in Hong Kong which indicates his failure to recognize, if not his outright denial of, the significance of diverse ethnic groups in Hong Kong.<sup>123</sup> Philosopher Wai-hung Wong (under his initial W. Wong, 2013) criticizes, Chin’s fantasy of reviving Chinese civilization in order to build up the “Chinese Confederation”, regardless of the multiethnic conditions and the existence of different cultures in Macau and Taiwan, can be called “Chinese Civilization Love Flower Poison” 華夏情花毒. Here, to return to the question of built heritage and the understanding of time and space in Hong Kong, Chin’s position shares the problem of projecting “reverse hallucination” towards the multiethnic heritage of port cities. It is precisely due to this “not seeing” of the histories and heritage of the ethnic groups other than the ethnic Chinese and Europeans – “not seeing”, consequently, how they have also contributed to shaping the conditions of modernity in Hong Kong – that the positions and the cultures of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong and non-Chinese in Hong Kong can be thus marginalized and excluded from the definition of what it means to be an “ethnic Hong Konger”, or at least from the “mainstream”.

In short, Hong Kong’s port city heritage, i.e., the heritage in which the histories of the shaping of Hong Kong’s vernacular modernity are embedded, can be seen in at

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<sup>123</sup> Law Wing Sang (2014b) argues that both Chin Wan and the “Cultural China” New Confucianist are anti-communist, fantasize a disappeared China and hope to counter-offense China through culture. Yet, Chin seldom refers to the New Confucianists. Law argues that Chin actually shares the mentality of “Little Sinocentrism” commonly found in East Asian countries.

least two forms. That which evidences the multiethnicity of Hong Kong, a form of cosmopolitanism other than the clichéd binaries of “East meets West”, “Chinese and Europeans”; and that which evidences the diversity of ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong. Together, these represent the diversity and complexity of the compradors and middlemen who were of such significance to the colonial port cities. As demonstrated in the above paragraphs, despite their disagreements over the relationship between Hong Kong and China, the state’s nationalistic narrative and city-branding and some of the right-wing localists share the same logic of Hong Kong’s being an “ethnically Chinese” city, blended with “Western” culture. Indeed, many people without a specific political stance also view the city like this. As Kwai-cheung Lo argues, the local ethnic Chinese population tends to view the non-ethnic Chinese as “foreigners” or “outsiders”, “usually denying their native status, excluding them from the integral part of the community and fundamentally hindering any acts of solidarity with society’s ‘others.’”(2008: 60) In terms of the non-Chinese, the ethnic hierarchy – if not Han-Chinese chauvinism – espoused by the local ethnic Chinese shares the logic of the colonial ethnic hierarchy and the neglect of other ethnic groups. As Lo correctly points out, “While white people are usually regarded as the symbolic presence of the West, the [other] ethnic is usually defined by a striking absence.” (ibid. 60) In everyday terms, such “absence” means “making the visible unseen” (ibid. 60), i.e. a “reverse hallucination”. In terms of government policy, it means a total neglect of their needs, a not seeing, and denial of the existence of, racial discrimination. As argued in Chapter 1, time (history, the temporal perspective of memory), space (spatial politics and relationships embedded in space and place) and identity are in trialectic relationship. The neglect of the histories and heritage of non-Chinese, non-European ethnic groups in Hong Kong – even though they were amongst the “founding fathers” and shaped the conditions of modernity in Hong Kong – and their neglect in society share similar logics. If even the better-off “founding fathers” from amongst the ethnic minorities are to be ignored, then those with even less economic and cultural capital are even more marginalized. The denial of their being “native” to Hong Kong by the government and the local Chinese population can be attributed to the “not seeing” of their long existence in Hong Kong, regardless of their social class and background. Conversely, the denial of their being “native” also works to encourage one not to see their long existence in Hong Kong, even though it is embedded in the urban landscape, even in some of those graded as historic buildings.

In discussing heritage preservation in Hong Kong, Abbas argues:

In any case, preservation is not the same as memory: it is a memory without pain. [...] Preservation in its selectiveness is the disappearance of memory, and this disappearance [...] can be very significant politically at this particular juncture of Hong Kong's history. It is surely not accidental that so many of the examples of preservation end up implicitly giving us history as decoration, as nostalgia. [...] Nostalgia is déjà vu without the uncanny.

(Abbas 1997: 83)

Abbas' argument is valid in terms of describing Hong Kong government's way of treating the port city heritage: either not to touch it, or to preserve it without actively engaging with it, so that the "painful" or "uncanny" part of the history will not be aroused. Yet if one believes in the decolonizing possibilities of heritage preservation, this attitude needs to be challenged. The histories and memories they do not want to remember or recognize, and so refuse to do so by "not seeing" are embedded in that port city heritage. Decolonization is a process undertaken to allow the colonized people to re-think and reflect on their relationships with the colonizers, not only politically and economically but also socially and culturally. Thus, one needs to face the uneasiness in that history, and challenge that which is all too easily assumed as "common sense". Port city heritage is embedded with such uneasiness. A true sense of the cosmopolitan and multiethnic history of Hong Kong<sup>124</sup>, offers a reading of Hong Kong as occupying a relatively autonomous position that resists PRC nationalistic discourses, and also resists the colonial and Han-Chinese racial hierarchy inherited by many of the local ethnic Chinese population. In other words, a critical engagement with the port city heritage challenges not only Chinese nationalism, but also a rightwing ethnocentric form of localism. This aids reflexivity in relation to the past, the present and the future, and offers grounds upon which to revise discriminative ethnic and racial policies. Thus, Hong Kong needs not only to preserve the multiethnic heritage of Hong Kong, but also to actively engage with the complexity of this heritage.

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<sup>124</sup> Including, along with the recognition of elites from non-Western and non-Chinese groups such as those buried in the Happy Valley cemetery cluster, having been amongst the "founding fathers" of Hong Kong, a sense of the multiethnic contribution as a whole.

Similarly, for the sake of decolonization, there also needs to be critical reflection on the diverse histories of the ethnic Chinese, and the histories of the collaborative colonialism of the ethnic Chinese, which can be carried out through the preservation of, and active engagement with the heritage in which these histories are embedded. The diverse backgrounds of the ethnic Chinese not only destabilize the nationalistic historical narrative, but, together with a recognition of the multiethnic environments, allow one to see the vernacular modernity of Hong Kong as it actually existed and exists. As Law argues, “collaborative colonialism” is central to the power formation and coloniality of Hong Kong, and “the complex configuration of the colonial ‘subjectivity’ of a collaborator [...] raises challenges to the often-assumed stability of Chinese identity” (2009: 201). The collaborators’ strategic manipulation of their in-between position and their multiple (dis-)loyalties cannot be reduced into simply nationalistic, anti-colonial or romanticizing discourses. Rather, in order to critically understand how local identities are formed or not formed, one needs to critically reflect on collaborative colonialism and its relationship to the political unconsciousness of Hong Kong (Law 2008, 2009). If this is the case, merely preserving the built heritage of the institutions of collaborative colonialism (such as Man Mo Temple) but evading that complex history, either by not mentioning or undermining it, is just another turning away from the past, as discernable in the government’s desire to demolish the Star Ferry and Queen’s Piers, as discussed in Chapter 2. The fact of such a building’s being declared as a monument and thus not being demolished offers a possible point of departure for undertaking postcolonial heritage preservation as a decolonization project. Ordinary citizens might take such opportunities to “dig up” and critically reflect on the histories not told by the state, and not evident or included in the “common sense” version.

### **3.5 Penang Streets: Making Cosmopolitanism Visible as Tourist Assets, and Political Resistance**

In the previous sections, I described several negative ways in which postcolonial states’ have been dealing with their port city heritage, and analyzed the underlying ideologies. Colonial port cities are sites where vernacular modernities emerged and evolved. These vernacular modernities were shaped by people from different ethnic groups and different backgrounds locally. These histories have been embedded in the

urban landscapes – those of the living, the deceased, *and* the spiritual – of these colonial port cities. As argued in previous sections, the recognition of and active engagement with the heritage of port cities and the histories embedded therein are important in challenging the singular, linear, occidentalist understanding of modernity, which can easily translate into a reductive understanding of economic development. Such recognition and active engagement are also important to challenge *ressentiment* politics underlying nationalisms, and to provide a more critical understanding of multiculturalism, cultural hybridization and cosmopolitanism. Yet the histories embedded in the heritage of port cities are often “uneasy” histories, which many postcolonial states want to avoid. Thus, as the previous sections demonstrate, the heritage of port cities is often simplified, demolished, evaded or avoided. The Singaporean government’s designation of ethnic-themed “historic districts”, their plan to demolish Bukit Brown Cemetery, and the Hong Kong government’s approach of leaving multiethnic religious buildings and cemeteries in place and preserving buildings in which the histories of early ethnic Chinese elites are embedded, yet without dealing with these histories, represent two negative state approaches to dealing with port city heritage, neither of which contribute to decolonization. Is it inevitable that states will not actively engage and dialogue with their port city heritage? Penang might be providing an example, albeit with its own limitations, of how the state, in co-operation with non-government organizations, might try to engage with its port city heritage through the recognition of how the urban landscapes there have been addressed by different ethnic groups living in Penang. This is being enacted through the transformation of Penang’s multiethnic port city heritage itself into tourist assets, and the recognition of the multiethnic population which resulted in the cosmopolitan environment, brought about by Penang’s history as a port city. This active engagement provides spaces for resisting the nation-state’s racial ideology and reflecting upon the racial relationships in present-day Penang.

As briefly introduced in Chapter 1, the British establishment of Penang as a colonial port city in 1786 was very important to British trade, as it was in a better location for the maritime trading route than Bencoolen at Sumatra, then another British colony. Before its occupation by the British, Penang had only a very small settlement. Unlike other port cities in the Malay Archipelago, which already had quite well-established urban settlements before the Europeans’ arrival, Penang’s urban foundation

was created only after the arrival of the British. Thereafter, Penang's geographical location and function as a port city made the urban landscape; shaped by the cosmopolitan demography attracted or brought there after its establishment as a port city. Penang was a colonial port city of migrants, whose population came from different parts of Asia and Europe. Besides the Europeans, there were also different "Malays" from different parts of the archipelago; Bugis, ethnic Chinese from Southeast China and Southeast Asia, Siamese, Burmese, different groups of Indians such as Chulias and Hindus, Arabs, Armenians, Eurasians and other mixed-raced people. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the demography of Penang had already been so diverse that even the colonial administrator believed that there was probably no other place with the diversity of peoples and languages as Penang (Nordin 2007, 2008; Tan, L.E. 2009; Lewis 2009). As Tan Liok Ee (2009) suggests, Penang has been a site of confluences and contestations, where different people and cultures encountered, interacted, struggled, contested, conflicted and hybridized with one another. Cultural hybridization in Penang is very noticeable amongst Penang's diverse Peranakan people: their languages, arts and food. The vernacular modernity of Penang was shaped by its cosmopolitan demographics, their local dynamics and interactions. As in other places where vernacular modernities emerge, the local experience and understanding of "the modern" is not based on a single culture, although English was a *lingua franca* among different ethnic groups (Lewis 2009).

As in Singapore and Hong Kong, the histories of Penang as a port city have been embedded in its urban landscape. George Town, the capital and the earliest urban settlement of Penang, was the place where different migrants and cultures met and interacted. Unlike Raffles, who had a very clear vision of how the land in Singapore should be designated to different ethnic groups, Light had no such clear vision of the spatial pattern by which Penang should be designed. In fact, Light only laid out several streets in the north-east corner of the newly-established settlement, and assigned some streets to some of the earlier groups of European and Asian settlers. There was little formal racial segregation in the colonial planning (Home 2013; Khoo 2007). Rather than top-down designation, the spatial pattern of Penang was thereafter shaped by the various migrants. It was not uncommon for the colonizers to later formalize the existent living patterns by naming the streets or settlements according to the ethnic groups living there, yet as in Singapore, there were often changes and overlaps to different ethnic

groups' living patterns, and colloquial names changed accordingly. Armenian Street, for instance, named after the Armenian settlement, was known as "Malay Lane" due to the existence of a Malay Settlement there in the early 1800s (Khoo 2007). In general, the spatial pattern was not clear cut; interactions between different ethnic groups have been common. The widespread dispersal of different clan associations and the religious buildings of different ethnic groups existing side by side serve as two good examples. Thus, as with the urban landscapes of urban Singapore, Bukit Brown Cemetery and Happy Valley cemetery cluster, to read the urban landscapes of Penang is to read and articulate the port city histories embedded there. How the people living in the colonial port city interacted with their cosmopolitan environment can be seen in their multiple ways of memorizing and naming the streets and urban settlements.

Similar to Singapore, and to a lesser extent Hong Kong, in colonial Penang there were often multiple sets of street names: the official one given by the colonial administration, and the colloquial names bestowed by the people living there, based on their living experiences. Although the two sets co-existed, they did not often correspond with each other (Yeoh 1992; Tan and Azizah Sidek 2011; Toh 2009). In Penang, the official set of street names in English given by the colonial government tends to have several major themes, such as naming after different ethnic enclaves (e.g. "Acheen Street"), celebrating the glory of British Empire (e.g. "Victoria Street") and remembering the elites (e.g. "Light Street"). Such naming represents the colonial understanding and vision of the city (Khoo 2007). On one hand, it expressed the desires of the colonial empire by imposing street names frequently used in Britain, naming streets for other British colonies and for the British and colonial elites that marked Penang as a part of the Empire. On the other hand, the streets named after different "ethnic enclaves", quite often side by side with each other, also indicated how Penang grew into a cosmopolitan port city that attracted different peoples from the region.

Meanwhile, both before and after the colonial government's gazette of official street names, the different ethnic groups in Penang also had their own sets of streets names, based on lived experience; naming streets after landmarks, economic activities and other characteristics of the places concerned. As they were named according to different logics, one street, according to the official name-set, could be divided into several in the colloquial. Different ethnic groups might also name the same street, or

same section of the street, differently according to their own understanding. For instance, what the colonial government named as “Beach Street”, after its coastal location, was not recognized as “one” street by the Malay and Chinese populations. Rather, the part between Light Street and China Street where many European trading stores were located was called “Street of Godowns” in their respective languages: by the Malay (*Jalan Gedung*), by the Hokkien (*[Ang Mo] Thó-khò Ke* [紅毛]土庫街), and by the Cantonese (*Tho-fu Kai*土庫街), while the Southern sections, named by the Hokkien according to their landlord (*Toan Lo-sin [Ke]* 緞羅申[街], Tuan Hussen[’s Street]), their economic activities (*Phah Thih Ke*打鐵街, Ironsmiths’ Street), and their location (*Sia Boey*社尾, End of Town<sup>125</sup>), were collectively known as *Fuk Kin Kai*福建街 (Hokkien Street) by the Cantonese, because they recognized that most of the shopkeepers there were Hokkien (Lo 1900; Khoo 2007; Toh 2009). Similarly, many Acehnese and Arabs, who referred to themselves as “Malay”, did not use the official street names, but referred to the urban landscape as divided into different *kampongs*. Many residents nowadays still address the urban landscapes like this rather than using the official street names. For instance, the area around Acheen Street Mosque is known by its residents as *Kampong Masjid Melayu* (Malay Mosque Quarter) (Lubis 2009).

The existence of multiple and even contradictory sets of street-naming systems strongly represents the cosmopolitan, multiethnic environment that shaped the vernacular modernity of Penang, and how the people living there interacted with their environment. As the names were given according to their lived experiences, when there were multiple ethnic groups living in the same city, it was understandable that they should have some “overlapping” and “common” experiences, such as seeing that a street was full of European trading shops and godowns, as well as very different ones, such as the Cantonese view of a street full of Hokkien shopkeepers which the Hokkien shopkeepers “saw” in more detail, naming the different “sections” according to *their* experience. The co-existence of these different ways of understanding the urban landscape represents both the diversity of the cosmopolitan port city, and how this diverse population understood and constructed the cosmopolitanism that shaped its vernacular modernity. Even after Penang’s independence from Britain, after Penang

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<sup>125</sup> The Malay population called the section known as *Sia Boey* by the Hokkien as *Hujung Pasir* (End of Sand) (Khoo 2007).

became a state of Malaysia and the Malaysian government passed the National Language Act which changed the official street names into the national Malay language (*Bahasa Melayu*),<sup>126</sup> the original, official English and colloquial names are still widely used, both by the locals and in tourist guides (Toh 2009). In short, the street names, representing both the way that the colonizer designated the urban landscapes, and the ways the different colonized peoples memorized and interacted with the urban landscapes, are imbued with the histories and cosmopolitan nature of colonial port cities, and of Penang in particular. Without its cosmopolitan population and their interactions, the vernacular modernity of Penang would be very different.

However, according to the nation-state's ideology, the cosmopolitan history of Penang, albeit of both local and regional importance and highly treasured by many Penangites, still sat uneasily with the its nation-building project, as may be seen in the nation-state's long hesitation in proposing George Town as a WHS, as I will discuss in later paragraphs. Similar to Singapore, Malaysia also follows the racial categories of "Malay", "Chinese", "Indians" and "Others", inherited from the colonial census categories and colonial racialized imagination. Along the road to the creation of the Federation of Malaya, this categorical understanding of race was much more obvious. After World War II, there was an increasing tendency for people in British Malaya to be identified or perceived in categorical racial terms, which led to the alienation of many Eurasians, Perankans and mixed race groups. Many were forced to assimilate into one of the major races (Tan, L.E. 2009; Goh, B. 2002). This became much more problematic when the road towards *merdeka* (independence) and the electoral practice of late colonial Malaya became dominated by racial-based parties and representations. The Alliance Party (*Parti Perikatan*) was formed by three race-based parties: the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malay(si)an Chinese Association (MCA), and the Malay(si)an Indian Congress (MIC). The Alliance was the precedent of the current ruling coalition *Barisan Nasional* (BN), whose majority member parties are race- or communal-based. The Alliance and BN have been the federal ruling coalition of Malay(si)a since the first federal election in 1955 (Jenkins 2008). Although the Alliance and the BN are party coalitions, they have been dominated by UMNO, which

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<sup>126</sup> In George Town, the capital of Penang, while many of these changes merely translated the original English official names into Malay, such as "Acheen Street" to "Lebuh Acheh", "Market Street" to "Lebuh Pasar", some were renamed completely, such as "Northam Road" which became "Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah".

has long been advocating Malay nationalism, and had a rigid rather than fluid understanding of “Malay” (Kahn 2006; Jenkins 2008). Since the founding of Malaysia, UMNO-dominated governments have pushed forward policies that have defined the nation based heavily on a particular understanding of “Malay”, prioritizing “Malay” interests over those other ethnic groups. In 1971, the federal government held a “National Cultural Congress” which concluded that the “national culture” of Malaysia was to be based on Malay culture, while elements of other cultures, where suitable, could be “incorporated” into the Malay-based “national culture”. It also concluded that Islam was and should be an important part of the “national” culture. The nation-state also launched the “New Economic Policy” (NEP) in 1971, which favoured the interests of *bumiputera* (“son of soil”), i.e. the Malays and other indigenous people, over other races and ethnic groups. According to the state’s ideology, its official symbols are Malayness, Islam and Malay-centered Malaysian nationhood. The consequence is the alienation of the non-Malay cultures, and an increasing sense that the identity and dignity of non-Malay groups is under threat (Jenkins 2008; Tan, S. B. 1988; Worden 2003).

In the process of nation-building dominated by a Malayness, Islam and Malay-centered Malaysian nationhood, the nation-state has selectively manipulated particular histories and heritage. The most typical example is the nation-state’s reinterpretation of Malacca (Melaka), the centre of the pre-colonial Malaccan Sultanate, as “where it all began”, site of “the birth of nation” (Worden 2001: 200, 2003: 31). In order to fulfil the nation-state’s ideology, the pre-colonial Sultanate is described as a purely Islamic kingdom, despite the region having been a Hindu-Buddhist one, its Islamization having been a later, gradual process. Knowledge of the Sumatran root of the Sultanate, and of the existence of diverse ethnicities since the establishment of the pre-colonial Sultanate, has thus been undermined by the nation-state. Even when Malaysia first tried to propose Malacca as a WHS, they emphasized the “Malay” heritage, despite Malacca is a town full of heritage of different ethnic groups and has a cosmopolitan heritage (Worden 2001, 2003; Nordin 2008). When the nation-state defined the “nation” in Malay-centred terms, Penang, as a state in which non-Malays long outnumbered Malays, a place long associated with cosmopolitanism, did not really fit into the nation-state’s narrative. Yet the history of Penang as a colonial port city, which has long been multiethnic and cosmopolitan, provides good resources for both the civil society and for oppositional

parties to resist the nation-state's ethnocentric nationalism. Cosmopolitanism, rather than simply upholding particular ethnic identities, provides a space of resistance to the nation-state's Malay-centred ideology, without resorting to another, reductive form of categorical racial politics. By addressing and engaging with cosmopolitan histories, it is possible to avoid falling back on the binary oppositions which may result in the operation of *ressentiment* politics. Moreover, addressing cosmopolitanism can allow for reflection upon the reductive, categorical understanding of race and avoid racialization.

Besides offering a chance for critical reflection upon the histories, identities and racial relationships in Penang, the preservation and critical engagement with the heritage of the port city also provides a chance to counter a developmentalist understanding of the future and development of Penang. The potential of the cosmopolitan heritage of Penang to yield valuable "tourist assets" provides a space for civil society groups and the state to collaborate and respond more positively to heritage preservation. In 1991, the federal government of Malaysia launched the ambitious *Vision 2020*, which anticipated that Malaysia would be "industrialized" and "fully developed" "economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally" by 2020 (Goh, B. 2002: 51). Meanwhile, Penang, still in the hands of BN, but under the new *Gerakan*<sup>127</sup> leadership of Koh Tsu Koon 許子根<sup>128</sup>, launched its own strategic development plan. In line with *Vision 2020*, "Penang into the 21<sup>st</sup> century" aimed at creating a "fully industrialized and culturalized" Penang, "to establish Penang as a centre for manufacturing, tourism, business, education, professional services, transportation and technology, as well as a centre for culture and the arts" (Goh, B. 2001: 167). Like *Vision 2020*, "Penang into the 21<sup>st</sup> century" is, to a large extent, a developmentalist agenda. This led to the construction of new infrastructure, and high-rise buildings which may threaten the urban landscape and skyline of George Town, the

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<sup>127</sup> The Malaysian People's Movement Party (*Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia, Gerakan*) is a party affiliated to BN. When *Gerakan* was founded and won the seat in Penang, it was an oppositional party, yet it joined BN in 1973. When BN was the ruling coalition of Penang, before defeated by *Pakatan Rakyat* formed of the People's Justice Party (*Parti Keadilan Rakyat, PKR*), Democratic Action Party (*Parti Tindakan Demokratik, DAP*), Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (*Parti Islam Se Malaysia, PAS*) in 2008, the *Gerakan* politicians Lim Chong Eu and Koh Tsu Koon held the position of Chief Minister of Penang, which also means that the state of Penang has had an ethnic Chinese Chief Minister since Malaysia was founded.

<sup>128</sup> The previous *Gerakan* Chief Minister Lim Chong Eu was defeated by the oppositional Democratic Action Party (DAP) leader Lim Kit Siang in the election in 1990, yet BN still held the ruling position in Penang. After the negotiation among parties in BN, Koh of *Gerakan* took the position of Chief Minister (Cheah eds. 2012: 196 – 197).

historical inner city of Penang, even though the Rent Control Act had not yet been repealed (Goh, B. 2001; Nagata 2001).

On the other hand, the state's vision of establishing Penang as a tourist centre provided grounds for civil society groups to lobby and incorporated heritage preservation into the state's agenda; at least in terms of tourism products. In the 1990s, Penang faced a decline in beach tourism, its original tourist product (Khoo 2008). The state thus needed to diversify its attractions. In this situation, the state began to recognize heritage as an important tourist asset, and heritage preservation as a tourism strategy (Koh *et al.* 1992; Jenkins 2008). Thus, from the state's perspective, the cosmopolitan urban landscape and the vibrant and living multicultural heritage of the historical George Town, incidentally protected by the Control of Rent Ordinance, became an asset for heritage tourism. In 1998, the state was finally persuaded by local NGOs such as the Penang Heritage Trust (PHT) to propose the nomination of the "Historical Island Port Settlement of George Town" as a UNESCO WHS. The plan consisted of a large area of inner-city George Town, including the colonial quarter, the historical vernacular port settlements and the "Millionaires Row" where the tycoons resided. The actual nomination of George Town as a WHS needed to be carried out by the federal government instead of the state government. From the federal government's perspective, WHS sites in Malaysia would help them to fulfil *Vision 2020*. However, as argued earlier, the nation-state was dominated by a Malay-centered ideology. Thus, the nation-state preferred to nominate Malacca, interpreted as the "starting point" of the nation, rather than Penang, as the first WHS. This application was rejected by ICOMOS, UNESCO's advisor, because Malacca had previously destroyed too much of the waterfront and failed to recognize the multiethnic and multicultural contributions to the development of the city. In return, the UNESCO regional advisor openly endorsed George Town as good example of heritage preservation. In this context, although there were tensions between Penang and Malacca, the federal government entered a joint nomination of Penang and Malacca to be WHS (Worden 2001, 2003; Jenkins 2008).

Here, one can see the contradictory perspectives on the value of the port cities of Penang and Malacca held by the nation-state, ICOMOS and UNESCO. From the nation-state's perspective, informed by its Malay-centered ideology, a selective version of "Malay heritage" is preferred over other heritage. Thus, even in a port city that has

experienced multiple layers of migration and colonialism, the diversity of ethnic groups is not recognised. Yet for ICOMOS and UNESCO, the vibrancy of a cosmopolitan and multicultural environment and the diversity of architecture was precisely what they regarded as most valuable. Indeed, in the later Advisory Body evaluation that recommends giving “Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca: Melaka and George Town” WHS status, ICOMOS highlights its “specific multicultural identity, manifested in both tangible and intangible heritage” (2008: 73) and recognizes it as “interesting testimony to the living cultural tradition of multi-culturalism of Asia, and a co-existence of many religions and ethnic groups with their individual cultures and customs” (ibid. 77). Although what the ICOMOS and UNESCO recognized as the value of the cultural heritage of Penang and Malacca contradicts with the nation-state’s original vision, the nation-state’s desire to be listed as a WHS made those involved submit to the logic of appreciating the diversity and multiculturalism of port cities of long history, at least in the nomination file to UNESCO.

On the Penang level, the cosmopolitan environment, multiculturalism and cultural hybridization resulting from Penang’s history as a colonial port city have multiple meanings. First, they combine to create the local characteristics, which background the vibrancy of the city and city life. This can also be capitalized as a “uniqueness” marketable to tourists. Recalling that the nation-state’s Malay-centered ideology often mistakes “Malay” as a unified group, and that non-*bumiputera* cultures have often been regarded as less important, it is to be hoped that the recognition of the cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism of Penang would go some way to rectifying such problems. The city’s appeal for tourism, and the grounds for its being listed as a UNESCO WHS are not derived from individual buildings, but the whole urban landscape and the cosmopolitan environments that have emerged since Penang became a colonial port city. The incentive thus arose for the state to recognize and engage with Penang’s port city heritage, and the cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism embedded in it.

As argued earlier, the urban landscape as a whole, including how different ethnic groups interact with and name it, is embedded with the histories of the port city. Even the official street names that have been changed into Malay, along with the original, official English street names and the colloquial street names in different languages are

not only “histories” but also an important part of the city’s multicultural and cosmopolitan heritage. Although the original English and colloquial names were and are still widely used by locals and in tourist guides, for a time, the street signs were only in Malay. It was decided that this mismatch and confusion for those who did not understand Malay would be “tourist-unfriendly”. Since 2005, the PHT had been suggesting that the government erect plaques to illustrate the historical names of the streets and install bilingual Malay-English street signs in important streets in George Town so that the tourists could follow them. This proposal was generally ignored by the government until 2007, when the state needed to prepare for ICOMOS and UNESCO evaluation of their WHS application. Both in preparation for this evaluation, and in response to the installation, by oppositional DAP members, of “illegal” Chinese street signs under the official Malay ones, in 2007 the BN state government finally began to install bilingual Malay-English street signs and set up a working group to prepare plaques featuring the historical names and backgrounds of the streets (*Sin Chew Daily* 2007). In short, the desire of the state to instrumentalize the city’s cosmopolitan nature to promote tourism and brand the city caused them to begin a more active and positive engagement with the city’s histories as a port city.

Besides tourist assets, the cosmopolitanism dating back to when Penang became a colonial port city also provided resources with which to challenge the nation-state’s racial ideology. As argued earlier, although the unbroken federal ruling coalition, BN, is formed by different parties, including non-Malay parties, UMNO still dominates the BN coalition. Politics and elections in Malaysia have been criticized for “playing the race card” frequently. For instance, many UMNO politicians have been criticized for their speeches against non-Malay citizens, and MCA politicians have been criticized of mobilizing ethnic Chinese voter’s fear of Islamic *hudud* law (Singapore Institute of International Affairs 2006; Alford 2013; Tay 2012). As the major parties in the BN coalition have been ethnic-based, mobilization through racial language and the understanding of racial relationships in categorical terms has become common. In contrast to the major, ethnic-based ruling parties, most oppositional parties, past and present, have been non-communal and multi-ethnic parties<sup>129</sup> (Tan, L.E. 2009; Wu 2014). In order to promote an image different from that of the BN coalition, oppositional

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<sup>129</sup> The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), a religious-based party, which is now a member of the oppositional coalition *Pakatan Rakyat* can be seen as an exception.

parties tend to present an image of their respect for different cultures and ethnic groups. In Penang, the urban landscapes and the street signs became a site for the oppositional parties to present their difference from the ruling coalition, in terms of their treatment of different ethnic groups and cultures. In 2007, the opposition party DAP went to install street signs in Chinese under the official street signs in Malay. During the election period of 2008, DAP further promised to install multilingual street signs if they were elected. When George Town was listed as a WHS in 2008, this was also, coincidentally, a year of governmental change in Penang and several other states in Malaysia. The opposition coalition *Pakatan Rakyat* defeated the ruling BN coalition in the state election of Penang, and although BN was still secure in its unbroken control at the federal level, the DAP politician Lim Guan Eng 林冠英 replaced Koh to become the Chief Minister. In November 2008, the *Pakatan Rakyat* government began to change the original street signs in George Town into multilingual ones. The second languages on each of these signs include English, Chinese, Tamil, etc. (*Kwong Wah Yit Poh* 2008; *Malaysia Today* 2008; *Malaysiakini* 2008). Through this action, the opposition coalition, now the ruling coalition of Penang, could present an alternative image from that of the ruling coalition. In practical terms, it was also much more convenient for tourists.



Photo 3-R: Green multilingual street signs in Penang (Malay and Chinese), with the blue plaque of the historical names and background at the back. There have been two sets of names: the official Malay name “Lorong Argus” is from the former official English name “Argus Lane”, after the name of a newspaper once published there. The Chinese name is based on the Hokkien name *Sek-lan-ni Hang*, which means Serani (Eurasian) Lane.



Photo 3-S and Photo 3-T: Multilingual plaques showing what the streets in George Town have been called by different ethnic groups. Visitors can see how the same street can be addressed differently because the different ethnic groups “read” the streets in different ways.

In 2009, blue plaques documenting the different historical names of streets in the George Town WHS, giving background and explanations, initiated by the PHT and funded by both federal and state governments, were finally installed (Tan, A. 2009). The multilingual street signs and plaques, although to a certain extent initiated to attract international tourists, was a first step in the state’s more positively and actively engaging with the cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism resulting from Penang’s history as a port city. The UNESCO WHS, which values the cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism and cultural hybridity nurtured locally, as a result of the maritime trade networks and multiple flows of migration to the port cities, thus offers an opportunity for opening up the re-discovery process. The research into how the streets have been named and experienced by different ethnic groups, and the public representation of this in the urban landscape is, I would argue, an important step toward further engagement with the cosmopolitan histories embedded in the urban landscape. From the reaction of the UMNO politicians and suspected satellite organizations that challenged the multilingual street signs as, they said, violating the Constitution and disrespecting the status of Malay as the official national language, one can see how the act of installing multilingual street signs challenges UMNO’s Malay-centered nation-building ideology

(*Kwong Wah Yit Poh* 2008; *Leerang Bato* 2008). The multilingual street signs and plaques in Penang can usefully be compared with the bilingual street signs in the ethnic-themed and racialized “historic districts” in Singapore. Both sets are intended for the enhancement of the “multicultural heritage” in historical parts in the city; yet these two places deal with the issues of languages differently. In Singapore, as a consequence of the racialized representation imposed there, only the correspondent language of each supposed “ethnic enclave” is given, regardless of how the streets were named by other ethnic groups. In Penang, in contrast, especially on the blue plaques, multiple names in different languages are listed. If the Singaporean signage thus reveals a model of “multiculturalism” emphasizing racial differences, the Penang signage shows how different ethnic groups sharing the same space can have both common and different understandings of a place’s meaning. The latter is thus a closer representation of how a multiethnic landscape has been constituted and lived. If the state’s more positive and active engagement could provide spaces for further studies of cosmopolitan heritage and the formation and evolution of vernacular modernities, it would offer far more possibilities for projects of heritage preservation to become decolonization projects.

### **3.6 Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how multiculturalism, the processes of cultural hybridization and the vernacular modernities created locally by the different ethnic groups in port cities are and have been embedded in their urban landscapes and built heritage. Following the critique of anti-colonial nationalism as *ressentiment* politics, this chapter discussed ways to engage with a particular form of urban landscape: that of colonial port cities, of which colonialism took part in the formation. The chapter has discussed, also, the fact that the actual, existing cosmopolitanisms and multiculturalisms of these colonial port cities quite often are, and have been more complex and complicated than the official versions offered by the postcolonial states. The vernacular modernities formed and evolved in colonial port cities challenge the occidentalist understanding of modernity, yet in the process of postcolonial nation-building, the diversity of ethnic groups, complexities of the processes of cultural hybridization, and the roles of collaborative colonialism have often been undermined in order to suit into the state’s own narrative. This chapter has taken Singapore and Hong Kong as examples to illustrate how various different ways of dealing with the

urban landscapes and built heritage in which the complex histories of port cities are embedded have nonetheless resulted in the same escapist denial of such complexities. In the name of survival and development, the Singaporean government is demolishing Bukit Brown Cemetery, which I argue is a case of an occidentalist developmentalism-as-modernity threatening the existence of a vernacular modernity. The government is using the seemingly depoliticized discourse of development to justify and carry out this destruction, as a way to deny the validity of any form of historiography other than the state's version. The postcolonial state's desire to "catch up", thus reproducing the occidentalist developmentalist-as-modernity understanding of "the modern", both leads and equates to their not regarding the existing vernacular modernity *as* a form of modernity. Their conservation of several historic districts did not really involve the engagement with the histories embedded in these urban landscapes. It was rather undertaken in the service of a system of racialized representation that essentializes ethnic differences than dialoguing with the existing multiethnic landscapes, according to the state's dominant ideology and its version of a multiethnic policy. Similarly, Hong Kong's treatment of its non-European, non-Chinese heritage is also undertaken according to the state's re-Sinicization policy. In order to avoid these "Pandora's Boxes", the state takes an attitude of "not seeing" this built heritage, except for those buildings that are graded as historical; with which they actively engage. Neither attitude is useful for a critical decolonization project. Indeed, there is much "uneasiness" embedded in the "heritage of port cities". Vernacular modernities exist in multiple spaces, which are *not* different temporal points in the historical queue toward a singular, linear, Western modernity. Without recognizing the existence of multiple vernacular modernities, decolonization is impossible. To preserve the heritage of a port city is not in itself a denial of modernity; but such preservation should engage the city's vernacular modernity, and the conditions of how it was shaped, including by conflicts, contradictions and negotiations. In order to be a critical subject, one needs to face and reflect upon all of these. In other words, one needs to critically engage and dialogue with the heritage of port cities. Penang's multilingual street signs and plaques, regardless of how "superficial" one may find them, might be seen as a possible starting point; but by no means an ending.

As demonstrated in this chapter, the racialization of "historic districts" in Singapore has been carried out not only by the state but also the private sectors. In short,

following the argument of the previous chapter, both the nation-building agenda and global capital have shaped the policies and practices of heritage preservation. The phasing out of rent control evicted many talented individuals, who were of significance to their multiethnic landscapes. The situation in Penang was similar; rent control was phased out, leading to serious evictions in George Town in the 2000s, which likewise harmed the multiethnic landscapes and multicultural living heritage of George Town. Both in the process of fighting for George Town to be listed as a WHS, and after it was listed as a WHS, the NGOs in Penang carried out many research projects and held forums related to the cosmopolitan histories of Penang. Even though the PHT emphasized the importance of *waqf* in Penang, which are dedicated to Islam and, indeed, express something of the diversity of Penang's Malay and Muslim population, the phasing out of rent control also put these *waqf* under threat. The PHT has also often argued for the importance of the "vibrant multicultural living heritage", which relies heavily on precisely those residents and economic activities threatened by gentrification and eviction (Jenkins 2008). Here, the question thus arises of whether and how cultural heritage can be mobilized to resist evictions resulting from the neoliberalization of urban politics. This goes back to the question of "right to the city", which I am going to discuss in Chapter 4.

Another private sector force that influences the state's attitude towards the multiethnic and multicultural landscape is tourism. As the case of Penang shows, without the incentive of tourism, many of the discursive engagements with the city's cosmopolitan heritage would not have taken place. Even the multilingual street signs and plaques were, to a large extent, conceived of and realized for the convenience of tourists. Yet as Richard Engelhardt, in his public lecture "Can Penang Become a Heritage Site" puts it: "Can we put a price tag on heritage?" (quoted in Jenkins 2008: 141) On the relationship between heritage and tourism, the ICOMOS evaluation of George Town and Malacca notably warns that "the increase in visitors [...] could potentially jeopardise their values, integrity and authenticity" (2008: 78) and demands the state must have a management plan to "control [...] tourism pressure" (ibid. 83). Without rent control, the rents in George Town keep on going up; this, combined with the ever increasing tourist-oriented businesses are likely to keep driving out the "vibrant living heritage" so essential for the cosmopolitanism of the city, the reason why George Town was declared a WHS in the first place. Here, the question of how to let tourism

be an add-on, rather than harming the cosmopolitan vibrancy, while still allowing for the locals to reflect upon their port city heritage thus remains a concern. As to what forms of “tourism” are sustainable and can offer useful resources for local communities, I will discuss this in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4

### Radicalism through the “De-politicized”: Cultural Heritage as / and Social Movements

*We can ‘resist violence’ but can’t ‘resist aesthetics’?*

---- Yang Ya-ling (2011)

*If this city is really worth to hope, we need some battles for desires, the desire of escaping from a hell to a better hell, the desire of escaping from the city of mice to the city of swallows. The latter ones are the cities liberated from the former ones.*

---- Huang Sun Quan (2012: 175)

*In the face of this pseudo-right, the right to city is like a cry and a demand. This right slowly meanders through the surprising detours of nostalgia and tourism, the return to the heart of the traditional city, and to call of existent or recently developed centralities. [...] The right to the city cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life [...] as long as the ‘urban’, place of encounter, priority of use value, inscription in space of a time promoted to the rank of supreme resource among all resources, find its morphological base and its pratico-material realization.*

---- Henri Lefebvre (1996: 158)

Sau Ping was a longtime resident of Wan Chai, an “old district” of Hong Kong threatened by many urban renewal projects initiated by both the state and private sectors. She is still an active member of the community and also a popular guide of cultural tours organized by a local non-government organization (NGO). The NGO offers a variety of cultural tours, each covering different yet overlapped routes and engaging

issues of the livelihood of ordinary people, ghost stories, urban renewal and heritage preservation in Wan Chai. People join these tours through the NGO, and schools and university classes can also request to join in the tours. One day, Sau Ping was guiding a tour as usual and planned to take her group up to the rooftop of a conserved *Tong Lau*, the Hong Kong counterpart of shophouse, at 60 – 66 Johnston Road. The *Tong Lau* was generally known as “Woo Cheong”, after the name of the pawnshop that once occupied the site, however, it had now been preserved and converted into high-end restaurants. Indeed, such conservation are regarded as “good practice” by the government and the statutory body Urban Renewal Authority (URA), despite the fact that the URA had previously had no plans to preserve this historic *Tong Lau*. When Sau Ping tried to lead her group up to the rooftop of “Woo Cheong” to discuss her opinion of the heritage preservation project, the management of the restaurant that occupies the building locked the lift, thus denying them access to the rooftop. In this way, the rooftop of the “Woo Cheong” conservation has been one of the central issues in discussions of top-down and profit-driven heritage preservation. The conserved “Woo Cheong” is located in the URA’s H16 urban renewal project, and this project involved the use of state power as a result of to URA’s privileges to urge the government to resume the land through the *Lands Resumption Ordinance* (Huang, L. 2002; Sun 2003). In 2009, there was a newspaper report in a local English-language newspaper that exposed that fact that “under the consensus between the government and the URA”, the rooftop of the conserved “Woo Cheong” was in fact a “public open space”, even though this status was not stated clearly in the lease or the master layout plan (Yau and Li 2009). In other words, the high-end restaurant’s occupation and renting out of the “Woo Cheong” rooftop is another example of the privatization of public space, which has been an ongoing controversy in Hong Kong and many other cities.

As argued in Chapter 1, the conversion of a pawnshop into a high-end restaurant is a re-colonization of urban space by capital. The privatization of a supposedly-public space and the invention of “privately-owned public open space”<sup>130</sup> and “private open

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<sup>130</sup> “Privately owned public space” refers to any “public space” or publicly accessible spaces, such as streets, small gardens and open squares, under private ownership and management. They are privately-owned land dedicated for public use. However, the public’s right to use and access these privately-owned public spaces is subjected to the legal permission granted by the owners. In practice, many of these spaces were once in public ownership before urban redevelopment projects. In the process of urban redevelopment these publicly owned spaces were transferred to private ownership. This is a process of the privatization of public space (Kayden 2000; Vasagar 2012a; Lam and Tavecchia 2014).

space”<sup>131</sup> are further examples of urban re-colonization. In the “Woo Cheong” example this was carried out through heritage preservation. However, this is not the only case. Over the last few years in Hong Kong, there have been many other cases in which heritage preservation was used to turn some buildings into exclusive and luxury places, and in which the managements of such places have become powerful to the extent of being able to arbitrarily reserve powers to forbid people from doing ordinary things such as having snacks<sup>132</sup> or taking photos<sup>133</sup> even in supposedly “welcoming” settings. Similarly, in the previous chapters, I also used the example of racialized and themed “historic districts” in Singapore to illustrate how heritage preservation has become a way to displace communities, to accumulate capital and to escape from the “embarrassment” of history.

So, what cultural tours, such as the ones on which Sau Ping volunteers as guide, are about—especially if there are so many negative stories about heritage preservation in Hong Kong? Actually, these tours are not against heritage preservation *per se*. Rather, the guides talk about the landmarks and the livelihood of Wan Chai that they feel are

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Quite often, the private owners (usually corporations) dedicated part of their land to public use in order to bring them profits, such as permission to increase the floor plot ratio (Cheung 2011; Németh 2009). However, although these spaces are publicly accessible, in practice, there are designs and measures forestalling or alienating the public from using these spaces. For those presented to welcome public access, private owners can easily refuse the public’s right to entry. There is also the problem of limited political and social functions. For instance, protests and forming picket lines are not allowed in many of these “privately owned public space” (Cheung 2011; Németh 2009; Minton 2012; Vasagar 2012a, 2012b; Too 2007). Thus, the public’s right to use these privately owned public spaces is not guaranteed and is subjected to the rules of private ownership.

<sup>131</sup> “Private open space” refers to any open space such as park, garden, leisure space, under private ownership and management. “Private open space” can be regarded as an interchangeable terms of “privately owned public space”.

<sup>132</sup> The above-mentioned *Tong Lau* at 60 – 66 Johnston Road is a Grade II Historic Building. After conversion into high-end restaurants, the management forbade visitors from having food or drink, except water, on the rooftop (Wong, A. 2009b; *Apple Daily* 2012).

<sup>133</sup> The former Marine Police Headquarters in Tsim Sha Tsui was constructed in 1884 and has been declared a monument in Hong Kong. In 2004, the government granted a subsidiary of Cheung Kong Holdings, the real-estate company owned by tycoon Li Ka-shing, the rights to preserve and redevelop the former Marine Police Headquarters compound as a tourist attraction (Yeh 2012). The real-estate company re-opened the site as “1881 Heritage”, which includes a “heritage hotel”, luxury restaurants and a shopping mall. The name “1881 Heritage” is an irrelevant naming and the project has been criticized for destroying the landscape of the compound, including the important Tsim Sha Tsui Hill, which was the main focus of the heritage preservation campaign two decades ago (Wong, R.T.C. 2012; Wong, A. 2009a). When the “preservation project” was finished in 2009, the former public building was turned into another exclusive site. The newspaper reports that one of the AAB board members was stopped from taking photos when she was visiting the conserved building. According to the report, the security guard even said, “Cheung Kong has bought this place! You are not allowed to take photos!” Again, similar to the “Woo Cheong” case, in the lease between Lands Department and Cheung Kong Holdings, there is no clear statement about heritage preservation and operation requirements (*Apple Daily* 2009).

worthy of preservation. This, then, is a bottom-up, community-participation form of heritage preservation that differs considerably from the approach of the government, the URA or developers to heritage preservation. However, such emphasis on the importance of vernacular heritage and folk cultures has been criticized, and concerns have been raised that the struggle to preserve them will have little effect on the problem of capitalist accumulation. Accordingly, by “spectacularizing” their neighborhoods, communities participating in such struggle could merely encourage gentrification that would ultimately lead to their own displacement (e.g. Kwok 2011; Leung 2007).



Photo 4-A: The *Tong Lau* “Woo Cheong” is conserved and converted into high-end restaurants. At the back of the *Tong Lau* is the new residential building in the same redevelopment project.

These worries and concerns of whether heritage preservation would be beneficial or damaging to affected neighborhoods are not new. Sharon Zukin (1982, 1987, 1995) uses the example of “loft-living” in New York to illustrate the “symbolic economy” of culture and heritage preservation. The de-industrialization of Lower Manhattan left many lofts in the area now known as “SoHo” unoccupied. These spaces were then taken up by various light industries or used as artist studios, with some of these artists even living in their lofts. Before the 1970s, living in loft was not considered desirable because it contradicted the dominant middle-class binary of home and

working place. Artists living in their loft-studios were also threatened with eviction. Developers had once wanted to demolish these “slums” to build luxury residential buildings, but this idea was challenged by the occupiers of the lofts and also by the progressive urban middle-class who appreciated arts and culture, and the aesthetic of the loft buildings. In 1970s, the SoHo area was designated as a “historic district”, which meant that demolition of the lofts would not be allowed. Due to the shift in aesthetic taste since the 1960s lofts came to “present a perfectly setting for gracious late-twentieth-century living” (Zukin 1982: 2), and the artists’ practice of loft-dwelling made lofts and loft-living “artistic”, “desirable” and “chic”. Real-estate agents seized this opportunity to capitalize on the once “undesirable” lofts that had previously hindered their bulldozing urban redevelopment projects, and turned them into something marketable and profitable. In other words, in the long run, the fruits of the bottom-up movement, i.e. the preservation of the loft area as an historic district, originally against the developmentalist logic and the developers’ vision were ironically reaped by the developers. Zukin tends to be skeptical about whether heritage preservation is a good strategy for mobilizing communities and whether it is a good strategy for communities to mobilize against their displacement (1987). She argues that when the “pre-gentrification” residents of old urban areas join with the new middle class residents that had only recently moved into the area, and they use notions of “heritage preservation” or “historic districts” to fight against the “developers” and their “bulldozer-style urban redevelopment” methods of accumulating capital; then they may be contributing to a process which ultimately increases the market value of properties and leads to the total gentrification of the neighborhood and their own displacement. As a result of the different interests and agendas within diversified neighborhoods and the ability of capitalists or real-estate developers to appropriate and mediate the “symbolic economy” of “culture”, success in preserving built heritage does not necessarily equate to success in resisting displacement. The “market” can mediate “heritage” to increase rents so that the existing residents and businesses are priced out of the market and forced to move out (Zukin 1982, 1987, 1995).

When local citizens, especially the new urban educated middle class, expressed discontent with bulldozer-style urban redevelopment and the indifferent urban landscape dominated by high-rise buildings, and voiced their desire for better environments, it became increasingly common for governments and developers to

respond by appropriating the discourses of “aesthetic”, “beauty” or “authenticity” in relation to public gardens, parks, and other cultural heritage, in order to “recycle” urban spaces occupied by the lower-income population. Clearly, gentrification and the concomitant displacement of community is not necessarily carried out through coercive forces or violent demolition, but is achieved through “parks”, “gardens”, “culture” and/or “heritage preservation”. Because this form of displacement is quite often not accompanied by physical demolition and seems to respond to the citizen’s “desires” and “needs”, resistance to it is generally smaller (Zukin 1995; Huang, S.Q. 2012; Yang 2011). As Yang Ya-ling (2011) states in the quote that begins this chapter and that also opens up a question for the public, “We can ‘resist violence’ but can’t ‘resist aesthetics?’” Following Zukin’s arguments about how developers make use of the symbolic economy of “culture”, critics and activists now call this form of “displacement” the “green bulldozer” when it involves the use of “parks” and “green land” (Huang, S.Q. 2012), or the “culture (as) bulldozer” when it involves the name of “culture”, as in the heritage, cultural and creative industries (Treasure Hill Commune 2006).

The way in which “heritage preservation” or other “cultural” terms have been appropriated to execute community displacement and to deny the public’s right to the city is generally observable. It is seen, for example, in the preservation of “historic districts” in Singapore discussed in Chapter 3 and in the way the URA in Hong Kong uses preservation projects as façade behind which they carry out bulldozer-style project. However, this does not change the reality of profit-making agenda behind of such projects. There are many cases that illustrate how built heritage has become “good business”, which the primary function of the heritage has become profit-making; for instance, in the commodifications of the past that were discussed in Chapter 1 and require no repetition here.

However, if this is the whole picture, why there are still so many bottom-up urban social movements related to heritage preservation? Here, heritage preservation can be the means or the end, or both the means and the end in some cases. For instance, as mentioned in Chapter 1, community building often involves heritage, which then becomes a method for civic engagement and community empowerment. Thus, it is unfair to criticize the use that community-based urban social movements make of the notion of “culture” and “heritage” for failing to criticize the logic of capitalism. For

instance, in the SoHo case, if the artists had not taken part in the heritage preservation movement, would that have stopped them from being displaced? Given that the developers had already drafted plans to demolish the lofts, the artists would still have been displaced, perhaps even more quickly, had they not used “heritage preservation” as a way to resist displacement.

It is true that some developers adjusted their strategies from “bulldozer” to “adaptive reuse” and the area could ultimately be gentrified. In terms of the result, one may argue that the artists living there would have faced displacement no matter what. Yet without the heritage preservation movement, this displacement could have happened ten years earlier. Is that ten-year difference really not important? Did the heritage preservation movement really create no change? Is it necessary to phrase criticism of “culture”, “heritage” and “political-economy” in terms of binary opposites? Returning to the major concern of this dissertation, how postcolonial heritage preservation can function as a decolonization project, the question becomes, is heritage preservation necessarily an urban (re-)colonization project? Are there any possibilities of using heritage preservation to decolonize the urban spaces and to resist neoliberalization in urban politics? And if so, how would this be done?

In this chapter, I will use the heritage preservation movements in Hong Kong in the 1970s as an example to illustrate how heritage preservation movements have a tendency of “middle-class radicalism” and were not simply initiated by a “fetishism” of old buildings even before the notion of “cultural heritage” was taken up by community-based urban social movements. Following this, I will discuss the community-based urban social movements that mobilized discourses of heritage in Wan Chai to bring back the alternative tradition of heritage preservation as bottom-up process aimed at urban policy reform. I am going to argue that these community movements’ making use of the notions of cultural heritage needs to be contextualized. The seemingly depoliticized discourses of cultural heritage actually provided opportunities for the potentially displaced communities to engage with the state without being distorted as “greedy residents”. The mobilization of heritage should be understood in terms of what I have called “radicalized collective memory” in Chapter 1. I argue for the need to re-negotiate the relationship between the seemingly binary terms of culture” and “political-economy”

analysis and criticism.<sup>134</sup> Through doing this, one can rethink the relationship between the discourses of heritage preservation in community movements and the resistance to neoliberalization, and the re-colonization of the urban. Heritage has associations with the sense of place, and I argue that this place-attachment can disassociate rights from property ownership, and thus usher in the idea of the right to the city and ideas of alternatives beyond the property regime. The third part of the chapter looks at the heritage preservation movements in Singapore to develop this re-negotiation further. I will argue that where civil society is relatively weak and where urban social movements are quite impossible, heritage preservation becomes a *de facto* urban social movement through its seemingly “apolitical” or “depoliticized” nature. It therefore becomes a conduit through which many more radical ideas pointing to the border political-economic and socio-cultural situations can be brought into to debate.

#### **4.1 Heritage Preservation Movements as a Form of Middle-Class Radicalism**

In order to understand how community-based urban social movements make use of the discourses of heritage preservation in defending their rights and to resist displacement, it is necessary to understand the rise of heritage preservation as a movement initiated from the bottom-up that demands social change and goes beyond the discourses of the “aesthetics” of architecture. In other words, there are precedents of bottom-up heritage preservation movements that are useful for articulating the negotiation of relationship between “culture”, “aesthetic” and political-economic criticism. In the Western context, as Raphael Samuel suggests (1994), the rise of “middle-class radicalism” in the 1960s contributed to environmental and heritage preservation campaigns that aimed at social reforms. In his discussion of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the main environmentalist campaign in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s, Frank Parkin (1968) outlines the characteristic of “middle-class radicalism”. He argues that the social movements with a middle-class base quite often offer no direct benefit to the participants and are motivated by non-class-based moral and humanitarian concerns. He also notices that the “middle-class radicals” are “not randomly from all sections of the middle class” (Parkin 1968: 176), but are concentrated in a certain educated sector of the middle-class “whose social position and life chances

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<sup>134</sup> “Political-economy” analysis and criticism refers to analysis and criticism (directly) based on the language and understanding of the political-economy, such as capital, class, etc.

rest primarily upon its intellectual attainments and professional qualifications, and not upon the ownership of property or inherited wealth” (ibid. 179). Parkin’s articulation of “middle-class radicalism” is supported by Stephen Cotgrove and Andrew Duff (1980), who also use the case of environmentalist movements to further elaborate “middle-class radicalism”. Similar to Parkin, they argue that the middle-class radicals, “a group within industrial societies which reject the dominant social paradigm”, are “a specific fraction of the middle class whose interests and values diverge markedly from other groups in industrial societies” that is mainly drawn from the “non-productive service sector” (Cotgrove and Duff 1980: 340). They further argue that the “new middle-class”, from which middle-class radicals are usually drawn, should not be seen as essentially serving the ruling elites and the dominant social order. Middle-class radicalism, they argue, is motivated by the belief in an alternative world view and in values different from the dominant social paradigm. Besides their interest in the major issue of any movement, their participation, for instance, in the environmentalist movement, is also a “protest against alienation from the processes of decision making” (ibid. 341). In short, these “middle-class radicals” are usually the educated, professional middle-class, who often achieved their class status beyond property ownership. Their involvement in social movements is aimed at changing social values and the decision-making process rather than at immediately “materialistic” benefits. Their approach to the world is not based on developmentalism.

Parkin and Cotgrove and Duff focused on the environmentalist movements in the West in 1950s – 1970s. However, following Samuel’s articulation of post-war heritage preservation in Britain, I want to argue that the concept of “middle-class radicalism” is also useful for understanding the heritage preservation movements in Hong Kong during the 1970s and 1980s. In other words, the heritage preservation movements in Hong Kong at that time did not simply aim at preserving buildings; they also proposed an alternative paradigm and argued for reform in the decision-making process.

In Hong Kong, heritage preservation has seldom been initiated by the government. The colonial government was too afraid that legislating a heritage preservation act would anger the PRC government, and therefore was very hesitant to introduce such a bill. The colonial government only began to draft the Antiquities and

Monuments Ordinance bill after consent was received from the PRC government in the 1960s (Public Records Office 1957 – 1971). Within the colonial government, it was those middle-to-upper-level officials with professional or scholar backgrounds and interests in archaeology or anthropology that advocated for heritage preservation legislation, rather than those at the highest level of (political) decision-making.<sup>135</sup> In other words, a split in the elites in the colonial government made the legislation possible. Since the birth of heritage preservation policy in Hong Kong, the government has not been devoted to heritage preservation; instead they prioritized the developmentalist mode of “development” over heritage preservation. They regarded land mainly in terms of exchange value and as a resource for capital accumulation. Some scholars, such as Ip Lam-chong, took a more pessimistic view on the formation of heritage preservation policies and its consequence. Ip argues,

[...] the heritage preservation system in Hong Kong has been limited since its birth. The system could be formed only because of the interests of a few Westerners, who were at the same time scholars and government officials.

(Ip 2010: 56, my translation)

However, I read the situation in another way. The colonial government did not wholeheartedly support heritage preservation. Their disinclination towards a more ambitious and progressive approach to heritage preservation is no different to that of the “dominant social paradigm”, i.e. developmentalism and the prioritizing of exchange value, which is similar to the paradigm faced by middle-class radicals involved in the environmentalist movements discussed above. If the formation of the heritage preservation policy was the result of a split in elite, this has two consequences; on one hand it limits the possibility of heritage preservation within the system; while on the other hand, this explains why there has been a significant rise in heritage preservation practices and also a number of battles over heritage preservation outside the government system and at its margins.

As demonstrated in the legislation process, heritage preservation in Hong Kong is seldom a top-down government initiative. In the 1970s, several major heritage

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<sup>135</sup> An important figure in the government to advocate the legislation of the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance was James Hayes. (See Appendix II)

preservation-related controversies erupted between the government and civil society. The Hong Kong Heritage Society and the Conservancy Association were the two main groups that advocated for heritage preservation. Active members of both groups were members of the educated middle-class with professional backgrounds, similar to the “middle-class radicals” described by Parkin and Cotgrove and Duff. The Hong Kong Heritage Society was founded in 1977 and mainly comprised expatriates, local non-ethnic Chinese professionals and local English-educated middle-class and professional ethnic Chinese.<sup>136</sup> The Conservancy Association was founded in 1968 and was primarily an environmental group, but it was also involved in a number of campaigns to preserve built heritage (Conservancy Association 2003). It mainly comprised local ethnic-Chinese professionals. These two organizations cooperated and were committed to several major heritage preservation campaigns in late 1970s. Their aim was not merely to save individual buildings but also to change the town planning policies and to demand more public space for the public. I will discuss two of these campaigns, the preservation of old Tsim Sha Tsui railway station and the Central Barracks, to illustrate how heritage preservation in Hong Kong in the 1970s can be regarded as a form of “middle-class radicalism” and to demonstrate their potential to change urban politics.<sup>137</sup>

The old Tsim Sha Tsui railway station building was built in the 1910s and had served as the terminal station of the Kowloon-Canton Railway (KCR) until the terminal station was relocated to Hung Hom in 1974. It was well recognized landmark in Kowloon. Since the decision to relocate the railway terminal, some resident groups petitioned the government, urging for the preservation of the station. The government’s original plan was to demolish the whole station to make way for a cultural complex and

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<sup>136</sup> Office holders in the Hong Kong Heritage Society included David Russel, a chartered architect, Jon Prescott, an architect and town planner, Ruy Barretto, a barrister-at-law, and Geoffrey Emerson, a teacher, etc. Since their registration in 1977 until their disbandment in 1988, they have used the postbox of the Hong Kong Institute of Architects as their correspondence address. This further proves their close linkage with professionals in Hong Kong (Public Records Office 1977 – 1988; The National Archives 1978b).

<sup>137</sup> In the 1970s, besides these two campaigns, the Hong Kong Heritage Society and the Conservancy Association also co-operated with the pro-preservation members the Hong Kong Club, to preserve the Victorian-style building of the exclusive gentlemen’s club, which the committee members planned to replace with a new building. The major argument for the preservation of the building was the historical and architectural (aesthetic) value of the building. Although they also proposed the reformation of the town planning policy, the nature of the club, and thus the building, is too distant from the public; thus, this case would rather support the typical cynical view that it was just “a bunch of *gweilos* [the local Cantonese slang for white people]” being enthusiastic to heritage preservation because they were nostalgic for the Victorian architecture (Chugani 1978a; Ashbrook 1980; Chan 2010; Hawksley 1979). The “publicness” and “radicalism” are clearly not present in this case.

sites for commercial developments. In 1977, the Hong Kong Heritage Society, the Conservancy Association and several professional bodies launched a campaign to save the station (Chan 2010; *South China Morning Post* 1977a; The National Archives 1978a, 1978b). They argued for the great architectural merit and historical value of the station building and put the station building in the context of the surrounding cultural landscape, including the nearby Tsim Sha Tsui Hill where the Marine Police Headquarter stood. In contrast to the government's plan to demolish the station to make way for a cultural complex (the current Hong Kong Cultural Centre cluster), they proposed an adaptive reuse plan that would transform the old railway station into cultural facilities that would merge with the planned building. The preservation plan was quite extensively supported by resident groups, some Urban Councilors and quite a number of people who wrote to the local newspapers. AAB also recommended that the whole station be declared a monument, but this was turned down by the government (*South China Morning Post* 1977a; The National Archives 1978a, 1978b; Antiquities Advisory Board 1980). The Hong Kong Heritage Society petitioned with their plan for the preservation of the station, Tsim Sha Tsui Hill and the Marine Police Headquarters, and requested that their alternative plan towards the station and the cultural complex be adopted. However, the government refused to do this and used the "foul tactic" of claiming that the planning was already at an advanced stage and consequently could not be modified. They only agreed to preserve the station's clock tower as compromise (Chugani 1978b; The National Archives 1978b). The Hong Kong Heritage Society made the accusation that the refusal to preserve the station was merely motivated by the interests of the developers. They even petitioned the British Crown in 1978, demanding not only the preservation of the station, but also the reformation of town planning policy in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) dismissed the petition (The National Archives 1978a). The old station was torn down and only the clock tower was preserved. The new cultural complex, including the current the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, the Hong Kong Space Museum and the Hong Kong Museum of Art, was built in the 1980s and the clock tower was declared a monument in 1990. Later, a joint-campaign by the Hong Kong Heritage Society and the Conservancy Association focused on the nearby Tsim Sha Tsui Hill prevented the government from demolishing the Marine Police Headquarters for commercial development in 1979. The Marine Police Headquarters was declared as monument in 1994, but was tendered to a private developer in 2003 and converted into a luxury hotel, which later opened as the "1881

Heritage”, arousing much controversy (Conservancy Association 2003).

The Central Barracks complex was the site of the three major British military barracks in Central, namely Victoria Barracks, Murray Barracks and Wellington Barracks. Together with the Admiralty Dock at the current Tamar site, they formed the earliest military site of the colony. After World War II, parts of these barracks, such as Murray House at Murray Barracks, were transformed from military use into other government departments. In short, the Barracks have remained in military and governmental use since their establishment. In 1974, rumours that the government was going to demolish Murray House spread, and these were not denied by the government in the Legislative Council. The government further admitted that a redevelopment plan was ongoing (*China Mail* 1974; Hong Kong Legislative Council 1974). In 1977, the government clearly planned to demolish and redevelop Central Barracks in order to sell the land and buildings for office and commercial development. A special committee advising on planning the Victoria Barracks was set up by the government in March 1977. The committee was reminded to bear in mind the following:

- (a) the need to redevelop in such a way as to add to the amenity and appearance as well as to the **commercial growth** of the central area of Hong Kong;
- (b) the use of the area as a whole should take account of **its value**, and ensure its acquisition from the Ministry of Defense results in a **reasonable direct or indirect return to public revenue**; and
- (c) a recommendation to retain any of the present buildings must be supported by proposals for use which generally acceptable to the public and compatible with (a). and (b). above.

(Public Records Office 1977 – 1979, my emphasis)

With the premise of securing “commercial growth” and a “return to public revenue”, the idea of “amenity” was put aside. In the original plan, only a small proportion of the Barracks mainly at the wooded hillsides was to be transformed into a park or public garden, but this was criticized as being “virtually inaccessible to anyone but an Outward Bound graduate and mountain goats” (*South China Morning Post* 1977b). The remaining parts were to be sold out to private developers for commercial and residential use (Public Records Office 1977 – 1979). The Hong Kong Heritage Society, the

Conservancy Association, many professional groups and resident groups all opposed the plan. They were very concerned about the lack of public parks in urban areas and demanded that Victoria Barracks and the buildings inside should be preserved and that the whole site to be transformed into a public park (Alano 1977; Chan 2010). However, their demands were not taken seriously by the government despite support from the municipal council, the Urban Council. The committee's final report only agreed to revise the plan to preserve a few buildings in the Barracks (Public Records Office 1977 – 1979). Unsurprisingly this revision was not able to gain support from the Urban Council, the preservation groups or the resident groups. In contrast to the government's revised plan, they demanded the preservation of all of the buildings in Victoria Barracks, or as many as possible, and opposed selling off the land, which they demanded should be transformed into an extensive urban park. The Hong Kong Heritage Society also demanded the preservation of Murray House in-situ as an extended green belt link to Charter Garden and the planned park at Victoria Barracks (Hong Kong Heritage Society 1978; Chugani 1978c; *South China Morning Post* 1981). Again, the government refused. Eventually the government demolished parts of Victoria Barracks, and all of Wellington Barracks and Murray Barracks. Parts of the demolished barracks would be retained for government use, while a large proportion was to be sold for redevelop for commercial use,<sup>138</sup> and this is now the site of the current Pacific Place, Citibank Plaza and the Bank of China Tower. The remaining part of Victoria Barracks, with several buildings preserved, was to be turned into a public park, the current Hong Kong Park. In short, except the small portion that became Hong Kong Park, the most of Central Barracks were demolished and re-colonized by global capital.

The old Tsim Sha Tsui railway station and the Central Barracks examples are not separate and unrelated cases. They actually happened at the same time. These two cases clearly demonstrate that there were two different sets of competing ideologies and beliefs about urban space. The government regarded its developmentalist way of treating urban space, i.e. demolishing the old buildings, “vacating” the land, redeveloping the sites for generating huge profits, as the only “rational” path. Under

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<sup>138</sup> In legal terms, all land in Hong Kong is owned by the government and is leased to the landlord. Technically, land sales mean the selling of government land leases (Li, L. 2006). Yet, whether the land is freehold and leasehold is not central in the argument. The freehold / leasehold distinction is only important in knowing who exactly “owns” the land in property terms. It is insignificant if the understanding of land transcends that of the rigid language property, but is instead understood in terms such as place-attachment, the sense of place, place-based memory and identity.

such processes, land was treated as a commodity in the property regime and exchange value was prioritized. Public land was treated as the “private property” of the government that could be sold off to make a profit. For instance, when the special committee on redeveloping Victoria Barracks was set up, the government had already reminded them that the proposals needed to be based on “commercial growth” and to generate income for the revenue. Historical and architectural values and alternative forms of development that could have preserved the buildings were not prioritized, or were even totally neglected, in the government’s town planning considerations. When civil society groups, with members who were architects and town planners, proposed a detailed alternative plan the adoptive reuse of the old railway station for a future cultural complex, it was simply dismissed by the government. The government’s arguments were that the demolition would best serve the “public interests”, that adoptive reuse would be unpractical and too expensive, and that the planning was already in an “advanced stage” and it was too late to make any changes (The National Archives 1978b). “Public interests” was an arbitrary term that the government often manipulated. It was generally believed that the government’s plan for the cultural complex was not at such an “advanced stage” that modification was impossible (Chugani 1978b). Rather, the government underestimated the level of public support for the preservation; it was too confident, if not too arrogant, of its own “expertise” and “rational” planning, and was not willing to change its plan. In short, the government’s plans represented the “dominant social paradigm” with market-value and commercial growths as its core value, in which exchange value rather than use value was prioritized, and the government upheld the “rationality” of its town planning which was backed up by this value and did not care about the history of the buildings or the memories and feelings attached to the place (Cotgrove and Duff 1980). The government even thought that they could produce a ‘placeless’ landmark.

In contrast, the people who participated in the heritage preservation movements, such as the Hong Kong Heritage Society and the Conservancy Association, operated under an alternative paradigm that prioritized a different set of values and a different visions of urban space. Similar to the environmentalists discussed by Cotgrove and Duff (1980), they challenged the core values of the dominant social paradigm. In these heritage preservation movements, the preservationists were against the prioritization of market-value and commercial values. In both cases, the preservationists accused the

government of planning the demolition of the old railway station and the barracks solely for the speculative interests of the developers (The National Archives 1978b; Chan 2010). Instead of commercial values and a narrow-minded understanding of “development”, the preservationists prioritized history, cultural heritage and open space for the public to enjoy. Land was not treated as commodity. Use value, not exchange value, was prioritized. Thus, their understanding of public interest could be best served also differed considerably from that of the government. For them, “public interest” does not refer to the demolition of old buildings or the sale of the land to developers for the purpose of generating huge public revenue incomes. Rather, they believe that public interests were best served by heritage preservation, by recognizing continuity and incubating cultural identity and cultural pride, and by making the place sustainable. Therefore, for instance, they held that instead of being demolished and transformed into office towers and shopping malls, the Barracks should be preserved entirely and opened to the public as a public park that could be enjoyed by everyone and not just by the privilege few. Here, the radicalism lies not on their actions, but in their challenge to the hegemonic materialistic ideology in which non-market values were undermined. In this sense, the heritage preservationists in the 1970s were not simply “nostalgic” and did not merely fetishize old buildings, rather, they encouraged the preservation of historic buildings *for* the public.

In spite of the “depoliticized” nature of the heritage preservation movement,<sup>139</sup> and despite the fact that some of the active members had shared backgrounds with the government officials,<sup>140</sup> the preservationists were regarded as “trying to attack the very heart of the colonial system” by the government (Walker 1978). The Hong Kong Heritage Society and the Conservancy Association were two of the “pressure groups” under police surveillance, together with the more politicized teachers’ and students’ unions and other social organizations (Vagg 1996). The government’s hostility towards the preservationists should be connected to the preservationists’ attempts to challenge

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<sup>139</sup> “Depoliticized” is used as a comparative term here. The heritage preservation movements were rather “depoliticized” compared to the highly politicized 1967 Leftist Riots in the previous decade or to other social movements in the same decade, such as the “Protect Diaoyutai Movement” which eventually transformed into an anti-colonial movement in 1971, protests against the corrupting colonial police in 1973, and the Golden Jubilee School Corruption Incident of 1977 – 1978, which led to large-scale protests by the teachers’ and students’ unions in Hong Kong.

<sup>140</sup> Some of the British expatriate professionals in the civil society groups had even worked in the government and were close friends with the governor’s family (Clibborn-Dyer 2006; Wordie 2007).

not only the ideology and core values, but also the decision-making processes of the colonial government. As argued earlier, the government insisted its “rational” town planning was cost-efficient, profits were prioritized and planning was regarded merely in “technical” terms. Yet for the preservationists, this approach to town planning, which failed to recognize non-material values such as history, heritage and identity, was “outdated” and allowed “virtually no public involvement” (Walker 1978). When the government was too powerful and could determine the final results, this meant that even the educated-middle class professionals were alienated from the decision-making process, not to mention the general public. The preservationists demanded the reformation of town planning policy to allow for greater public consultation and involvement, empowering AAB with the power to influence town planning issues and raising issues beyond the “flog the land to the highest bidder” approach into consideration in town planning, such as the importance of the environment and history (Walker 1978; Chan 2010). During the heyday of these campaigns, the Hong Kong Heritage Society even announced that it would sponsor candidates to contest the Urban Council elections of the coming year, so that issues such as the environment and heritage could be represented (*The Star* 1978; Ortmann 2010). In this sense, the colonial governmentality as a whole was challenged by the preservationists, although such challenge was not “political” in the traditional sense. In the context of the 1970s, the “depoliticized” issue of heritage preservation led to a demand for greater democratic representation and challenged colonial bureaucratic institutions (Ortmann 2010). Thus, even though it was not an anti-colonial demand from the colonized, the question of heritage preservation nonetheless challenged the institutions and the decision-making process of the colonial government.

Taking the understanding of “colonialism” and “decolonization” a step further towards urban space, I argue that the heritage preservation movements in the 1970s paved the way for resisting urban re-colonization and had the implications of urban decolonization, even though the preservationists might not have started with such ideas or agenda. In the Central Barracks case, the major dispute between the government and the preservationists and resident groups was about how to “develop” the site. Under the government’s original plan, the barracks were to be demolished and most of the former military space to be sold to private developers. Only a small, not readily accessible part was to be turned into a public park. Thus, although the colonial and military buildings

on the site were to be demolished, the space was not going to be given back to the public. It was going to become a site of capital. Even though anyone can “visit” a shopping mall, it is not public space. As Henri Lefebvre made clear, “The right to the city cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right” (1996: 58). The preservationists and residential groups observed that the lack of public open space in the city affected the quality of life. Their advocacy of the preservation of the barracks and its conversion into a public park would have led to the once military and colonial space being opened to the public as a public space. In other words, the meaning of the colonial and military buildings would have been completely changed even though they were to be preserved. The space would thus have been de-militarized and decolonized, not through its demolition, but through its openness and change of use. In this sense, the preservationists’ demand that the whole barracks be turned into a public park equates to a demand for the de-militarization and decolonization of urban space. This would be the “right to the city”, and would be similar to the Preservation Movement of Queen’s Pier discussed in Chapter 2. In other words, the alternative paradigm advocated by the preservationists might have started out as “leisure” and open space in the city, but could imply a further urban decolonization. In this sense, such “mild” and “depoliticized” demands can clearly embed significant political-economic and socio-cultural criticism and open possibilities towards an alternative.

In short, the combination of the preservationists, their core values, their alternative paradigms that resist the dominant social paradigm of prioritizing market-value and profit-making, and their demands for reform of the decision-making process are comparable to the above-mentioned “middle-class radicals”. The heritage preservation in 1970s Hong Kong could be regarded as a form of “middle-class radicalism”. The preservationists’ aims were not merely to protect historic buildings, but encompassed a wider reform of town planning policy and ideology, and were embedded with political-economic criticism of the way that the city was developed. However, there are also limitations to articulating heritage preservation movements *per se* merely in terms of “middle-class radicalism”. In many circumstances, heritage preservation movements are not single issues but are single aspects of larger urban social movements and people involved in the heritage preservation movements are not limited to the ranks of educated middle-class professionals, or the “new middle class”.

As Manuel Castells (1983) argues, in many urban social movements and in the process of the production of urban spaces, there was considerable interaction between the protest of minority neighbourhoods against urban renewal and displacement, and the rise of a “new middle class” that was committed to the values of urban life, environmental quality and cultural identity as a major social force in local society. For instance, heritage preservation was significant among the demands of the Madrid’s Citizen Movement in the 1970s, which covered a wide range of demands; heritage preservation was not separated from other demands that included housing, transportation, more open space, the improvement of social life and political freedom. The people involved in the Citizen Movement came from a variety of backgrounds and demanded greater political participation. In resisting pro-growth coalitions that were trying to change the city so rapidly and drastically, both the working class and the middle-class could have faced a reduction in their quality of life. Thus, it is very difficult to say that the new middle-class dominates the movements at such a large scale. Therefore, I would argue that there are some cases, such as the heritage preservation movements in the 1970s in Hong Kong, which tended more towards middle-class radicalism. Yet other heritage preservation movements, especially those engaged with wider movements, cannot be termed as such. Nonetheless, the inspirations of middle-class radicalism provide important resources for other urban social movements that cannot be underestimated.

#### **4.2 Heritage Preservation as/and Community Movement: Wan Chai, Hong Kong**

In the previous section, I brought up the progressive and radical tradition of heritage preservation, and used dimension of middle-class radicalism to articulate the heritage preservation movements in the 1970s. These movements questioned whether the land should be merely treated as a commodity and whether exchange value should be prioritized over use value. Yet as the elaborated cases show, the disputed sites were often urban landmarks that lacked existing residents or communities. The issue of the “right to the city” was thus often expressed in terms of public open space and against developers taking over the city. In this section, I will further explore the progressive, radical and “public” tradition of heritage preservation and broaden the “class” issue.

Capital accumulation is not necessarily pursued through “recycling” “idled

spaces” in the city, such as old train stations and barracks, but also by “recycling” urban neighbourhoods through urban renewal, which often means the displacement of existing communities and the gentrification of the area. In the course of community movements against displacement, discourses of heritage preservation are mobilized. In other words, in these cases, the disputed sites are now inhabited by preexisting communities and heritage preservation is far more closely related to the political-economic situation. As mentioned earlier, the mobilization of heritage discourses by community movements has been criticized for not being critical or radical and for failing to attack the political-economic situation. Yet such criticism also is problematic because it ignores the contexts and the content of the heritage discourses mobilized by community movements. In this section, I will use the community movements in Wan Chai after 2000 as an example to illustrate my argument. It is worth noting that the community movements in Wan Chai are not isolated; different neighbourhoods in Wan Chai are connected. In the process, the Star Ferry Pier and Queen’s Pier Preservation Movements (discussed in Chapter 2) also broke out. These movements are inter-connected. Here, I will first briefly introduce Wan Chai and the community movements. Then, I will contextualize the mobilization of heritage discourses by the community movements and the actual content and the implications of such discourses, and the relationship between the heritage discourses and the right to the city. Following that, I will analyze the broader meaning of the heritage preservation discourses, and why they were useful in terms of resisting the neoliberalization of urban politics.

Wan Chai, an urban area located to the east of Central, the political-economy centre, was developed early in in Hong Kong’s colonial. In the earlier colonial period, as mentioned in Chapter 3, there was seldom any segregation by zoning, and the “colonial urban settlement” and the “indigenous settlements” were technically separated by barracks, police stations and hills. The abovementioned Central Barracks and the Central Police Station compound were located on the east and west of the centre of the colonial institutions, and acted as “protection” for the colonial institutions. The settlements of the ethnic Chinese population were beyond these “protections”. Wan Chai was on the east, while Sheung Wan was on the west. These places became the major settlements for the ethnic Chinese, although other ethnic groups also lived there. The vernacular, tenement buildings known as *Tong Lau* began to emerge from late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since the 1930s, different kinds of industries, such as printing, construction,

and rattan furniture-making, began to appear and cluster in Wan Chai. They mainly clustered on the south of Hennessey Road, the land that existed 1921-1930 reclamation. This area was later colloquially known as “Old Wan Chai”. In the 1950s and 1960s, the area had already developed into a very vibrant, mixed-use area (Yuen, Yu and Chen 2007; Huang, S. 2012; Wong, Cheng and Luk eds. 2006). After the Central Barracks were demolished, office towers and commercial developments were constructed on the original barracks site, simultaneously expanding the commercial area of Hong Kong and removing the “buffer zone” between the central business district and the vibrant mixed area.

In late 1980s, the government set up a statutory body to speed up urban renewal, the Land Development Corporations (LDC).<sup>141</sup> The LDC had planned seven projects in Wan Chai but only three had been completed when it was dissolved. The remaining projects were taken over by its successor, the Urban Renewal Authority (URA), set up in 2001 (Lam 2008; Huang, S. 2012; Supplement Team, Hong Kong Economic Times ed. 2008). The LDC was unpopular among the neighbourhoods affected by its projects and regarded as “inefficient” by the state and developers. In order to speed up urban renewal (and capital accumulation), the URA was empowered by the government through the *Lands Resumption Ordinance*, with the power to seek government orders for the resumption or forced purchase of land regardless of the percentage of land that it has acquired, provided that the land is required for the “public interest”. However, “public interest” is an abstract notion,<sup>142</sup> which has been abused in many cases, along with the URA’s land resumption powers (Huang, S. 2012). After resuming the land, the URA generally bulldozes almost everything and “co-operates” with developers, while the profit made is not transferred into public revenue. In short, the URA makes a profit and facilitates the accumulation of capital with the aid of the state power.

When the URA replaced the LDC, it took over the LDC’s unfinished projects and started its own projects. Since its establishment, there are six urban redevelopment, preservation or “revitalization” projects in Wan Chai (Table 4.1). These projects were

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<sup>141</sup> Before that, there were already smaller-scale, private-led urban redevelopment projects in different part of the city (Lam 2008).

<sup>142</sup> In contrast, the LDC “had to prove that it had tried every rational and possible measure to assume the property yet still fail to have the property owner to agree with the purchase” before they could appeal for land resumption (Huang, S. 2012: 74).

located very close to each other, and also started within a short time of each other, some almost simultaneously. Thus, affected residents or businesses were difficult to look for new homes or shops in the district. Displacement becomes inevitable in the URA's mode of urban renewal dominated by demolition-and-rebuild practices. Some businesses require certain spatial settings, which makes it impossible for them to relocate to other types of building, while others require commercial networks and clustering effects which means that once they relocate, their business become unsustainable. In short, the URA's mode of urban redevelopment destroyed many viable businesses (Chau, To and Lee eds. 2007). Although some of the projects, such as projects H15 ("Lee Tung Street"), H16 ("Johnston Road") and H9 ("Wan Chai Road") entail elements of "preservation", the preservation plan did not come out in the beginning. They are essentially urban redevelopment. Even though the H05-026 ("Blue House Cluster") project began as a heritage preservation project, the URA's original plan was also to displace the residents (Wong, A. 2011). In short, residents and businesses affected by the URA's projects do not have the choice of "staying".

<b><u>Project Nos. and Name (Location)</u></b>	<b><u>Nature of Project</u></b>	<b><u>Landmarks within the boundary of the project</u></b>
H9 Wan Chai Road / Tai Yuen Street	Urban Redevelopment	Wan Chai Market, Tai Yuen Street / Cross Street Market (Bazaar)
H15 Lee Tung Street / McGregor Street	Urban Redevelopment	Lee Tung Street ("Wedding Card Street")
H16 Johnston Road	Urban Redevelopment	"Woo Cheong", "Hop Yuen" <i>Tong Laus</i>
H17 Queen's Road East	Urban Redevelopment	
H05-026 Nullah Stone Lane / Hing Wan Street / King Sing Street (originally partnered with Hong Kong Housing Society)	Preservation and Revitalization	"Blue House Cluster"
WC/001 Mallory Street / Burrows Street	Preservation and Revitalization	"Green House"

Table 4.1 URA urban redevelopment, preservation or revitalization projects in Wan Chai

Source: URA website, S. Huang (2012), A. Wong (2011)

Of these URA projects, I will highlight the Lee Tung Street (H15) and Blue House Clusters (H05-026) case. On the surface, the Lee Tung Street case was an urban redevelopment project in which almost all the buildings would have been demolished, while the Blue House Clusters case was a preservation and revitalization project in which some buildings were to be preserved.<sup>143</sup> Yet as mentioned earlier, there was no option to “stay” in the URA’s plans and the people affected were displaced. Residents were offered no other possibilities but to accept “compensation” from the URA, and their only “option” was to negotiate a higher “compensation”.<sup>144</sup> In short, in the process of carrying out urban renewal projects, the URA views “properties” in terms of exchange value. However, in reality, there are residents and businesses that do not want to move for reasons that cannot be articulated purely in terms of property and exchange value. These reasons include emotional attachment to place, a sense of belongings in the neighbourhood or district, and the spatial and network requirements of certain types of business. The URA’s failure to offer the option to “stay” or “move back”, or options for community participation in urban renewal meant displacing and tearing communities apart.

In this context, the “H15 Concern Group” that was formed by the residents and businesses affected by the H15 project and aided by intellectuals and professional volunteers started a community movement that demanded “a flat for a flat, a shop for a shop” and “ownership participation”<sup>145</sup> in urban renewal. Their slogan prioritized the

<sup>143</sup> In the “Blue House Cluster”, there are three *Tong Lau*s built in different eras. The “Blue House” was built in the 1920s; the “Yellow House” in the 1930s and the “Orange House” in the 1950s. In the original plan by the URA and the Hong Kong Housing Society, the Orange House was planned to be demolished.

<sup>144</sup> In many newspaper reports or even colloquial expressions, the lump sum offered by the URA is often called “compensation”, regardless of any identity as landlords or tenants (e.g. *Oriental Daily* 2013; Fung 2013). However, the word “compensation” is misleading. The URA seldom resumed land for public facilities. Rather, the URA collaborates with private developers to build up the resumed lands to accumulate capital and the generated income does not return to public revenue. In this sense, as the current chairman of the URA, Victor So 蘇慶和 admits, “the URA is also a developer” (*Oriental Daily* 2013), and I should add, back up by state power. When a developer acquires land from private landlords for redevelopment, such action in the “market” is known as a “purchase” or “acquisition”, not “compensation”. The abuse of the state power of land resumption does not make this “compensation”, but the purchase becomes compulsory while the private landlords’ ability to negotiate is reduced. The word “compensation” easily misleads people into thinking that the lump sum offered involved public money rather than being a transaction between a developer and a private landlord.

<sup>145</sup> “Flat for flat, shop for shop” (*lau wun lau, pou wun pou* 樓換樓, 舖換舖) means that the property owner, in this case, also the occupiers of the flats and the shops, do not aim at accepting the acquisition from the URA. Rather, they use their “ownership” to “participate” in the urban renewal process and to exchange for a flat or a shop respectively in the original site, or at least a nearby site, after urban

use value of the “property”, rather than its exchange value. They also called for the preservation of built heritage, including pre-and-post-war *Tong Laus* in the street and “local characteristics”, namely the famous wedding-card printing shops and related industries that clustered in the street and the “social network”. They proposed an alternative “Dumbbell Proposal”, which involved both the elements of heritage preservation and the protection of existing social networks (Huang, S. 2012; Lam 2008; Wong, A. 2011; Chau, To and Lee eds. 2007; Wong, Cheng and Luk eds. 2006).

While the Lee Tung Street community movement was taking place, the URA, partnered with the Hong Kong Housing Society to announce another project in the nearby Blue House Cluster. The partners’ original plan was to partial-preserve the *Tong Laus* within the cluster, to displace the residents and convert the *Tong Laus* into a tourist spot containing a Chinese medicine museum and a teahouse. This approach to “preservation” was criticized as being “fake” and “mummified” preservation (Szeto and Sham 2006). The residents, other concerned members of the Wan Chai community, social workers at the nearby St James Settlement community centre, and volunteering professionals came up with a counter-proposal that involved the preservation of all the buildings and also a “living preservation” that could “keep both the houses and the people” (*lau uk jau lau jan* 留屋又留人). This proposal was later accepted by the government after the outbreak of the Preservation Movement of Star Ferry and Queen’s Piers. Those residents who wanted to stay in the Blue House Cluster were given the right to move back after the renovation; while those who wanted to move out were also to be resettled to public housings. (Huang, S. 2012; Wong, A. 2011).

These two community movements in Wan Chai were inter-connected. Members of the Lee Tung Street Movement went to the Blue House to share experiences and volunteers from the Blue House Movement also supported the movements in Lee Tung Street. Meanwhile, activists fighting against the demolition of the street market and the eviction of hawkers in Tai Yuen Street, which is located in the URA’s H9 Project, also supported the Blue House and Lee Tung Street community movements. Active

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renewal. The nearby “option” in this case would be the H16 project which had started a little bit earlier (Huang, S. 2012; Chau, To and Lee eds. 2007). Although the “participation” is still limited to property ownership, it goes beyond the language of a pure property regime. Use value (a flat or a shop), rather than exchange value (the price for the flat or the shop), is prioritized.

members of the Wan Chai community were often involved in several community movements, and also guided cultural tours in Wan Chai.

The mobilization of heritage preservation discourses by the community movements should be contextualized in relation to the supposed responsibilities of the URA and the changing politics of Wan Chai. As above, although both the URA and its predecessor the LDC were set up by the state, the URA was more powerful and could request land resumption more easily than the LDC. In return, the URA was supposed to take on more responsibility. When it was set up, the URA operated according to the so-called “4Rs” approach, which stands for “Redevelopment”, “Rehabilitation”, “pRservation” and “Revitalization”, to enable “a holistic approach to unlock the full potential of urban renewal” (Huang, S. 2012: 74). Theoretically, the URA’s work was also guided by the *Urban Renewal Strategy* (URS), which, in the version current at that time, mandated the URA to adopt a “people-centered approach” when carrying out urban renewal. The “main objectives” of urban renewal were to include:

- (e). promoting sustainable development in the urban area; [...]
- (g). preserving buildings, sites and structures of historical, cultural or architectural interest;
- (h). preserving as far as practicable local characteristics;
- (i). preserving the social networks of the local community

(Urban Renewal Authority 2001: 2)

In other words, URA was supposed to take up the responsibility to preserve built heritage, “local characteristics” and “social networks of the local community”. This legitimized the affected neighbourhoods’ mobilization of heritage preservation discourses, in terms of both the tangible and intangible heritage. Since the URA had not defined “local characteristics” and “social networks of the local community”, despite being mandated to preserve them, the affected communities were able to take these keywords up in the process of community-building and defending their rights, and phrased their demands in these terms.

For instance, the Lee Tung Street community defined the clustering of wedding-card printing shops and related industries in the same street as “local characteristics”;

they also defined their mutual-aid network within the community as the very “social network” and “community network” that the URA was supposed to preserve. In this way, they were able to legitimately criticize the URA’s proposal to bulldoze, displace and destroy the built heritage, “local characteristics” and “social network of the local communities” that was mandated to protect (Lai, C. 2004; Huang, S. 2012). Other community movements in Wan Chai quickly learned from this strategy of (re-)defining the URS keywords. The community movements’ mobilization of heritage preservation discourse can thus be seen as their attempt to actualize the URA’s lip-service promises as a weapon to defend their rights and resist displacement. I will go into the actual content of the heritage discourses in later paragraphs.

Besides taking the weapon from the “enemy”, the mobilization of heritage discourse in community movements in Wan Chai can also be explained in terms of the changing urban district politics. The period during which the URA launched its urban renewal projects in Wan Chai co-incidentally overlapped with the 2004 – 2007 session of Wan Chai District Council, a rare session with several more progressive and pro-civil society councillors. These councillors chaired the District Council and some council committees, such as the Urban Renewal Task Force and the Cultural and Leisure Services Committee.<sup>146</sup> Traditionally, District Councils have been “advisory bodies” without much real power. Many councillors have conventionally focusing on giving petty favours. They seldom evinced any vision on issues of community building and development, and only concentrated on their tiny constituencies. Nevertheless, these more progressive and pro-civil society councillors believed the District Council should take a more active role, despite its limited power. A former Wan Chai District Councillor argued that the URA would not give up its power to resume and acquire land but the special nature of Lee Tung Street as “Wedding-Card Street” provided a way to articulate the urban renewal issue in “cultural” terms such as cultural heritage and local identity. These councillors were able to take up the communities’ claims and transform them into a discursive resource to be articulated and to back up the other community movements in the district.<sup>147</sup> The District Council also conducted research and used other methods to back up the affected communities’ claims and demands (Wong, A. 2011). Therefore, the more pro-active District Council and its more intellectual-based and progressive

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<sup>146</sup> Interview with Mary Ann King, 28 Feb 2012

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

councillors, provided a background that allowed using heritage discourse to intervene into urban renewal, so that it was not merely treated as “compensation” issue, but as a community-building and empowerment.

The community movements and the process of community-building were co-related and took place together. As Tseng Shu-cheng argues (1997), the sense of crisis initiated by the threat of displacement builds up and consolidates a “sense of community”, which, as Cresswell notes, is a form of sense of belonging towards a place that is larger than the boundary of one’s residence (2004). In Wan Chai, the neighbourhoods threatened by displacement articulated their mutual-aid relationships and business networks as a “social network” and/or a “community network”, which allowed them to justify their demand of not to be displaced. Clearly, the sense of community built contributed back into the community movement as a resource. Legitimated by the URA and supported in the district political environment of the period, heritage and related cultural terms were mobilized to build up a “resistance identity” and/or “trench identity” (Castells 2010). Here, heritage is not the end by itself, but serves as a means to make the community’s demands and vision visible. The actual content of the heritage preservation discourses goes beyond the fetishization of “historic buildings” or the commodification of nostalgic and “collective memory”.

As argued in Chapter 1, it is necessary to differentiate depoliticized and radicalized versions of collective memory, and each leads to different versions of heritage discourse. Criticisms against the mobilization of heritage discourses by the community movement fail to recognize these two forms of collective memory and the actual content of the heritage discourse. For instance, Jackie Kwok (2011) criticizes the community movement for as involving much “Imagineering”, and she feels that the methods used by the preservationists ultimately produce a middle-class “cultural Wan Chai”. She argues, the heritage discourses

[...] “heritagize” the remaining urban buildings built in (or even before) the 1950s and 1960s, “museumize” the general population’s ways of living in the 1960s and 1970s, and “samplize” the diminishing light industry in urban centre; in order to tell Hong Kongers, especially the young students, that these are Hong Kong local culture!

(Kwok 2011: 166, my translation)

She further satirizes:

The government and private developers are very happy to see this direction of development. Cultural critics, artists, social workers and youth together turn urban space into tourist spots and special communities. All add value to urban space, and add extra (cultural) values/selling points to the real estate market. These are the unexpected gains of the government and developers... Turning “history” and “culture” into “cultural industry”, “craftizing” light industry, the livelihood of the neighborhoods displayed as local characteristic. All of these can be included in ideas of a profitable tourist industry, the inspirations of the design industry, the atmosphere of food and beverage industry... What a bravo decision agreed by the whole Hong Kong population!

(Kwok, 2011: 166, my translation)

I understand Kwok’s concerns. However her argument mixes up the two versions of “collective memory” and “heritage”, and mis-reads the actual content of the heritage discourses mobilized by the community movements.

The “direction of development” that Kwok claims the government and private developers are “happy to see” would be like the Woo Cheong turning into “The Pawn” or the 1881 Heritage hotel, or merely the depoliticization and decontextualization of the past to capitalize on the “nostalgic feeling”. This is the depoliticized version of collective memory, in which the people are not important and can be erased from the setting and narration. This is exactly the opposite of the community movements’ mobilization of heritage preservation discourses. The people are important to the community movements. The buildings and the people are not separated. Their mobilization of heritage discourses is about both the built heritage and the people in the neighbourhood. Their culture-related terms are about the livelihood of the people and the community (Chau, To and Lee eds. 2007; Huang, S. 2012). The notions of heritage are drawn on to preserve the community, the people’s livelihoods and their rights to stay and not be displaced. Thus, although both the developers and the communities talk about old buildings, their contents are different. Here, the question of “*for whom and why heritage preservation?*” becomes important, which is truly the site at which

heritage is contested and its politics revealed.

Both the Lee Tung Street and Blue House community movements clearly bound together built heritage, the urban landscape and the people living and operating businesses in the neighbourhoods. In terms of the language of heritage, the building is the “tangible heritage”; the business, the light-industries or “craft-industries” and the craftsmanship embedded in the production network are “intangible heritage”. For instance, in its role as a “Wedding-Card Street” the characteristics of Lee Tung Street do not signify a “marriage-themed” street (without production) as promoted in the finalized version of the URA plans, but is inseparable from its history, the space and the people there. Without the affordable and spacious *Tong Lau* ground floors that house both shop-fronts and production spaces together, the wedding-card printing shops that made the street famous and that comprise the “local characteristics” could not survive. The shops’ survival also relied on other shops in the same street, such as business referral and shops specialized in other production procedures. The clustering of the wedding-card printing industry in the street also contributed to other related businesses in the same street, such as wedding accessories shops. The whole process is not a top-down designation but a bottom-up organic growth. If the *Tong Laus* that provided the space the industries required were demolished and the networks so important for the business’ survival were broken by displacement, the local characteristic and thus the landmark status of “Wedding-Card Street” could not be preserved (Lai, C. 2004; Chau, To and Lee eds. 2007; Leung 2007).<sup>148</sup>

In this sense, by mobilizing the discourses of heritage, the community movements were able to raise these concerns and demand their rights to stay so that the networks and their livelihood could be sustained. Thus, heritage discourse was used to support the alternative “Dumbbell Proposal”, which planned to preserve the *Tong Laus* in the middle section of the street in order to preserve the local industry in-situ, while also enabling “flat for flat, shop for shop” to preserve their “community network”, their

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<sup>148</sup> After the displacement of people in Lee Tung Street, I conducted several interviews with the original shop-keepers in 2009, as a part of an urban renewal review research project. These interviewees include owners-occupiers and tenants in Lee Tung Street. After they had been displaced, some even still run their business in Wan Chai, but the rent became so high that they needed to separate their shop-fronts and production factories. Business dropped a lot. According to some interviewees, the breakup of the Lee Tung Street printing cluster made business difficult. Many stopped their businesses when or soon after they were displaced.

rights to city, and their rights not to be displaced. Translated into heritage discourse this becomes: if their alternative plan allows the community can participate in the urban renewal process, the people will not be displaced and the *Tong Laus* in the middle section of the street can be preserved. The community networks essential to the formation of local characteristic can be preserved as well. The community members' rights to stay are rights disassociated with property ownership.

Similarly, the necessity of sustaining their social networks and livelihoods, the very things that comprise the "local characteristics" of heritage discourse, cannot be reduced into the language of exchange value of the neoliberalization regime. Rather, use value and rights independent of property ownership are emphasized. As Shu-Mei Huang argues, the community movement's aims were not only the "right to the city" but also the "right to planning" (2012: 124). These two "rights" are highly related to each other. The "right to the city", as the quotation by Lefebvre at the beginning of this chapter suggests, "can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life" (1996: 158). When a community is facing displacement as a result of an urban neoliberalization regime backed up by state-coercion, the mobilization of heritage discourses can also back up their counter-proposal that would defend their rights. Huang argues, the "right to planning", with the demands of "flat for flat, shop for shop", "is a collective process of redefining properties" (2012: 78). Rather than understanding "property" as an exchangeable commodity, the use value of the shop and the flat are valued. Their "rights", here, the right to participate in the planning process, are not based purely on property ownership, but rest on the fact that they have been living, working or participating in the neighbourhood community for a period of time and are the agents responsible for the creation of the meaning of the place. The "right to planning", in this sense, is a way of accessing the "renewed right to urban life". Similarly, the mobilization of other culture-related discourses, such as "creative industries", while raising the question of ignored issues such as the spatial requirements of businesses, industrial networks, craftsmanship and the community issues which have been undermined by the government and developers, is a form of radicalization of "culture-led urban regeneration" discourses which can help to sustain industry and the urban neighbourhood (Yuen, Yu and Chen 2007; Wang and Li 2011; Paddison and Miles, eds. 2007). Heritage and other culture-related discourses were bridges for the affected communities to narrate their demands and for an alternative plan to resist urban re-

colonization by capital.

In mobilizing heritage discourses in community movements, certain stories in the communities are often prioritized and made more vocal. For instance, in the Lee Tung Street community, stories about the wedding-card industry were prioritized; while in the Blue House community, stories of residents having been lived there for generations, or occupied more “interesting” places, were prioritized. Yet this does not mean that the other affected members in the communities were ignored. As mentioned earlier, community movements and community building are processes that interact with each other. As Tseng argues (2007), “community” is not a pre-existing entity but to be created and built. Place is one aspect of community building. Similar to “community”, “place” is also “being made, maintained and contested” (Cresswell 2004: 5). Thus, a “sense of place”, i.e. “the subjective and emotional attachment people have to place” (ibid: 7), also needs to be created or built through a process.<sup>149</sup> This building process requires the mobilization of people’s “knowledge” of the place, a process in which the sharing of memory and stories is important. The mobilization of heritage and other culture-related discourses helps to bring to light the stories and livelihoods of individual community members in the neighbourhood that are usually ignored by the dominant historical narratives.

For instance, in 2005, during the Lee Tung Street community movement, several photographers used computer editing techniques to re-produced a large photo of Lee Tung Street, showing both sides of its whole length. This photo was later exhibited in a shopping centre in Wan Chai, as a part of the community movement’s efforts to arouse public concern. The photo was edited so that the *Tong Laus* built in 1950s and 1960s in the middle of the street were shown very clearly, while the high-rise buildings built behind the site after 1980s were edited away or blurred. The exhibition also showed the architectural and visual details of the streets. It made the diversity of shops on the “Wedding-Card Street” visible, which helped to demonstrate that the street was not “purely” dedicated to the wedding-card business so that it could resist the easy “thematization” (Community Museum Project 2005). Audiences were attracted to the exhibition for different reasons. Some were active Wan Chai community members or

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<sup>149</sup> The understanding that place and the sense of place are created should not be taken to indicate that they are fake.

other concerned citizens who had long been active in urban renewal and urban heritage campaigns. Some were merely attracted by the exhibition.

Although the editing of the photograph seems to be an “Imagineering” project that created a “perseverance, coherent, consistent” image of Lee Tung Street, as some critics would put it (Kwok 2011: 184), the effect contributed to community building and the community movement, and undeniably empowered the community. During the exhibition, some community members shared previously-untold stories about their lives in the street; once they saw the visualization of the street, those stories came up, including many details of their lives on the street and the ways the shops were related to each other. These details were gained in the process of the mobilization of heritage and artist discourses, and their visualization was certainly very important for community building. In general, when members of a neighbourhood are threatened with displacement backed by the state, the need to come up with a resistance strategy often overshadows some of their more “personal” histories that have less obvious “direct” connections to the resistance movement. However, the examples discussed above illustrate how closely those “personal” histories are connected with the neighbourhood, or even district, histories that can be usefully transformed into a vision of what “community networks” and “livable cities” actually comprise. For instance, when the Lee Tung Street community members were able to see their street visualized in the photograph the stories it evoked of how the community interacted enabled them to consolidate ideas about how the community and businesses worked and to understand that they were indeed an organically emergent cluster. In this sense, the heritage and “culturalization” process contributed to the alternative “Dumbbell Proposal”. As well as contributing to the alternative proposal that aimed at resisting displacement, the fact that their stories were heard and valued empowered the community members, who were mainly working and lower middle-classes.

Similarly, when the Blue House community members and the professionals supporting them presented their preservation proposal to resist the URA’s plans, it was the Blue House and “Old Wan Chai” community members who became the ones sharing their experiences and stories with visitors. This transformed their position from that of the “unheard” in society to those who pass on knowledge to others. This is clearly an empowerment process. Although it might seem that the community members’

“commodification” of heritage shared a similar form to that of the developers, the major differences lay in the issue of the active involvement of the communities. In the process of sharing their stories, these “unheard” in the society became active agents. This, then, would be the radicalized version of collective memory that challenges the way that dominant narratives ignore the livelihoods and histories of lower middle-class and grassroots communities. Clearly, cultural heritage not only participates in community movements, but also has the effect of empowering communities that have long been silenced and undermined. If colonialism prioritizes the stories of ruling elites and ignores those of ordinary people, then the challenge is to resist the colonial order and let the subaltern voice heard. Community participation in heritage preservation is one way to achieve such resistance.

The mobilization of heritage discourse by community movements also needs to be understood in the larger context and atmosphere of Hong Kong. Hong Kong has long been a highly commercialized society and the market value (“price”) of housing has been an indicator of the “economic performance” (*Apple Daily* 2003). “Class” language has been unfamiliar and lacks legitimacy in Hong Kong. Before the ridiculously huge rise in housing prices over recent years led to unprecedented demands for lowering housing costs, any “failure” of the housing market, i.e. any drop in housing prices, whether as the result of government policy or external factors, would be seen as a failure of the government (Kwok 2013; *Ming Pao* 2011; Huang, S. 2012). Furthermore, when the discourses of the pro-growth machine dominate, exchange values are prioritized over use value; flats and shops are generally viewed as just another commodity and units in old buildings are regarded as “devalued”. Such ideas and narratives have been reproduced widely in the mainstream media. Kit Lam (2008) quotes a H15 Concern Group’s leaflet that summarizes how Hong Kong’s mass media approaches its coverage of news related to Lee Tung Street. The most dominant approaches aim at convincing the readers to support the URA’s perspective on the projects, while those who refuse to leave are depicted as being merely selfish, greedy and wanting more “compensation”. According to such discourses, the conflict between the URA and the residents or shopkeepers is basically an issue of money.

For instance, in a news coverage of the URA’s plan to launch urban renewal projects in three districts in 2002, a report titled “Residents in three old districts hear

the good news of urban redevelopment” starts with the following:

Residents in the urban renewal areas of Wan Chai, Tai Kok Tsui and Sham Shui Po felt a little bit sorrow for leaving their “old environment” when they found out that their current place of living would be redeveloped. Yet they **understood the importance of urban redevelopment** and believed that [URA] would offer **reasonable compensation**. Thus, most of them believe it is **a piece of good news**. As the reporter knows, most of the affected residents want to be relocated in the same district. Residential landlords are considering “flats for flats” or **receiving money and leave. Landlords of shops are considering what amount to ask for.**

*(Ta Kung Pao 2002, my translation and emphasis)*

This article, published before the URA had started its acquisition process, gives the readers an impression that the urban redevelopment carried out by the URA is beneficial to society, while the major issue involving the residents and shops is “the [level of] compensation”.

A similar tone quite often re-appears in newspapers, even in relation to more recent urban renewal projects in other districts carried out by the URA. In a 2012 report about 30 stores that had been in business for more than 30 years and which refused to be displaced, these dominant approaches still operated. The reports start thus:

The progress of land acquisition in Kwun Tong Town Centre urban redevelopment has been very good. Hip Wo Street and Mut Wah Street have been resumed ahead of schedule. Yet the URA still cannot speed up the urban renewal **because the stalls that have occupied the government land at Yan Shun Lane for about 30 years all refuse to leave. Even though the URA has already offered an extra \$50000 rental allowance**, the temporary stalls **still** ask for the same as the residential tenants, i.e. a rental allowance equivalent to 3 years or \$150 thousands, in order to leave. There are about 30 stalls. The URA worries that if they cannot “clear the site” in time, the construction sites cannot start to operate on schedule in the middle of next year.

*(Sing Tao Daily 2012, my translation and emphasis)*

Similarly, in this report, the URA was depicted as a reasonable organization willing to

negotiate, and the majority of the affected residents or shopkeepers were said to have accepted the URA's offer. Nevertheless, the urban redevelopment carried out by this "reasonable" institution was obscured by a handful of "greedy" stall holders who refused to leave. Their only concern was to ask for more money. However, why the stall holders actually thought the money was insufficient was absent in the report.

These media narration represents the dominant social paradigm, which is dominated by the developmentalist understanding of "progress" and the language of the "property" regime that prioritizes exchange value. When the media is dominated by these narrations aim at making the general public have an impression that people refuse to leave merely because they want more money and that their only motivation is their greed, then the reasoning involved in calculating adequate compensation can be easily twisted. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the general perception of old, vernacular buildings like post-war *Tong Laus* is that they are not valuable on the market, and this often gives the impression that the URA has offered a much more generous rate for acquisition. Conversely, however, the lump sums offered are quite often not enough to purchase a 7-year-old unit of similar size in the same district, as promised by the policy. In fact, the URA purchases the "unit" for the whole piece of land and the development rights. Nevertheless, these dominant, propaganda narratives can still ignore these "too complicated things", and simplify the complexity of the issues at stake into "greedy" residents and shops that want "more compensation" (Wong, A. 2011; Tang 2004; Hui 2004; Chau, To and Lee eds. 2007). In this context, pursuing any arguments involving the issue of "compensation" would be either ignored or counter-productive, despite the fact that this issue embeds the important issue of distributive justice.

In contrast, the mobilization of "non-materialistic" discourses, such as cultural heritage and community lives, ushers in a paradigm shift that means that the demands of the affected communities cannot be reduced to the question of "compensation", just as their story cannot be reduced to the "greedy-ones-want-more" narrative (Huang, S. 2012). This paradigm shift transforms the communities' demands from the language of "property ownership" into something irreducible into terms of property ownership. Cultural heritage, with value beyond the boundaries of "private ownership", opens a space for an alternative understanding of the buildings and neighbourhoods that transcends the language of pure property. Rather than defining "rights" in terms of

“property”, it provides a space to understand the rights to engage and participate in terms of historical importance and place-attachment. In short, even though the community does not “own” the piece of land or the building, the historical importance of place, place-attachment, and place-based identity gives them a legitimate position from which to argue for preservation. Moreover, this paradigm shift in the discourses of the community movements, and the shift in focus from a materialistic and monetary basis towards one of cultural heritage and community, secures the beachhead to attract the attention of people unfamiliar with issues of urban renewal, but who would buy into discourses of “culture”. This new audience can include a certain proportion of the middle-class and even some members of the elite. In this sense, the demands of affected communities acquire a channel through which they can be heard rather than twisted into the usual “greedy-ones-want-more” narrative.

In the previous paragraphs I articulated the rationales for community movements to mobilize heritage or other culture-related discourses. However, this mobilization was only useful when it was also accepted by, at least, a critical number of people in society. The question of how “culturalizing” urban politics can draw people’s attention should be articulated with the issue of the rising local consciousness. In other words, it is important for Hong Kong people to relate the community movements in Wan Chai not only to the issue of Wan Chai but also to the wider issues of Hong Kong. Although the heritage preservation movement in the 1970s also involved such a notion, it appears to have been a minor point. The heritage preservation discourse of that time was mainly focused on “historical value” often linked with “official” great events and “aesthetic values”. Some scholars tend to use the 1997 handover as a line to demark a change in the concerns of heritage preservation (Cody 2002; Lu 2009). Two main standpoints can be taken towards heritage in Hong Kong since 1997: the PRC’s notion of “Hong Kong people running Hong Kong” (*gangren zhigang* 港人治港) could make people feel that Hong Kong is their home and thus be more concerned about their heritage, while the fear of being “no different” to mainland China could lead to the need of heritage to construct an identity differentiated from China. However, regardless of the perspective taken, much literature has displayed a simplified understanding of the formation of “local identity” in Hong Kong and its relationship to heritage preservation.

In Hong Kong, there are different understandings of the “local” and thus

different waves of its formation. It can be seen as the product of colonial policies, as the arena of resistance movements, as identity politics and as popular culture (Sham 2009: 189 – 207). In the 1990s, a time of anxieties about the marginalization of Hong Kong, some Hong Kong scholars and cultural critics wanted to establish a “position” for Hong Kong. The most well-known and seminal contribution to this movement was Rey Chow’s “Between Colonizers: Hong Kong’s Postcolonial Self-Writing in the 1990s” (1992). Her notion posited at the level of an abstract identity politics can be seen as making overly hasty generalization about Hong Kong and its two “colonizers”, and makes less consideration or reference to the local political-economic and social realities, nor to Hong Kong’s relationships with other places. This position was criticized as an identity politics with essentializing accents that was blind to the “Northbound Imagination” and for justifying the arrogance of its position by merely claiming marginality (Szeto 2006). Such debates about identity politics first appeared in abstract terms with little recognition of internal differences. This might be explained by the fear of “1997 as day of doom” made a narrower sense of identity politics prevail. It can be represented by the primitive response binary of “who I am (we are)” and “who I am (we are) not”, which fails to address differences. However, when such “necessity” passed, “identities” in multiple terms could be more easily articulated. Since 1997, several books on the “common” yet plural experiences of the “old days” or of “how ‘we’ grew up” have been published (e.g. Ngai *et al.* 1997). They narrate local identity through common lived experience, and thus help constitute a collective identification based on the everydayness and the concept of “collective memory” in Hong Kong.<sup>150</sup> When the community movements in Wan Chai mobilized heritage discourse, the livelihood in old districts, local vernacular buildings and local characteristics and economic activities could be easily translated into one of these “common experiences” of Hong Kong, and thus as part of local identification. Thus, the “Wan Chai” story can be understood in terms of a vernacular “Hong Kong story”. As mentioned earlier, the Preservation Movement of Star Ferry and Queen’s Piers, which further enhanced concerns about cultural heritage in Hong Kong, overlapped with the community movements in Wan Chai. Under these circumstances, the heritage discourses were able to draw further public attention to urban issues.

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<sup>150</sup> Interview with Ng Chun Hung, 29 Apr 2011.

In contrast to the argument that the cultural tours organized by the local-based NGO is an act of “exoticization” and “spectacularization” of Wan Chai (Kwok 2011: 203), these tours guided by local community members could be used as a tactic to attract the public through “depoliticization” and “culturalization”. More critical and radical issues can often be brought up during these tours, such as how the URA and private developers have been changing the urban landscape, displacing residents and businesses in Wan Chai. When the tour goes to the Tai Yuen Street Market saved from demolition and displacement, the tour guide also discusses the issue of the local economy and how the new development had planned to displace the street market. Even on the most “exoticized” tours about ghost stories in Wan Chai, the political-economy and urban politics are brought in. For instance, according to the tour, the now-gentrified Star, Moon and Sun Streets area was haunted in 1980s when an Earth Deity Shrine responsible for calming the spirits of death in the air-raid shelter behind it was removed and displaced. Since the Earth Deity was gone, the spirits came out and wandered in the area. The haunting incident was only resolved when the Earth Deity Shrine was rebuilt in-situ and the Earth Deity was invited back to the Shrine. At this point, the tour guide linked the issue back to the urban redevelopment in Wan Chai, and suggested that urban redevelopment should improve people’s lives, as when the Earth Deity was finally invited to be relocated in-situ. Here, the haunting in the 1980s can be understood as a metaphor for contemporary urban politics. The whole issue started because of a wrongdoing in the urban landscape, the demolition of a “house” and the displacement of the deity, which symbolized the community displacement. The “haunting” and “possession” of the place can here be read as the return of discontent; where the only way to make the place peaceful again was to let the communities relocate in-situ. In other words, although it uses the same language of exoticized haunted stories, the content is re-politicized and used as criticism of contemporary urban politics.



Photo 4-B: A cultural tour guided by a local community member in Wan Chai

By addressing how the Wan Chai communities mobilized heritage preservation in community movements, I have no intention to suggest that the grassroots or the communities are unified and harmonious groups, even though some community members would have expressed as such in retrospect or in public. Such sentimental expressions, or even romanticization of the past, are actually a way for expressing a preference over the less-preferable present and projected future (Chua 1995, 1997). As Manuel Castells (1983) illustrates, urban social movements often have multiple goals by diversified agents. I realize that there are often contestations, conflicts and dynamics in communities and community movements. Chua Beng Huat *et al.*'s (1985) study of the relocation of a village in Singapore due to urban redevelopment in 1980s has illustrated the complexity and mixed feelings of the community. On one hand, the villagers had developed their own culture, community sentiments and sense of place towards the village. Some villagers' economic activities were also village-bound. On the other hand, the limitations of the physical environment, such as poor hygiene and lack of amenities, were also recognized by many villagers. While the resettlement would immediately eliminate some of the negative aspects especially in terms of physical environment, it created an ambivalent attitude towards resettlement. How willing to, or how eager to be resettled depends on a wide-range of issues, such as whether the

villagers were village-bound, their gender, age, economic activities and status in the families. For instance, those village-bound villagers, with economic activities relying on the physical space of their house that could also become the manufacturing and storage spaces, and whose social networks were often within the village would be more negatively affected by, and thus less likely to be in favour of, relocation than the non-village-bound villagers. In multifamily households which would be split into multiple nuclear families after relocation, the daughters-in-law might be more in favour of relocation, as this means an immediate escalation in the family status; meanwhile, the aged or middle-aged women, the nominal heads of the multifamily, were usually more upset in the splitting of the multifamily due to relocation, especially if their children were relocated far from them (Chua *et al.* 1985; Chua 1997).

In Hong Kong, similarly, there are often different opinions within neighbourhoods affected by urban renewal projects, as well as between some residents and the civil society groups. For instance, in URA's H19 Staunton Street / Wing Lee Street project in Central, the dynamics in the community, including those living nearby, were more complicated. Due to the Wing Lee Street's architectural and historical value, local heritage preservation concern groups were outraged by URA's plan to demolish the buildings. The landlord who had repaired and renovated the *Tong Lau*s also found the demolition unreasonable. Business owners also feared that the displacement would seriously affect, or even mean the termination of, their businesses; so they would hope that there would be chances for their business to sustain if the building was to be preserved. Yet, there were also tenants living in poorly-maintained *Tong Lau*s were eager for quicker urban renewal project, which could help them relocate to public housings. Thus, when URA announced to change their plan and excluded Wing Lee Street from the urban renewal boundary, those residents who wanted to move out was disappointed and even angry about the delay in relocation (Lachlan 2014; Ley and Teo 2014; *Apple Daily* 3 Mar 2010). Even in both Lee Tung Street and Blue House clusters in Wan Chai, there were also residents who wanted to move out and be relocated. However, even though the communities were not unified and harmonious groups, it does not mean that the demands for heritage preservation and the mobilization of heritage discourses are impossible. The demands for preserving the built heritage, the social networks and traditional business should not be reduced into that everyone in the neighbourhood is forced to stay. It is as unreasonable as displacing everyone in the

neighbourhood. Similarly, preservation should not be understood as without renovation. Rather, preservation with renovation could improve the living environment without demolition and displacement. URA, as a state-backed up agent, also has the responsibility to offer different choices so that those community members want to move out can have proper resettlement; while those who want to stay have the right to do so, after the project is finished. The case of the Blue House has illustrated the importance of choices; so that, those who wanted to move out and those who wanted to stay are not necessarily in agonistic positions. As those who want to move out and who want to stay are not necessarily in agonistic positions, and those who want to move out can actually fulfill their wish not through the demolition of built heritage, the mobilization of heritage preservation can still function as a resistance of displacement.

To summarize, in a highly commercialized society like Hong Kong, heritage preservation provides possibilities to address broader political-economic issues, and urban politics and policies as it transcends the property discourses on which the neoliberalization regime relies. On one hand, this neoliberalization regime has produced an atmosphere that encourages the idea that buildings are to be seen as commodities and in which speculation on real estate markets has long been regarded normal and acceptable, if not admired. On the other hand, paradoxically, while the state back urban redevelopment, residents or shops who were only asking for distributive justice when they negotiated for higher acquisition prices or greater relocation allowances were considered “greedy” and thus morally wrong. Here, the state, including the URA, were easily able to dominant what was represented as in the “public interest” or for the “good for the society”, and thus, with the help of the propaganda machine, was able to position itself as moral, while positioning those negotiating for fairer treatment as its opposite. Thus, the potential of the affected neighbourhoods to resist was predicated on the paradigm shift from questions of price to the issue of “value”.

Given the state’s (URA’s) claim that they would also be preserving built heritage and local characteristics, it was completely legitimate to mobilize the discourses of cultural heritage and effect this paradigm shift. Cultural heritage was re-interpreted by the community movements to encompass not only its conventional understanding but also the people in the community. The discourses of cultural heritage provided an understanding of buildings and land beyond the logic of “property” and

exchange value, and helped to evoke a sense of place. Through this, the people's right to engage with urban politics did not have to be based on property ownership and exchange value. Instead, use value and understandings of place independent of property ownership were given the space to be addressed. Thus, the seemingly depoliticized discourse of cultural heritage became a vehicle for smuggling in more politicized and radical ideas, such as the right to planning and the democratization of urban politics. The shift from "materialistic" to "value" also coincided with the interests of middle-class radicalism and broadens its class basis. In the context of Hong Kong with its increasing concerns about local identities since the 1990s, the mobilization of heritage discourses was certainly able to attract people's attention. However, while it is true that the increasing concern with local identities also raised the possibility of the commodification of local cultural heritage, this does not mean that the mobilization of heritage discourses necessarily participates in the commodification process. It is not that community movements' mobilization of heritage discourses was unmotivated by concerns for political-economic criticism, distribution justice, the displacement of the poor; they were facing a situation in which attempts to address these issues directly would have been ignored or made counterproductive by the mass media. Thus, alternative ways to address these issues were sought.

The mobilization of heritage discourses in Wan Chai community movements is just one of the examples. Similarly, in Penang, the famous heritage preservation advocacy group, the Penang Heritage Trust (PHT), had both a "professional arm" and a "community arm". PHT members were mainly from (upper-)middle-class professional backgrounds, but quite a number had been activists when they were young. When Malaysia was repealing rent control regulations with the aim of abolishing it, the inner-city of George Town in which many pre-war buildings protected by rent control were located was going to be seriously affected. At this point, the activist tendencies of the PHT re-surfaced. The PHT collaborated with residential groups against displacement in a campaign called Save Our Selves (SOS). The PHT strategically used its "professional" image of long-term concern with heritage preservation to urge the government to consider heritage and housing in holistic manner (Nagata 2001; Jenkins 2008). In short, heritage discourses were mobilized in Malaysia with the aim of resisting displacement in a similar way to that in which they were used by the community movements in Hong Kong.

In terms of “results”, although quite a number of the community movements that mobilized heritage discourses failed to resist displacement, for example in the case of Lee Tung Street; it should not simply be concluded that this was because the cultural heritage discourses failed to address the political-economic situation or because heritage is easily incorporated by capitalism. Also, the context of state involvement in these urban politics should not be ignored. Even had heritage discourses not been mobilized, the issue of displacement would still have remained. The strategic mobilization of heritage could still create possibilities for resistance, especially when there are critical public concerns about heritage preservation that the state needs to pacify, as in the the Blue House Cluster and Tai Yuen Street Market examples. The Blue House Cluster was transformed from a total displacement project to one in which residents were able to choose whether to stay or relocate. The Tai Yuen Street Market was allowed to continue to operate. Regardless of the result, the empowerment through community building that comes with community movements can transform the society.

There is another way in which heritage discourses addresses the issue of political-economy, which becomes clear when one moves beyond narrowly class-defined conceptions of the political-economy. Capitalism treats land as a commodity and the neoliberal globalization further speeds up the privatization of public space and denounces ordinary people’s rights to city. In the era of neoliberalism, gentrification no longer merely retains its conventional sense of “middle-class” people displacing the “working class”. Instead, “global elites” have become “super-gentrifiers” whose affects are especially concentrated in areas at or very close to the central area of a city. The new displaced can include the previous gentrifiers and the middle-class, while the new gentrifiers are often closely related to the global financial markets and other global elites (Butler and Lees 2006; Lees 2003; Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008). Wan Chai is experiencing such “super-gentrification”, given the sky-rocketing prices of URA redevelopment projects that displaced communities cannot afford<sup>151</sup> and the growing numbers of serviced apartments targeting the super-rich and the global elites of

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<sup>151</sup> For instance, when the URA acquired the property in H15 Project in 2004, the price they offered was HK\$4079 per square foot, based on usable floor area. In November 2013, when the URA and the co-operating developers Sino and Hopewell started to sell the apartment buildings still under construction there, the minimum price based on usable floor area was HK\$18771 per square foot (*The House News* 2013).

multinational corporations (Huang, S. 2012). Capital is mobile, but place is relatively less mobile (Cresswell 2004). The way that the city redevelops and accumulates capital relies on people without attachment to place and “sense of place”, so that ordinary people living in urban areas can be easily displaced and less likely to resist “uprooting”. When arguments centre on distributive justice, the propaganda machine that blames “greedy” people can easily get to work. In short, the lack of a sense of place favours capital accumulation in neoliberalism. Yet, as argued in Chapter 1, a “sense of place” and “identity” are closely related to cultural heritage. Heritage helps to build communities, a sense of place and local consciousness. The concepts of community, place and local consciousness should not be read decontextually, as in what David Harvey (1997) calls the “communitarian trap” that romanticizes the notion of “community” (Kwok 2011). Rather, these concepts provide a way to address alternatives. In their progressive versions, as writer Chan Chi-Tak (2006) suggests, they can “rebuild the relationship between people and the land, criticize short-sighted economic and market interests, criticize rootless policies that neglects the humanity and environment”. What needs to borne in mind is that the production of these spatial and place consciousnesses is, as Massey suggests, “always in process and never a closed system” (2005: 11). Place identity is an organic process full of diversity. It is not that the people in the community refuse to change, but that they refuse a top-down uprooting imposition of change. Heritage and the notion of community, in this sense, remain sites of contest, which also provides a space of imagination of a preferred future.

### **4.3 Heritage Preservation Movements as the Resistance Movements**

In the previous section, I demonstrated how heritage and related “cultural” terms can open up possibilities for community-based urban social movements and community building. It also provides an alternative in the imagination of urban space and urban politics. Its seemingly depoliticized image gives affords possibilities for community groups and the boarder civil society to introduce more radical and political-economic ideas that can challenge the dominant social paradigm, and which would be dismissed or easily mis-represented if they presented in a more straight forward way. “Heritage” creates a space of possibilities to challenge state-backed neoliberalization. At the same time, heritage is clearly re-politicized due to the challenge it presents. Besides the situations discussed above, there are other situations in places in which ordinary types

of social movements, such as sit-ins and protests, are less preferable. In these situations heritage becomes a site of resistance and *de facto* social movements of these places. While, what initiates the concern with heritage and the heritage preservation movement may at first be “apolitical”, more radical ideas and political-economic criticism are often aroused in the process. As argued and demonstrated in earlier chapters, heritage is a site of contest and often raises “counter-memories” that contest the state’s version of heritage and historic narration. Nevertheless, on the surface, heritage is quite often a “non-threatening concept” (Nagata 2001: 181), especially when one compares it with the open demands for political reforms and social justice. Thus, heritage also provides potential avenues through which these more radical and direct political-economic criticisms and demands can be “smuggled in” and channeled. For postcolonial states, it is not uncommon that the ruling elites inherited the governmentality of the former colonizer, and ordinary citizens generally lack decision-making power. Thus, if the demand being smuggled in through heritage is related to the empowerment of the people, it creates spaces for the possibility of decolonization. Heritage, in this sense, can become a “low-risk banner” for civil society to channel more radical causes that are closely related to decolonization. In this section, I am going to use the heritage preservation movements in Singapore as examples to illustrate this argument. I will first discuss the state-civil society relationship in Singapore. Then, I will discuss the heritage preservation movements in Singapore, including Bukit Brown Cemetery discussed in the previous chapter. This will enable me to explore the type of radical ideas and political-economic criticisms are smuggled in through heritage discourses and advocacy, and how this is achieved.

The existing literatures generally agree that Singapore has a very strong state, which has a strong influence on many different aspects of its people’s everyday life (Ortmann 2010; Rodan 2001). The current ruling party, the People’s Action Party (PAP), has been the ruling party in Singapore since 1959. Theoretically and on the surface, Singapore has been a representative democracy since its independence in 1965; elections are held regularly and the government ministers are elected members of the parliament. Yet in practice, many anti-democratic practices and legislation suppresses or contains dissent (Chua 1994; Francesch-Huidobro 2008; Ortmann 2010). For instance, the freedom of the press is very limited, and Singapore ranks very low in the Press Freedom Index, especially when compared with other developed economies

(Reporters Without Borders 2013, 2014). Freedom of Assembly is also very limited. If the citizens want to protest, they need to apply for permits. The “Speakers’ Corner” at Hong Lim Park is the only venue where protests and public-speeches are allowed without the need for a permit (George 2000; Lee 2002; Han 2013). Maria Francesch-Huidobro suggests that Singapore is an example of “illiberal democracy”, “where free elections take place [...] but where civil liberties [...] and respect for the rule of law [...] are restricted.” (2008: 97). There was an infamous case in the 1990s when a young scholar belonging to the opposition party attracted much attention when he was sacked by the head of his department, who was a PAP member, “allegedly for misusing a research grant” (Bell and de-Shalit 2011: 84). Individual members in the government also use, if not abuse, the defamation law to sue foreign media and outspoken individuals that criticize the government or government officials (Ellis 2002).

Such coercive practices and anti-democratic legislation that restrict civil liberties should be understood in the context of Singapore’s state ideology. As argued in previous chapters, Singapore is dominated by state ideologies of “survivalism”, “pragmatism”, the “rational” use of land, which together can be translated into “economic growth”. Government officials have openly suggested that “political stability” is “of utmost importance” for the “prosperity” of the country (Goh 1985: 14). In practice, this often translates into the “father-knows-the-best” paternalism of top-down decision-making, and as the substitute of the society, the state or its ruling elites should be free from “populist” challenge and competing groups, which are deemed to obstruct “effective” rule. Thus, the state’s ruling elites strategically and carefully manage the spaces of dissent and the political spaces that different citizens are allowed access to (Koh and Ooi 2000, 2004; Goh 1985). However, in order to sustain its legitimacy, the state needs popular support, and participation from and engagement with the public. In 1991, the then-Minister for Information and the Arts, George Yeo, called for the creation of a strong “*civic* society”, instead of “*civil* society”. “Civic society”, according to Chua Beng Huat (2000), emphasizes the citizen’s “civic responsibilities”, rather than the civil rights that “civil society” is linked to. Similarly, greater participation and engagement with the public does not really mean enhancing political rights. Rather, from the state’s point of view, citizens’ participation means providing the government with “useful” suggestions through carefully-managed “proper” channels, or participation in voluntary or welfare activities and events organized by the government

and its closely-linked organizations. In short, the state aims to encourage participation in their “outcome” activities and in the implementation, but not the process, of decision-formulation (George 2000; Koh and Ooi 2004; Kong and Yeoh 2003). Even though the state later began to use the term “civil society”, the “co-operative” dimension is still emphasized (Yeo 2000).

The abovementioned coercive and anti-democratic practices and legislations, the abuse of power, and the constant direct and indirect threats from the government create an atmosphere of fear and thus self-censorship in Singapore. Ruling PAP’s politicians often use the infamous “OB markers” (“out-of-bounds markers”) to indicate what is “acceptable” in public discussions. Yet where the “boundaries” are is ambiguous. This makes the general public hesitate to criticize government policies in public because they do not know if certain comments or opinions would be “out of bounds” and get them into trouble. Although the Singaporean government wants to forward communitarianism over individualism, its political repression has almost the opposite effect; it discourages communitarian aims while fostering greater individualism. This also creates an atmosphere of self-censorship and thus silences dissent, at least in public (Francesch-Huidobro 2008; Velayutham 2009; Loh, K.S. 2007; Tan, K.P. 2007; George 2000; Bell and de-Shalit 2011). However, this does not mean that resistance does not exist. In the general level, resistance and dissent do take place, but in more subtle ways and in the politics of everyday life. For instance, Selvaraj Velayutham (2009) suggests that ordinary Singaporeans express their dissent through complaints and humour. The ruling party and government departments are often renamed with same acronyms in ironic and satirical ways by bloggers and netizens as a way to express their discontent.<sup>152</sup>

While the general public uses cynical methods to express their dissent, NGOs quite often use better articulated methods that aim at increasing the levels of articulated social advocacy and policy reform. Although “OB markers” might serve as unwritten restrictions on the issues that NGOs can get involved with, and thus forestall NGO office-bearers from affiliating with opposition parties, it is not uncommon for NGOs to test and push these boundaries (Francesch-Huidobro 2008; Chi 2011). Nonetheless,

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<sup>152</sup> Examples include “Pay and Pay” and “Party Against People” (People’s Action Party), “Pay Until Broke” (Public Utilities Board), “Sorry Must Repair Train” (Singapore Mass Rapid Transit), etc. (TalkingCock n.d.; HWZ Forums 2013a, 2013b),

local NGOs often present themselves as non-confrontational and nonpartisan. I have seen an NGO officer openly proclaim, “We are not against the government”, in a public forum. This would no doubt appear strange in other places, where civil society groups can openly contest government policies; but in the Singaporean context, such a non-confrontational gesture is understandable. Nevertheless, this should not be misread as being in any way similar to the actions of government-related *civic* organizations. Given that the state can be very high-handed towards the dissidents, such non-confrontational and nonpartisan gestures can allow the NGOs to “play safe”, so that their “protest” is seen to be based on the issues and to be motivated for the common good of society, rather than as directly targeting the state and the ruling parties *per se*. The government also treats several major issue-based NGOs as advisory bodies (Francesch-Huidobro 2008). However, in the course of their advocacy, these NGOs propose alternative paradigms related social values and alternative decision-making process. The NGO’s non-confrontational gestures still imply considerable constraints, especially on how far their views can be channeled in the absence of more radical forms of contest. Also, their “play safe” tactics may suggest that a chilling effect among intellectuals and professionals. However, my main concern here is the the way in which heritage preservation movements become a *de facto* social movement in this context and how this allows more radical and political-economic criticism to be smuggled into public debate through heritage preservation movements.

Heritage preservation movements and environmental movements are the two main movements with concerns about the use of land in Singapore. The major NGO that advocates for better environmental and nature protection in Singapore is the Nature Society (Singapore) (NSS), while the Singapore Heritage Society (SHS) is the NGO with a long-term commitment about heritage preservation in Singapore. The NSS and the SHS have been engaging with environmental and heritage preservation policies through public advocacy, arousing public concern, organizing public forums and submitting papers. They do not simply focus on “lobbying” the government (Francesch-Huidobro 2008; Chiah 2013a, 2013b). Just as the Conservancy Association and the Hong Kong Heritage Society collaborated in Hong Kong in the 1970s, in recent years the NSS and the SHS have collaborated in advocating the preservation of sites significant to both natural and cultural heritage, but threatened with development. These

include the former *Keretapi Tanah Melayu* (KTM) railway stations and corridors<sup>153</sup> and Bukit Brown Cemetery mentioned in Chapter 3 (Leong 2011). Besides these NGOs' long-term commitment to advocacy and engagement with heritage preservation policies, plans to demolish important landmarks and cultural landscapes also spark controversies and public concern. Apart from the most recent Bukit Brown Cemetery controversy, which I have already outlined in Chapter 3, the government's plan to demolish the National Library building at Stamford Road in the early 2000s was another major heritage-related controversy in Singapore.

The National Library controversy erupted when the Singaporean government's plan to demolish the post-war red-brick National Library building in Stamford Road to make way for the building of a tunnel became known to the public in 1999. Institutionally, the history of the National Library can be traced to the colonial period. While the materials in the library were originally mainly orientated towards the European population, following World War II and during the dismantling of the British Empire, there were rising demands for a public library service for local populations. The construction of the post-war National Library was made possible by local contributions. In 1953, a prominent local Chinese millionaire, Lee Kong Chian, offered a huge donation towards the cost of the National Library, on the condition that the future library would be free and public, and equipped with substantial collections in the Asian languages widely used in Singapore. The colonial government accepted the offer. The red-brick National Library building was designed by the Public Works Department, under the approval of the Labour Front government during Singapore's period of partial internal self-government. The National Library was opened in 1960, after the PAP had won the 1959 election and Singapore had become fully internally self-governed.<sup>154</sup> After its completion, the National Library became a place where locals gathered to study and hang out (Kwok, Ho and Tan eds. 2000; Khoo 2010; Luyt 2009). Architecturally,

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<sup>153</sup> KTM (Malayan Railways) is a railway network in Malaysia which has linked to Singapore since the colonial era. In 2011, the southern terminus of KTM was moved from the city centre of Singapore (Tanjong Pagar) to Woodlands which is closer to the Singapore-Malaysia border. Thus, the future use for the large rail corridor between Tanjong Pagar and Woodlands became uncertain. The NSS, the SHS, some cycling groups and architects jointly-proposed to convert that space into a "Green Corridor" with cycling and pedestrian paths, and a nature environment conservation (Leong 2011). The Green Corridor proposal was generally adopted by the government although some railway structures along the old railway corridor were demolished (Lip 2012).

<sup>154</sup> The name "National Library" was already used before Singapore joined Malaya in 1963 and became an independent state in 1965.

some have dismissed the National Library building for lacking architectural merit, for being “unworthy” and for not matching the adjacent National Museum. Yet others claim the building signifies an important period in Singapore’s architectural history (Lim 2001; Khoo 2010). The government commissioned the Heritage Link Study to evaluate the Library site and to make recommendations for future development in the area now known as the “Civic and Cultural District”. Their report recommended constructing a new building to house the National Library, but concluded that the existing building “should not be casually removed” and that the government might consider adaptive reuse for it instead (Collins, Erickson, Perrot and Sugaya 1987: 5). In the 1992 Revised Master Plan for the area, it is clear that the government had already decided to relocate the National Library and to demolish the red-brick building to make way for a tunnel, but these plans and rationales were not mentioned in the press. It was until December 1998, when an overseas Singaporean wrote a letter to the newspaper, that the possibility that the National Library would be demolished became known, and the plan for its demolition was only confirmed publically in March 1999. This sparked a huge outcry. Many letters were written to newspaper editors expressing sentimental feelings about the Library and discontent about its panned demolition. Prominent architects drew up alternative plans and submitted them to the government. The SHS organized a public forum, in which not only issues about cultural heritage, identity and memory were aroused, but also those of the decision-making process (Kwok, Ho and Tan eds. 2000; Khoo 2010; Lim 2001). Despite the huge outcry, the alternative plans were rejected. The red-brick National Library building was closed in 2004 and the National Library was relocated to a new building about a 15-minute walk from the old building. The old building was demolished in 2005 and some of the bricks relocated to the new building. What remains on the site is only the pillars of the original National Library gate and a new tunnel (Khoo 2010). The question of whether the outcry sparked by the government’s decision to destroy the National Library can be considered as a form of activism is debatable. However, I still regard it as a “movement”, given that open dissent had been very rare in Singapore. It was not only a reaction to the government’s decision, but also called for greater civil society input into the decision-making process. Moreover, the exchange of opinions and campaigning were vocal and sustained.



Photo 4-C: The National Library was demolished to make way for the construction of the Fort Canning Tunnel. The decision to demolish an important landmark to build the tunnel was criticized as a “tunnel vision” (Govindasamy 2007).

Compared with the National Library controversy a decade ago, the input of civil society, including more established NGOs and the “Brownies”, to save Bukit Brown Cemetery was much closer to the conventional understanding of a heritage preservation movement. Their input involved constant information and opinion exchange by heritage enthusiasts, and research about the history and values of Bukit Brown. Besides letters-to-editors, public forums and alternative plans, they also conducted continuous advocacy by holding regular guided tours, public lectures and seminars. The movement also sent petitions to governments, initiated signature campaigns and even filed reports to international organizations, so that Bukit Brown is now included on the World Monuments Watch list. The Brownies also establish the image of themselves as local experts who know the place much better than the government.



Photo 4-D: A guided tour to Bukit Brown Cemetery by the “Brownies”

By comparing heritage preservation with other causes advocated by civil society in the same period, heritage preservation advocacy clearly possessed a higher degree of legitimacy. Despite the government’s pro-growth developmentalist agenda, it could not simply dismiss public concern with heritage preservation as something “controversial”, against “core social values” and that should not be discussed. Although the government still used the “pragmatic” and “survivalist” approach to defend its decisions, heritage preservation is not “out of bounds”. Indeed, the government also needed to show they have taken note of popular sentiment and concerns by claiming that it would safeguard built heritage and “integrate local identity and heritage into the development and design of public housing estates and community spaces” in the Draft Master Plan 2013 (Urban Redevelopment Authority 2013). Thus, heritage preservation movements can enjoy greater legitimacy than other causes, and are therefore able to become vehicles for the insertion of more radical ideas and political-economic criticism because they participate in some of the common discourses as the state.

When the state prepared more comprehensive heritage preservation policies in the 1980s, nation-building was one of its key motivations. From the state’s point of view, a rootedness in Singaporean and other “Asian” traditions was to be encouraged to counter the negative influence of “Westernization” (Kong and Yeoh 2003; Yeoh and Huang 2008). According to the Committee on Heritage’s report of 1988, “unique

heritage” “can play a vital part in nation building” (The Committee on Heritage 1988: 6). When categorizing the heritage of Singapore, a category known as “nation building heritage” was included. This is “derived from the historical events and experiences” that Singaporeans “have lived through and which have shaped [their] lives”, and includes their experiences of and responses to events such as the “British colonial administration[,] the Japanese Occupation, the post-war struggle for independence and the struggle against Communism” (ibid. 27). In other words, the state perceived heritage as a legitimate tool for nation-building. Heritage preservation movements in Singapore, therefore, quite often appropriate the rhetoric of the “nation” and “nation-building” strategically, but infuse it with their own different understandings.

For instance, as Clara-Ann Khoo (2010) suggests, the National Library clearly fit very well into logic of nation-building. It was planned and built when Singapore underwent the shift to self-government. Like the National Theatre that was built in 1963 but which had already been demolished, the “National” in the library’s title can be regarded as bearing witness to the nation-building process since the late colonial period, had begun to construct the national identity even before Singapore became independent (Quek 2012). Lau Wai Har’s speech at a SHS-organized public forum about the National Library illustrates how the National Library was a good fit for the nation-building vision. She suggests,

It is most important to note that the National Library has developed from an exclusive colonial institution to a free public library that belongs to all Singaporeans. It has evolved concurrently with the political and social development of our nation – from the colonial era, renewing itself through the self-government period, to total independence as nation. It mirrors the process of Singapore’s nation-building, serves as an anchor for reminding us of our struggle for independence, and strengthens our sense of belonging and identity.

(Lau 2000: 25)

In short, the heritage preservation movement can appropriate the language of nation-building legitimized by the state, in a similar way to that in which the Wan Chai community movements in Hong Kong legitimized their claims through what the URA should do. Accordingly, if the state really believes in the nation-building that enabled

the Singaporean struggle to colonial rule and achieve independence, then the National Library should have been preserved as it was as a part of nation-building heritage.

Similarly, in the Bukit Brown Cemetery preservation movement, the Brownies also tried to appropriate the national traditions invented by the state. On Singapore's National Day, the state organizes a celebration ritual known as the National Day Parade (NDP) every year. On the National Day in 2013, the Brownies also organized a "NDP" in Bukit Brown Cemetery to celebrate with the "National Deceased Pioneers" buried there. They appropriated many rituals of the state-organized NDP, such as reciting the Singaporean National Pledge<sup>155</sup> and singing the national anthem. They even appropriated the state's NDP slogan "One Nation, Many Stories" to emphasize that there were many "stories" about the nation in the cemetery (Heng 2013b; Chong and Chua 2014). The Brownies constantly referred to the deceased buried in Bukit Brown as the "pioneers", which implied they had contributed to building the nation even before there was a nation. By appropriating the nation-building discourse and even its rituals, the heritage preservation movement was able to challenge the state's version of nation-building, which is very much focused on the PAP version of narration.

As argued in previous chapters, differences in understanding what "nation-building" is affect the understanding of history and the importance of the site. Yet the state could neither deny nor challenge the movement's nation-building discourse embedded in the sites, and could only return constantly to its discourses of survival and pragmatism. In this sense, even though the demands of the heritage preservation movements are ignored by a state, the movements still retain legitimacy. This legitimacy also affords some space for more radical and directly political-economic criticism to be smuggled in through heritage preservation. In this sense, heritage preservation movements in Singapore became *de facto* social movements, which were able to enlarge

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<sup>155</sup> The Singapore National Pledge was written in 1966 by the then-Foreign Minister Sinnathamby Rajaratnam, when the racial tensions were high (Hong and Huang 2008). The pledge represents the ideal of building Singapore based on "civic national identity", rather than "ethnic national identity" (Ortmann 2009). In the pledge, it includes the lines "citizens of Singapore" "regardless of race, language or religion" pledging "to build a democratic society based on justice and equality" (National Heritage Board n.d.). This is often recited in schools and at the NDP. The state also encourages the recitation of the pledge "during occasions of national significance" (ibid.). However, comments have been made that it is ironic that the state encourages people to recite it given the lack of justice and equality (Loh, K.S. 2009). The pledge is also recited on the parades of the opposition, to suggest that they are actually aiming at the ideals set out in the pledge (Ortmann 2009).

the space of civil society advocacy.

One of the political-economic criticisms that can be smuggled in through heritage preservation movements is the issue of spatial justice. Edward Soja (2009, 2010) argues that “spatial justice” is not a substitute to other forms of justice. Rather, it emphasizes the spatial aspects of justice and reads justice in terms of critical spatial perspectives. Accordingly, spatial justice and injustice includes issues about location discrimination, the spatial structures of privilege and disadvantage, resource distribution, and redistributive justice/injustice in spatial terms, etc. Linking the issue of spatial justice to heritage controversies, the Singapore government’s plans to demolish the National Library and Bukit Brown Cemetery, for instance, become not just a question of what was demolished, but about what was to be built on the vacated sites. Compared with the original or potential use of the site in question, the issue is whose interests are served under any proposed new use and whose are excluded. Are there any alternative plans and, if so, why are these not adopted? Who will be affected in the original or alternative plans? These questions have often been raised by heritage preservation movements and related heritage discourses. The National Library and parts of the Bukit Brown Cemetery were demolished to make way for road construction. When the National Library was demolished, there was much discussion of the importance of collective memory, but much less discussion about the road or tunnel. Yet by the time of the Bukit Brown Cemetery controversy, many historic buildings had previously been sacrificed for road construction, and there were ongoing government plans to demolish a public housing estate for yet another expressway (Chee 2011). Consequently, the Bukit Brown controversy generated considerably more criticism that compared all these issues and targeted the state’s prioritization of cars and car-owners. For instance, Terry Xu published an article entitled “Bukit Brown and Rochor: Development for Who?” on *The Online Citizen*, questioning “who” would benefit from such “development”. He argues:

In the case of the Bukit Brown and Rochor developments, the extension of Singapore’s road network will undoubtedly benefit vehicle-owners by easing traffic congestion. Car-owners stand to benefit most, since cars account for the largest proportion of all vehicles. Car-owners can safely be assumed to be in the middle and upper strata of society, simply because of the economic demands associated with

purchasing and owning a car.

(Xu 2011)

Xu took the Singaporean context into account to argue that car-owners are the more privileged ones. Yet the cost of new roads is the loss of a culturally and historically important heritage site, and the uprooting of a whole community, one that is unlikely to benefit much from the highway (Xu 2011).

Besides the new eight-lane road, the government's other reason for demolishing the Bukit Brown Cemetery was to construct a long-term housing development. As suggested in Chapter 3, putting aside the issue of what kind of housing development was planned, the civil society actors also questioned why it was the Bukit Brown Cemetery that was chosen for redevelopment and not golf-courses, such as the nearby Singapore Island Country Club (SICC). Shifting the controversy from the government's plan to demolish Bukit Brown Cemetery, Liew Kai Khiun (2011), for instance, took the opportunity to open up the question of land use in Singapore. He published an open letter in a newspaper contrasting the Bukit Brown Cemetery and the SICC and other golf courses across the island. On one hand, there were socially exclusive and ecologically damaging golf-courses that serving a privileged few. On the other hand, there was a "culturally, ecologically and historically rich site" that "all can enjoy". Liew argued, "If there must be redevelopment in the Lornie Road area, one of SICC's golf courses, rather than the cemetery, should make way." (Liew 2011). Liew's opinion was not only endorsed by the Brownies and emphasized as one of the points made on their guided tours, but was also shared by others concerned with heritage preservation, land use and social values in Singapore (Aw 2012; Han 2013; Gintai 2012; SOS Bukit Brown 2012). William S.W. Lim, a prominent Singaporean architect, and Faith Wong (2012) clearly articulated the issue in terms of spatial justice, linking the future development of Bukit Brown Cemetery and the issue of prioritizing golf-courses. In an article called "Applying Spatial Justice in Singapore", Lim and Wong argue that the contestation of public spaces, which include Bukit Brown Cemetery, "should not be viewed as antagonistic anti-establishment actions but opportunities for ordinary citizens to present alternatives as stakeholders", where the demands for preserving these places are to conserve them as "public". They articulate Bukit Brown Cemetery as a contest of spatial justice, "whether this site should be assigned for elitist housing or for acknowledging

the spirit of the recent awakening for an inclusive society”. Similarly, “the disproportionate amount of greens for golf courses in Singapore”, they argue, “is a spatial injustice when more than 20 golf courses take up a large amount of land while servicing only the privileged minority”. (Lim and Wong 2012). In short, the privileging of roads for car-owners over heritage sites and public housing, the demolition a heritage site for luxury housing, and the sacrifice of heritage site instead of golf-courses all reveal the existence of spatial injustice at the local level “created through discriminatory decision making”, here, urban planning and land use, by the state (Soja 2010:9). In this sense, saving Bukit Brown Cemetery and transforming it into a “heritage park”, as the Brownies called it, is not about nostalgia for the past or prioritizing the dead over the living. Rather, it is about rectifying spatial injustice by demanding that a site that is important to history and nature, and which is a public space that everyone can enjoy, be preserved instead of prioritizing the land use practices that served only the interests of the elites. As suggested in Chapter 1, the demolition of a site enjoyed by the public and its transformation into an exclusive place used only by the elite is a form of urban colonization. Thus, heritage preservation is a way to resist spatial injustice and urban colonization. The spatial injustice had existed in Singapore long before the heritage preservation movements emerged. The most obvious example is the number of exclusive golf courses across the island. Heritage preservation provides a potential platform for channeling this issue. The seemingly “de-politicized” heritage preservation discourses clearly made it possible for more directly political-economic criticism of land use to be heard and channeled in public discourse.

The heritage preservation movements in Singapore also quite often touched on a fundamentally political issue closely related to that of the spatial justice of land use, namely: Who decides? As suggested earlier, Singapore’s top-down, “rational”, “father-knows-the-best” form of decision-making does not regard public participation or even consultation in the decision-making process as important. From the state’s point of view, rapid economic development and the “comfort” brought by materialistic enjoyment can justify its “rational”, top-down decision-making and political oppression (George 2000; Bell and de-Shalit 2011). However, the controversies sparked by the government’s plans to demolish heritage buildings and sites actually prove that the government’s assumptions about and rationalizations of decision-making are problematic. The government’s position represents the “dominant social paradigm” (Cotgrove and Duff

1980). The over-emphasis on “rationality” and pragmatism separates fact and value, thought and feeling, and often ignores people’s sentiments about and attachments to urban landmarks and the landscape of the city. As William S.W. Lim argued in the SHS-organized forum on the National Library, policy-makers, who were used to the “rational” form of planning that emphasized economy and technology, would find it difficult to incorporate people’s memories of a place, which “cannot be quantified and assigned an exchange value”, into their urban design plans, because of the “elusive and dynamic” nature of such memories. That is why actively seeking the participation of civil society and local communities is important (Lim 2000: 15 – 17). There were many speeches and letters-to-editors addressing the issue of public participation in the National Library controversies. They questioned why consensus building was lacking and why the people were only “notified” after the decision had already been made (Kwok, Ho and Tan eds. 2000; Ho and Tan 1999). Even after the outcry was sparked and civil society actors tried to lobby the government, they felt that the government was still “explaining” the decision to them, rather than having any intention of “listening” to their opinions or demands (Khoo 2010). Following the demolition of the National Library, there have in fact been some heritage-related cases in which a certain amount of public input was sectioned, such as the KTM Rail Corridor and the designation of the Tiong Bahru estate as a conservation area. However, these tended to be less “controversial” sites or ones with few development pressures (Khoo 2010; Kong 2011).

Nonetheless, the situation in which the government merely announced a decision that it had already made to the public as a *fait accompli* was repeated in the Bukit Brown Cemetery controversy. There was no proper public consultation or due process leading up to the decision to demolish Bukit Brown Cemetery. Even NGOs with long-term commitments to heritage preservation, such as the SHS, only found out about the government’s decision through private connections with senior officials (Singapore Heritage Society 2012). As revealed in a public forum in November 2011, even members of the PMB only heard about the plan 12 hours before its announcement. There was hardly any public engagement in the decision-making process. Just as in the National Library controversy, civil society groups were disappointed that the government had not sought genuine consultation before they made decisions. For instance, in a 26-page position paper published in January 2012, the SHS criticized the lack of any “genuine consultation” and “honest deliberation of alternatives and options”

before the government had made the decision. They criticized the so-called consultation process of the government, claiming that their meetings with civil society groups and relevant stakeholders merely served as a way to inform them of the government's rationale, while feedback was merely used to fine-tune the decision (Singapore Heritage Society 2012). They argued:

The consultation process is vital to the nation-building project. Government consultation of relevant stakeholders and citizens over national and policy issues serves to foster a sense of ownership and belonging to the nation. The Bukit Brown issue presents an excellent opportunity for government and civil society to engage in the exchange of ideas, concerns and interests.

(Singapore Heritage Society 2012: 15)

In responding to accusations about the lack of consultation, the then-Minister of State for National Development, Tan Chuan-Jin, conceded that there could have been earlier public consultation, “[but] not all plans can be shared beforehand, largely due to market sensitivity especially where land acquisition could take place” (Singapore Government News 15 March 2012). In short, the state still treats urban planning as a “market” issue instead of valuing public engagement in the decision-making process. The following “consultations” were still no more than explanations of the government's position (*Channel News Asia* 2012).

As argued earlier, the lack of genuine public consultation and public input in decision-making processes is not limited to land use and urban development. Heritage-related issues are merely one of the more obvious examples. In taking up the issue of consultation and participation in the decision-making process, heritage preservation movements also provide a channel for these criticisms to be made and articulated. Given that heritage issues can be legitimated in terms of nation-building discourses, they can also smuggle in and channel these more radical and direct criticisms in a relatively “safe” way with less fear of touching on “OB markers”. Moreover, the demands for genuine public consultation and participation raises issues about another aspect of spatial justice; the process of achieving spatial justice. It is an issue about the right to the city, not only about access to a place, but about being able to actively engage in making the place, as in what Harvey (2003: 941) calls “an active right to make the city different” and “the

creation of a new urban commons” for “active democratic participation”. In this sense, the Singaporean heritage preservation movements are comparable to the community movements in Hong Kong in their common use of heritage discourses to achieve the right to the city and the right to planning, despite the differences in the scale and level of demands for public participation, which can be explained by the differences between the existing spaces of civil society in the two cities.

Compared with the community movements in Hong Kong, heritage preservation movements in Singapore are relatively closer to “middle-class radicalism”. Many enthusiastic activists in these campaigns come from educated middle-class, professional backgrounds or are artists. These movements were usually initiated as by discontent about the demolition of heritage sites, and by feelings aroused by the cultural, historical and ecological value of the sites. In terms of core values, the movements have different priorities from the state. The state mainly represents the dominant social paradigm and prioritizes the material, economic growth and developmentalist understanding of “development”, which realized through a “rational” and “pragmatic” decision-making process. Such dominant social paradigm undermines the importance of cultural value and happiness, both of which are elusive and dynamic, and not easily calculable. The dominant vision of development and economic growth also creates social and spatial injustice. On the other hand, the enthusiastic activists of the heritage preservation movements, many of who derive from a specific section of the middle-class, represent an alternative paradigm that prioritizes “non-materialistic” values and an alternative vision of “development”. For them, cultural, historical and ecological values need to be included in any consideration of “development”. Instead of thinking of “development” in terms of building more roads and demolishing heritage sites for new residential and commercial developments, they favour sustainable development, rather than developmentalist ideologies. Accordingly, preserving a cemetery is not a “waste of land”, for instance, because it can be transformed into a “heritage park” that provides a public space for everyone. The alternative paradigm that the heritage preservation movements represent also holds that happiness is not achieved through rapid and continuous “economic growth”, but instead believes that qualities of life that transcend mere materialist quantification must be considered. However, questions of “value”, social and spatial justice, and the decision-making process are inseparable. In this sense, spatial justice and the democratization of the decision-making process would also be

the demands in heritage preservation movement. Yet at the same time, these are also issues that the border civil society in Singapore fights for. Read in this perspective, the “depoliticized” heritage preservation movements, which can share the languages of “nation-building” with the state, become a channel through which these more radical and directly political-economic criticisms can be smuggled in and addressed. These political-economic criticisms are often not limited to the concerns of the “middle-class”, especially when they are directed to the spatial injustice inherent in the use of land in Singapore.

#### 4.4. Chapter Conclusion

Heritage remains a site of contest. The spread of practices that commodify and decontextualize cultural heritage, often as a force that drives up rents, does not mean that cultural heritage necessarily lacks a critical edge. Cases of developers making use of heritage, like making use of parks and open space, do not mean that cultural heritage will necessarily become a part of the “bulldozer” and cultural (re-)colonization, because one would not reject parks and open space *per se* merely due to the developers’ appropriation. In this chapter, I have articulated the heritage preservation campaigns in 1970s Hong Kong, the community movements in Hong Kong in the 2000s, and the heritage preservation movements in Singapore into a more radical and progressive tradition of heritage preservation. Middle-class radicalism, which was used to articulate environmentalist campaigns in the West by Parkin (1968), Cotgrove and Duff (1980) and also heritage preservation campaigns in the West by Samuel (1994), is also useful to articulate heritage preservation campaigns and movements with activists mainly from a specific, professional fraction of the middle-class in Southeast Asia. “Middle-class radicalism” diversifies the understanding of the “middle-class” and disassociates the stereotypical connection of the middle-class with the property regime and support of dominant social paradigms, such as neoliberalization. Rather, it provides a lens to articulate urban politics beyond rigid class analysis and cross-class resistances in urban politics. In the discussed case studies, even where activists in the movements were mainly middle-class, they did not only have different sets of “social core values”, but also resisted urban (re-)colonization and spatial injustice. In the era of neoliberalization, the accumulation of capital has been intensified. This process is often backed up the state. Land is treated as a commodity, exchange value is prioritized and the state often

treats public land as its own “private” property that it can transfer to private developers for capital accumulation. In such processes, “rights” are often rigidly associated with property ownership. For instance, the managers of privatized space have full power to control who can enter and what activities are permitted. Thus, spatial justice is violated. Heritage provides an understanding of place beyond rigid property discourses. It also provides a channel through which to negotiate the concept of the right to the city. In the community movements in Hong Kong, the affected communities and the activists made use of heritage discourse, quite often regarded as a “middle-class” discourse, to build a sense of community with the aim of resisting displacement and achieving the right to planning. The failure to resist displacement should not be blamed on the mobilization of heritage discourses. Rather, similar to the failure of some heritage preservation movements, the issue is what society values and how the state reacts. Nonetheless, the seemingly depoliticized discourse of heritage provides possibilities and platforms for more radical and political-economic criticism to be smuggled in and channeled, which is important in social advocacy.

By saying that heritage discourses and heritage preservation movements provide possibilities for more radical ideas and political-economy criticisms to be smuggled in and channeled, I am not saying that heritage preservation movements are merely a *means*. They are *both* the means and the ends. They are and should be articulated with the bigger picture of social movements. Yet at the same time, they are also urban social movements by themselves. People’s emotional and sentimental attachments of place are often an important motivation. This shapes and forms identities and subjectivities, which at the same time constitutes people’s different understandings of history and the meaning of place. While the forces of neoliberalization tend to uproot neighbourhoods, demolish urban landmarks and privatize public space for capital accumulation, and exacerbate spatial injustice, people’s attachment to a place and the identity generated in the resistance movements, can be resources for resisting these larger forces of neoliberalization. Such resistance may not be in the form of “revolution” or the mobilization of class language. Yet they still create spaces, spaces for projecting and imaging a better future, in which to renew the rights to the city. These heritage preservation movements open up possibilities of, as the quote by Huang Sun Quan’s (2012) that opens this chapter states, “battles for desire”. This may not lead to total liberation and constraints will still be faced. Yet, these movements create both the

potential to loosen the dominant social paradigm and possibilities for spaces of hopes in the cities.

## Chapter 5

### Dissertation Conclusion

Even while this dissertation was in the final stages, news reports related to built heritage issues in the same cities as those of the case studies in this dissertation continued to come out. There have been reports about heritage sites threatened under the pressure of urban (re-)development and the debates about the future of preserved heritage sites. For example, reports in April and May 2014 state that the remains of a pre-colonial settlement (that arguably dates back some 700 to 1000 years) were discovered in Hong Kong's railway construction site. This example brings to mind the arguments of early local historians, such as Lo Hsiang-lin *et al* (1963). Even before the establishment of the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) and the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB), heritage preservation advocates and activists had demanded the careful preservation of such valuable archaeological sites. At the same time developmentalist and populist politicians urged that the railway be operated as soon as possible, pointing out the cost of maintaining/preserving the archaeological site (Lee and Fung 2014; Fung 2014a, 2014b). Also in Hong Kong, the preserved former police married quarters in Hollywood Road (mentioned in Chapter 3) was re-opened as a creative industry hub called PMQ. Yet the pre-opening "night market" event, at which alcohol and food were served, which might even overshadow the hub's creative industry products, was criticized as inappropriate and causing a disturbance to local residents, (*Hong Kong Daily News* 2014).

In Singapore, although the first phase of the exhumation of Bukit Brown Cemetery (mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4) had started in December 2013, guided tours by the Brownies at the site continued. The cemetery was also introduced and ranked very high on tourist websites such as *Trip Advisor*. The *Cheng Beng* Festival for tomb-sweeping in April 2014 was also described as the last *Cheng Beng* at Bukit Brown Cemetery for some "residents" (Rojak Librarian 2014). Meanwhile, the documentation of Julan Kubor "Malay" cemetery started, and this sparked concerns that the heritage site would be sacrificed for residential development (Zaccheus 2014). Moreover, the effectiveness of "civic society" in influencing the state's policies, including heritage preservation, urban and environmental policies (discussed in Chapter 4), became an

issue in mainstream media (Lim, L. 2014; Chua and Leow 2014).

In Penang, after several years of George Town being listed as World Heritage Site (mentioned in Chapter 3), the inner city was seen as “revived”. An increasing number of art venues also opened in the George Town WHS. Yet the issue of how such a trend could avoid driving out the people living there and how “sustainable tourism” that would not “kill the goose that lays the golden egg” could be ensured remained a key question and concern (Tan, J. 2014; Ooi, K.C. 2014).

All of these issues can be understood in relation to the constantly reemerging concerns of this dissertation, positing heritage in a trialectic relationship with time (history, the temporal dimension of the society), space (sense of place, the political-economic relationships embedded in urban space), and identity. Heritage not only contests the potential threat from demolition, but also remains a site of contest. What is at stake here is not only the conventional question of *whose* heritage is preserved, but also the relationship between heritage and neoliberalization. How can heritage preservation become resistant to neoliberalization instead of being manipulated by global capital? As I have demonstrated throughout the dissertation, “colonialism” and coloniality are not limited to the direct political-economic domination by the colonizer. They are also central to knowledge production, to the understanding of history and “modernity”, to spatial designations and decision-making processes. Neoliberalism has become a new form of colonialism by continuing, through privatization rather than coercion, the processes of dispossession – processes that are quite often backed up by state policies. Whether cultural heritage is manipulated for capital-accumulation or used to provide resources for civil society groups in their resistance towards different forms of colonialisms ultimately depends on who appropriates cultural heritage and in what ways. Thus, the question of *how postcolonial heritage preservation could function as an actual decolonization project* remained the key concern. In addressing this question, this dissertation also contributes to Inter-Asia cultural studies, postcolonial studies and broadens the understanding of urban space in terms of decolonization.

## 5.1 How Can Postcolonial Heritage Preservation Function as an Actual Decolonization Project?

Throughout the dissertation, I have aimed to examine the complexity of my major research question: How postcolonial heritage preservation can function as an effective method of decolonization. Based on an understanding of decolonization as a process that allows colonized people to re-think and reflect on their relationships with the colonizers, I have summarized how decolonization is made possible through its critical engagement with heritage preservation.

First, there is the issue of historical narration. As outlined in Chapter 1, historical narration is a process of selecting what particular past to memorize and what to forget. Ernest Renan (1996) makes it clear that nation-building requires the individual to forget many things that would disrupt the national narrative. Such a process, however, arouses critical questions of whose versions of history are to be remembered and whose versions are to be forgotten. A problem that impact the narratives of history constructed by many nation-states as part of their nation-building agenda is that they often reconstruct a complex and conflictual past into a singular and linear narration (Duara 1995; Wang, Q. E. 2001). Ranajit Guha's (1988b) criticism of Indian historiography, dominated by the colonialist and nationalist elites, is, unfortunately, also valid in other postcolonial contexts. Alternative understandings and narrations of the past are either ignored, simplified or repressed in such a process. As demonstrated in the historical narrative presented in the permanent exhibition in the National Museum of Singapore discussed in Chapter 2, if a postcolonial state's historical narrative is to fulfill the state's particular version of nation-building, subaltern histories will still be suppressed or simplified in order to be assimilated into the state's narrative. Moreover, as argued in Chapter 2, the anti-colonial or anti-imperial nationalisms and historical narratives based on these ideologies do not offer effective ways to decolonization. Colonialism and anti-colonial or anti-imperial nationalism may have different standpoints on the same historic events or periods. Nevertheless, they share the same logic. When anti-colonial or anti-imperial nationalism regards colonial heritage as a "national shame" and demolish it, what it is doing is merely repeating the same old colonial historical narration without seeing the other histories embedded in the urban landscapes.

Colonialism and coloniality are complex and full of negotiation and contestation. This is represented in urban landscapes, for example, in the differences between the colonial government's plans and actual living patterns in Singapore discussed in Chapter 3, and in how the "colonial" landscape was appropriated by everyday use and resistance movements as discussed in Chapter 2. The relationships between the colonizers and the colonized were not simple and straightforward. Collaborative colonialism took place in different colonial port cities is a good example. There are many uneasy pasts and subaltern histories embedded in colonial history, which nationalism may want to avoid, ignore, undermine or even deny. Simply replacing the colonial historical narration with the national historical narration cannot be regarded as a decolonization project, because the subaltern histories which cannot be subsumed into the nation-building narration are still absent.

In order to create critical decolonized subjectivities, not only do repressed pasts and subaltern histories should be recognized and addressed, but there is also a need to be aware of and to critically engage with the "uneasiness" of the past. Examples of this uneasiness include long-repressed resistant movements, the contributions of different ethnic groups and the relationships between them, and conflictual identities and histories. To fulfill this goal, heritage preservation should not be motivated purely by aesthetic or architectural values. It is not a "memory without pain" (Abbas 1997: 83) either. Rather, heritage preservation is regarded as an essential step, not only for the recognition of the official history emphasized by colonial and postcolonial states, but also for the recognition and critical engagement of suppressed histories, the histories of resistances, and the "difficult" and "uneasy" histories that the state and mainstream public opinion want to avoid. It is necessary to refuse the racialization or simplification of these complex and uneasy histories embedded in the urban heritage. Such a critical engagement with the historical narration of preserved heritage is not only a reflection upon the past; it also creates a critical subject for the present and the future.

Closely related to historic narration, this dissertation also argues for the need to recognize the existence of the multiple vernacular modernities that emerged in different colonialities, and which lay beyond the dominant "occidental" understanding of the singular linear "historical queue" of "modernity" that regards Western modernity as the "norm". Postcolonial studies has been long concerned about the simplification and

reduction of the co-existing heterogeneity and multiplicity of modernities as the singular and linear historical progress of “modernity”. Rather than understanding the vernacular modernities in colonies as “belated” and mirroring the colonial empire, it is more accurate to articulate them as co-existing multiple vernacular modernities (Chen, K. 2006; Venn 1993, 2000, 2006; Massey 2005).

It is problematic that the occidentalist understanding of modernity, which ultimately ignores the existence of vernacular modernities in different colonies, has been internalized by many colonized societies. The desire to “catch up” with the West in terms of economic development further enhances this singular occidentalist understanding of “modernity” (Gupta 1998; McEwan 2014; Venn 1993, 2000, 2006). In order to critically reflect upon one’s relationship with the colonizers and the colonialities, it is necessary to recognize the existence of multiple vernacular modernities, because the conditions of modernities in different colonies could be different. The formation of vernacular modernities took place at the local level, and people of different ethnic groups and classes contributed to this in a multi-directional way (Venn 2006; Sang 2012). Colonial port cities are examples of sites where different vernacular modernities took place, and these histories were embedded in the urban landscapes. Yet the existence of multiple vernacular modernities is often undermined, because the internalization of colonial and Eurocentric knowledge production only recognizes one form of “modernity”. As argued earlier, the desires of postcolonial states to “catch up” in terms of “economic development” could easily lead them to ignore the existence of vernacular modernities and subsume them to the logic of Occidentalism.

This is much more problematic when it is backed up and enhanced by the state’s historic narration, as demonstrated in the Singaporean context in Chapters 2 and 3. The demolition of Bukit Brown Cemetery, as I have argued in this dissertation, is indeed a contest between two forms of modernities; a developmentalism-as-modernity supported by the state and neoliberalization regimes, and the vernacular modernity that is embedded in the cemetery. In order to decolonize occidentalist knowledge production, it is necessary to acknowledge the multiple vernacular modernities emerged in different colonial conditions.

The recognition of the existence of multiple vernacular modernities and multiple

colonial conditions is essential for postcolonial studies to be relevant in different colonial and postcolonial contexts. This would also help tackle the current constraints of postcolonial studies that bypass East and Southeast Asia and which are primarily focused on land-based colonies colonized by European powers. In this dissertation, I have argued that colonial port cities have been examples of spaces of vernacular modernities. Here the conditions of change and becoming “modern” were shaped by a *de facto* cosmopolitan environment at the local level, where different cultural elements came into contact, interacted, contested, negotiated and hybridized.

The way the postcolonial governments treated the *de facto* multiethnic, multicultural and cosmopolitan colonial port cities is representative of their mentality towards both the vision of “modernities” and to issues of multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and racial politics. As demonstrated in Singapore’s “multiracialism” and the designation of different “historic districts”, the state’s top-down version of multiculturalism often simplifies and racializes a much more complex *de facto* cosmopolitanism. I argue that the recognition of and active engagement with the complexity of the *de facto* cosmopolitan past would help one to reflect upon colonial histories, nationalist discourses and simplified official versions of “multiculturalism”. It also helps one to reflect upon the treatment of ethnic minorities and the racial prejudice that is still present. For instance, as argued in studies of the heritage of the port city in Hong Kong in Chapter 3, the re-engagement with the cosmopolitan histories of Hong Kong challenged not only nationalist discourses but also right-wing localists. The failure to recognize the contribution of non-Western and non-Chinese populations in the past can explain mainstream Hong Kong society’s “not seeing” of its ethnic minorities.

The preservation of the heritage of port cities does not deny modernity. Rather, it engages with vernacular modernities and the conditions that shaped them. Preservation could hopefully create space in which the re-negotiation of the complexity of ethnicities, identifications, histories, colonialities, and modernities embedded would become possible. This resonates with Stuart Hall’s (2005) argument that “multicultural heritage” should not be merely understood in terms of “including” “other” heritage into the sealed official narrative of “heritage” without acknowledging their long-intertwined and complex histories. The project of decolonization could be possible if one goes

beyond a simplified version of multiculturalism by critically engaging with the much more complex, long process of multiethnic negotiation, cultural hybridization and cosmopolitanism.

In terms of urban space, this dissertation traces two trajectories of “public space”: “public space” as a “civic space” and as a “colonial public space”. In the colonial context “public space” often simply referred to the land owned by the government; it was often highly regulated and used to demonstrate colonial power. The colonial concept of “public” was also often exclusive to the elites. The current notion of “public space”, associated with the “right to the city” and “spatial justice” (Harvey 2003, 2013; Lefebvre 1996; Soja 2010; Mitchell 2003), is a radicalization and result of bottom-up contest that opens up “civic spaces”. In other words, the “publicness” of these public spaces was often the result of bottom-up resistance and contest. Postcolonial societies do not necessarily guarantee the “publicness” of public space. In practice, they might continue make use of colonial “public space” to celebrate the postcolonial states’ power, regardless of whether the public space has been designated as a heritage site or not, and continue the strict regulation of “public space” through coercive forces. This not only takes place in the (former) colonial context, but also in other parts of the world. Urban scholars such as Don Mitchell (2003) and Setha Low, Dana Taplin and Suzanne Scheld (2005) argue that fear of the “threat” that marginal populations pose often leads to the reinforcement of tougher controls and surveillance of public space that ultimately threatens the “publicness” of public space. Besides coercive forces, the privatization of public space is also a new form of urban (re-)colonization. Such privatization of public space also results in the diminishing of “publicness”, for example, the constraint of democratic rights in urban spaces (Cheung 2011; Németh 2009; Minton 2012; Vasagar 2012a, 2012b; Too 2007).

The relationship between heritage preservation and urban (re-)colonization can take two different forms. On one hand, there is a chance that heritage is manipulated to bring about urban (re-)colonization, as demonstrated by the various cases in which heritage sites were converted into shopping malls and luxury restaurants. On the other hand, this dissertation argues that it is possible for heritage preservation to resist urban re-colonization, and that it could assert the right to the city (Lefebvre 1996; Harvey 2003, 2013; Mitchell 2003). Here, I argue that this possibility lies in how cultural

heritage provides a way for understanding urban space, buildings and the land beyond the logic of property ownership. The central issue for movements defending public space and protecting it from privatization is not the question of whether the land is “publicly” (state) or “privately” owned, it is about the “right to the city” and “spatial justice”. State or “public” ownership of the land does not guarantee the right to the city or spatial justice. As demonstrated the case studies on Star Ferry and Queen’s Piers, and the urban renewal projects in Hong Kong and in Bukit Brown Cemetery in Singapore, postcolonial states share the same logic as the colonial government in their treatment of “public” space. They regard “public” space as land belonging to the state; as if it were their “private property” and they had the right to decide what to do on it and whether and when to transfer it for capital accumulation.

Edward Soja makes it clear that the expression “public space” used by urban scholars and activists indeed is “a localized urban expression of the notion of common property or, as it was called, the commons” (2010: 45). The commons was a pre-Enclosure form of land where one’s right to use of land was disassociated from land ownership (Neeson 1993). It was a right before the modern public-private binary, which defines rights according to property ownership. To revive the concept of the “common” in the neoliberalization era can provide an alternative understanding of “rights” beyond property ownership, and thus beyond exchange value. I suggest that cultural heritage, with its implications of “collective” ownership, place-attachment, place-based memory, is in the domain of the “commons”. As demonstrated in the heritage preservation movements discussed in this dissertation, one does not necessarily need to “own” the building to regard the building as historically important, as a landmark or as sites important to the community. This provides a space for people attached to a place and reliant on “common land” to justify their demands not in terms of property ownership but as another form of “rights” disassociated with property ownership. Thus, “collective memory” can be radicalized not only in terms of digging up un-narrated, subaltern histories, but also as resources for creating a “sense of place” and for community-building that can be used to articulate this form of “common rights”. As Jon May argues, one’s “sense of place” often goes “beyond the boundaries of residence to include the wider sense of belonging” (2000: 748). Cultural heritage, as a form of “common”, also provides an understanding that the relationship between rights and ownership is not absolute. Moreover, as argued in Chapter 4, neoliberal forces that aim to speed up

capital accumulation by “recycling” urban spaces operate best in the absence of place-based identities and the sense of place, because attachment to place can provide the basis for a strong resistance to the uprooting and demolition of urban landmarks. In short, as a shared and “common” notion, cultural heritage provides an alternative through which one’s relationship with a place can be addressed beyond the terms of “property” and exchange value. This makes it possible to use cultural heritage to address the right to city, including the right to planning, because they are also not defined purely in terms of “private property” and exchange value. Recognizing the right to the city, including those previously excluded, and then extending the right to encompass participation and the right to planning, makes it further possible to decolonize the decision-making process and thus decolonize the concept of the “public”.

In addressing the policies and practices of heritage preservation, I have observed some emerging trends or practices that are common not only in Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang but also in other cities in East and Southeast Asia, such as Taipei and Macau. One such trend is the planned conversion of built heritage into venues for the cultural and creative industries. As many of these projects are still in the planning or conversion stages, I have chosen not to discuss them in this dissertation. Yet these examples are worthy of attention, especially because they concern the adaptive reuse of colonial buildings as venues for the cultural and creative industries, and are not limited to post-industrial spaces as I have commonly observed in many cities around the world. Unfortunately, I am not in a position to comment on the practices through which these sites will engage with the histories embedded in them in the future, because many of them have not yet or only recently re-opened. Yet I believe that these practices should be related back to one of the main issues raised in Chapter 2, that of the relationships between colonialism, nationalism and global capitals. In many areas where the creative and cultural industries have the potential to produce handsome profits, governments have put considerable effort into providing venues for them, at least on the surface. Transforming heritage sites into venues for these industries seems to be both a response to the rise in opposition to the demolition of heritage sites and also a way to provide venues for profit making. However, when states choose to transform colonial heritage sites, such as former police stations or prisons, my question is whether this demonstrates the states’ desires to use adaptive reuse to escape their uneasy histories? In other words, are these states trying to use “capitals” to avoid the legacy of the complexity of

colonialism that their “nation-building” may be politically heir to? This is worthy of further research.

## **5.2 “Port Cities as Method”, Contribution and the Future of Inter-Asia Cultural Studies and Postcolonial Studies**

This dissertation contributes to the fields of Inter-Asia Cultural Studies and postcolonial studies by introducing and demonstrating a new methodology known as “port cities as method”. As outlined by Kuan-hsing Chen (1998), the decolonization question has been central for the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies project since the beginning. Response to imperialism, colonialism and nationalism, and how “resistance” could become possible have been the major concerns of Inter-Asia Cultural Studies. Compared with other postcolonial societies, East and Southeast Asian societies beyond or on the margins of China, yet with large ethnic Chinese populations faced a double problem. Not only did they face the Eurocentrism that many postcolonial societies faced, but they also faced China-centrism. Scholars such as Allen Chun (1996), Rey Chow (1998), Ien Ang (1998, 2001, 2003), Shu-mei Shih (2013a, 2013b) and Law Wing Sang (2007) have criticized the problems of “Chineseness” and the colonialism embedded within the notion of “Chineseness”. Both Eurocentrism and China-centrism reproduce the same centre-periphery binary opposition. Both of these “centrisms” treat an abstract centre as a “universal” “norm”, and undermine the importance of the “local” as possible sites of knowledge production. Inter-Asia Cultural Studies is significant that it shifts the focus from the debates of universalism and particularism and the critique of the “centre” (Eurocentrism or China-centrism). Rather, it multiplies the reference points and reduces these “centres” as merely one reference point through engaging inter-referencing with other locals with similar experiences, or with comparable conditions of development. Through multiplying reference points and shifting the focus, Inter-Asia Cultural Studies forestalls postcolonial studies being trapped by the “imperial centre”. (Turner 2010; Chen, K. 1998, 2006, 2010; Chua 2013, 2014)

Besides, another problem with the existing literature in mainstream postcolonial studies is that it is articulated from the experiences of continental-based colonies in Africa and South Asia, and therefore has failed in many ways to respond to the

experiences of colonies in East and Southeast Asia, especially those based in the colonial port cities in Southeast Asia (Chua 2008). This dissertation has developed the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies “method” of inter-referencing, i.e. by engaging with “locals” other than their own and by using what is learned from the engagement to rethink their local concerns, Shu-mei Shih’s articulation of Sinophone as “a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness” (2007: 37), and previous studies that saw “port cities” as cosmopolitan urban spaces closely inter-related with each other, but marginalized in nationalist discourse (Hein 2011; Basu ed. 1985; Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University 1998), to propose “the port cities as method”.

The “port cities as method” recognizes the “local” as a site of knowledge production. An in-depth, critical and reflexive understanding of the local that includes the complexity of local histories, local conditions of modernities, and local ethnicities and cultures, is essential for the creation of critical subjects and decolonization projects, without the necessity of (ethno-)nationalism. Through inter-referencing between these “locals” (port cities in this case), “port cities as method” allowed one to avoid the necessity of drawing a “centre”, be it the “West”, “Chineseness” or “universal”, as the mediation. In other words, “port cities as method” offers a way to fulfill what François Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (2005) envision as a “minor transnationalism” contextualized in the contexts of (colonial) port cities.

The significance of “port cities as method” to Inter-Asia Cultural Studies is that it extends the capacity of field and envisions Inter-Asia scholars’ commitment of regarding the “locals” as the sites of knowledge production and reference by going beyond “nation-states” as the basic entity. In this dissertation, for instance, I took three former British colonial port cities which have been closely connected through the colonial maritime network, as the “locals” of the studies and references. By emphasizing the histories of Hong Kong as a colonial port city and its geographical location at Southeast Asia, the dissertation re-establishes the linkage of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, and the broader Asia, which has been “forgotten”, or at least undermined in the post-1997 re-Sinicization process. By doing so, the reference points of Hong Kong could be multiplied. Thus, the relationship of Hong Kong is not merely understood vis-à-vis China and Britain (Lo 2014a). Such a concept can also be applied

to treaty ports in China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan to let them to be understood in relation with other port cities in Asia, rather than merely with, if not subsumed to, the respective nation-states. “Port cities as method” can also overcome the current constraints of “Southeast Asia studies” that restricts the boundary of “Southeast Asia” as ASEAN countries. “Port cities as method” provides a shared frame known as “port cities” as the base of inter-referencing, as demonstrated throughout the dissertation by rethinking how heritage preservation can provide possibilities to decolonize urban spaces, resist neoliberalization in urban politics, and as a channel for civil society to challenge illiberal and undemocratic decision-making process (Chapters 2 and 4), and how to engage with the past of colonial port cities (Chapter 3).

The “port cities as method” not only provides an inter-referencing methodology, but also problematizes “port cities”. As the nodal points in the non-homogenous maritime trading networks, port cities are the sites where people from different ethnic groups and backgrounds and different cultures meet, contest and negotiate. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, port cities are multiethnic, multicultural, and even cosmopolitan spaces. How these port cities become “modern” cannot be separated from the population. Thus, their historical past as port cities can provide spaces to reflect upon or challenge the current racial discourses, ethnic and racial politics and discourses of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. For instance, as argued in Chapter 3, the tracing of Hong Kong’s forgotten past as a colonial port city, with multiethnic and multicultural foundation beyond the Britain and Chinese, as well as the diversified background of the ethnic Chinese majority, challenges not only the Re-Sinicization agenda of the state but also the societies’ racist exclusion of the non-Western non-Chinese population such as the South Asians minorities (Lo 2008; Erni and Leung 2014). The tracing of the actually existing and more complex cosmopolitanism in Singapore challenges the Singaporean state’s simplified and racialized version of “multiculturalism”. The history as a port city, and heritage of port city in Penang (and other port cities in Malaysia such as Malacca) offer a reflection upon the actual racial politics and challenges to the Malay-centred nation-building discourses in Malaysia. Engaging with other locals’ treatment of the heritage of port cities provides one a deeper of one’s local racial and ethnic politics, and their relationship with the nation-state’s discourses. Similar researches could also be conducted in the other port cities in the region, especially places with rising (ethno-)nationalism.

Another important issue that the address of “port cities” help to articulate is what “collaborative colonialism”, as proposed by Law Wing Sang (2009). The colonial and even pre-colonial conditions of port cities were different from those of land-based colonies. From the colonizers’ perspective, port cities, including colonial port cities and treaty ports, did not function primarily for the extraction of raw materials. Rather, their major function was that of trading outpost. Thus, they needed “middle-men” from different ethnic groups, and there are more compradors and other collaborators in these colonial port cities than in land-based colonies. Thus, the port cities, including both the colonial and treaty port cities, are the cradle of “collaborative colonialism”. As elaborated throughout the dissertation the concepts of “collaborators” and “compradors” should not be understood as negative moral judgments and their roles should not be understood as passively submitted to the colonizers. As Law argues, the relationship between these collaborator and the colonizers were much more complex. These collaborators’ strategically manipulated their positions and multiple (dis)loyalties to make their fortunes, and this suggests that the relationships between the colonizers and colonized in these contexts were not those of binary opposition. Thus, the colonial experiences should not be understood in binary opposition. As elaborated in Chapters 2 and 3, anti-colonial / anti-imperial nationalistic discourses based on binary opposition terms and moral-evil *ressentiment* politics are unproductive and cannot grasp the complexity of collaborative colonialism and the roles of these collaborators. As the histories of collaborative colonialism are embedded in built heritage and urban landscapes in port cities, how to engage with the complexities of these histories would become essential in the process of preservation and heritage-making. Due to the scale, limited resources and my limited language abilities, my discussion in this dissertation mainly focused on the ethnic Chinese and South Asian collaborators in Hong Kong, and the ethnic Chinese collaborators in Singapore and Penang. Yet the collaborators are not limited to ethnic Chinese but across different ethnic groups in the port cities. Future research can be developed in the direction articulating the roles of the non-Chinese populations in Singapore and Penang, such as the different ethnic groups now classified as “Malay”, “Straits Muslims” (Karim ed. 2009), South Asians, and how the built heritage related to them has been treated and the politics behind.

Although the examples in this dissertation are mainly drawn from the three former British colonial port cities, (partly due to the constraints of my language skills I have mostly relied on English or Chinese language resources), the “port cities as method” is not limited to former British colonies or the Anglophone world. The methodology can be extended to the other “nodal points” (port cities) in maritime trade networks, and also goes beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. For instance, the methodology could help Macau to articulate and compare their experiences with former Portuguese colonial port cities, not only in Southeast Asia but also in South Asia. It could also help investigate how colonialism transforms cultural interactions within different colonial port cities and treaty ports in the region. By focusing on the maritime trade network and its “nodal points”, the method shifts focus from the land to the sea. This also challenges nationalism and nationalist narratives of history, which are based on land boundaries (Hamashita 2003; Connery 1996). The re-emphasize of “port cities” can open up the possibilities of future researches of different locals to multiply the points of reference instead of merely dialoguing with the respectively nation-states. The “port cities as method” engaged in more research articulated in contexts of Southeast Asia and its colonial port-cities, this would no doubt result in critical insights that differ from those of current literature on mainstream postcolonial studies. Such research is important if postcolonial studies is to continue to be relevant and is to be developed beyond its current overly narrow focus on the experiences of Africa and South Asia. Clearly, as “port cities as method” is engaged in further dialogues, for instance, Sinophone studies and “minor transnationalism”, it will be possible to open up and deepen discussion of new questions related to Chinese and Japanese colonialism, and deeper comparisons of the differing conditions of modernities.

### **5.3 “Right to the City” as a Decolonization Project**

Conventionally, the “right to the city” and “spatial justice” are interlocking concepts and concerns in the fields of human geography and urban studies that address social justice, political rights and human rights from the spatial perspective. Although there are differences between different scholars’ understandings, there is nevertheless consensus that “space” and social forces are interrelated (Lefebvre 1996; Mitchell 2003; Soja 2010; Harvey 2003, 2013). The “right to the city” is a key theoretical concept that

was proposed by Henri Lefebvre in 1968. In the 2000s, there has been a revival of the concept, not only in academia but also in political mobilizations and social movements (Soja 2010). A notable recent revival is David Harvey's recent book *Rebel Cities* (2013), in which he links the "right to the city" with "urban revolution". In this dissertation, I argue that the "right to the city" and "spatial justice" are not limited to the concerns of human geography and urban studies. Postcolonial studies also needs to take urban space into account and consideration. Transforming a colonial or military space for the people is a form of urban decolonization, while the privatization, gentrification and militarization of public space, or the "commons", are forms of urban (re-)colonization through either capital or coercive forces. The "right to the city" is a "common" right beyond discourses of property ownership. More importantly, the "right to the city" points to "a transformed and renewed right to urban life" and prioritizes the "use value" of the urban (Lefebvre 1996: 158). Besides the Preservation Movement of Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier discussed in this dissertation (Chapter 2), the recent Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, where thousands of people occupied various areas in the city, especially in the political and financial centre, is far more than fighting for democracy. It was also a movement about the "right to the city". Through occupying the area symbolized as a "global capital – military – government" complex (Szeto 2007), the movement is, again, a decolonization of urban space.

The concept of "right to the city" also transforms the understanding of the city, not in terms of a narrow definition of "citizens", but in terms inclusive of those who have been constantly excluded from and/or marginalized in "citizenship", such as ethnic minorities and migrant workers, etc. Thus, the "right to the city" decolonizes the concept of "public" inherited from the colonial period. In transcending narrowly-defined ideas of "citizenship", "the right to the city" allows the voices of the excluded and marginalized in the city to be heard and recognized, in both the colonial and postcolonial eras. This collective "right to change" (Harvey 2013: 4) creates active agents in the city. In other words, the "right to the city" enables the subaltern to become an active agent, and is thus important for the creation of decolonizing subjects. Shu-Mei Huang (2012) further elaborates and develops the "right to the city" into the "right to planning" in order to illustrate bottom-up community participation in urban planning that could be disassociated with property-ownership. In other words, Huang suggests that the extension of the "right to the city" to the "right to planning" challenges the capitalist

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logic of the city. I argue that this is the way to access the “renewed right to urban life” (Lefebvre 1996: 158), a right that has been alienated by capitalism’s emphasis on exchange value, and by the decision-making processes that the nation-state inherited from colonialism. In this sense, the “right to the city”, which extends to include the “right to planning” as one of the “renewed right[s] to urban life”, decolonizes the decision-making process and allows the excluded to become active agents.

## Appendix I

### Glossary for terms in non-English languages

#### 1. General Terms in Chinese languages

<u>Term</u>	<u>Hanyu Pinyin</u>	<u>Chinese characters</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
<i>Ang Mo</i>	<i>Hongmao</i>	紅毛	Red hair (Hokkien reference to Caucasian)
<i>benshengren</i>	<i>benshengren</i>	本省人	local Taiwanese
<i>bun tou / pún-thó</i>	<i>bentu</i>	本土	local (literally “[of] this soil”)
<i>Cheng Beng</i>	<i>Qing Ming</i>	清明	Clear and Bright, a festival for tomb-sweeping
<i>chun</i>	<i>chun</i>	村	village
<i>duhen</i>	<i>duhen</i>	妒恨	jealous-hatred, <i>ressentiment</i>
<i>fengshui</i>	<i>fengshui</i>	風水	wind and water, knowledge of reading the environment
<i>fu</i>	<i>fu</i>	府	prefecture
<i>gangren zhigang</i>	<i>gangren zhigang</i>	港人治港	Hong Kong people running Hong Kong
<i>gung man</i>	<i>gongmin</i>	公民	citizen
<i>gung man se wui</i>	<i>gongmin shehui</i>	公民社會	civil society
<i>gweilo</i>	<i>guilao</i>	鬼佬	ghost man (Hong Kong Cantonese reference to Caucasian man)
<i>hoi fau</i>	<i>kaibu</i>	開埠	open of the port
<i>hong</i>	<i>hang</i>	行	company
<i>huawen</i>	<i>huawen</i>	華文	Chinese language(s)
<i>huay kuan</i>	<i>huiguan</i>	會館	(clan) association
<i>huawen guoji</i>	<i>huawen guoji</i>	華文國際	Sinophone International
<i>Huang Qing</i>	<i>Huang Qing</i>	皇清	The Grand Qing
<i>jan man kwai waak</i>	<i>renmin guihua</i>	人民規劃	people’s planning
<i>jiguan</i>	<i>jiguan</i>	籍貫	origin, ancestral home
<i>kongsi</i>	<i>gongsi</i>	公司	(clan) association
<i>lau uk jau lau jan</i>	<i>liu wu you liu ren</i>	留屋又留人	keep both the house and the

			people
<i>lau wun lau, pou wun pou</i>	<i>lou huan lou, pu huan pu</i>	樓換樓，舖換舖	flat for flat, shop for shop
<i>man gaan</i>	<i>minjian</i>	民間	the people, folk, grassroots
<i>Minguo</i>	<i>Minguo</i>	民國	Republic
<i>mushou (qushou)</i>	<i>mushou (qushou)</i>	墓手 (曲手)	tomb's arms
<i>Nanyang</i>	<i>Nanyang</i>	南洋	South Sea (Southeast Asia)
<i>ngee</i>	<i>yi</i>	義	righteous, voluntary, moral, ought to do
<i>ngee sua</i>	<i>yishan</i>	義山	(communal) cemetery hill
<i>poah poe</i>	<i>ba bei</i>	跋杯	throw the divining blocks (a method of divination)
<i>renxin huigui</i>	<i>renxin huigui</i>	人心回歸	reunion with both minds and hearts
<i>sheng</i>	<i>sheng</i>	省	province
<i>shoufu</i>	<i>shoufu</i>	守府	guard the family
<i>si tau po</i>	<i>shitou po</i>	事頭婆	female boss
<i>siā-khu êng-chō / sa-ki in-co</i>	<i>shequ yingzao</i>	社區營造	community building
<i>sing bong</i>	<i>chengbang</i>	城邦	city-state
<i>sua / san</i>	<i>shan</i>	山	hill
<i>tanghua</i>	<i>tanghua</i>	唐話	Tang language (overseas Chinese reference to their mother tongues)
<i>tangshan</i>	<i>tangshan</i>	唐山	mountain of Tang (overseas Chinese reference to their homelands)
<i>teng / theng</i>	<i>ting</i>	亭	pavilion
<i>Tong Lau</i>	<i>Tang Lou</i>	唐樓	“Chinese building” (Hong Kong shophouse)
<i>towkay</i>	<i>toujia</i>	頭家	head of household, boss
<i>Waa Haa</i>	<i>Huaxia</i>	華夏	Chinese (civilization)
<i>wai man</i>	<i>yimin</i>	遺民	remnants
<i>waishengren</i>	<i>waishengren</i>	外省人	mainlanders (literally “people from other provinces”)

<i>wui gwai</i>	<i>huigui</i>	回歸	return, reunion
<i>xian</i>	<i>xian</i>	縣	county
<i>xiang</i>	<i>xiang</i>	鄉	(rural) township
<i>xuncheng</i>	<i>xuncheng</i>	巡城	petrol the city
<i>yuanmao</i>	<i>yuanmao</i>	原貌	original face
<i>ze cau baan</i>	<i>zhechou ban</i>	遮醜板	board for covering up blemishes
<i>zhen</i>	<i>zhen</i>	鎮	(urban) township
<i>Zhonghua</i>	<i>Zhonghua</i>	中華	Chinese
<i>Zhonghua Minguo</i>	<i>Zhonghua Minguo</i>	中華民國	Republic of China
<i>zhou</i>	<i>zhou</i>	州	prefecture
<i>zi gu yilai</i>	<i>zi gu yilai</i>	自古以來	since time immemorial
<i>zoi dei / chāi-tē</i>	<i>zaidi</i>	在地	local (literally “at this place”)
<i>Zung Waa Bong Lyun</i>	<i>Zhonghua Banglian</i>	中華邦聯	Chinese Confederation

## 2. General Terms in Malay Language (*Bahasa Melayu*)

<i>bukit</i>	hill
<i>bumiputera</i>	son of soil
<i>jalan</i>	street, road
<i>kampung</i>	compound, settlement
<i>kopi</i>	coffee
<i>lebu</i>	street
<i>lorong</i>	lane
<i>merdeka</i>	freedom, independent
<i>padang</i>	field
<i>teh tarik</i>	pulled tea
<i>Yang di-Pertuan Agong</i>	Supreme Ruler

## 3. Personal, organization and place names

Burrows Street	巴路士街
Canton (Kwong Chow / Guangzhou)	廣州
Chen Yingzhen	陳映真
Cheng Hoon Teng	青雲亭
Chew Gek Leng	周玉龍
Chinchew (Quanzhou)	泉州
Choa Chee-bee	蔡紫微
Choa Lap-chee	蔡立志
City Hall (Hong Kong)	香港大會堂
Cross Street	交加街
Diaoyutai Islands (Japanese: Senkaku Islands)	釣魚台列嶼 (尖閣諸島)

Dung Kai-cheung	董啟章
Edinburgh Place	愛丁堡廣場
Fang Shan	方珊
Foo Yan Man Ser	輔仁文社
Fuk Kin Kai	福建街
Fumun (Humen)	虎門
Goh Chok Tong	吳作棟
Hakka	客家
Happy Valley	跑馬地 / 快活谷
Heng San Teng	恒山亭
Hing Wan Street	慶雲街
Ho Fook	何福
Ho Kom Tong	何甘棠
Hoh Fuk Tong	何福堂
Hokkien (Fukien / Fujian)	福建
Hokkien Huay Kuan	福建會館
Hop Yuen	合源
Hsing Chung Hui	興中會
Johnston Road	莊士敦道
Joseph S. P. Ting	丁新豹
Kang Ha Pheng Sim Kok	江夏平心閣
Khoo Kongsi	邱公司
King Sing Street	景星街
Koh Tsu Koon	許子根
Kom Tong Hall	甘棠第
Kong Hock Keong (Kuan Im Teng)	廣福宮 (觀音亭)
Kopi Sua	咖啡山
Kuomintang	國民黨
Kwong Hou Sua	廣孝山
Kwong Wai Siew Peck San Theng	廣惠肇碧山亭
Lam Ann (Nan'an)	南安
Lau Sua	老山
Lee Kuan Yew	李光耀
Lee Hsien Loong	李顯龍
Lee Tung Street	利東街
Lim Boon Keng	林文慶
Lim Chin Siong	林清祥
Lim Guan Eng	林冠英
Local Action	本土行動
Longxi	龍溪
Loo Aqoi	盧亞貴
Mallory Street	茂羅街
Man Cheong (Wenchang)	文昌
Man Mo Temple	文武廟
McGregor Street	麥加力歌街

Mo Ti (Wudi)	武帝
National Museum of Taiwan Literature	國立臺灣文學館
Ng Choy (Wu Ting-fang)	伍才 (伍廷芳)
Ngau Cheh Shui (Gu Chia Chui / Niu Che Shui)	牛車水
Ngee Ann Kongsi	義安公司
Nullah Stone Lane	石水渠街
Ong Sam Leong	王三龍
Oon Chim Neo	溫深娘
Phah Thih Ke	打鐵街
Queen's Pier	皇后碼頭
Queen's Road East	皇后大道東
Quemoy (Kinmen)	金門
Robert Hotung	何東
Seh Ong Sua	姓王山
Sek-lan-ni Hang	色藍乳巷
Shiuhing (Siew Hing / Zhaoqing)	肇慶
Sia Boey	社尾
Sin Chew	星洲
So Sau-chung	蘇守忠
Sun Yat-sen	孫中山 (孫逸仙)
Star Ferry Pier	天星碼頭
Tainan Prefecture Hall	台南州廳
Tai Yuen Street	太原街
Tam Achoy	譚亞財
Tan Boo Liat	陳武烈
Tan Ean Kiam	陳延謙
Tan Kim Cheng	陳金鐘
Tan Tock Seng	陳篤生
Tao Nan School	道南學校
Teochew (Chaozhou)	潮州
Thai Whan Sua	太原山
Thian Hock Keng	天福宮
Thó-khò Ke (Tho-fu Kai)	土庫街
Toan Lo-sin [Ke]	緞羅申[街]
Toi Shan (Taishan)	台山
Tsim Sha Tsui	尖沙咀
Tua Poh	大坡
Tung Ann (Tong'an)	同安
Tung Ann Huay Kuan	同安會館
Wai Chow (Huizhou)	惠州
Wak Hai Cheng Bio (Yueh Hai Ching Temple)	粵海清廟
Wan Chai	灣仔
Wan Chai Road	灣仔道

Wan Tsing-kai  
Woo Cheong  
Yeung Ku-wan  
Yundao

溫清溪  
和昌  
楊衢雲  
運道

## Appendix II

### Biographies

**James Hayes 許舒** was both a historian and a “cadet officer” in the colonial government in Hong Kong (Hayes 1996). For Hayes, the significance of legislation of the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance was far more than control over archaeological discoveries and preserving heritage buildings for enjoyment, but as “an important weapon in the war against disruption through spiritual deprivation” and a successful heritage preservation policy was a “great opportunity to develop Hong Kong’s cultural assets”. He even proposed giving up his then-post to take up the role as the Executive Secretary of the not-yet-founded AMO. Yet his proposal and vision was turned down by the more powerful elites who did not wholeheartedly believe in heritage preservation and regard Hayes’ idea too “political” (Public Records Office 1971 – 1976; Ip 2010).

**Lee Hsien Loon 李顯龍** is the current Prime Minister of Singapore. He is also the son of Lee Kuan Yew, the long-serving Prime Minister of Singapore. Lee Hsien Loong made the speech of “how Singapore succeeded against all odds to become a nation” on the occasion of the launch of the national education program during his term as Deputy Prime Minister in 1997 (Hong and Huang 2008).

**Ong Sam Leong 王三龍 (1857 – 1918)** was a Chinese Peranakan tycoon born in Singapore, with paternal ancestry from Quemoy (Kinmen 金門). His business included supplying Chinese labourers (coolies) to the mining industry on Christmas Island, and other construction-related business in Southeast Asia. Ong’s tomb is the biggest in Bukit Brown Cemetery (*Sin Chew Daily* 1 November 2010; Lee, H. H. 2009). Although his tomb is not currently affected by the road construction, the tomb of his daughter-in-law, Oon Chim Neo 溫深娘, is set to be exhumed. Oon’s tomb is the biggest single person’s tomb among those that will be exhumed this time (Hui 2012b).

**Tan Kim Cheng 陳金鐘 (1829 – 1892)** was the eldest son of famous Peranakan Chinese businessmen Tan Tock Seng 陳篤生. He was born in Singapore and was one of the richest men in Singapore, with huge business interests in the region. He was the leader of the Hokkien and Peranakan Chinese communities. He maintained good relationships with the British colonial government and the Siamese King. He was appointed as Siamese Consul, and later as Consul-General of Singapore. In Singapore, he was appointed as a Justice of Peace, Municipal Councillor and *Kapitan Cina*. His grandson Tan Boo Liat 陳武烈 was also a famous Hokkien and Peranakan Chinese leader (Chiou 1991).

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