

From Fishing Port to “City of Life”: Hong Kong History according to the Hong Kong Tourism Board

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Introduction

"Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the creation of an élite of intellectuals. A human mass does not 'distinguish' itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organising itself: and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is without organisers and leaders... But the process of creating intellectuals is long and difficult, full of contradictions, advances and retreats, dispersal and regrouping, in which the loyalty of the masses is often sorely tried."¹

The quotation above is from the Italian Communist thinker, Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci believes that one can only recognize his/her own power of improving the living environment through the precise knowledge that one has towards his/her own historical background and environment. He thinks that intellectuals (or Knowledge) are crucial for such kind of learning process. In other words, we can only understand ourselves, recognize the society that we are living in, and identify the community we belong to etc, by acquiring knowledge. This process of knowledge acquisition takes a very long period of time. More importantly, Gramsci thinks that history is also a kind of knowledge. The people who possess power have the authority to control the way history is written and interpreted. Therefore, they also limit the way we interpret our pasts and project our future. Rulers through the ages took only those aspects of history, be it political,

economic, social or cultural, that suited their interests. As history was written by victors, the voice of the downtrodden could not be heard. The rights of the aboriginals in Taiwan had never been expressed in history. Therefore, critical examination of History is one of the best ways to subvert such kind of Hegemony.

Hong Kong government (before 1997), and also the Hong Kong SAR government are both putting great emphasis on tourism. This is because the manufacturing industry in Hong Kong had shifted production to the Mainland. As a result, the Hong Kong economy has become heavily dependent on tertiary industries, such as tourism. It is believed that attracting tourists from all over the world is one of the ways to retain Hong Kong's privileged position among Asian countries.

The importance of tourism to Hong Kong is also bolstered when China joined the WTO in 2000. Enterprises from all over the world want to establish business relationship with Chinese companies. The SAR government is positioning Hong Kong as the main business center in Asia and calls Hong Kong "Asia's World City". Developing tourism is one of the ways to strengthen the relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China. Various measures have been adopted by the SAR government to promote tourism. One such measure is the "Workplace English Campaign" which aims to improve the proficiency of English and to attract more tourists.

The SARS crisis of early 2003 dealt a serious blow to tourism in Hong Kong. It quickly recovered however, and the number of visitor arrivals in Hong Kong in October 2003 was the highest ever recorded in a single month. The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) put much effort in attracting tourists worldwide. An important job of the Hong Kong Tourism Board is to

represent Hong Kong to foreigners. This aspect of the work done by the HKTB is not so much little discussed as hardly noticed. But what people outside Hong Kong, including those in Mainland China, know about Hong Kong is to a great extent determined by which means the image of Hong Kong projected the HKTB. Therefore, it is necessary to look closely how the HKTB does its job.

In this paper, publications of the HKTB will be critically examined to see how the HKTB promotes Hong Kong. In particular, the paper will focus on how the history of Hong Kong is constructed by the HKTB as it promotes Hong Kong. But a few words about the background of the HKTB is in order.

Background of HKTB

In 1957, the Hong Kong Tourism Association (HKTA) was established by the Hong Kong Government to develop tourism in Hong Kong. The HKTA was reconstituted as the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) in April 2001. Unlike the HKTA, which was an association of members, the HKTA has no affiliation from any specific sector or organization. The government claimed that the HKTB is able to support the interests of Hong Kong’s tourist industry in its entirety².

Members of the board of the HKTB are all appointed by the Hong Kong SAR government.

Here is the list of board members in 2003:

Board Member	Title
Mrs. Selina Chow	Chairman of the board Member of the Legislative Council,

	Wholesale and Retail of Functional Constituency
Mr. Stephen Ip, GBS, JP or	Secretary for Economic Development and Labour
Ms. Eva Cheng, JP	Commissioner for Tourism, Economic Development and Labour Bureau, Deputy Chairman
Mr. Philip Chen, SBS, JP	Deputy Managing Director of Cathay Pacific Airways
Mr. Stanley Ko, BBS, JP	Director of Jardine Pacific Ltd. Chairman of Hong Kong Coalition of Services Industries
Mr. Paul Chiu	
Mr. Patrick Yeung	Managing Director of Cathay Pacific Holidays
Mr. Robert Chow	DJ of RTHK, founder of “Recruit”
Mr. George Magnus, BBS, OBE	Chairperson of Hong Kong Electric Holdings Ltd.
Mr. Mark Lettenbichler	Chairman of Hong Kong Hotels Association Vice President & Area General Manager, The Ritz-Carlton Hong Kong
Prof. Andrew Chan	Director of Executive MBA (EMBA), School of Business Administration, CUHK
Mr. Chau Kam Piu	Council Member, Kowloon Federation of Association
Ms. Wailee Chow, JP	Architect
Mr. Adolf Hsu, JP	Managing Director of New World First Bus Services Ltd.
Mr. Michael Hui	Film Worker
Mr. Michael Sze, JP	Executive Director of the Hong Kong Trade Development Council
Mr. Tang Kwai Nang, JP	Chairman Emeritus, Asia Pacific, ACNielsen

Mr. James Wu, SBS	Vice President of Hong Kong Food Council Limited
Mr. Yu Pang Chun	Chairman of the Hong Kong Retail Management Association Yue Hwa Chinese Products Emporium Limited
Mr. Vincent Fang, JP	Managing Director of Topy Co. (HK) Ltd.
Ms. Vivien Chan, JP	Partner of Chan & Co., Vivien

The HKTB is a Government-subsidized body. Members of the board of the HKTB were appointed by the Hong Kong SAR government for appointment terms of up to three years. The Board of the HKTB was expanded from 11 to 20 members during the year 2001/02 to enable it to represent a broader cross-sectional interests within the tourist industry.

However, a quick look at the list of the board members is enough to reveal that all board members of the HKTA are managers in their respective companies. It is doubtful that managers of big multinational corporations (MNC) are ready to support the interests of the rank and file in the tourist industry.

The chief responsibilities of the HKTB are marketing and promoting Hong Kong as a unique, world class and a desired destination to visitors. The HKTB also makes recommendations to the HKSAR government and other relevant bodies on the variety and quality of tourist facilities. As for “formulating Government policies, plans, strategies for tourism development, as well as coordinating the work of other government bureaus and departments on developments that have an impact on tourism”³, these are the responsibilities of the Tourist Commission, a government

department.

Even though vast changes have taken place in Hong Kong as the HKTB took over from the HKTA, the former is still using the image of a Chinese junk as its logo. The image of a Chinese junk is highly symbolic. It represents the past of Hong Kong as a group of small fishing villages. The contrast with the Hong Kong of today cannot be greater. The very logo of the HKTA sums up in a nutshell a well-rehearsed version of the history of Hong Kong.

In addition, various aspects of the work of the HKTA inevitably focus on Hong Kong's past. One example is the two-year City of Life: "Hong Kong is it!" tourism campaign launched in 2001. The campaign was to promote some of Hong Kong's lesser-known treasures. Visitors were invited to explore the diverse attractions of Hong Kong and local residents were encouraged to recount interesting folklore tales associated with places or traditions of Hong Kong. These stories were later published in a delicate booklet distributed to foreign visitors.

The HKTB maintains a website which provides information of Hong Kong for tourists and businessmen. At the same time, the HKTB publishes a wide range of materials on Hong Kong. In 2002, the publications of the HKTA included *Hong Kong Tourism Kit* (香港旅遊錦囊), *Museums and Heritage* (博物館及古蹟), *Hong Kong Easy Go* (香港自由行) and several other tourism related magazines. They have also published in three languages, *The Best Food Guide* (美食之最大賞指南). The HKTB finds that visitors are interested in traditional aspects of life in Hong Kong and comes up with a publication called *Cultural Kaleidoscope* (文化萬花筒)⁴.

In this paper, the publications of the HKTB are chosen as the focus in examining the images of Hong Kong promoted to visitors. There are two reasons for this way of analysis. Firstly, the publications are the most important reference materials for visitors who just arrive. The HKTB has distributed over 10.3 million copies through hotels, airlines, shopping malls, public transportation facilities etc. As it is usually the first published material related to Hong Kong that visitors receive, the publications of the HKTB are highly influential in the kind of image visitors have on Hong Kong. Secondly, even local residents are not immune from the kind of image of Hong Kong promoted. The kind of images that is vigorously promoted to the tourists is also constructing our self-identity.

The image of Hong Kong

In this part, a textual analysis of the publications of the HKTB will be attempted. Four booklets from the HKTB publications will be the focus of analysis. These are *Hong Kong Visitor's Kit*, *Hong Kong Museum & Heritage*, *Hong Kong Walks* and *Hong Kong Cultural Kaleidoscope*.

All of the above mentioned booklets were published in 2002. However, they were all packaged in riotous colors with the slogan, "Hong Kong Live it. Love it!" The covers of the booklets were printed with some attractive and clear photos. It is worthwhile to take a closer look.

Booklet	Photo	Color
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<i>Hong Kong Walks</i>	Tai Tam Reservoirs, the big Buddha in Lantau Island and two foreigners appreciating some Chinese handicrafts	Green
<i>Visitor's Kit</i>	A nightscape of Hong Kong	Purple
<i>Museum & Heritage</i>	Former Kowloon-Canton Railway Clock Tower	Gold
<i>Cultural Kaleidoscope</i>	Jing opera	Blue

In these booklets, not much information on Hong Kong's history is provided. The little information provided is found in *Museum & Heritage* and *Visitor's Kit*. The former contains a longer paragraph than the latter, with the following description:

“This vibrant, dynamic city was once a “barren rock” housing a collection of fishing villages when claimed by Britain in 1842 following the First Opium War with China. Hong Kong Island was ceded to Britain under the Treaty of Nanking. The Kowloon Peninsula and Stonecutters Island were handed over in 1860 and a 99-year lease was granted on the New Territories, [...] Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty on 1 July 1997, and is now a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China operating under the “one country, two systems” principle. Today, Hong Kong is a flourishing international center with a population of about 6.8 million people. [...] A unique combination of more than 150 years of colonial influence and 5,000 years of Chinese tradition, Hong Kong is a fantastic holiday experience that you will treasure forever!”⁵

In this description, the history of Hong Kong is reduced to a few statements that point out that Hong

Kong had once been a British colony and was handed over to China in 1997. On the other hand, [the bulk of “Museum & Heritage”](#) dwells on one particular aspect of the history of Hong Kong with such statements as, “during the Qin dynasty, Hong Kong became a part of the Chinese empire, but Han Chinese from the north Central Plain area did not settle in large numbers until the 12th Century.”⁶ The Han Chinese that immigrated to Hong Kong was far from being a homogeneous group. There was also the “Tanka” (People who live in boat) and the Hakka, people who moved south to escape persecution. Such niceties are conveniently left out.

In any case, around the 1840s, Hong Kong became the main port for the Sino-British trade. Tea, silk, spices and opium were the main items of trade. In 1842, the Opium war ended. Hong Kong was ceded to Britain. The lease of New Territories would end on 30th July 1997, and in 1984, British and China signed the “Sino-British Joint Declaration”, which declared that British would return Hong Kong, Kowloon Peninsula, the New Territory and other small islands around Hong Kong region to the People Republic of China. The booklet describes the handover in 1997 as “an unprecedented event in the 20th Century and another fascinating chapter in Hong Kong’s exceptional history.”⁷

The history of Hong Kong presented in these booklets is extremely economical about the 150 years of British colonial rule. The reasons for such an oversight are not difficult to fathom. In the first place, the fact of colonial rule is disreputable from the nationalist point of view and the SAR government is eager to promote nationalism. Secondly, by belittling the importance of British colonial rule to Hong Kong, perhaps it is hoped that the national identity of Hong Kong people can

be quickly brought in line with that of the people in the Mainland.

The publications of the HKTB are not completely blank on the colonial period however. Some “fun giggle” about the British government during the colonial rule were served. In *Hong Kong Walks*, for example, there is an interesting piece of information about the last Hong Kong governor, Chris Patten, who while in Hong Kong affected to enjoy freshly baked egg tarts very much⁸. Such “Little story” is evidently thought to be something funny to the tourists.

Hong Kong Museum & Heritage mainly focuses on introducing the monuments and museums of Hong Kong. It states that Hong Kong has 75 declared monuments and five deemed monuments built by the Protection of the Hong Kong Antiquities Advisory Board (The Board) and the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO)⁹.

Beside Monuments, the booklet also introduces visitors to different museums in Hong Kong. Two particularly important ones are the Hong Kong Museum of History located in Tsim Sha Tsui and the Hong Kong Museum of Heritage in Sha Tin. The Hong Kong Museum of History has a permanent exhibition called “The Hong Kong Story”, while the Hong Kong Museum of Heritage showcases the history and culture of the New Territories, contemporary Hong Kong art and design, Cantonese opera and even Chinese culture in general. These two museums are also mentioned in *Hong Kong Cultural Kaleidoscope* and *Hong Kong Visitor’s Kit* booklets.

Museums and heritages have profound meaning towards the construction of history. Whether for tourists or local residents, museums and heritages are the places where a certain knowledge is cultivated. Such knowledge is often closely correlated to the state apparatus. Heritages and

museums are the affirmation of the achievements of a regime. They help to reinforce the legitimacy of the government. Museums and heritages are constructions of the past since heritages have first to be defined and protected and objects displayed in museums are highly selective. For local residents, looking at the lives of people in the past through museums and heritages, will only reinforce the sort of cultural identity beneficial to the ruling regime which is also responsible for the designation and protection of heritages as well as the way museums go about their display.

As for tourists, museums and heritages are the main sources to understand the history of a place. As tourists, they have little time for the history of a place. They will be satisfied with a bird's eyeview of the history of a place. In such a view, only the most spectacular and the most outstanding will be noticed. The "Hong Kong Story" exhibition in The History Museum of Hong Kong does precisely this. The economic development of Hong Kong is highlighted while cultural and political development of Hong Kong is barely mentioned. All these facts I have mentioned above are all taking a role in building up the images of Hong Kong in tourists' mind, and in return, they are affecting us, by the perspective of "the Others", the way we construct our self-identifications.

The HKTB publications and its website have repeatedly pointed out that Hong Kong is the meeting place of the east and the west. One example from *Hong Kong Visitor's Kit* says, "this vibrant, dynamic city witness dynamic and timeless heritage, culture and festivals from traditional culture and heritage to out of the way places beyond the city's bustling urban areas". It keeps on reminding tourists that Hong Kong is a culturally diversified society. However, Hong Kong society

is not as diversified as the HKTB suggests in its publications. Diversity only exists when it is related to commercial activities. For example, there are unrivalled shops from world famous brands to thrive the high streets. There are various kinds of native and imported foods. But the list stops here.

Before Mainland China adopted an open-door policy to foreigners, Hong Kong was a window for foreigners to observe China to understand Chinese culture. But this is a mere historical coincidence. Yet the HKTB goes out of its way to make a meal of it. The HKTB has thrown its weight behind many promotional events which aim to give the impression that Hong Kong is the main depot of traditional Chinese culture. For example, in *Cultural Kaleidoscope*, there are “Tai Chi Class”, “Cantonese Opera Appreciation Tour”, “Feng Shui Cleass” and of course, “Kung Fu Corner” and so on. The booklet claims that these activities are the tradition and life of Hong Kong, and the old and new meet at every turn. Although feng shui and kung fu are practiced in Hong Kong, it is far more than the truth that they are a sort of bread and butter to the people of Hong Kong. Like Edward Said suggests that Orientalism is a kind of “Western regime”, “Re-construction” and “Western Domination” academese. Hong Kong, being the door for the western countries to interact with the east, was re-constructed to be the image of the east in the eyes of the west.

These activities mentioned above are promoted to tourists by the HKTB. At the same time, a sort of self-identity for the people of Hong Kong is also promoted since everyone is to a certain extent affected by the other’s views. In this case, the views are both superficial and highly artificial as they are effected by the HKTB’s marketing ploy.

The role of the HKSAR Government

As indicated above, the HKSAR government has the final authority to delegate the board members in the HKTB. This shows that the government does have a strong influence in determining the direction of the HKTB in many aspects. In addition to this, it is the HKSAR government, which provides funding and financial support to the HKTB. Therefore, once again, it goes without saying that HKTB should be following the direction indicated by the HKSAR government. The predecessor of the HKTB, the HKTA composed of more than a thousand representatives from various tourism-related entities and companies. The HKTA was in a much better position than the HKTB to solicit opinions from different interest groups within the industry. The social base of the HKTB on the other is rather narrow. Its board is filled exclusively with managers and they are all appointed by the chief executive. Hence it is important to understand the role of the government in shaping the direction and the behavior of the HKTB. In this regard, the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997 is highly significant. The handover was and still is treated by China as a major diplomatic victory. Not only was British colonial rule in Hong Kong ended peacefully but also ended in such a way that China is able to step into the shoes of the British and assume full control.

Thus, how to represent the history of the colony is a political issue rather than a historical question. For China, it was humiliating that Hong Kong Island was ceded to the British in 1840. By investigating the above-mentioned promotional items from the HKTB, we can see that the HKSAR government's political consideration is clearly reflected in the representation of the history of Hong Kong. Even though conspiracy theory is cheap, the absence of the colonial period in the

representation of history given by publications of the HKTB cannot be overlooked.

According to the *Hong Kong 2002*¹⁰, tourism is a significant component of Hong Kong's economy. Compared to the year 1997, the number of visitors have risen by 47% in 2002. The major reason for the rise is that visitors from the Mainland have increased from 236 million to 683 million. The HKSAR government has been allocating resources in developing the tourist industry because she would like to position Hong Kong as the number one traveling spot among all Asian countries. Hong Kong Disneyland will be in operation in 2005. Hong Kong Wetland Park is scheduled for completion in 2005. The HKSAR government has also invited private companies to preserve, repair and develop various heritage sites. Given the importance of tourism accorded by the HKSAR government, the HKTB would be seen to be not doing its job had it failed to market Hong Kong aggressively. Judged by the variety of publications published by the HKTB and the series of promotional events it sponsored, the HKTB has done its job although at a rather high cost. As Hong Kong is aggressively marketed, a censored representation of Hong Kong's history is put on show. It is therefore extremely important to realize that as tourism is vigorously promoted, a heavily biased version of the history of Hong Kong is also constructed. This brings us to the question of cultural hegemony.

Cultural hegemony and the war of position

The theory of hegemony is the work of Antonio Gramsci who was the founder of The Italian Communist Party. He devoted himself to revolutions and social movements, trying to counter the trend of Fascism. His thought was developed from his struggle against Fascism. He broke new

ground in advancing a concept of ideology which departs from the common conception of orthodox Marxism. In the latter's view, ideology works from top to bottom, and it is a tool of the ruling class. Gramsci thinks that for ideology to be effective, it must pervade the whole of society and if there exists a dominant ideology in society, this ideology cannot be sustained by the power of the ruling class alone. In Gramsci's view, such an ideology should be able to arouse people to support the consensus of the society they are living in. To understand how such an ideology works, it is not enough simply to analyse the interests of the ruling class. It is also important to understand the pre-conditions of their rule. Gramsci thinks that there are two pre-conditions. First, the ruling class has to improve the quality of lives of the people in terms of material belongings so as to transform them to become "vested interest" under the current political structure. Second, the ruling class has to integrate and reconstruct their own culture and mythos so as to introduce mores and world-view that facilitate and reinforce their rule and dominance. This is the background of the theory of hegemony, and Gramsci calls it "moral and intellectual leadership".

In terms of Orthodox Marxism, hegemony is basically part of the super structure, the configuration of which is determined by the economic structure of the society. The super structure does not have much of an impact on the development of history. However, according to Gramsci's theory of hegemony, the ruling class and its power bloc not only has to gain control of the state apparatus, but also needs to win the support of civil society, which consists of such organizations as schools and labor unions. However, due to the complexity and diversity of civil society, it is impossible to articulate the whole cultural system and all the social organizations. Therefore the

only way is to strategically and selectively articulate a portion of the cultural mythos instead of articulating the whole.

In the wake of Gramsci's theory, the HKTB's effort and by implication the SAR government's effort at promoting tourism must be seen in a new light. Promoting tourism also constructs people's common sense and knowledge. Such common sense is built up by various kinds of promotion projects, publications, museums and heritages. The work of formulating policies, declaring or not declaring heritages, representing Hong Kong to visitors and staging various promotional events is also the work of defining common sense and knowledge. These common sense and knowledge, of course, also include the construction of history. In addition, the process of common sense construction also involves the utilization of public fear. After the financial crisis of 1998, the economic environment was poorer than before. People worried about the future prospect of the economy. Amid such a climate of fear for the future, it is easy for the HKSAR government to convince the people of Hong Kong that the development of tourism is an important measure to achieve economic recovery. As tourism is understood simply in economic terms, the HKTB as the organization charged with promoting tourism, has pretty much a free hand in presenting a lopsided view of Hong Kong's history to both visitors and local residents.

However, in Gramsci's view, a hegemony would change or even collapse over times. The struggle for hegemony never stops. In the battlefield of culture, Gramsci hopes that intellectuals would take part in this "cultural war". He divides intellectuals into two types: traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals. Traditional intellectuals are those intellectuals who live all

their lives in their particular niche. Organic intellectuals are those who try to amalgamate knowledge with political movements, social concerns and cultural issues. Now everybody can be an organic intellectual. With respect to the lopsided representation of Hong Kong's history, one can take the responsibility of an organic intellectual and initiate a war of position with the authorities. War of position can be carried out in all cultural activities and in any places.

Conclusion

This essay has analyzed the history, organizational structure, background of the HKTB. We have discussed the image of Hong Kong that the HKTB is representing, and applied Gramsci's theory of hegemony to investigate the situation of Hong Kong. To conclude, I would like to suggest some ways to counter the Hong Kong history presented by the HKTB and the power bloc of which it is part of.

Firstly of all, every one should have the awareness to rethink what is history. Who has the authority to write history? Are there any missing dimensions? We can find that the standpoint should be on the fact that history writing is critical and crucial in terms of the construction of a country's common sense. Thus, we should raise our alertness on the power relations regarding the history writing.

Secondly, obtaining the control of the war of position would help us to counter the history that has missed out our voices. We can utilize cultural activities and publications etc. to represent our own history. That would be a violence to write some distorted history and exert this on the citizens. To counter such violent culture, we have to articulate and integrate different kinds of

experiences and common sense, exercising our influences on different positions in the society.

*July*¹¹ directed by Cheung Hung is one of the examples, *Sex is butter and bread, a interview on the sex workers in Hong Kong*¹², published by Ziteng and Step Forward Multimedia is another example.

The cultural battle will never be ended. We all are organic intellectuals and we are all free to negotiate with organizations and people in our society. I do believe that when we talk about history, about the quality of history, it should not be monistic. History should be diversified. Therefore, we do not allow dominance to appear in the construction of history, only speak out our own voices is the way to make the society become diversity.

Notes

¹ Antonio Gramsci. Prison Notebooks, quote from: <http://www.theory.org.uk/ctr-gram.htm#word>

² Hong Kong Tourism Board Annual Report 01-02. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Tourism Board. pp02.

³ Hong Kong Tourism Board Annual Report 01-02. pp 02.

⁴ Hong Kong 2002. Hong Kong: Information Services Department, Hong Kong SAR Government. pp238.

⁵ Hong Kong Tourism Board (2002). Hong Kong Visitor's Kit. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Tourism Board, pp2-3.

⁶ Hong Kong Tourism Board (2002). Hong Kong Museum & Heritage. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Tourism Board.

⁷ Hong Kong Museum & Heritage. pp6

⁸ Hong Kong Tourism Board (2002). Hong Kong Walks. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Tourism Board.

⁹ Hong Kong Museum & Heritage. pp9.

¹⁰ Hong Kong 2002. pp238.

¹¹ A documentary regarding to the July 1 March in 2003.

¹² *Sex is Butter and Bread 性是牛油和麪包*. Hong Kong: Ziteng and Step Forward Multimedia (1999).

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Attachment: The Logos of HKTA





