Design Identity of Hong Kong: Colonization, de-colonization, and re-colonization

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Abstract

Hong Kong, a former British colony, was a focus of the world in various venues before July 1997 because of the transfer of its sovereignty to the People's Republic of China (PRC), from a capitalist economy to a communist regime. This changes influence all walks of life in Hong Kong. This paper provides a brief historical background of both periods under the British rule and the new rule of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China since 1997. It continues with the discussion of a brief design development in Hong Kong. This paper examines the definition of "national" design identity and its applications to Hong Kong. Design work examples will be used to illustrate and support the major arguments of the paper.

This paper looks at "Design in Hong Kong" from a historical perspective as a cultural product that reflects ideological changes. It argues that throughout Hong Kong's colonial history, its design and cultural identity with Chinese characteristics has always been marginalized and discouraged under the British colonial rule. It was not until the unveiling of the 1997 issue in the 1980s, the design and cultural identity of Hong Kong become the topic of discussion first in the academia, and the mass media at a later stage. After the sovereignty of Hong Kong was returned to China in July 1997, much has been changed in the territory.

This paper continues to argue that Hong Kong is facing another form of "colonization" in "PRC's way" with both "de-colonization" and "re-colonization" taking place at the same time. The identity crisis of Hong Kong people has never been such serious. But once again, the development of the individual design and cultural identity of Hong Kong are not preferred by its sovereign country, the Beijing's PRC government. The discussion focuses on the difficulties and dilemmas of Hong Kong design in the past and current political and economic environment. This paper hopes that the experiences of Hong Kong design can contribute to the world design history and knowledge with its unique experience.

Key Words

Hong Kong, China, Design identity, design history, colonialism

Introduction

Leading up to the 1997 transfer of Hong Kong's sovereignty from Britain to the People's Republic of China (PRC), the former British colony was the focus of the world's attention. The transfer transformed Hong Kong from a capitalist economy to a communist regime. The former colony now became the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) under Deng Xiaoping's concept of "one country two systems." Although this policy of PRC guaranteed maintenance of Hong Kong's lifestyle and capitalist system for 50 years, it is almost impossible for Hong Kong not to evolve and remain static with the new sovereign government in a new political and economic environment. For example, the recent Basic Law Promotion public service advertising campaign, and the Patriotism campaign organized by the Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education highlighted the intention of the HKSAR government on the mass education of the public towards the concept of "kwokga" (nation), and the "love" of their "jokwok" (motherland). Unlike the colonial British government's *laissez-faire* policy, which did little to impose the concept of "nation" and loyalty to its sovereign country, the new government wants to instil the people of Hong Kong with patriotic ideology towards PRC, the new boss of Hong Kong.

This is a small example of how much has changed in the territory since the 1997 transfer. With the downturn of property market since late 1997, the SARS outbreak in 2003, and the keen business competition from PRC, the citizens of Hong Kong are feeling uncertain and lacking their trademark confidence about their future. The identity crisis of Hong Kong people has never been so serious.

The new economic, social and political circumstance has had a major impact on the development of a new "colonial" Hong Kong identity under the rule of pro-Beijing HKSAR government and the Central People's Government. This paper looks at the design identity of Hong Kong from a historical perspective as a cultural product that reflects the ideological changes. It argues that throughout Hong Kong's colonial history, its design and cultural identity imbued with local flavours has always been marginalized and discouraged under the British colonial rule. Furthermore, this paper argues that Hong Kong is facing another form of "colonization" in "PRC's way" with both "de-colonization" and "re-colonization" taking place at the same time. Design work examples from different fields and mass media are used to illustrate and support the major arguments of the paper.

Challenges of defining design, and the word "design" in Chinese context

To begin the investigation of design identity of Hong Kong, it is impossible not to take both Chinese and Western cultures into account as it is a city rooted in Chinese culture and strongly influenced by Western culture. I started the investigation with a look at the definition of design in both contexts. "Design" is one of the few words in English that impossible to give a definite and static definition (i.e. see Margolin, 2002; Walker, 1989). According to the dictionary, the *American Heritage Dictionary* for instance, offers us the definition as "to formulate a plan for" in the usage as a verb, and "a drawing or sketch" or "the purposeful of detailed plan for construction or manufacture" in the usage as a noun. The dictionary version of definition can only provided a mechanical explanation of what a word means in brief and in the larger

context. To the study of design as an academic discipline, various scholars have contributed greatly in the discussion and debate about what is the meaning of design.

It is a common consent that design is everywhere and design is part of the daily life in most industrial societies, such as Hong Kong. The word of "design" referring to different professional disciplines such as graphic design, industrial design, fashion design, interior design and so on. To conduct the professional activities of design, Margolin (2002) interprets that, "as a demonstrative form of problem solving," which "may provide new and valid compromise solutions" (p. 3). Design historian, John Walker (1989), acknowledges the complexity and problems in defining the word/concept of "Design" because of the process in involved in design, in his book entitled *Design History and the History of Design*.

Clive Dilnot (2003) offers his take on the process of design, as a "design with a small 'd,' design as a verb, an activity" which "occurs everywhere" (p. 18). He differentiates

> Design, with a capital 'D," is a much more self-conscious process. Indeed, at best, that is what Design is, it's the process of becoming self-conscious about making, shaping and forming. All things, be they products, institutions, or systems, are configured, that is they are formed. Design in this sense, our sense, is the process whereby the form of things is put on the table as it were, where configuration is examined, self-critically and often reinvented. This is design's great virtue. This is what it offers business and what it promises society (p. 18-19).

Like most of the discussion on the definitions of design and its activities existing in the English literatures on design history and design studies, Dilnot representing the Euro-centric point-of-view of how "Design" or "design" defined in the Western context. Precisely, because of the major problem of indefinable nature of word/concept of design as identified in the Western context, it is impossible to apply and adopt what is existing and understood without any alternation in a non-Western cultural context.

Here, I challenge the notion of "self-conscious process" and "the process whereby the form of things is put" as Dilnot points out are not necessary identical in every societies and cultures of the world (also see Ghose, 1989/1995). To investigate what is "design identity" of Hong Kong in the context of a Chinese society, it is a must to consider the social and cultural formation of the subject matter. To conduct my argument, I have no intention to adopt or distinguish the difference of my definition of design of this paper with a capital "D" or a small "d" as Dilnot proposed. It is simply because Chinese language does not contain the concept of the "capital" or "small" letter in the writing. Thus, I should begin with investigation of word and concept of design in Chinese context.

Modern design is considered a Western import in China as well as in Hong Kong. The "term 'design' does not have a natural equivalent or a directly translatable term in most Asian languages" as point out by Rajeshwari Ghose (1990, p. 3) on the studies of the design and development in South and Southeast Asia. China is a craft rich country with a long history of art and craft tradition or the "gongyi 工藝" tradition in Chinese. "Gong" means to "a form of productions and techniques" and "yi" means to "a kind of art skills. Together "gongyi" as a term refers to wider range of ancient handicrafts as well as the semi-machine made handicrafts in modern manufacturing context based on the traditional handicrafts. The term "gongyi" was incorporated in the early education system for the training on handicraft skills by the late Qing government in 1903. The extension of this term, "gongyi meishu 工藝美術" was borrowed from the Japanese kanji in the

late 1920s as a reference to the applied arts (Yuan, 2003). Also, the equivalent word of design, "sheji 設計" that commonly used in Greater China region today was believed adapted from Japanese, "sekkei," as a translation of "design" in English during that period. Like the word "design" in English, "sheji" can be used as a verb or noun. "She" means "strikes, establish, set up," and "ji" means calculate, plan, scheme."

Apart from the above terms, *gongshang meishu* (commercial arts in English) was also commonly used as a reference to the equivalent word of design in a disciplinary sense. The first professional design organization in China, Zhonggong Gongshang Meishu Zuojia Xiehui 中國工商美術作家協會 (China Commercial Artists Association) was established in spring 1934 in Shanghai (Yuan, 2003). The association aimed at promoting commerce and business in China (ZGMZX, 1937). The establishment of this professional body marked the early development of "modern design" in China, and the transition of ancient *gongyi* activities to a modern profession, commercial art/design.

Figure 1: *Modern Miscellany* Magazine, 1930s, Shanghai

In the catalogue of the show organized by the Association, one of their members criticizes the mainstream *gongshang meishu* in China at that time was full of "Western style" imitation work, and there was a lack of studies of how ancient *gongyi* can adapt to the modern context (ZGMZX, 1937). From the comments by this early pioneer, we can see the word and concept of "design" in modern China did not stop as the terminology of profession and activity, but rather, as a signifier that reflect the national identity. The examples of work influenced by this advocate can be easily found in the 1930s Shanghai (figure 1).

The modern design development in Hong Kong had a strong link with the evolution of the early modern design in Mainland China. Due to near three decades of isolation of PRC with the rest of the world including Hong Kong and Taiwan, the terms in Chinese equivalent to the word "design" in English is still unresolved after almost a century of development. Such as even in today's PRC education system, the Central Government adopted "yishu sheji 藝術設計" (or Design Arts in English) as an official title of programs in design. However, in Hong Kong, the term "tsit-gai" (*sheji* in Cantonese) has been commonly used since the 1970s. Regardless of the common equivalent terminology of "design" in Chinese language, this study would like to take *sheji*, the most common equivalent term to design in English, used in the contemporary context in the Hong Kong to design. Like the term itself, it is a hybrid term influenced by the Western concept imported indirectly from Japan. Also, like the problem of defining the meaning of design in English language, the Chinese equivalent *sheji* is also very difficult to define as it signified many meanings at the cultural level. The studies from the cultural designing process aspects on Chinese design are seriously under developed.

This paper takes design in Chinese Hong Kong context as a modern profession with the "original" hybridised style resulted from the "East meets West" paradigm established in the 1930s Shanghai. Due to the complex issue of design and the limited space available in this paper, I intend to focus the

investigation of the design identity of Hong Kong from the stylistic level in relation to the changing political and social environment at the macro level.

The origin of "colonial" design identity of Hong Kong

What is the definition of design identity? It can be understood as the identifiable "national characteristics in design and manufacture. Geography has naturally played a part in the way in which people identify aspects of culture: to attach them to a town… the stylistic or figurative traditions associated with the place." (Aynsley, 1993, p. 31). Hong Kong is not a nation, the design style that generated from the city throughout the decades can be consider as a regional design identity under the framework of Chinese design identity. Although Hong Kong has been a British colony from the period 1841 to 1997, its culture has always been rooted within Chinese tradition. The design direction that developed in Hong Kong after WWII evidenced little disjuncture with the Mainland China in the understanding of the heritage of *gongyi* traditions. Chinese modernism came to entail a "fusion of indigenous fine and folk arts" (Turner, 1995, p. 207) along with graphics and arts style borrowed from Europe and Japan.

The most well-known example of Chinese modern design is found in the Shanghai style of the 1920s and 1930s. Design works produced in Shanghai during this period reflects various foreign influences due in large part to the existence of numerous foreign concession zones in the city through which the customs and products of other countries entered local life. Pioneer Shanghai designers were inspired by Western design, particular Art Deco and Cubism, which were admired for their "experimentation with geometric ornamentation, bold colours and strong patterns." (Minck & Jiao, 1990, p. 36). The importation of Western art styles enriched the expressive vocabulary of composition and form in emergent Chinese modern design, and the new resources were artfully combined with elements from Chinese own artistic traditions.

Shanghai style in the 1930s exemplified the parallel world decorative arts style during that period, and successfully integrated with its own. According to design historian Jeremey Aynsley (1990), the 1930s Shanghai style can be considered with the quality of "a curious blend of global similarity and regional difference" (p. 59). The output of Chinese modern design represented by Shanghai style was quite distinctive, moving beyond what had been simply imported from the West. This "masterful synthesis" (Minck & Jiao, 1990, p. 38) formed the fundamental stylistic identity of early modern Chinese design tradition. The Shanghai style represented the beginning of a hybridised Chinese modern design, a result of the colonization by foreign powers on China's soil. The achievements in Shanghai were a strong influence throughout the country. However, after the establishment of PRC, creative design work of the quality produced in the 1930s Shanghai could not be sustained in Mainland China under communism. Instead, the Shanghai spirit of commercial arts was able to continue under the capitalist economic system and British colonial rule in Hong Kong after WWII. Thus, the Shanghai style with the duality of "global" and "regional" accents can be considered as the origin of Hong Kong's design identity.

The art and culture sectors in Hong Kong benefited from the influx of talent from Shanghai. In the period after WWII through to the 1960s, commercial design nourished steadily along with the production and industrial development. Although the British colonial government's *laissez-faire* policy did little to interfere in the development of Chinese culture in the

society, it also did little to encourage the growth and the formation of local Chinese cultural identity. Matthew Turner, design historian who once taught design in Hong Kong, observes that Hong Kong was able to maintain its modern Chinese design style until at least the 1960s, through the contributions of both Mainland and Hong Kong designers (Turner, 1993). He contributed greatly in reclaiming the early design history and design identity of Hong Kong in manufacturing sector with the exhibition at the Hong Kong Museum of History, entitled, *Made in Hong Kong: A history of export design in Hong Kong,* in May 1988. Turner attributes a rapid fading of Chinese design style after 1960s to the mass arrival of American companies and to the assistance of the governmental Federation of Hong Kong Industries away from the local designers and towards American design specialists. Chinese local designers previously trained in Guangzhou and Shanghai had to gradually alter their style to fit into the new commercial environment dominated by American companies and to meet the standard set by American-trained designers (Turner, 1989/1995).

It was not until 1970 that Chinese became the second official language after English in Hong Kong, and the government started to develop and communicate the concept of "community" to the society at large. The implementation of these policies was a result of the 1967 Riot triggered by the growing anti-colonial sentiment in the 1960s. When the economy took off in the 1970s, local designers who grew up in Hong Kong and perceive the city as their home were inspired by Japanese design. It was the beginning of a process of rethinking their creative direction. Among them was Henry Stenier, an American designer who arrived Hong Kong in 1961 and became a long time resident. His love of Chinese culture was reflected the cross-cultural creative strategy displayed in his work. Stenier was the only prominent designer known by the international design community in the 1960s working in Hong Kong.

Figure 2: Old & New, *Asian Magazine*, Designer: Henry Stenier, 1965

Here, I assert, it is because of Stenier's pioneering role of picking up the dying Shanghai hybridised style that gave the early modern Chinese design style a "re-birth" in Hong Kong (figure 2). Again, like the 1930s Shanghai style, the work by Stenier encompassed "global" and "regional" accents. Such achievement was not accidental, but the consequence of the policy of the British colonial government. Although United Kingdom was the sovereign nation of Hong Kong, the colonial government did little to impose

a "national" identity to the city. Rather, it was the post-1960s mass media that shaped the conscious of "identity" of Hong Kong residents (Leung, 1996). Hong Kong is known for "modernizing by copying the culture and lifestyle of the Western capitalist countries" (Leung, 1996, p. 65). The "East meets West" paradigm originating in 1930s Shanghai found in colonial Hong Kong the necessary socio-economic and cultural environment to give it a new lease on life. Thus I argue, the origin of design identity in Hong Kong was following the "East meets West" spirit rather than being colonized with any identifiable "stylistic or figurative traditions associated" (Aynsley, 1993, p. 31) of British design.

Along with the establishment of "East meets West" design identity of Hong Kong, other prominent designers in graphic design such as Patrick Chung, Cheung Shu-sun, Lui Lup-fun, Ng Man-pin, Leung Fok-kuen, Choi Kai-yan, and Alan Chan also contributed greatly to the design history of Hong Kong in different dimensions. Hazel Clark, the former Chairperson of the School of Design at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, comments on this paradigm as a "'one-dimensional' characterization of Hong Kong design" (Clark, 2003, p. 2) in her introduction as a guest editor to the special issue on Hong Kong Design for a design journal, *Design Issues*. Indeed, in this phase of "East meets West" became overly used and extremely cliché way to describe the styles of Hong Kong design. "For Hong Kong people identities are not something fixed, but something that appears, disappears and reappears" (Tam, 1998, p. 77) as another observer points out, the following section attempts to investigate beyond the "one-dimensional" design identity of Hong Kong.

The de-colonization and the design identity of Hong Kong

Cultural critic Ackbar Abbas (1997/2004) once commented on the identity of Hong Kong people, writing "…Hong Kong, caught between the not-quite-there (it is Chinese but not quite) and the more-than-there (it is too open to other influences). Its relation to tradition then is an often frustrating game of hide-and-seek" (p. 284). Throughout the British colonial history, Hong Kong has slowly forged its own unique identity, which is Chinese, but not quite "Chinese" when compared to the "Chinese-ness" of the Mainland and seldom associated as a "subject" of Britain, or of China. Educator Bernard Luk points out:

> Generations of Hong Kong Chinese pupils grew up, learning from the Chinese culture subjects to identify themselves as Chinese but relating Chineseness to neither contemporary China nor to the local Hong Kong landscape at that time. It was a Chinese identity in the abstract, a patriotism of the émigré, probably held all the more absolutely because it was not connected to tangible reality. And in this way, Hong Kong's schoolchildren grew up with a conception of Hong Kong society that was very much at the periphery of its dual centers of China and Britain, at a time when that society itself was emerging as the capital of the Chinese diaspora and a major center of the Chinese-speak world. (quoted in Tam, 1998, p. 74)

The de-colonization policy was initiated by British colonial government as a way to distance local Chinese in Hong Kong to the communist regime of China, the PRC. Actually, the government was "careful not to impose the British way of life on the Chinese, and to some extent were even adamant that the Chinese keep their customs and ways" (Chan, 2000, p. 297). As a result, the cultural identity with local flavours was able to bloom. Also, with the unveiling of "1997 issue" in 1979 and "Hong Kong ruled by Hong Kong

Figure 3: A study of the Hong Kong martial arts film: 4th Hong Kong International Film Festival. Designer: Kan Tai-keung, 1980.

people" solution was given by the Sino-British governments to Hong Kong after 1997, Hong Kong cultural identity was able to further develop under the British rule. The mid-1980s not only "witnessed the beginning of the retreat of the British in Hong Kong" (Tam, 1998, p. 75) but also experienced the emerging of a unique Hong Kong cultural identity in many aspects. As reflected in design, the identity was not just a showcase of "East meets West" commodities, but embedded with the spirits and artefacts of Hong Kong cultures inspired from the contemporary everyday life and popular culture.

For example, in a poster for Hong Kong Martial Arts Films in 1980 by Kan Tai-keung, used Hong Kong style kung-ku comics drawing, by Wong Yuk-long, to create a Hong Kong version pop art style (figure 3). In response to the awareness of the 1997 issue, an invitational poster exhibition entitled "My Image of Hong Kong" was held in 1982. The exhibition displayed works by Hong Kong graphic designers responding to the general concern over Hong Kong's uncertain future. Many of the works expressed themes of struggle, instability, transition, anxiety and precariousness.

The 1980s was an era of exploration of Hong Kong Chinese graphic design styles by designers in the city. The artefacts of Hong Kong culture became a new inspirational source for designers. However, the Hong Kong style design work was often restricted to the local market. Such as Kan Tai-keung, he was the first Chinese from Hong Kong (but not the first Chinese) accepted as a member of Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI). Kan is a Chinese shui-mo painting artist himself with a signature style of "Chinese painting" in his design work. In addition to an AGI membership, he was also featured on the covers of *Graphis*, *IDEA*, *Novum* in 1993, and in the *Communication Arts* in 1999.

The Hong Kong style design identity had its glass ceiling in the international design sphere. Most of the designers in Hong Kong worked with "Chinese," "Hong Kong" and "Western" styles side-by-side depending on the needs of the assignment. Hong Kong identity is known for its fluidity, which reflects "the high degree of adaptability of the Hong Kong people" (Tam, 1998, p. 77). A work by product designer, Alan Yip, *Flexical* (now renamed as *Suzhical*) a roll-up calculator resembling bamboo scrolls first debut in Hong Kong in 1991 (figure 4). It may provide the best example to illustrate the "Hong Kong design identity." This product was considered a huge commercial success with the worldwide accumulated sales of close to two million pieces. It was also purchased widely to become part of the permanent collections of overseas design institutes. In the most recent publication promoting Hong Kong design organized by the Hong Kong Design Centre, describes *Suzhical* as an electronic product which "can be folded in either direction up to 30,000 times without breaking. Membrane switches are widely used for equipment such as scales and treadmills to soften the overall appearance of a machine's control panels. Yip very cleverly

Figure 4: *Suzhica*l, a roll-up calculator. Designer: Alan Yip. 1991

makes use of these critical components, along with printed circuit boards, integrated circuits and LCD displays, to revolutionize the conventional form of the calculator" (Heskett (ed.), 2004, p. 48).

In order to survive, Hong Kong designers grew up shifting with the changing winds together with manufacturers and businessmen to satisfy the needs of the overseas buyers. To be versatile and as "clever" as Yip's calculator, is the known solution for the development of design in Hong Kong. Yet, Clive Dilnot who has spent few years teaching in Hong Kong makes a fair observation of Hong Kong design and industrial design in China. He criticizes the design model of Hong Kong saying it "is not innovation but the copy" and "'R&D' in Hong Kong means "replication and duplication" (Dilnot, 2003, p. 12). He calls for "the invention and development of an authentically modern Chinese culture" (p. 16) in China. How will Mr. Dilnot assess Mr. Yip's calculator with his criteria of an innovative design? Will that be another example of "replication and duplication" or an example of "authentically modern Chinese culture?" I have no intention to seek the answer here but rather to address a question of the role of Hong Kong design in inventing and developing "authentically modern Chinese culture." And most importantly to explore what is "authentically modern Chinese culture," or what is the meaning of tradition and nationalism in design.

Take fashion design in Hong Kong as an example. "Hong Kong has produced but few international fashion brands" (Skov, 2002, p. 554) although it has been one of the largest garment exporters in the world since the 1950s. Skov (2002) studies on Hong Kong fashion design show that designers are often caught between conflicts and frustrations. When they want to design something with "Chinese" touch, comments such as "Hong Kong Chinese don't want to buy Oriental styles" (p. 562) will be commonly heard. And the overseas buyers often came with their own designs rather than seeking authentic Chinese design from the local talents. Hong Kong design faces double discrimination and is marginalized from both internal and external forces. The question of tradition and nationalism in the global marketplace is just simply too complex for an individual designer to tackle and the issue is beyond the control of designers.

Figure 5: Products by Goods of Desire (G.D.O), 2003

Hong Kong design with "Chinese" elements, such as Yip's calculator, will have a better chance to receive recognition and global success. But, how about other innovative design with strong Hong Kong local flavour, such as

G.O.D. (Goods Of Desire, or translated as "to live better" in Chinese), a furniture and home retail store received very positive attention in the past few years (figure 5). Co-founder, Douglas Young said "[w]e would like to play a part in defining the Hong Kong identity for future generations. Our brand aim is to make local people aware of the special-ness of our native culture and lifestyle, and to spread it overseas" (quoted in Heskett (ed.), 2004, p. 19). How the voice and idea of Young on the Hong Kong identity can be implemented and sustained under the rule of HKSAR government, and selling all over the world? The next section investigates the new development of Hong Kong design identity in the new era.

Design identity (?) of Hong Kong in the new era

After a long history of separation under the British colonial rule, it is clear now that the HKSAR government gradually wants the general public to learn more about their *jokwok* (motherland), and become more patriotic towards China – PRC, a communist regime that the general public have resisted in the past. For the pro-Chinese HKSAR government, such anti-communist sentiments should no longer exist, and what the people ought to know is their concept and love of *jokwok*. The British colonial government and the HKSAR government represent "two antagonistic ideological orientations. In one orientation, the emphasis is placed on the maintenance of the political culture that has emerged from Hong Kong's unique history. The other orientation, however, emphasizes the assimilation of the Hong Kong political culture into that of Mainland China" (Ho, Chau, Chiu, & Peng, 2003, p. 412).

As Kau and Lau (2003) put it, the "post-colonial politics has opened up a new vista in terms of state building, fostering the idea of a moral state under a new mantel" (p. 316). However, faced with Hong Kong's unprecedented economic downturn since the Asian Financial crisis in 1998, Hong Kong people have a high demand for the government to fix the economy as the first priority. With the assistance of the Central Chinese Government, HKSAR government introduced Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA), and various economic plans to help the recovery of the economy.

To facilitate the development of both "state" and economic building tasks in the new era, the HKSAR government launched a "Brand Hong Kong" programme in May 2001 to position Hong Kong as "Asia's world city." This publicity campaign, commissioned to Landor Associates and Burson-Marseteller Public Relations, aims at promoting Hong Kong internationally with the image of Hong Kong as the gateway to "Mainland of China and the hub for business throughout the Asia-Pacific region" (BHK, 2001). The Brand Hong Kong signature is composed of the Dragon symbol, the Brand Hong Kong logotype, and the brand-line. The Dragon symbol embedded the two Chinese characters of "Hong Kong" as a part of the design. The overall brand platform and the Dragon symbol received a lot of negative critiques because of its "Asia" platform and the cliché Dragon symbol.

Despite the unpopularity of the "Brand Hong Kong" programme, it sets the main direction for development of the city. The Hong Kong Design Centre (HKDA) is another example of a newly established organization funded by the government with a strong business-building mission and a vision of setting up Hong Kong as a design hub in Asia. Although HKDC set up initially in 2001, a result of the amalgamation of four design associations with government funding support, it was not active until HKDC started to organize two major annual events: Business of Design Week, and Design for Asia Awards, in 2003. With generous funding from the government, HKDC

organized high profile events like design exhibitions, international conferences and forums, award presentations and gala dinner at the Hong Kong Conventional and Exhibition Centre (HKDC, 2004).

The academic sector has also benefited from government generosity. The numbers of both government and privately funded design schools and programmes are rising in the past 3 years. Also, recently arrived design scholars like John Heskett, Vijay Kumar of Illinois Institute of Technology, and Craig Vogel of Carnegie Mellon University are boosting the ranks of the faculty at the School of Design, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Here they will engage in research development in a newly re-regenerated Master of Design programme under the new Chairperson - Lorraine Justices of Georgia Institute of Technology. Throughout it's colonial history, Hong Kong has a long history of hiring expatriates. Like Matthew Turner, Hazel Clark, and Clive Dilnot, they were all former faculty of the School of Design, and had contributed to design and design education in Hong Kong with their writing and in many other ways. For sure, this new breed of scholars from tech-savvy leading institutes from the United States will have a high possibility to transform the MDes programme. Outside the academy, the newly appointed Executive Director of HKDC, Anne Stenros, the present Managing Director of the Finnish Society of Craft and Design/Design Forum Finland, will take up her position at HKDC on January 1, 2005 (HKDC, 2004).

Post 1997 Hong Kong is no longer British, and Communist China is no longer communist ideologically speaking. Now Hong Kong has a strong "identity" of being "officially" Chinese. The Brand Hong Kong platform created a "reappeared" Chinese/Asian identity for Hong Kong, which also governed the main development framework of design in the city, leaded by HKDC. The characteristics of a colony is being fluid, where everything can restart all over again without any memory of the past history and experience. Hong Kong people are used to being submissive to its colonizer, British, and now, China. Under the Brand Hong Kong platform, I see the development of design identity of Hong Kong can only be heading in one possible direction: the Central Chinese Government approved one. All current major design activities either by HKDC or academic are under one banner/voice: Business.

In this context, what will be the possible design identity of Hong Kong that can promote Hong Kong "Design Business" in this new era? Will that be the G.O.D.'s Hong Kong identity, or the techno-savvy identity backed up by the newly arrived expatiates? What is "Hong Kong Design?" To promote "Hong Kong Design" as a "brand" one needs to know what is the "content" and "substance" of that particular "brand." The current design promotion activities headed by the HKDC is just an "old wine in a new bottle," not much different from most design award contests and thematic seminars events organized by various design associations and institutes in the past. In a culture accustomed to discontinuity (or discouraging of continuity) and with a habit to re-start everything all over again, problems can be often be found, addressed, forgotten, and identified again in a circle of every three to eight years (depending on the duration of the contract of the expatiates). I am sceptical about the current brand building direction because of its denial of past experience and the history of Hong Kong design once again. There are still a lot of same old fundamental design issues such as professional qualification and education that are yet to be discussed. However the new approach and solutions are already coming in a big wave. The task of this study to investigate the design identity of Hong Kong cannot be accomplished as the identity is still fluid and evolving. I hope that the design community is Hong Kong will eventually find its anchor. I shall be tracking these

developments as they occur, continuing to search for the answers posed in my study.

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