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Entertainment, Chinese Culture, and Late Colonialism in Hong Kong

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Abstract

This article argues that the late colonial government of Hong Kong shaped and reconstructed Chinese performances and festivities to secure public support, creating Chinese culture that was *sui generis* and historically produced. The disturbances of the 1960s prompted local officials to improve state–society communication and legitimize their rule. They utilized Hong Kong people’s identification with Chinese culture to formulate their policies. Focusing on the Festival of Hong Kong, carnivals, Chinese opera shows, and the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, this article shows that colonial administrators adopted policies that targeted people across generations and communities. They sought to cultivate a sense of belonging to Hong Kong by engaging both the older and younger generations in these cultural activities. Late colonialism became intertwined with notions of Chineseness in Hong Kong. Unlike colonial officials in other former British territories, those in Hong Kong went beyond British culture and focused on cultural elements that the people preferred. This cultural perspective, which has been underexplored, shows that late colonialism in Hong Kong not only made the colony’s decolonization differ from other cases but also created diversified Chinese culture that was independent of the mainland China’s and Taiwan’s political discourses.

In April 1973, Governor Murray MacLehose took up the task of evaluating Hong Kong’s first officially sponsored Arts Festival. He wrote that ‘more items from the [Asian] region must be injected’ and, more importantly, ‘there must be more of a specifically Chinese nature – preferably from China itself. He later added in his correspondence to London that ‘somehow also the organizer must include some local [Hong Kong] Chinese performers, so as to produce a sense of local identity’.¹ This quotation reveals not merely how the Hong

¹ MacLehose to Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), 19 Apr. 1973, FCO 40/458, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA).

Kong government planned the festival in the coming years, but also how it emphasized Chinese culture in its policies from the late 1960s.

By scrutinizing both official and unofficial sources, this article argues that Hong Kong's late colonial government shaped and reconstructed Chinese performances and festivities to secure public support across generations, creating Chinese culture that was sui generis and historically produced. From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, British late colonialism became intertwined with notions of 'Chineseness' in the colony. This was an era when geopolitical considerations of the colonial government and the local Chinese hopes for preserving traditions met. Taking a historical perspective, this article shows how colonial officials and local Chinese leaders constructed and negotiated cultural notions of Chineseness. In Eric Hobsbawm's words, this reform in colonial governance was an 'invention of tradition'.² In Hong Kong, however, colonial officials 'invented' the traditions not for nation-building. Celebrations and festivals, including those created by the colonial government, became formalized and ritualized as regular programmes. Officials repeatedly borrowed practices from earlier generations, such as lion dances, Cantonese operas, and Chinese instrumental music, to serve its political aim of stabilizing the colony. To attract the attention of the younger generations, they also added popular elements of the 1970s, such as DJ shows, pop concerts, and balls to these rituals or celebrations of festivals.

Like the invented traditions described by Hobsbawm, these cultural practices were 'unspecific and vague' precisely because of their constructed nature.³ Colonial officials had no specific criteria in selecting which cultural elements to preserve, promote, or modify. Instead, they chose the Chinese cultural items that they perceived to be useful in gaining people's support. Local officials had long realized the significance of traditional Chinese festivals among the people.⁴ Within this historical production of Chinese culture, the boundaries of being 'local' (i.e. Hong Kong) and 'Chinese' became blurred in the colony, as colonial administrators believed that the colony's population valued the celebrations of Chinese festivals and traditions. Unlike later decades, there was no clear distinction between local and Chinese culture in the eyes of the administrators.

'Chineseness' became constructed in the context of Hong Kong's late colonialism. Historians have used the term 'late colonialism' to describe the development of colonial territories while nationalist discourses or the preparation for decolonization were taking place. John Darwin has pointed out various features of the 'late colonial state', such as the increasing emphasis on economic modernization, the set-up of 'parapolitical institutions', and the 'self-destruct' state.⁵ From the perspective of decolonization, late colonialism attempted to

² Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: inventing traditions', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 1–14.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴ Former District Officer James Hayes has recounted his observation of the festivities' importance to local society; see James Hayes, *Friends and teachers: Hong Kong and its people, 1953–1987* (Hong Kong, 1996), pp. 164–74.

⁵ John Darwin, 'What was the late colonial state?', *Itinerario*, 23 (1999), pp. 76–81.

shape and transform societies and culture in response to local crises. In the case of Malaya, the late colonial state attempted to construct an Anglicized version of the Malayan identity through cultural platforms such as museums, periodicals, and radio (though it largely failed).⁶ Through items such as theatrical performances (co-ordinated by the British Council) and broadcasts (by the British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC), the British also reshaped their cultural influence in African colonies even after the empire shrank.⁷ During the wave of post-World War II decolonization, the UK government also hoped to exert British cultural influence in the Arabian Gulf and Cyprus through the British Council, though it did not succeed in the latter case.⁸

Notions of late colonialism in Hong Kong, however, differed from the above cases. Colonial administrators made limited attempts at promoting British culture, as they realized the majority of Hong Kong's population was Chinese and these people did not identify themselves with Britishness.⁹ The colony's decolonization process is an anomaly. Hong Kong had no prospect of independence but would instead be 'retroceded' by its British administrators to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Its political system did not experience any significant change until the 1980s, when Britain and the PRC settled the colony's future.¹⁰ This result was partly because of a lease between Britain and China (during the Qing dynasty). In 1898, Britain signed the second Convention of Peking with China and leased the rural area between the Kowloon Peninsula and China's Shenzhen River, currently known as the New Territories. Unlike other permanent cessions of territories, the lease would only last for ninety-nine years and Britain would have to return the territories to China in 1997.¹¹ As the next section explains, the geopolitical context of Hong Kong from the late 1960s onwards prompted colonial administrators to consider the issue over the colony's future in their policy-making. In terms of culture, the Hong Kong government went beyond the British lens and considered preferences of the local population, which was primarily ethnic Chinese, to legitimize its rule.

What made Hong Kong's late colonialism so special was its 'entanglement' with notions of Chineseness. Scholars have long criticized Chineseness as a floating and ambiguous concept that oversimplifies the identities of Chinese

⁶ T. N. Harper, *The end of empire and the making of Malaya* (Cambridge, 1999), ch. 7.

⁷ Caroline Ritter, *Imperial encore: the cultural project of the late British empire* (Oakland, CA, 2021), pp. 8–9, and chs. 1–3.

⁸ See Gerald Power, 'Education, culture and the British position in the Arabian Gulf: establishing the British Council in Kuwait, 1952–1955', *Britain and the World*, 15 (2022), pp. 47–65; Maria Hadjiathanasiou, 'Colonial rule, cultural relations and the British Council in Cyprus, 1935–1955', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 46 (2019), pp. 1096–124.

⁹ Mark Hampton, *Hong Kong and British culture, 1945–1997* (Manchester, 2016), pp. 164–5. See the next section for a more detailed elaboration on the Chinese identity among Hong Kong's population.

¹⁰ John Darwin, 'Hong Kong in British decolonisation', in Judith M. Brown and Rosemary Foot, eds., *Hong Kong's transitions, 1842–1997* (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 16.

¹¹ In 1984, British officials agreed to return not only the New Territories but also other parts of the colony to China, including Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and outlying islands.

overseas, especially those who do not see themselves as Chinese.¹² Meanwhile, some scholars have pointed out that over-deconstructing Chineseness could be dangerous. These critiques impose a binary framework on Chineseness and colonialism, thus neglecting their mutually constitutive relationship in colonial Hong Kong.¹³ This article takes a historical approach and investigates how different historical actors constructed Chineseness. In this case, it was the late colonial administrators who shaped Chineseness to reform governance and obtain public support. This study is not the first one that has brought the concepts of late colonialism and Chineseness together.¹⁴ Instead of merely stating how Hong Kong's Chineseness differed from that of the PRC and Taiwan or how it appeared as post-war neo-colonialism in Asia, this article examines how Chineseness became a plural notion and formed part of Hong Kong's late colonial governance and long-term decolonization. It represented the culture that both the older and younger generations of Hong Kong people preferred, as seen by officials engaging in this long-term decolonization. Yet it also incorporated diversified branches of Chinese culture and languages, including Cantonese, Fukienese, Chiu Chow, and Peking entertainment to fit the need of various local communities.¹⁵ In the case of China, Gina Anne Tam has argued that *fangyan* (the different local Chinese languages) were pivotal in shaping Chinese nationalism and society, even when the PRC government was attempting to promote *putonghua* (the common tongue).¹⁶ The case of Hong Kong was unique in this era because it was not only the people but also the administrators who preserved this diversity. Moreover, this diversity encompassed not simply the linguistic but also the generational divides in Hong Kong society.

This late colonial construction of Chinese culture led to a historically produced Chineseness for Hong Kong. This preservation and shaping of culture contrasted sharply with the cultural destruction in the PRC, which was experiencing the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). The movement of eliminating the 'Four Olds', including 'old ideas, culture, customs, and habits of the exploiting classes', destroyed much of the tradition and heritage in mainland Chinese

¹² See, for instance, Rey Chow, 'On Chineseness as a theoretical problem', in Shih Shu-mei et al., *Sinophone studies: a critical reader* (New York, NY, 2013), pp. 43–56; Ien Ang, 'Can one say no to Chineseness? Pushing the limits of the diasporic paradigm', in Shih et al., *Sinophone studies*, pp. 57–73.

¹³ Law Wing-sang, *Collaborative colonial power: the making of the Hong Kong Chinese* (Hong Kong, 2009), pp. 2–3.

¹⁴ See Gregory B. Lee, *Chinas unlimited: making the imaginaries of China and Chineseness* (London, 2003), pp. xiii–ix.

¹⁵ Various Chinese dialect groups (or groups with shared places of origins) had long-established communities in Hong Kong, some of which can be dated back to a major southward migration of Chinese in the twelfth century. Many of these groups formed into 'native place associations' (*tong-xianghui*) during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There was a strong sense of community among each group, and leaders of these groups sought to influence the society, and sometimes government policies. See Peter Y. L. Ng and Hugh D. R. Baker, *New peace county: a Chinese gazetteer of the Hong Kong region* (Hong Kong, 1983), p. 22; Hugh D. R. Baker, 'Life in the cities: the emergence of Hong Kong man', *China Quarterly*, 95 (1983), p. 471.

¹⁶ Gina Anne Tam, *Dialect and nationalism in China, 1860–1960* (Cambridge, 2020), p. 4 and ch. 5.

society.¹⁷ In January 1968, the central authorities of the PRC even banned the celebration of the Lunar New Year and other festive practices.¹⁸ Across the Taiwan Strait, the Nationalist Chinese regime under Chiang Kai-shek initiated the Cultural Renaissance Movement in 1966. It constructed its conservative and Confucian version of Chinese cultural traditions. This movement aimed at showcasing Taiwan as the guardian of Chinese culture and countering the PRC.¹⁹ Currently, there is no archival evidence showing that the cultural construction in Hong Kong served part of this battle between the PRC and Taiwan. Existing records also do not reveal that any of the entertainment programmes were a response to the PRC's cultural policies during the Cold War. This geopolitical context, nevertheless, made Chinese culture in Hong Kong even more unique. While preserving and shaping culture, British officials in Hong Kong aimed at stabilizing the colony and prolonging British rule instead of propagating any Chinese political ideologies. This culture was diversified, incorporating entertainment from different parts of China. Bridging the fields of colonial and modern Chinese history, this article shows that late colonialism in Hong Kong not only made the colony's decolonization unique but also created diversified Chinese culture that was independent of the PRC's and Taiwan's political discourses.

I

Entertainment policies from the late 1960s onwards emerged in the context of Hong Kong's new geopolitical position and its people's identification with Chinese culture. Riots during the late 1960s reminded British and colonial officials that they had to eventually return Hong Kong to the PRC. In 1966, the Star Ferry Riots broke out, with people protesting the increase of the ferry fare.²⁰ This unrest reminded the government of the need to take 'determined and unfaltering steps' to foster a sense of community.²¹ In less than a year, leftist-inspired riots tore the colony apart. Though the riots ended with the suppression by the Hong Kong government, they prompted London to realize that the return of Hong Kong to China was inevitable. Even though the 1967 riots had local roots, they were primarily a result of the Cultural Revolution in China. The PRC's Anti-British Struggle Committee supported the riots in Hong Kong during the early phase.²² After suppressing the riots, the British

¹⁷ Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's last revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), pp. 113–22.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

¹⁹ W. Tozer, 'Taiwan's "Cultural Renaissance": a preliminary view', *China Quarterly*, 43 (1970), pp. 81–7.

²⁰ In 1965, the Hong Kong government agreed to increase ferry fares. Urban councillor Elsie Elliott petitioned the government for the repeal of the increase. In 1966, protester So Sau Chung supported Elliott's action with a hunger strike and was later joined by other young protesters, resulting in riots on 6–7 April 1966; see Ian Scott, 'Bridging the gap: Hong Kong senior civil servants and the 1966 riots', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 45 (2017), pp. 133–4.

²¹ *Kowloon disturbances 1966: report of Commission of Inquiry* (Hong Kong, 1967), pp. 141–4.

²² John M. Carroll, *The Hong Kong-China nexus: a brief history* (Cambridge, 2022), p. 46.

and Hong Kong governments assessed the colony's 'long-term future'. They held a pessimistic view because, due to the colony's proximity to mainland China and the resulting vulnerability (demonstrated by the leftist riots), the PRC could launch a 'direct military attack' or 'internal uprisings' in Hong Kong. The colony's future would thus be in the hands of the PRC. The British objective would be to negotiate Hong Kong's return to China 'at a favourable opportunity' and on 'the best terms obtainable' for Hong Kong people and British interests.²³

The colony's retrocession did not take place immediately. Instead, British officials decided to keep Hong Kong, despite the waves of decolonization in Asia and Africa from the late 1940s onwards. This was firstly a diplomatic decision. Both the British and the Chinese governments decided to maintain a status quo over the issue of Hong Kong during the 1970s. The PRC expressed to the British side that it did not plan to take back the colony until 1997, the expiry of the New Territories lease. It continued this policy of 'long-term planning and full utilization', which had begun in the 1950s. Hong Kong's strategic value, including foreign exchange earnings and Cold War intelligence, prompted the PRC not to take any action. The British government also decided not to raise the Hong Kong issue. In fact, this issue had nowhere to go while the two countries were improving their diplomatic relations.²⁴ The decision to keep the colony also aligned with British interests. Britain's sterling reserve, investment, and trading activity in Hong Kong made London willing to hold onto the colony.²⁵ The improved Sino-British relations also paved the way for the shift from the anti-communist to the local-oriented objectives of the cultural policies.

As the British officials decided to hold onto Hong Kong, they had to resolve problems concerning colonial governance. Many policies of the 1970s aimed at improving state–society relations and the government's image via non-political or covert means. Cultural policies constituted part of this reform. Before the 1960s, state–society communication remained limited.²⁶ The 1966 riots made local senior civil servants agree that the government had to further legitimate and justify colonial rule.²⁷ In particular, the riots revealed youth grievances, the communication gap between the state and the people, and the need to cultivate people's sense of identity.²⁸ However, political reforms did not appear as a possible option. British and colonial officials believed that the PRC would not tolerate any effort to democratize Hong Kong. Due to the vulnerable position of Britain and the fear of a Chinese attack, the officials did not attempt to reform colonial governance via constitutional or

²³ Chi-kwan Mark, 'Development without decolonisation? Hong Kong's future and relations with Britain and China, 1967–1972', *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, 24 (2014), pp. 323–4.

²⁴ Chi-kwan Mark, *The everyday Cold War: Britain and China, 1950–1972* (London, 2017), pp. 185–7.

²⁵ Mark, 'Development without decolonisation', p. 323.

²⁶ Florence Mok, 'Town talk: enhancing the "eyes and ears" of the colonial state in British Hong Kong, 1950s–1975', *Historical Research*, 95 (2022), p. 297.

²⁷ Scott, 'Bridging the gap', p. 140.

²⁸ *Kowloon disturbances 1966*, pp. 141–4.

electoral changes.²⁹ As a substitute for representative democracy, the Hong Kong government improved state–society relations via Town Talk. It was a covert mechanism that gathered public opinion through City District Offices, a new platform for state–society communication. Through the Town Talk reports, local officials covertly considered people’s views on policy-making to avoid the PRC’s opposition to political changes.³⁰

Entering the 1970s, the colonial government attempted to eliminate social grievances by establishing the Independent Commission against Corruption (commonly known as ICAC), introducing housing programmes, and implementing free and compulsory education.³¹ In 1975, the government replaced Town Talk with the Movement of Opinion Direction, a strengthened covert opinion poll to consider public opinion in policy-making.³² The new provision of entertainment during this era could be seen as part of the wider attempt to erase social tension and secure public support via non-political channels. As the Hong Kong government had the autonomy to implement its cultural policies, entertainment could also be viewed as part of the wider delegation of power from the British to the colonial government after World War II.³³

Entertainment policies of this era were nevertheless unique in another way. Ray Yep and Tai-lok Lui have shown that welfare policies of the 1970s were a continuation of the policy reviews that began before the riots.³⁴ However, official entertainment from the late 1960s onwards was a new response to the people’s identification with Chinese culture. From the late 1940s on, a Chinese ‘sojourner mentality’ and ‘a patriotism of the émigré’ existed in Hong Kong due to the influx of immigrants from the mainland.³⁵ Existing works have revealed how a local identity emerged in the colony during the 1970s, partly in contrast to the mainland Chinese identity.³⁶ However, this binary did not exist among the local population, especially during the early 1970s. Many residents continued to identify themselves with Chinese culture while concurrently developing a local identity for Hong Kong. For instance, some believed the Cultural Revolution had destroyed much of the Chinese tradition and that they had to preserve the remaining customs in Hong Kong.³⁷ Students and younger activists also inherited this sense of cultural Chinese identity and

²⁹ Mok, ‘Town talk’, p. 293.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 297–300.

³¹ John M. Carroll, *A concise history of Hong Kong* (Lanham, MD, 2007), pp. 160–1, 172–6.

³² Florence Mok, ‘Public opinion polls and covert colonialism in British Hong Kong’, *China Information*, 33 (2019), p. 70.

³³ See Leo Goodstadt, *Uneasy partners: the conflict between public interest and private profit in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, 2009), ch. 3.

³⁴ Ray Yep and Tai-lok Lui, ‘Revisiting the golden era of MacLehose and the dynamics of social reforms’, *China Information*, 24 (2010), pp. 250–1.

³⁵ Bernard Hung-Kay Luk, ‘Chinese culture in the Hong Kong curriculum: heritage and colonialism’, *Comparative Education Review*, 35 (1991), pp. 667–8.

³⁶ Agnes S. Ku, ‘Immigration policies, discourses, and the politics of local belonging in Hong Kong (1950–1980)’, *Modern China*, 30 (2004), p. 351.

³⁷ Allan T. F. Pang, ‘Stamping “imagination and sensibility”: objects, culture, and governance in late colonial Hong Kong’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 50 (2022), pp. 791–2.

engaged in ‘patriotic’ movements.³⁸ The colonial government seized this cultural preference of the people and implemented policies that suited their interests. Chinese culture became central to the government’s cultural attempts to secure public support.

Official entertainment of this era also marked a departure from the Cold War cultural policy of censorship. Before the late 1960s, the Hong Kong government paid little attention to the provision of entertainment.³⁹ While officials cared about culture in the colony during the 1950s, their policies were mainly to censor cultural products and contain communist influence.⁴⁰ The left–right dichotomy of this Cold War confrontation is inadequate to explain Hong Kong’s entertainment policies from the late 1960s onwards. As Jeremy Taylor and Lanjun Xu have argued, the Chinese cultural development in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia ‘went far beyond a simply Left–Right dichotomy’ even during the Cold War. The emergence of new post-colonial nationalism in Southeast Asia also contributed to the various notions of Chineseness.⁴¹ In this case, it was Hong Kong’s late colonialism that shaped the colony’s Chineseness. On the one hand, the Cold War remained partly relevant because local leftists confronted the new cultural policies. Due to the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, the PRC also viewed Hong Kong as a cultural threat that exposed its ‘backwardness’. On the other hand, as available archival evidence reveals, the colonial administrators focused on the people’s need, instead of the suppression of communists, when they were planning their new entertainment policies. This does not mean that censorship completely disappeared from the colony. Nevertheless, archival records reveal that these cultural policies emphasized local stability and identity in light of the new geopolitical context described above, instead of the anti-communist objectives during the 1950s.

II

From 1969 to 1973, the colonial government created its own occasion of celebration, the Festival of Hong Kong, to entertain ‘all sections of the Chinese community’.⁴² It hoped to create a sense of community through this carnival. Although officials did not construct the festival as a moment for

³⁸ Chi Keung Charles Fung, ‘Colonial governance and state incorporation of Chinese language’, *Social Transformations in Chinese Societies*, 18 (2022), pp. 64–6; Carroll, *A concise history*, p. 170. See Anthony Sweeting, *Education in Hong Kong, 1941 to 2001: visions and revisions* (Hong Kong, 2004), pp. 8–9, for discussion on the historical usage of the word ‘patriotic’.

³⁹ Liu Jingzhi (Liu Ching-Chih), *Xianggang yinyue shilun: wenhua zhengce, yinyue jiaoyu* (Analysis of Hong Kong’s history of music: cultural policies and music education) (Hong Kong, 2014), pp. 2–4; David Clayton, ‘The consumption of radio broadcast technologies in Hong Kong, c. 1930–1960’, *Economic History Review*, 57 (2004), p. 714.

⁴⁰ Michael Ng, *Political censorship in British Hong Kong: freedom of expression and the law (1842–1997)* (Cambridge, 2022), ch. 3.

⁴¹ Jeremy E. Taylor, ‘Introduction: putting “Chineseness” back into Cold War cultures’, in Jeremy E. Taylor and Lanjun Xu, eds., *Chineseness and the Cold War: contested cultures and diaspora in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong* (London, 2022), pp. 12–13.

⁴² Clark to heads of department, 29 Mar. 1968, Hong Kong Record Series (HKRS) 1562-2-9, Public Records Office (PRO), Hong Kong.

commemorating Chinese traditions, they utilized traditional Chinese entertainment, such as folk music, dragon dances, and Kungfu, to delight and charm the locals. The government also hoped to involve as many people as possible in organizing the festival so that they would feel part of one community.⁴³ Children and youth were the main targets.⁴⁴

This event was not the brainchild of the Hong Kong government. Instead, it originated from the Hong Kong Week of 1967. This was an initiative of the Federation of Hong Kong Industries, the organization that represented local industrial companies, to promote local products among residents and stores. The chairman of the Hong Kong Week Committee (who was a merchant and also the first chairperson of the federation), Chau Sik-Nin, mentioned in June 1967 that Hong Kong people held a 'general antipathy' towards locally produced goods, while the 'wide variety of top quality Hong Kong products' always amazed overseas customers.⁴⁵ As a result, the federation recognized the need to create 'a sense of pride' among local people towards Hong Kong products.⁴⁶ However, as the leftist riots escalated, various sectors of the community, including *kaifong* (neighbourhood), journalists, and teachers, expressed that the Hong Kong Week should be aimed more at 'demonstrating the community's desire and ability to work together for the benefit of all'.⁴⁷ The government thus decided to support the event with public funds. An Executive Council memorandum in 1968 recorded that the week evolved to become a 'Hong Kong Community Week'.⁴⁸

To accommodate local preferences, organizers presented programmes that featured traditional Chinese culture. While Chinese culture was not the only focus of the week, it became the attraction of many events.⁴⁹ Cantonese operas by local stars, Cantonese dramas, Chinese folk dances, and so on appeared on the agenda as important events, while exhibitions were also highlighting Chinese traditions.⁵⁰ An exhibition titled '200 Years of Chinese Beauties' displayed clothing and fashion styles in Chinese history, ranging from gowns of the Empress Dowager Cixi to mini-skirts from the Republican era.⁵¹ The week reached its climax with a pageant composed of traditional Chinese performances, including lion dances, folk dances, and a dance with a 120-foot-long dragon.⁵² Tickets sold out quickly. The exhibition on Chinese fashion, for instance, was so popular that the organizers had to continue the event at the Hilton Hotel in Central after the end of the week. Commercial Radio, the colony's main commercial broadcaster, had to broadcast the Cantonese

⁴³ 'Festival of Hong Kong 1969 Activities Committee: minutes of the first meeting', 25 Apr. 1969, HKRS1562-2-9, PRO.

⁴⁴ 'Game rallies', n.d., HKRS306-5-9, PRO.

⁴⁵ Press release, 28 June 1967, HKRS70-1-129, PRO.

⁴⁶ 'Address by the Hon. Sir Sik-Nin Chau', 28 June 1967, HKRS70-1-129, PRO.

⁴⁷ 'Head 76 - subventions: miscellaneous', 20 Sept. 1967, HKRS70-1-130, PRO.

⁴⁸ 'Hong Kong Week', 9 July 1968, HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

⁴⁹ See *Hong Kong Week report* (Hong Kong, 1967).

⁵⁰ *Official programme of the Hong Kong Week* (Hong Kong, 1967), p. 5.

⁵¹ *Hong Kong Week report*, pp. 9-10.

⁵² 'Hong Kong Week pageant', 3 Nov. 1967, HKRS70-1-129, PRO.

opera performances because so many people hoped to attend, but tickets were sold out.⁵³ The local press also generally viewed the week positively.⁵⁴ This favourable response demonstrated that residents preferred entertainment with Chinese features, and this could be a key to gather public support. Meanwhile, local leftists dubbed it as an ‘anti-China plot’. They criticized the organizers for encouraging Hong Kong residents to stop using goods and supplies from mainland China and use only Hong Kong products.⁵⁵

Despite the leftist criticism, colonial officials proposed to repeat the event in 1969 and make it a ‘permanent feature of the Hong Kong calendar’.⁵⁶ The Executive Council approved the proposal, which later acquired a new name: The Festival of Hong Kong. Officially, the government aimed at providing a ‘week of relaxation, enjoyment and interest for the people of Hong Kong’, especially youth. It also emphasized that this would be a ‘truly popular week’.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, fostering a sense of community was an internal goal. Clement Tong has argued that the Hong Kong-oriented nature of the 1967 event helped form a new local identity against the radical leftists.⁵⁸ Witnessing the success of this earlier campaign, the Executive Council specified in a memorandum that the upcoming festival should be a community-wide effort that would develop ‘civic pride in Hong Kong and a sense of identity’ through cultural activities, exhibitions, sport competitions, and so on.⁵⁹ The rationale was to make as many people involved in the festival as possible and make them identify themselves as part of the local community. While various official committees would hold functions for all districts, the government also required City District Offices and the New Territories Administration, which were established to improve state–society communication after the 1960s disturbances, to co-ordinate efforts at district levels.⁶⁰ These offices enlisted the support of district communities, such as *kaifong* and business associations, and made them help organize the festival.⁶¹

The float parade was the most eye-catching attraction. The government publicly announced that the parade would showcase the characteristics of

⁵³ *Hong Kong Week report*, pp. 9–10 and 16.

⁵⁴ ‘Xianggangzhou kaimu yinlong huoyue’ (Hong Kong Week started with an active silver dragon), *Wah Kiu Yat Po (WKYP)*, 31 Oct. 1967, p. 2.1; ‘Shuilai pohuai “Xianggangzhou” jiugai gunchu xianggang qul’ (Whoever destroys the ‘Hong Kong Week’ should get out of Hong Kong!), *Kung Sheung Daily News (KSDN)*, 31 Oct. 1967, p. 2.

⁵⁵ ‘Attention news editors’, 1 Nov. 1967, HKRS70-1-129, PRO.

⁵⁶ ‘Hong Kong Week’, 9 July 1968, HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

⁵⁷ Chen to city district commissioners (CDCs) and city district officers (CDOs), 1 May 1969, HKRS489-7-22, PRO; ‘Hong Kong Week’, 7 Mar. 1969, HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

⁵⁸ Clement Tsz Ming Tong, ‘The Hong Kong Week of 1967 and the emergence of Hong Kong identity through contradistinction’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch*, 56 (2016), pp. 52–61.

⁵⁹ ‘Hong Kong Week’, 9 July 1968, HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

⁶⁰ Steve Tsang, *Governing Hong Kong: administrative officers from the nineteenth century to the hand-over to China, 1862–1997* (London, 2007), pp. 79–80.

⁶¹ ‘Hong Kong Week 1969 – committee organisations and terms of references’, 17 Mar. 1969, HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

Hong Kong, namely stability, harmony, industry, and prosperity.⁶² It also turned the parade into a Chinese procession so that it would suit the taste of the local population. Officials wanted the floats to be 'remembered for many years to come' and be 'regarded by many Chinese as a symbol of good luck and general prosperity'.⁶³ When the government issued its press release in May, it described the parade as a festival commemorating Chinese culture:

Three huge 200-foot dragons and six 100-foot lions will dance through the streets to the beat of traditional Chinese music supplied by drums and cymbals. Various troupes will stage tableaux of heroic incidents which form part of the legendary history of China...There will also be clowns, acrobats, gymnasts, motorcyclists and several musical bands to entertain the people with displays of their skills and with music, both ancient and modern Chinese music and the latest in 'Pop'.⁶⁴

Evidently, Chinese culture filled almost every part of the festival, including its soundscape. When the Music Committee planned the festival programmes, they invited both Chinese and Western music groups, including the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, the Radio Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, and the Hong Kong Youth Orchestra. Yet, they stressed that they were still awaiting responses from more 'popular Chinese choral and other groups'.⁶⁵ The festival office later decided to hold a series of school concerts showcasing Chinese choral and instrumental music.⁶⁶ The Lung Cheung Chinese Opera Troupe of Radio Hong Kong also performed every night during the festival. To cater for the needs of residents in the New Territories, the troupe chose to perform more in that region instead of Kowloon and Hong Kong Island.⁶⁷ The festival programme also included Chinese opera of different origins. For instance, the open-air fiesta in Statue Square included not only Cantonese but also Peking opera.⁶⁸ Even a beach party at Repulse Bay could not escape from Chinese dragons and phoenixes. Dragon boats and phoenix boats appeared in the party. Performers also presented dragon and lion dances on the beach.⁶⁹ The commemoration magazine records that even the local British troops 'staged a tableaux of heroic events' in Chinese history.⁷⁰

Both the government and the public considered the 1969 festival a success. The report for the Executive Council claimed that the events not only enabled the public to enjoy, but also 'enhanced Government's image in the eyes of the public'. The secretary for home affairs, the commissioner of police, the director of information services, and the director of commerce and industry

⁶² 'Hong Kong Week: Entertainment Committee', 15 Apr. 1969, HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

⁶³ 'Plan for festival procession', 2 May 1969, HKRS1562-2-9, PRO.

⁶⁴ 'Grand finale to Festival of Hong Kong 1969', 10 May 1969, HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

⁶⁵ 'Music Committee report', 15 Apr. 1969, HRKS489-7-22, PRO.

⁶⁶ Ng to hon. secretary for home affairs, 16 June 1969, HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

⁶⁷ 'Entertainment: second progress report', 22 May 1969, HKRS1562-2-9, PRO.

⁶⁸ 'Festival's open air fiesta in Statue Square', 11 Dec. 1969, HKRS545-1-339, PRO.

⁶⁹ 'H.K. Festival beach carnival meeting', 15 July 1969, HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

⁷⁰ *Festival of Hong Kong Commemoration Magazine 1969* (Hong Kong, 1969), p. 21.

unanimously agreed that this government effort brought 'considerable enjoyment' for the people.⁷¹ However, some officials doubted whether the government should provide so much free entertainment for the people. Secretary for Home Affairs David Ronald Holmes and his subordinate Denis Bray, who was responsible for state–society communication and district administration, both opposed the festival as they believed the government should not spend so much money for this purpose.⁷²

The government responded by asking city district officers to survey public opinion towards the festival. Interviewees pointed out problems related to administration, logistics, and other technical arrangements. However, they viewed the festival favourably overall. A report from the Wong Tai Sin district recorded that, before the festival began, people criticized the government for spending so much on recreation. However, once the festival started, 'people's attitude turned to one of excitement and enthusiasm again and they were happy to attend and participate in the many events that were organized'. After the festival ended, many residents praised the government for being 'so enlightened as to provide a week of such gaiety and enjoyment of the public'. The city district officer reported that events at both the central and district levels were well attended. The Chinese-styled parade amused residents so greatly that they were still talking about it 'in an excited manner' after the festival, and no interviewee criticized the disruption arising from the closure of Nathan Road during the event. The elderly also compared the parade to what had happened in 1952 during the queen's coronation. The Wong Tai Sin officer emphasized that sponsors, participants, and organizers realized 'they were doing something for the community' and that 'their contribution towards the community was being appreciated'. This resulted in the 'growth of a feeling of civic pride'.⁷³

Other reports revealed similar comments. While the programmes included both Chinese and other entertainment, such as a carnival in Central and a military tattoo, Chinese items drew much of the attention.⁷⁴ At the same time, the float parade was the second most popular to Central residents even though they had seen the traditional performance very often. They also enjoyed the Chinese performance in their own district. For instance, the elderly enjoyed the free Cantonese opera performances, while children participated in the school variety shows. Local events, such as lion dances, concerts of Cantonese operatic songs, and Chinese boxing and karate were popular among the 'very young and the less sophisticated older generation'.⁷⁵

City district officers supported repeating the festival, but they believed holding it biannually would be a better option as it was a heavy administrative burden.⁷⁶ Instead of recording how successful the event was, the purposes of

⁷¹ 'Festival of Hong Kong: proposal for the future', 12 Mar. 1970, HKRS931-6-159, PRO.

⁷² Holmes to deputy colonial secretary, 8 Oct. 1969, HKRS489-7-22, PRO; Bray to CDCs, 22 Oct. 1969, HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

⁷³ 'Report on Festival of Hong Kong', n.d., HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

⁷⁴ Lam to CDC (Kowloon and Hong Kong), 30 Dec. 1969, HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

⁷⁵ 'Report on the Festival of Hong Kong', 31 Dec. 1969, HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; Lam to CDC, 30 Dec. 1969, HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

the reports were more to refute the view of Holmes and Bray and justify the continuation of the festival. The community that denounced the festival was, again, the leftists. Officials generally ignored their criticism. David Holmes later wrote in 1970 that the strong opposition of local leftists was in fact 'quite an important additional factor illustrating the Festival's success'.⁷⁷ Other government departments also supported the officers' proposal, and the Executive Council decided to repeat the festival in 1971.⁷⁸

The festivals in 1971 and 1973 followed the pattern of their predecessor. The aims of providing weeks of enjoyment and fostering a sense of community remained.⁷⁹ The Festival of Hong Kong Office repeated the popular activities in 1969. In March 1971, the office announced that it would present an 'even more colourful and attractive' parade.⁸⁰ The result showed that being colourful was equivalent to being traditional. The procession became part of the festival's opening ceremony. Officials emphasized that it was a 'traditional Chinese procession' with lions and dragons.⁸¹ The local press described the parade as if it was a Chinese festival. The *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, a major Chinese newspaper in Hong Kong, reported that the parade was full of lion and dragon dances, with women dressed as ancient Chinese beauties dancing and singing with their lanterns. Other Chinese performances include Chiu Chow music, foreigners dressing as Chinese historical figures, and classical acrobatics. The only foreign elements that were briefly mentioned in that report were the national anthem of the United Kingdom, a brass instrumental performance by Welsh musicians, bicycle acrobatics, and MacLehose, who gave a speech and declared the start of the festival.⁸² The *South China Morning Post*, the colony's major English newspaper, described that this 'traditional Chinese procession' attracted enthusiastic spectators.⁸³ The foreign elements, such as the military band and scouts, were nowhere to be found in the *Post* coverage.

Everyday programmes also became more 'Chinese'. The festival office first invited the bandmaster of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers to arrange a festival fanfare. However, the fanfare was not in Welsh but in Chinese musical style. Programme booklets recorded that the fanfare was based on a 'nonsense song' from China's Hebei province, and the arranger made it 'recognisable as a Chinese tune'.⁸⁴ While the district programmes were a mix of Chinese and Western features, Chinese ones featured every day and everywhere.

⁷⁷ Holmes to hon. colonial secretary, 10 Jan. 1970, HKRS489-7-22, PRO.

⁷⁸ 'Festival of Hong Kong: proposal for the future', 12 Mar. 1970, HKRS931-6-195, PRO; 'Festival of Hong Kong 1971 office accommodation', 20 Mar. 1970, HKRS931-6-159, PRO.

⁷⁹ Whitley to hon. director public works et al., 30 Sept. 1970, HKRS489-7-23, PRO.

⁸⁰ 'Item issued on behalf of the Festival of Hong Kong Office', 29 Mar. 1971, HKRS489-7-23, PRO.

⁸¹ 'The following is issued on behalf of the Festival of Hong Kong Office', 19 Apr. 1971, HKRS489-7-23, PRO.

⁸² 'Xianggangjie dengshi dafang guangming' (Illuminations of the Festival of Hong Kong brightens up the city), *WKYP*, 27 Nov. 1971, p. 2.2.

⁸³ 'Giant crowd cheers festival's opening display', *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, 27 Nov. 1971, p. 1.

⁸⁴ *Festival of Hong Kong: Joint Concert* (Hong Kong, 1971).

Cantonese opera, Chiu Chow music, Peking opera, and Mandarin pop music concerts appeared throughout the festival.⁸⁵ The performance by a Chinese classical orchestra was especially popular. A report stated that its concert was 'popular and enthusiastically received'. The concert's high attendance also 'proved the benefit of a single orchestra over a mixed concert'.⁸⁶ To commemorate the festival, the government also issued postage stamps that featured Chinese cultural elements.⁸⁷

The 1973 festival had the same aim of fostering a 'sense of identity and community' through 'traditional' entertainment. Officials continued to seek district organizations and leaders to help organize events. However, they came up with certain new elements, including the emphasis on the colony's internal achievements and tourist trade.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, the government established the Local Celebrations Committee to let community leaders organize district programmes.⁸⁹ Back in 1969, the government allowed *kaifong* associations to organize events based on the needs of their districts, aiming to enable more members of the public to help organize the festival.⁹⁰ The establishment of the new committee was a top-down process that intentionally allowed public participation. It further demonstrated the aim of fostering a local identity by making the event a festival of the people. While the leaders could decide programmes of their choice, they still preferred Chinese entertainment. The committee voluntarily subsidized traditional Chinese events, even though it did not receive applications from local organizers. The dragon procession of the Chai Wan Residents Association was an example.⁹¹ In the Western District, organizers also added more Cantonese opera shows by the Lung Cheung Opera Troupe.⁹² The Music and Performing Arts Committee also had a policy of increasing 'Chinese musical items'.⁹³ The committee also had foreign dramas, such as the Caucasian Chalk Circle, played with Chinese themes.⁹⁴ However, the same kind of performance appeared so frequently that the spectators became bored. Residents also complained that the festival included too much martial arts.⁹⁵ These comments paved the way for the end of the festival after 1973.

⁸⁵ Hassan to all CDOs and district officers, 15 Oct. 1971, HKRS489-7-23, PRO.

⁸⁶ 'Precis of music comments - City Hall etc.', n.d., HKRS1124-2-20, PRO.

⁸⁷ Pang, 'Stamping "imagination and sensibility"', p. 800.

⁸⁸ Tsang to assistant secretary (city districts), 21 Feb. 1973, HKRS489-7-24, PRO; Mason to Kelley, 19 Sept. 1973, FCO 40/458, TNA.

⁸⁹ 'Local celebrations committee paper 1/2', 12 Apr. 1973, HKRS489-7-24, PRO.

⁹⁰ 'Festival of Hong Kong: proposal for the future', 12 Mar. 1970, HKRS931-6-159, PRO.

⁹¹ 'Minutes of the fifth meeting of the Local Celebrations Committee', 8 Aug. 1973, HKRS489-7-24, PRO.

⁹² Yeung to Cheng, 19 May 1973, HKRS489-7-24, PRO.

⁹³ 'Minutes of the first Music and Performing Arts Committee meeting', 12 Jan. 1973, HKRS1124-2-20, PRO.

⁹⁴ 'Minutes of the eighth meeting of the Music & Performing Arts Committee', 15 June 1973, HKRS931-6-164, PRO.

⁹⁵ Leung to CDC (Hong Kong), 13 Dec. 1973, HKRS489-7-24, PRO; Chiu to CDC (Hong Kong), 14 Dec. 1973, HKRS489-7-24, PRO; CDC (Kowloon) to deputy director of home affairs, 20 Dec. 1973, HKRS489-7-24, PRO.

Publications from university students revealed the younger generations' voices. Student activists once tended to criticize official celebrations as political missions. They claimed that the festival simply aimed to fool the public by covering up local problems such as corruption and robberies; without the 'May Storm of 1967', the colonial government would not take such actions to hide its problems.⁹⁶ Others complained that the festival was a waste of money, and some students viewed the arrangements of the festival programmes as unattractive and boring.⁹⁷ A report in the Hong Kong University Students' Union *Undergrad* magazine emphasized that what Hong Kong needed was not a sense of belonging, but democracy, social welfare, and a more equal allocation of income.⁹⁸ However, some of these students still recognized the successful aspects of the festival. Even *Undergrad* pointed out how the festival succeeded in arranging the entertainment, though it also stressed that the residents' 'co-operative spirit' and 'cautious attitude' were the keys to this success.⁹⁹ In 1973, an article in the *Chinese Students Weekly* praised how the festival promoted traditional Chinese music.¹⁰⁰ While not all of Hong Kong youth supported the cultural programmes, their writings indicate that the government (at least partially) cultivated a 'collective spirit' as planned.

III

In 1974, the government decided not to hold another Festival of Hong Kong due to 'extreme' financial difficulty.¹⁰¹ However, it turned its attention to traditional Chinese festivals. Compared to the Festival of Hong Kong, its new efforts were even wider in scope. Officials incorporated contemporary or trendy elements, such as balls, pop concerts, and DJ shows into festival celebrations to engage youth in these community events. At the same time, officials included traditional performances, such as folk dance and songs, when celebrating foreign festivals. People across all ages could thus enjoy the joyful atmosphere. Even though attendance could be low at some events, the government or the Urban Council insisted on organizing them and making them an annual affair. The council, formerly named the Sanitary Board, was responsible for municipal services on the Hong Kong Island and in Kowloon from 1936

⁹⁶ Hai Feng, 'Tan Xianggangjie' (Discussing the Festival of Hong Kong), *Chinese Students Weekly* (CSW), 1113 (1973), p. 3.

⁹⁷ Chen Yilong, 'Xianggangjie jietou renyu' (People's casual comments about the Festival of Hong Kong on streets), CSW, 909 (1969), p. 8; Chen Ren, 'Xianggangjie yanzou zaji' (Records of music performances in the Festival of Hong Kong), CSW, 910 (1969), p. 12.

⁹⁸ Lin Fu, 'Gei Xianggangjie da wenhao' (Putting a question mark for the Festival of Hong Kong), *Undergrad*, 20 (1970), p. 1.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*; retired journalist Ching Cheong believed that the editorial team's pro-Chinese stance could have led to *Undergrad's* appreciative attitude towards Chinese entertainment; *Xueyuan 60* (Sixtieth anniversary of the *Undergrad*) (Hong Kong, 2015), pp. 82, 87.

¹⁰⁰ Yi Chen, 'Xianggangjie, guoyue, ji qita' (Festival of Hong Kong, national music, and others), CSW, 1113 (1973), p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Moss to all heads of departments, 7 Nov. 1974, HKRS931-6-166, PRO; Roberts to Kan, 17 Dec. 1974, HKRS1180-3-1, PRO.

onwards. It carried out many of the cultural policies from the 1970s and operated under government directions. The government declared the council financially and administratively autonomous in 1973 to showcase the government's liberal reforms.¹⁰² However, the council functioned through the official Urban Services Department. The director of the Urban Services chaired the department, and he or she was responsible to the colonial secretary, instead of council members.¹⁰³ Activists in 1973 complained that appointed members occupied half of the reformed council, meaning that the government could disapprove any plans by asking them to vote against the motions. Moreover, new rules prohibited councillors from discussing issues not clearly within the council's jurisdiction and allowed them to hold only one free-style public debate per year.¹⁰⁴

Both the governors and their subordinates cared about these Chinese festivals. When Patrick Hase took up the position of district officer in the 1970s, his superior John Walden told him that officers had to organize a 'big New Year's party' for all district leaders in the New Territories annually and to take great care of this celebration. As Hase recalled, Walden still insisted on holding the party even though the budget was tight. In 1977, the office only had 700 Hong Kong dollars to cover the expenses of a party meant for 600 people. Hase had to complete this task by asking his staff to search for cheap food and drinks all around Hong Kong. His team succeeded and the food and drinks were so cheap that Hase suspected 'they had been stolen'.¹⁰⁵

The government hoped to engage both the young and old in its festival celebrations and construct a positive image of itself. It did so through the Urban Council. The first new attempt after the Festival of Hong Kong was the 1974 Lantern Carnival, which took place during the Mid-Autumn Festival. Local organizers saw this as a chance to promote Chinese traditions. The carnival chairperson (and merchant), Yu Look-yau, mentioned in his opening address that the event aimed at providing more local entertainment and to promote the 'joyous atmosphere of our country's traditional festivals'.¹⁰⁶ Yu later mentioned in an interview that this festival was worth celebrating because it was one of the most important festivals among local people, and it was a Chinese festival with 'folkish characteristics'.¹⁰⁷ Even the deputy director of the Hong Kong Tourist Association, D. B. Donaldson, believed that Hong Kong had lost many of its Chinese traditions and that this was the moment to rescue them, though he approached this issue from the tourist perspective: 'we are greatly disturbed by the steady erosion of many traditional Chinese cultural

¹⁰² *Hong Kong 1974 - report of the year 1973* (Hong Kong, 1974), p. 28.

¹⁰³ Y. W. Lau, *A history of the municipal councils of Hong Kong 1883-1999: from the Sanitary Board to the Urban Council and the Regional Council* (Hong Kong, 2002), pp. 127-8.

¹⁰⁴ Suzanne Pepper, *Keeping democracy at bay: Hong Kong and the challenge of Chinese political reform* (Lanham, MD, 2008), p. 167.

¹⁰⁵ 'The district office: Dr Patrick Hase, transcription of tape', 27 Apr. 1999, box 372, John Walden Collections, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford.

¹⁰⁶ 'Zhongqiu caidenghui xianci' (Speech for the Mid-Autumn Lantern Festival), *WKYP*, 29 Sept. 1974, p. 3.2.

¹⁰⁷ 'Yuzhongtongle de caidenghui' (Lantern Carnival for everyone to have fun), *WKYP*, 29 Sept. 1974, p. 3.2.

activities and practices in Hongkong as so many of these are of great interest to our visitors'.¹⁰⁸ In other words, through tourism and politics, the government and the community leaders preserved and promoted traditional Chinese culture in the strategic purposes they perceived. Around 80,000 people attended these Chinese programmes, which again included dragon and lion dances, an opera show, and a lantern parade.¹⁰⁹

The carnival even became larger in scale as the Urban Council continued it in later years. In 1975, the council included both traditional celebrations and trendy items, such as a fashion show, a DJ concert, and a performance by Commercial Radio artists. This carnival attracted around 100,000 participants, 25 per cent more than the previous year. The council report stated that it was 'extremely well received by the public at large'.¹¹⁰ In 1976, the council held an additional carnival in Kowloon Park to cater for residents there.¹¹¹ The iteration at Victoria Park became an eye-catching event as the council invited Cantonese opera star Tang Wing Cheung (under the stage name Sun Ma Sze-tsang) to perform and distribute mooncakes. As the next section explains, Cantonese opera had been an important theatre performance for Chinese communities. Moreover, Tang was one of the most influential local artists of the twentieth century, and the *Wah Kiu Yat Po* described this performance as an 'exception' because, after the 1960s, he usually performed only in charity shows.¹¹² Tang's willingness to perform in the carnival made it even more significant for Hong Kong people.

In the late 1970s the carnival continued to grow. A council report described the one in 1977 as being on a 'very big' scale and 'undoubtedly a very entertaining affair for both young and old'. Hot-air balloon rides became the new attraction of the year. The council also co-operated with the Education Department to engage more school children in the events, especially the school band and dance performances and the lantern design competition. On the other side of Victoria Harbour, the council held another smaller carnival in Cheung Sha Wan Playground. Children attended the band concert, party, and fun fair, while adults enjoyed the Cantonese opera and Chinese folk-dance performances.¹¹³ In 1978, the council held one more carnival in Morse Park. Even though it only attracted 4,600 people, the council still stated that it should continue this practice so that Kowloon residents could have their own carnival.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ 'Carnival to raise \$24,000', *SCMP*, 23 Sept. 1974, p. 24.

¹⁰⁹ 'Evaluation of the September entertainment programme', 7 Oct. 1974, Municipal Councils Archives Collection (MCAC). MCAC documents cited in this article are searchable in the Multimedia Information System, Hong Kong Public Libraries (<https://mmis.hkpl.gov.hk/web/guest/municipal-councils-archives-collection>).

¹¹⁰ 'Evaluation of the September entertainment programme', 3 Nov. 1975, MCAC.

¹¹¹ 'Evaluation of the September entertainment programme', 28 Oct. 1976, MCAC.

¹¹² 'Jinwan Weiyuan zhongqiu caidenghui' (Tonight's Mid-Autumn Lantern Carnival in Victoria Park), *WKYP*, 8 Sept. 1976, p. 5.2; Paul Fonoroff, 'Sun Ma Sze-tsang', in May Holdsworth and Christopher Munn, eds., *Dictionary of Hong Kong biography* (Hong Kong, 2012), pp. 410–11.

¹¹³ 'Evaluation of the September entertainment programme', 1 Nov. 1977, MCAC.

¹¹⁴ 'Evaluation of the September entertainment programme', 11 Nov. 1978, MCAC.

The council devoted even further efforts and resources to the 1979 carnival. It established the Lantern Carnivals Organizing Committee to allocate regular staff and resources for this annual event. The committee believed that the coming carnival should be 'mainly related to traditional Chinese arts and culture but well blended with a contemporary element'.¹¹⁵ It later stressed this Chinese emphasis again in its report: 'to revive their interest in various aspects of traditional Chinese festivities'. Committee members prioritized programmes that could 'blend Chinese culture and folklore with elements of modern and popular interest'. As the report claims, Chinese items intrigued more people: fortune telling's popularity had been 'ever increasing' and the committee needed more fortune tellers in the coming years. Chiu Chow Opera shows were of a 'high standard' and attracted large audiences. Overall, the number of participants in the carnivals increased fourfold from 1974 to the early 1980s.¹¹⁶ The council also held a Mid-Autumn Festival Ball that enabled local youth to participate in festive celebrations.¹¹⁷ From 1975 onwards, the council also organized similar celebration programmes for the Lunar New Year.¹¹⁸

IV

By the mid-1970s, the government was presenting traditional entertainment to its people all year long. Before the late 1960s, the government had recorded and monitored Cantonese opera performances, such as those for ritualistic, religious, or fund-raising purposes in the New Territories. District offices closely monitored gatherings in the New Territories to eliminate any 'undesirable influences' of these meetings.¹¹⁹ Starting in 1968, the Urban Council co-operated with the Lung Cheung Opera Troupe to present outdoor Cantonese opera shows. In the mid-1970s, the council made the performances a regular programme, which later became 'one of the most popular' of the council's initiatives.¹²⁰ Cheap tickets and good publicity were two keys to the popularity. These features attracted an audience across all generations.¹²¹ The government had reinserted Chinese culture into the fabric of Hong Kong society.

To provide a greater variety of Cantonese opera, the council later collaborated with more troupes. Critics complained during the 1970s that the official Radio Hong Kong's Lung Cheung Cantonese Opera Troupe monopolized the council's performances. As a result, the council invited other local groups to collaborate.¹²² One was the Chinese Artists Association, a union of local Cantonese

¹¹⁵ 'Organization of the 1979 Lantern Carnivals', 25 Apr. 1979, MCAC.

¹¹⁶ Numbers were taken from the Urban Council's evaluation reports from 1974 to 1982, MCAC.

¹¹⁷ 'Evaluation of the October entertainment programme', 27 Nov. 1979, MCAC.

¹¹⁸ 'Evaluation of the February entertainment and recreation programme', 5 Mar. 1975, MCAC.

¹¹⁹ Lupton to district commissioner, New Territories, 13 June 1961, box 25, Barbara Ward papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford.

¹²⁰ 'Outdoor performances of Cantonese opera by the Chinese Artists Association', 9 Mar. 1979, MCAC.

¹²¹ Zijun, 'Xianggang yuejutuan keyi chengli ma?' (Can a Hong Kong Cantonese opera troupe be established?), *Fendou yuekan*, 5 (1979), enclosed in Kwok to Ward, 25 Aug. 1981, box 19, Ward papers.

¹²² 'Minutes of the meeting of Cultural Affairs Select Committee', 27 Mar. 1979, MCAC.

opera performers and workers formed in the late nineteenth century. The association responded enthusiastically. It later actively co-operated with the council to provide free outdoor performances. Council officials later reported that the association's performance was of 'professional standard', and it strove to create a 'real theatre atmosphere' by using its own sets and props for council-related performances.¹²³ In late 1978, the council also started to present regular Cantonese operatic song performances, in which singers sang selected songs from various plays. Council records reveal that the shows were 'quite well received by the public because this form of art is performed rather infrequently these days'.¹²⁴ During the 1970s, the council believed the public held a 'unanimous opinion' that they wanted more Cantonese opera performances.¹²⁵ Official statistics reveal that the council had been increasing the number of Cantonese opera performances, with the number of viewers rising.¹²⁶

From the late 1970s, the council held regular Chinese opera festivals. The council's Cultural Affairs Select Committee hoped to present Cantonese opera of 'the highest professional standard' and promote it to youth through free shows.¹²⁷ It hoped not only to entertain the public, but also to encourage them to appreciate the traditional Chinese arts. For instance, the council distributed booklets in each festival and related performances to enable participants to understand more about the performers and the contexts of each play.¹²⁸ As previous sections reveal, Cantonese opera plays were always an attractive spot in festival celebrations. In 1979, the council also introduced Fukiense opera shows, though not as frequently as Cantonese opera. The number of viewers was also much lower than those who watched the Cantonese opera plays, ranging from a few hundreds to over a thousand.¹²⁹

These attempts to provide free or cheap performances suited the taste of many Chinese communities. While Cantonese opera might have lost part of its appeal in the 1970s due to the advent of television, it was still an important source of enjoyment for many Hong Kong Chinese. Anthropologist Barbara Ward was researching Hong Kong's Cantonese opera before she died in 1983. One of her unpublished works explained the significant role of theatre performances in Chinese societies. Her fieldwork revealed that the connection between this Chinese performing art and traditional ritual remained close in contemporary Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Chinese overseas communities. The plays were popular also because they engaged people in community activities:

¹²³ 'Evaluation of the May entertainment programme', 10 July 1979, MCAC; 'Evaluation of the August entertainment programme', 2 Oct. 1979, MCAC.

¹²⁴ 'Evaluation of the December entertainment programme', 8 Feb. 1979, MCAC.

¹²⁵ 'City Hall Select Committee: minutes of a meeting on 23rd July', 24 July 1974, HKRS801-1-2, PRO.

¹²⁶ Calculated based on the monthly evaluation reports of the Urban Council's entertainment programmes from 1974 to 1980, MCAC.

¹²⁷ 'Minutes of the meeting of Cultural Affairs Select Committee of Urban Council', 27 Mar. 1979, MCAC.

¹²⁸ *Chinese Opera Festival '81* (Hong Kong, 1981), box 17, Ward papers.

¹²⁹ 'Evaluation of the January entertainment programme', 6 Mar. 1979, MCAC; 'Evaluation of the February entertainment programme', 4 Apr. 1979, MCAC.

'spectacle, fun, exultation, illumination, horror, laughter, boredom, dismay – all these and other emotional responses are evoked'.¹³⁰ As Ward pointed out based on her observation, even though cinema and television seemed to become more popular, they took 'much from the traditional drama, both directly and indirectly'.¹³¹ The local Chinese press also revealed that people rushed for tickets for these Cantonese opera shows even when admission fees were charged.¹³²

V

During the early 1970s, the Urban Council targeted Chinese instrumental music as a new kind of entertainment. It had sponsored Chinese orchestral performances when it was still under the government's financial control. In 1972, a band of fifteen musicians performed Chinese instrumental music for the tenth anniversary of the City Hall. The council then decided to sponsor the group. Later, in August 1973, this group of musicians reorganized themselves and formed the Hong Kong Chinese Music Orchestra.¹³³ They continued to perform using the council's venues, and council members witnessed the public's enthusiastic response. While they recognized the concerts' significance in promoting traditional Chinese music, council members identified various problems with the existing orchestra, such as lacking 'discipline, form and energy', failing to balance various sections of instruments, and using Western instruments such as cello and double bass to replace certain Chinese ones. These limitations prompted the council members to take over the group in 1977 and turn it into an official 'Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra (HKCO)'. At the same time, promoting 'an appreciation of Chinese music' became an aim of the council's City Hall and Entertainments Select Committee in the 1977–8 session.¹³⁴ The council recruited Ng Tai-kong, a renowned musician among Chinese communities in East and Southeast Asia, as the music director, while the administrative power resided in the Urban Council and the Urban Services Department.¹³⁵ The orchestra presented two to three monthly concerts as public entertainment.

The council worked closely with Ng and followed much of his advice. When the council first formed the group, it devoted one million dollars for the first nine months of operation. This huge budget ranked second among all council branches.¹³⁶ In the following years, the council always approved Ng's requests

¹³⁰ Barbara Ward, 'Education, literacy and sinicization: a comment with special reference to the Boat People of South East China and the Cantonese theatre', n.d., box 7, Ward papers, p. 22.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹³² For instance, see 'Yishujie yueju yushou xipiao changxiao' (Presale tickets for the Arts Festival's Cantonese opera shows sold well), *WKYP*, 17 Feb. 1976, p. 3.3.

¹³³ Zhou Fanfu (Chow Fan Fu), 'Xianggang zhongyuetuan sanshinianlai de fazhan yu yingxiang' (Development and impact of the HKCO in the past thirty years), in Peng Li, ed., *Disijie zhongyue guoji yantaohui* (Papers of the Fourth International Conference on Chinese music) (Hong Kong, 2012), p. 109.

¹³⁴ 'Formation of a professional Chinese orchestra', 3 Mar. 1977, MCAC.

¹³⁵ Zhou, 'Xianggang zhongyuetuan', p. 111.

¹³⁶ 'Urban Council cultural presentation programme: financial position', 1 June 1977, MCAC.

for more resources. Examples of requests included: purchasing traditional Chinese instruments to 'preserve the genuine character of traditional and ethnic Chinese music', commissioning composers to create new works, and further training its musicians.¹³⁷ The council also increased the salaries of the musical director and composers to retain these talents.¹³⁸ Its members also hoped the government could prioritize the orchestra in using new concert venues, such as the Cultural Complex in Tsim Sha Tsui and the Queen Elizabeth Stadium in Wan Chai. Chairman of the Cultural Affairs Select Committee F. K. Hu wrote to Assistant Director of City Hall Darwin Chen in March 1979 that there should be more performances by the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra in these new venues.¹³⁹

To make this traditional Chinese music appealing to the young, the Urban Council also held free concerts for them. For instance, the orchestra presented two free concerts per month for students from the late 1970s. Each student attendee would receive a booklet which introduced all repertoires, notable performers, and the orchestra. The concerts also promoted the orchestra's regular concerts through advertisements in the booklets.¹⁴⁰ In addition, the council started sending the orchestra to perform at new venues in the New Territories during the 1980s. After receiving a good response to the first concerts, the orchestra accepted an invitation from the Tsuen Wan Cultural and Recreation Co-ordination Association to present regular concerts in the district. This policy allowed people living in new towns or outside urban areas to appreciate Chinese orchestral music.¹⁴¹

Hong Kong people responded to these new orchestral performances favourably. Reports show that the orchestra often achieved over 90 per cent (or sometimes 100 per cent) attendance, and the number of audiences per year increased over 55 per cent from 1978 to 1981.¹⁴² Other sources also state how the public received the orchestra enthusiastically. For instance, in 1978 tickets for the new session's opening concert sold out so quickly that the orchestra had to perform one more show.¹⁴³ Stories of the tickets being sold out also often appeared in the local press.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁷ 'Musical instruments for the Chinese Orchestra', 1 Sept. 1977, MCAC; 'Conditions and scale of fees of composition and arrangement of music for the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra', 6 July 1978, MCAC; 'Progress report no. 16 Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra', 5 Jan. 1979, MCAC.

¹³⁸ 'Minutes of the meeting of the Entertainments Sub-Committee of Urban Council', 14 Aug. 1978, MCAC.

¹³⁹ Fu to Chen, 23 Mar. 1979, enclosed in 'Minutes of the meeting of Cultural Affairs Select Committee of Urban Council', 27 Mar. 1979, MCAC.

¹⁴⁰ 'Request from the Arts Centre Festival of Youth and the Arts 1980', 22 Nov. 1979, MCAC; 'Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra - progress report 3/81', 5 June 1981, MCAC; *Xianggang zhongyuetuan: Xuesheng yinyuehui* (HKCO: student concert) (Hong Kong, 1982).

¹⁴¹ 'Co-operation with the New Territories in the promotion of cultural activities', 13 Aug. 1981, MCAC; 'Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra progress report no. 1/80', 12 Apr. 1980, MCAC; 'Minutes of the meeting of Cultural Activities Sub-Committee of Urban Council', 17 Apr. 1980, MCAC.

¹⁴² Calculated based on the progress reports of HKCO in the MCAC.

¹⁴³ 'Progress report no. 7 Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra', 4 Mar. 1978, MCAC.

¹⁴⁴ 'Xianggang zhongyuetuan shoudao relie huanying' (HKCO received an enthusiastic welcome), WKYP, 8 Nov. 1977, p. 7.2; 'Disanjie yazhou yishujie xianggang zhongyuetuan zuo kaimu yanzou' (HKCO performed at the opening of the Third Asian Arts Festival), KSDN, 30 July 1978, p. 6.

The council's efforts were significant to the development of Chinese music. Musicians and commentators believed that the orchestra helped modernize the instrumental music of China. A council review in 1981 pointed out that the orchestra was a 'distinguished' group because of its ability to 'amalgamate the cross currents of Chinese and Western cultures and to synthesize Western orchestration with the music and musical instruments in China', and to promote Chinese music to all sectors of society.¹⁴⁵ In Chinese tradition, musicians played their instruments individually, whereas Western musicians started playing different kinds of instruments, including strings, brass, woodwind, and percussion as a group from the nineteenth century on. Forming a Chinese orchestra was thus an attempt to perform traditional Chinese music in a modern way.¹⁴⁶

This 'modernization' of Chinese orchestral music was important as it made Hong Kong stand out in the cultural development of the wider region. This effort was so significant that even mainland Chinese musicians were aware of it. In a letter to Ng Tai-kong, resident composer of the Chinese People's Orchestra Liu Wenjin described how the HKCO inspired him:

We were inspired by your devotion and contributions to Chinese national music. Your attempts and research in Chinese national orchestra also gave us a great deal of encouragement. Your struggle, your attempts and your creativeness are what I should learn from...In fact, I have reported the development and achievement of your orchestra to many comrades who deeply appreciate your success and aspirations. Your orchestra's development will surely play a role in promoting the national music of our country.¹⁴⁷

The achievements of the Hong Kong Orchestra became so widespread among mainland musicians that the PRC even felt threatened by them. Ng visited mainland China in 1979 to purchase instruments for the orchestra. Through meeting various musicians, he realized that music circles in China identified HKCO as 'the best one of its kind'. This threatened the Chinese state, as mainland officials believed that the orchestra exposed China's 'backwardness'. They thus did not allow the orchestra to perform in mainland China and refused to issue exit permits to professional musicians to stop them from 'jeopardiz[ing] the development of Chinese music in China'. While some mainland orchestras, such as the Shanghai National Music Orchestra and the National Music Orchestra of the Central Radio Cultural Troupe, hoped to invite HKCO to perform, state censorship prevailed.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, the HKCO became a shelter to many professional musicians who escaped from political oppression in the

¹⁴⁵ 'Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra: review of progress since 1977', 25 June 1981, MCAC.

¹⁴⁶ Liu, *Xianggang yinyue*, p. 136.

¹⁴⁷ Lau to Ng, 14 Oct. 1978, enclosed in 'Progress report no. 17 Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra', 8 Feb. 1979, MCAC.

¹⁴⁸ 'Report on the procurement of musical instruments in China', 1 May 1979, MCAC.

PRC, allowing Chinese instrumental music to thrive in Hong Kong without any political interference.¹⁴⁹

VI

Hong Kong's late colonial government attempted to gain popular support by shaping and reconstructing culture. To improve state–society relations and legitimize its rule, the colonial government designed and provided entertainment for its people. The Festival of Hong Kong, carnivals, Cantonese opera shows, and the HKCO were the major examples that reveal how the government shaped Chinese culture. In these events, participants could find themselves surrounded by Chinese elements, be they visual or aural. Apart from turning the colony into a joyous place, officials also engaged as many sectors as possible in organizing the events. They delegated power to local leaders and let them organize functions at district levels. They also made their students join the activities. The purpose was to make them assist with the city-wide events and identify themselves as part of the Hong Kong community. In other words, the colonial government sought to foster a local identity via Chinese cultural policies.

This series of cultural policies produced Chinese culture that was unique to Hong Kong. The changing political context prompted colonial administrators to consider the deep-rooted problems of local governance. Riots of the late 1960s turned the officials' focus to improving state–society relations. Entertainment became an official channel to secure public support and ease public grievances. Like other covert and non-political means, these cultural policies offered opportunities for the public to contribute their ideas to these entertainment programmes. Hong Kong's geopolitical position and Sino-British diplomacy also shifted the official focus from Cold War censorship to the provision of entertainment. Even though local leftists and the PRC continued to confront colonial policies, they no longer occupied a significant role in the planning of cultural strategies. Regular cultural programmes and festivities met the need of residents across generations, districts, and interests and appeared as novel responses to the local care for Chinese traditions. Instead of implementing the British-oriented policies in other decolonizing societies, colonial administrators constructed Chinese culture that encompassed customs with diverse Chinese origins. This was a historical process of constructing Chineseness outside the political narratives of the PRC and Taiwan. Instead of focusing on cultural texts, this case-study has illustrated how Chineseness became shaped in the unique context of late colonialism in Hong Kong.

In the era of COVID-19, Hong Kong people seldom gather in crowds to celebrate festivals and attend performances. However, their post-colonial government continued this cultural 'tradition'. In 2021, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government continued to issue postage stamps to commemorate the Lunar New Year. Later in September, one could still discover numerous lantern decorations shining in the Victoria Park to celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival, even though there were no game stalls, DJs, or fortune-

¹⁴⁹ Liu, *Xianggang yinyue*, p. 133.

telling counters. In December, HKCO performed in a concert with singer Liza Wang. While these events seemed to demonstrate the Chinese roots of Hong Kong, they carried the imprints of the city's 'colonial Chineseness'.

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