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Ancestral Halls and 'Modern Temples': Museums in Postcolonial Hong Kong

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine how the meanings and roles of museums, as a worldwide cultural phenomenon that has been initiated in Europe, are adapted and transformed according to local contexts beyond Europe. My ethnographic research explores the specific context of post-colonial Hong Kong and examines the rise of non-government museums. I argue that this phenomenon is the result of nostalgia, rising historical and cultural consciousness, increasing 'museum-mindedness' and the continuing identity dilemma experienced by residents, both young and old, of postcolonial Hong Kong. I have critically analysed five types of museum-like institutions in Hong Kong, namely: ancestral halls, governmental, independent, amateur, and school history museums. Investigating recent developments of museums in Hong Kong through the lens of Chinese ancestral halls, I argue that ancestral halls are, in effect, 'precursory museums' for those that have been created more recently. Enabled by objects, spatial experience and social interactions, Chinese ancestral halls and contemporary Hong Kong museums both aim to preserve and transmit cultural knowledge and, in the process, facilitate identity construction. Set up by all kinds of actors, ranging from independent trusts to individual amateurs, non-government museums in Hong Kong are diverse in their forms but united by the same aim and function: to preserve and interpret local heritage in their own ways and according to indigenous criteria.

In a broader sense, I suggest that the non-government museums represent different points in a continuous spectrum which at one end is influenced by an indigenous museological model associated with Chinese ancestral halls, and, at the other end, by government museums, which still uphold the values of 'western' museum professionalism. I argue that the values and principles upheld by those who have created and curated ancestral halls are still influencing current museums in the postcolonial era, because the museums have inherited the traditional, social and historical functions of ancestral halls in Hong Kong as a channel for the Hong Kong public to 'retrace their roots'. Non-governmental museums in Hong Kong can also be potential sites of rejection of the official histories and representations constructed by the Beijing-influenced postcolonial Hong Kong government. They are therefore a manifestation of the postcolonial condition and a cultural arena in which Hong Kong residents could construct history, interpret culture, and shape identity.

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List of Abbreviations

AMO – Antiquities and Monuments Office, Hong Kong

HK - Hong Kong

HKMA – Hong Kong Museum of Art

HKMH – Hong Kong Museum of History

HKMM – Hong Kong Maritime Museum

HKSAR – Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

HKSARG – Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government

HKU – University of Hong Kong

HSBC – Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation

ICOM – International Council of Museums

IFC – International Financial Centre

LCSD – Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Hong Kong

LegCo – Hong Kong Legislative Council

MMJ – Mini Mathias Journey

PPP – Public-Private Partnership

PRC – People's Republic of China

QC – Queen's College, Hong Kong

QCHM – Queen's College History Museum

QCOBA – Queen's College Old Boys' Association

ROC – Republic of China

SMJ – St Mathias Journey

SOAS – School of Oriental and African Studies

UK – United Kingdom

WKCD – West Kowloon Cultural District

Note on Romanisation

Most interviews (unless otherwise specified) with researchers and collaborators were conducted and recorded in Cantonese – the native language in HK. They were then translated into and presented in English in the thesis by the author. In case it was impossible to present a direct translation from Cantonese to English, transliteration was used and the exact Chinese phrase quoted was presented.

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1
Introduction



Fig. 1.1. Museum at Tai O under the supervision of Mr Cheung (Photo by Author, 2017).

It was a hot and humid day at Tai O fishing village, Hong Kong (HK). An old local fisherman sat in the cool, shaded indoor space of his museum (Fig. 1.1), gazing at the incoming visitors from the bus station. "The exhibition environment is not ideal, we are struggling financially; but we will, and we must continue to collect and show visitors our heritage and culture," Mr Cheung murmured, as he flicked through the museum logbook. "We have asked the government for help for more than ten years, but nothing has been done. They would rather build a brand-new museum that has nothing to do with HK people."[1] He pointed to an image in the local newspaper that showed a sketch of the proposed Hong Kong Palace Museum. It was a cutting-edge structure mimicking the National Palace Museum at Forbidden City, Beijing, with professionally curated display cases holding the imperial collection. In front of museum-keeper Mr Cheung was the exact opposite – artefacts of local culture meshed with photographs and text explaining the former glory of his fishing village, and a museum initiated, curated and set up by museum 'laymen', the residents of Tai O themselves. One may ask, why do they not donate their collections to the well-funded and maintained governmental museums? This reminds me of an emotional statement from Tai O activist and museum-owner Wong Wai-king:

[1] Cheung, Interview, Tai O, July 2017.

"Tai O things have to stay in Tai O to keep their life and history. A Tai O shan-dau [sedan chair] put in a Shatin [government] museum would be nothing but a chair." (Fung 2014)

This vignette from my fieldwork experience with the local community museum at Tai O is thought-provoking. It seems that HK shares the polarity and diversity in museum development in postcolonial India, where both national museums and individually centred museums blossomed after its independence (Mathur and Singh eds. 2015: 2-3). Harris' (2012: 5) presentation of Tibet and its museums as 'doubly colonial' under British and now Chinese influence also crossed my mind – regarding the 'planting' of museums and culture in the former British colony of HK, in aid of the Chinese project of patriotic nationalism.

The concept and institution of the museum are commonly understood to have their origins in the early modern period (Alexander et al 2017: 2-4, Bennett 2004). But today, the aims and functions of museums have changed, and their meanings and roles have been transformed in myriad ways. As a phenomenon now present in every country, museums may generate frictions between local and global cultures and need to be understood ethnographically in the light of specific cultural contexts (cf. Kreps 2003, Karp et al 2006). I examine how HK, as a former British colony and a nexus of 'western' and Chinese culture and values, can demonstrate the modes in which the imported idea of a museum can be localised and transformed. In my research, I ask: in what ways are museums in HK influenced by indigenous Chinese and colonial modes of cultural representation?[2] To what extent is the development of postcolonial museums in HK

[2] Refer to Section 1.2.2 for definition of key terms including indigenous, colonial, Chinese and the 'west'.

related to decolonisation?[3] How far can we analyse museums in HK within existing museological and anthropological assumptions?

My ethnographic research explores the specific context of postcolonial HK and examines the previously neglected subject of the rise of non-government museums, through the lens of Chinese ancestral halls. I suggest that ancestral halls can be considered 'precursory museums' akin to the indigenous cultural centres described by Kreps (cf. Kreps 2003) because, like museums, they are "representational spaces" (Lefebvre 1991) enabled by objects and achieved through spatial experience and social interactions. They both aim to preserve and transmit cultural knowledge and, in the process, assist identity construction. Set up by all kinds of actors, ranging from independent trusts to amateurs, non-government museums in HK are diverse but united by one aim: to preserve and interpret local heritage in their own ways and according to indigenous criteria. This intriguing phenomenon could be seen as a response to current politics and the decolonisation of HK since the Handover in 1997. Yet, I argue that it could also be a result of nostalgia, rising historical and cultural consciousness, 'museum-mindedness' (cf. Kreps 2003), and the continuing identity dilemma experienced by residents, both young and old, of postcolonial HK.[4] By critically analysing three non-government 'museum-like' institutions and by comparing them to ancestral halls in HK,[5] my research examines the development of museums as a cultural phenomenon in a society outside of Europe, or the 'west'. It thereby explores the relationship between museums, colonialism, historical consciousness, and identity development in a

[3] The sovereignty of HK was handed over by the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China in 1997, after 155 years of colonisation since 1842. See Section 1.2.2 (p.5) for further discussion on my use of term colonial, decolonising, and decolonisation.
[4] Refer to section 1.1 for definition of museum-mindedness and historical consciousness.
[5] 'Museum-like institutions' refer to those organised spaces in HK that do not call themselves museums but still have museological purposes and qualities. See Section 1.2.2 (p.5) for further discussion.

postcolonial setting. My research also asks: how can we analyse this phenomenon when the existing literature and approaches to museology and museum anthropology are primarily focused on Europe or the 'west'?

Museums are especially intriguing institutions to study in the context of HK, since only under the influence of British colonialism have such kind of institutions been introduced to the region. Before British colonisation, there were no museums in HK. As a concept, museums are conventionally understood as having been introduced by Europeans into China only in the late nineteenth century during the late Qing dynasty (Denton 2014; Lu 2014). The British colonial government was involved in the founding of the first public museum in HK at the City Hall in 1873 (Museum Association 1934). The interplay between colonial 'western' and indigenous Chinese modes of exhibition and museum representation underpins my research since it has resonance in the context of HK. Currently, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government operates fourteen museums. However, my research shows that, if we include non-government museums, there are up to a hundred museum-like institutions in HK. The rapid development of non-government museums in HK after 1997 saw more than fifty established in the short timeframe of twenty years. This desire to create new museums in the postcolonial period deserves academic attention, especially when many of these museums were set up by the public voluntarily and without government support. Why do people feel the need to create local museums outside of the government system? Does this reflect an increase in the local HK population of 'museum-mindedness' (Kreps 2003: x, 23), that is, the consciousness and particular ways of thinking about museums and their purposes? This phenomenon might be seen as a response to current politics and decolonisation. It could also be a result of nostalgia, rising historical and cultural

consciousness, and the continuing identity dilemma.[6] This thesis explores these possible explanations in its chapters.

1.1 – Positionality and Research Questions

My research motivation stems mainly from my prior work and experience in HK museums, which has yielded intriguing observations. I have been brought up in the cosmopolitan city of HK under the dual influence of active decolonisation and globalisation, and I have been living abroad in the UK – the ex-colonising nation – for much of my adulthood. I have received education in both HK and Britain. With my passion for history, I have been active in the HK museum sector since 2013. Initially I was a museum volunteer at the HK Maritime Museum, and later I was appointed by my alma mater as the Honorary Curator of Queen's College History Museum. I have also worked in various museums across the UK as a volunteer. I am essentially an embodiment of HK's multiculturalism, and also of its identity dilemmas and the friction between global and local cultures.

These experiences have offered me opportunities to observe the differences in public expectations and perceptions of museums in HK and in the UK. In particular, I have observed that rather than celebrating or legitimising particular interpretations through representation in authoritative institutions, or fetishising objects of value, as it happens in 'western' museums, HK museums seem to focus on the 'discarded' past, or sometimes even to be considered as a 'dumping ground' of objects of the past.[7] In other words, the

[6] Vickers (2003: 49) suggested that the relative stability of British colonial rule over 15 decades was achieved by downplaying historical and cultural consciousness, discouraging democratic movement, and encouraging economic development. Since the 1980s, however, the uncertain future of HK forced the colonial government to adopt an active intervention policy in building up civic identity, historical consciousness and cultural sensitivity amongst the HK public.

[7] For example, a HK museum worker has revealed to me that the public have tried to deposit obsolete objects in her museums on the sole basis that the 'objects are obsolete' (Lo, Pers. Comm., 14 October 2017).

very act of establishing museums and accessioning artefacts into museum collections could be seen as a tool to delegitimise socio-political forces, events, and even history. For example, by displaying colonial objects such as British flags and colonial uniforms in the HK Museum of History, the HK government perhaps hopes to emphasise a clear break between the colonial British past and the Chinese HK present. Members of HK society are encouraged to let go of some aspects of the past, yet some individuals still choose to hang on to certain pasts and their material referents. As we shall see in the following paragraphs, this might be a major contributing factor to the proliferation of non-government museums.

In my prior experience, I have also observed first-hand how museums in HK act as mediators of knowledge and identity for the public during a postcolonial identity crisis. While earlier HK identity may have based on negation of the mainland Chinese 'other' (Abbas 1997b), a postcolonial HK identity is inclined to be based on local culture, memory, and history. Yet, despite the assimilation policies such as promotion of patriotic Chinese nationalism in addition to the constant inflow of mainland Chinese migrants into HK, many in HK feel 'lost' in the transition to People's Republic of China (PRC) and its rising cultural industries (Chu 2013: 17). In this context, the museum as a format is seen a desirable one by some non-government actors in HK. It allows them to express themselves, communicate their versions of the past, and construct their own narratives of the city's history and heritage.

Thus far, scholars have largely overlooked the opportunity to examine the processes of culture and identity formation through the lens of museums in HK. In particular, the fact that more and more private and community museums are being set

I have also experienced similar requests in a school history museum, where teachers-in-charge were disposing unused 'old' item in the museum, perceiving that it should be their 'final resting place'.

up shows that museums as social institutions are no longer exclusively manipulated by the government to construct hegemonic narratives and particular notions of identity, and that there is a need for new museological forms generated from the grassroots/localised agency. This thesis asks: how has the concept of the museum been adapted in HK, where both British colonial legacies and postcolonial Chinese influences hold sway? How can we account for the surge in non-government museums in postcolonial HK, and what can we learn from them? What is the place of material culture and heritage in the process of identity formation in HK with its hybrid histories?

Government and Non-government

HK is organised politically under a unique 'One Country Two Systems' policy, which, since 1997, has offered the city administrative, political, judicial, and economic independence from the PRC, of which it is formally a part of.[8] However, successive governments in postcolonial HK have exhibited tendencies to prioritise decolonisation and integration policies, essentially bringing the 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1977) of HK closer to that of mainland China. Decolonisation policies in HK consist of small subtle changes in different formats.[9] Although cultural policy in HK is officially in the hands of the HKSAR government, it is at the same time subtly influenced by politics in the PRC. In this thesis, I use the term 'government' to refer to efforts and actions of the HKSAR Government principally. 'Non-government', or 'non-state', on the other hand, refer to the actors that do not belong to the state or government apparatus.

[8] See Ash et al eds. (2003), Wong ed. (2004) and Ming K. Chan (2015) for a general introduction to HK's political history and the 'one country, two system' policy.
[9] For instance, British commemorative events and holidays were cancelled, organisations with royal affiliation were renamed, British HK landmarks were removed. The education system started to focus on Chinese history and Mandarin language education. Refer to chapter 2 for further discussion.

Operating a historic monument grading system separate from the mainland Chinese system, the HK government plays the leading role in deciding what (and what not) to preserve and is inclined to 'revitalise' such monuments into cultural and social-economic projects.[10] While the heritage and museum industry has historically been in the control of government, the private sphere has been gradually catching up – perhaps due to an increasing 'museum-mindedness' (Kreps 2003: x, 23) – making HK a fertile ground for academic research on museum and heritage development in a postcolonial setting.

As this thesis aims to uncover the complex networks of interactions and politics between government and private forces, museums in HK will be categorised in terms of their organising mechanisms, perceived audiences, types of collections, and founding bodies.[11] It follows that non-government museums refer to those museums whose premises, founding and governing bodies, and collections are not owned, directly managed and run by the government.

De-colonial and Re-colonial

The scholarship remains divided on whether postcolonial HK is experiencing *de*-colonisation or *re*-colonisation under the aegis of Chinese patriotic nationalism (e.g. Luk 2017). On the one hand, scholars such as Mathews et al (2008) emphasise that Chinese efforts to encourage HK to 'learn to belong to a nation' could be recognised as part of a decolonising project. On the other hand, scholars such as W.S. Law (2009: 174) argue that postcolonial HK is currently under a new 'sub-imperial order', characterised by the

[10] The HK government, through the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO), is responsible for declaring structures historic buildings and monuments in HK. Separately, in mainland China, the People's Republic of China Ministry of Culture and State Administration of Cultural Heritage issue rules and regulations guiding the implementation of the Cultural Relics Protection Law. (Hoffman ed. 2006: 499-500; Lau 2011).
[11] Some scholars categorise museums with their subject field (Hein 2000; Hohenstein and Moussouri 2017), while others with source of funding (Conn 2010; Candlin 2015).

prolongation of colonial management style, emphasising economic development and discouraging the pursuit of liberal ideals such as self-rule and autonomy. In such ways, the 're-colonised' HK can serve Chinese nationalism by proving the latter's capability to make HK prosper economically under the Chinese rule (Law, W.S., 2009, passim). At the same time, C.A.G. Jones (2015) notes that the HK government has not been proactive enough in preserving local culture and history, which is needed to resist against the city's increasing 'mainlandisation'. This leads to the development of a defensive local identity. The Sino-British negotiations leading to the transfer of HK's sovereignty to China in 1997 has arguably triggered a re-engagement with 'local' culture and challenged HK residents to rethink their identity. It is the aim of this thesis to ascertain whether the development of museums in this postcolonial period exemplifies public participation in negotiating HK identity and defining HK heritage. So, with this debate in mind, my use of the term 'postcolonial' refers simply to the immediate pre- and post-handover epoch in HK (i.e. 1979 onwards). By 'colonial', in contrast, I refer to the British colonial period in 1842-1997 unless otherwise specified. By decolonisation, I refer to the political and social processes of reversing and rejecting colonial understanding of history and culture as well as the processes of reinventing and establishing new identities and heritage interpretation. This is a different usage from that of the 'decolonising the museum' debate in museum studies and anthropological literature (e.g. Lonetree 2012, Wintle 2016)

Museums and Museum-like Institutions

As the 'western' concept of the museum has been indigenised in different cultures, it has engendered different practices, forms, and naming traditions.[12] This engenders different naming traditions for institutions that have museological functions. Sometimes this may be motivated by political reasons – Onciul (2015: 39) noted that there was an active opposition amongst Indigenous Peoples towards the use of term 'museum' to describe museum-like institutions. This showed their determination to resist the hegemonic influence of 'western' cultural imperialism, museology, and heritage management model. However, equally common is the lack of appropriate and naturally existing term in a language to denote a space with museological characteristics. *Bowuguan* (博物館), the Chinese term for a museum literally meaning 'a house of extensive objects', was in fact imported from Japan in late nineteenth century, which was created following Japan's participation in the 1867 Paris Universal Exhibition (Varutti 2014: 19).[13] Therefore, what constitutes a museum and when the term museum is used are perceived differently depending upon the nature of the institution and the location in which it is established.[14] In my research, while acknowledging nomenclature in the local language, I shall use the term 'museums' to refer to conventional museums as defined by the International Council of Museums (ICOM): they "acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit" (ICOM 2018). 'Museum-like institutions', then, refer to those organised spaces that do not call themselves museums but still have museological

[12] See Mead (1983), Simpson (2001), Kreps (2003), Ambrose and Paine (2006) for more examples on naming traditions of museums outside of the 'west'.
[13] Although Cantonese (mainly spoken in HK) and Mandarin (mainly spoken in mainland China) are pronounced differently, they share a lot of terms and *Bowuguan* (Cantonese: *bok3mat6gun2*) is one of them.
[14] For example, although St Stephen's College Heritage Gallery is essentially a school history 'museum', the institution chose the name 'gallery' instead, and its Chinese translation (文物館 *mun4 mat6 gun2*) literally meaning 'a house for heritage artefacts'.

purposes and qualities (cf. Kreps 2003). Examples of those include ancestral halls, community cultural centres and school history galleries.

As I have discussed in section 1.1, before British colonisation there were no museums in HK as defined by ICOM, but there are pre-existing spaces with museum-like qualities: that is the ancestral halls that served communities as places to honour and remember their ancestors in a ritualised manner. One of the main purposes of my thesis is to explore whether Chinese ancestral halls have museum-like characteristics. So, at various points of the thesis, I use 'precursory museum' to describe Chinese ancestral hall, as they chronologically precede contemporary museums that have now been set up in HK and could serve as a source of inspiration in terms of modes of representation and other characteristics. Nevertheless, museum development in HK did not just 'leap' from ancestral halls to contemporary museums; ancestral halls are not precursors in a one-direction, linear, settled sense.[15] Throughout the thesis, I shall explore further their nuanced relationship.

China and the 'West'

To contextualise my work in the field (HK), I shall adopt the local perspective and refer to countries primarily inhabited and governed by Euro-Americans, as the 'west' (e.g. UK, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and countries in Europe). At different points in the thesis, I use the term 'China' to refer to the Chinese nation. I will indicate separately when this term covers specific historical-political formations ranging from the Qing dynasty, the Republic of China, and the PRC. The English term 'Chinese' is used to refer to its people and their culture. Other uses will be duly specified. Anthropologists

[15] Refer to chapter 3 for detailed discussion on Chinese ancestral halls and their museum characteristics.

since the nineteenth century have been examining constructions of 'the Other', engendering ideas akin to the 'west versus the Rest' (Fabian 2014: 16, 28). The application of the term 'west' is problematic, as it risks generalising and oversimplifying the differences within and over-magnifying the differences between the two entities, neglecting the dynamic interactions between them (see e.g. Hendry and Wong eds. 2006; Mathews 2017). If Occidental ideas can be fixed, so too can those that originated in the East. Chinese ethnocentrism can be dated back to the dynastic era (Leibold 2007: 1), when 'Chinese' was associated with sophisticated culture and being 'civilised', contrasting with those 'others' being labelled 'uncivilised', 'foreign' and 'barbaric'. The contemporary idea of the 'west' in China came into being in the nineteenth century, built on such long-established Sinocentrism amid 'western' imperialism. Examples of 'western' colonial modes of representation could include ocularcentrism, decontextualised displays and univocalism, although they vary spatially and temporally. It is the purpose of this thesis to ascertain the 'indigenous' characteristics of non-government museums in HK. In the thesis, I use the term 'indigenous' and 'native' interchangeably to describe characteristics or institutions that are native to HK before British colonisation.[16] It must be noted here, however, that I have no intention to make sweeping generalisations towards single and universal Chinese or 'western' exhibiting culture, because there is none. Instead, I am interested in the indigenisation, appropriation, and transformation processes that make the proliferation of museums a cultural phenomenon. It is the focal point of this research.

[16] I understand that in Anthropology the term 'indigenous' is used specifically to refer to the aboriginal peoples of Americas, Australasia etc. before European colonisation. It is not my intention to refer to these peoples in my thesis, but indigenous people is the closest (yet problematic) term in English that captures what in Chinese means the "Original (Chinese) Inhabitants" of HK (原居民) before the arrival of British colonists. Some of these 'indigenous' people were immigrants themselves from various parts of greater China, which explains why they subscribed mostly to Chinese culture and social norms.

Museum-mindedness and Historical Consciousness

To describe HK people's increasing familiarity with the concept of museums, interest in visiting and participating in their events, and finally desire to set up their own museums, I draw on Christina Krep's term of museum-mindedness. Kreps first coined this term in her thesis (1994) looking at museum development and the politics of culture in Indonesia. In her monograph (2003: 10), she elaborated the term as "people who have been familiarised with concept of museums; a mentality or 'software' to go along with buildings or 'hardware' to integrate museums in a society". A sense of museum-mindedness, she explained, involved "a particular kind of consciousness about museums and their purposes" (Kreps 1998: 6). Nevertheless, Kreps pointed out that there could be more than one way of being museum-minded. For example, she found that many people in Central Kalimantan (Indonesia) were "conscious of their cultural heritage, … expressed a desire to protect it and keep certain traditions alive", and made sense of the museum idea by "integrating it into local methods of caring for, interpreting, representing, and transmitting their cultural heritage." (2019: 175-176) In my thesis, I shall explore whether and how HK people are museum-minded, as well as how that contributes towards museum-making. I will also explore how museum-mindedness could be connected to historical consciousness, the definition which I adopt from Seixas (2004, 2006: 15-17): "the ability to use traces from the past to construct historical accounts, understand the pastness and presence of the past, and acknowledging complexity and uncertainty of the past due to multiple causes and historical actors' differing perspectives" (Seixas 2006: 15-17). It is a consciousness of possessing a past and history, understanding of the past, and factors that shape the understanding.

1.2 – Introducing Hong Kong

Imported from the west during the colonial era and followed by enormous proliferation in the postcolonial era, museums in HK can be seen to exemplify postcolonialism in the region. As Mathews (1998) argued a year after its sovereignty was handed over by the UK to China, postcolonial HK might be the most exciting place in the world for doing anthropological research since its relatively recent decolonisation could demonstrate the tension and negotiation between state and market which museums are entangled in. In the following paragraphs, I will point out essential issues that form the background of my discussion on museums in HK and explain why postcolonial HK offers a suitable case to study museum as a cultural phenomenon.

History of Hong Kong

The ancient and indigenous *Baiyue* people, gradually sinicised since the first millennium AD, inhabited HK for at least five thousand years. Nevertheless, the city of HK only started to take its current shape and development since the British occupation in 1842 (Carroll 2007). Before then, there was no physical or fixed border with greater Canton, and what is now HK was just a cluster of small villages where ethnic Chinese inhabitants farmed and fished for a living (Carroll 2005b). The border of HK was only set as it is now in 1896, although administratively it remained relaxed until the establishment of Communist China in 1949 (Chan M., 2015). Although the British colonisation of HK brought people of different nationalities to the city, ethnic Chinese (92%) have always been the dominant group (HKSAR Census and Statistics Department 2017). Up to the 1980s, most ethnic Chinese inhabitants were migrants themselves, due to periods of political and social instability in mainland China from the late nineteenth century up to the 1960s. They treated HK as a transient home but their roots were over

the Chinese border. As a result, political, socio-economic, and cultural development in HK have always been intimately tied with mainland China, even during the British colonial era (Chan, M.K. 2015, also see Table 1.1 below).

Table 1.1. An overview of important historical events in HK, 1842-2022 (Compiled by Author, 2022).[17]

Year	Event
1842	HK Island ceded to Britain
1860	Kowloon Peninsula ceded to Britain
1873	First public museum, Hongkong City Hall Museum, established (closed in 1933)
1898	New Territories leased to Britain for 99 years, last expansion of HK borders
1912	1911 Revolution overthrew Qing dynasty, and established Republic of China
1925	Canton-Hong Kong General Strike
1926	Government secondary school King's College founded with a museum in library
1941	Japanese military occupation of HK
1945	British re-occupied HK
1949	People's Republic of China (PRC) founded, Hong Kong-China border closed
1953	First non-government museum, University Museum & Art Gallery, established
1956	HK 1956 Riots between pro-Nationalists and pro-Communists
1962	First fully government-funded museum, City Hall Museum and Art Gallery, founded
1967	HK 1967 Leftist Riots caused by Chinese Cultural Revolution fervour
1984	Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed, Hong Kong's future was decided
1989	June Fourth Incident (Tiananmen Massacre) led to mass migrations from HK
1997	Handover of HK to PRC on 30 June
2001	First 'popular' museum, Tai O Cultural Workroom, founded
2003	First school museum founded in Clementi Secondary School
2014	'Umbrella Movement' (sit-in protest) against restrictive Beijing's policies on HK
2016	Hong Kong Palace Museum project announced
2019	Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement led to violent protests in HK
2020	HK National Security Law passed on 30 June

[17] These are events that I deem most important to the discussion of the development of a museum culture in the context of HK. Due to limitation of space, I am not able to include more events. See Carroll (2007) and Chan (2015) for comprehensive introductions to the history of HK.

The British colony of HK developed from an entrepôt at the turn of twentieth century into an industrial city and subsequently an international financial centre by the 1980s. Its reversion to China in 1997 also signified the last gasp of the British Empire, having resisted the decolonisation trend in the international community for more than 50 years. Guaranteed by the Sino-British Joint Declaration, post-1997 HK inherits the pre-1997 border, administrative system, laws and way of life under the principle of 'One Country, Two Systems'. Despite reporting to the Central Government in Beijing, the new 'Special Administrative Region' government (HKSARG), set up in 1997, is supposed to uphold the social stability and lifestyle of its 7.3 million inhabitants.

Hong Kong Today: Colonial or Postcolonial?

Identity in HK is a process of constant negotiation and tension between cultural forces representing the Chinese and the 'western', the traditional and the modern, the rural and the urban, the colonial and the postcolonial, the state and the society. My research will investigate how museum, as a main public space where public opinion could be shaped and reshaped, may provide an important ground for this cultural contest.

According to Chu (2013: 12), a distinct HK identity did not emerge until the 1960s because of the sharp political and cultural division between the HK Chinese and the mainland Chinese due to the Cultural Revolution; prior to that its inhabitants treated HK as merely a place to obtain economic benefits. Yet, this HK identity was destabilised when talks on the reversion of HK to China began in the 1980s. Due to a dominant 'import mentality' under the British colonial administration, HK people before the 1980s mainly saw culture as that which came from elsewhere, thus rendering the city lacking a distinct cultural identity (Abbas 1997a). As Abbas argued, this resulted in a 'culture of disappearance' in the immediate postcolonial period – a reactionary and malign culture

posited on the imminent disappearance of the colonial and original way of life, threatened by the alien incoming culture of the mainlanders. Worse, the 1997 reversion radically uprooted British colonialism and rendered it no longer 'experienceable' for its inhabitants (Abbas 1997b). How far is HK, a quarter of a century later, still a 'cultural desert' that lacks a distinct cultural identity? In this thesis I am going to investigate HK's identity formation and its relationship with museum development.

Nevertheless, it is certain that such historical reasons led to what Chu (2013: 12) suggested as a persisting, widespread identity dilemma amongst HK residents, exemplified in the creation of 'in-between' identities such as HK Chinese and Chinese Hongkonger (*Table 1.2 & Fig. 1.2*). In addition, post-handover integration policies that regularly emphasise Chineseness of HK people and their shared Chinese cultural heritage with the mainland backfired (Zhang and Mihelj 2012: 506) and led to the emergence of a defensive local identity (Jones, C.A.G. 2015) and even colonial nostalgia (Ho, G. 2013). The current HK identity is a continuation of the previous tradition based on the negation of mainland China (Law 2014), or the good-and-evil contrast between the more sophisticated and civilised HK 'self' and the illiberal, backward, and uncivilised mainland 'other'. It is an aggregate of some 'imagined' ideals and values like 'superior' civic quality, bilingualism, cosmopolitan vision, multiculturalism, and sense of global citizenship that many Hongkongers perceive themselves to have possessed. Thus, HK identity can be seen as a "Chinese plus" identity (Matthews 2001: 298) – citizens embrace an essentially Chinese culture adapted to local and cosmopolitan experiences while projecting a 'westernised' global citizenship. Yet, the allegiance to both Chinese and 'western' socio-cultural norms and values make HK citizens unsure of how to fit into a contemporary Chinese identity that emphasises patriotic nationalism. On this point, Chu (2013) warned

that a new wave of 'disappearance' was threatening HK, due to the government's indifference towards preserving local cultural heritages and histories.

Table 1.2. Hong Kong residents' average self-perceived identity from 1997 to 2021. The identity category "Chinese Hongkonger" reflects the individuals' primary identification with Hong Kong and is vice versa for the category "Hong Kong Chinese" (HK Public Opinion Research Institute 2022).

Year/Identity	1997	2002	2007	2012	2017	2019	2021
Hongkonger	35.9%	30%	23.5%	27.3%	38.8%	55.4%	38.6%
Chinese	18%	31.1%	27.2%	21.4%	14.5%	10.9%	17.8%
Chinese HKer	23.6%	21.7%	31.5%	32.8%	29%	22.4%	31.5%
HK Chinese	19.9%	14.7%	16%	16.2%	16.1%	9.9%	10.6%
Others	2.6%	2.5%	1.8%	2.3%	1.6%	1.4%	1.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

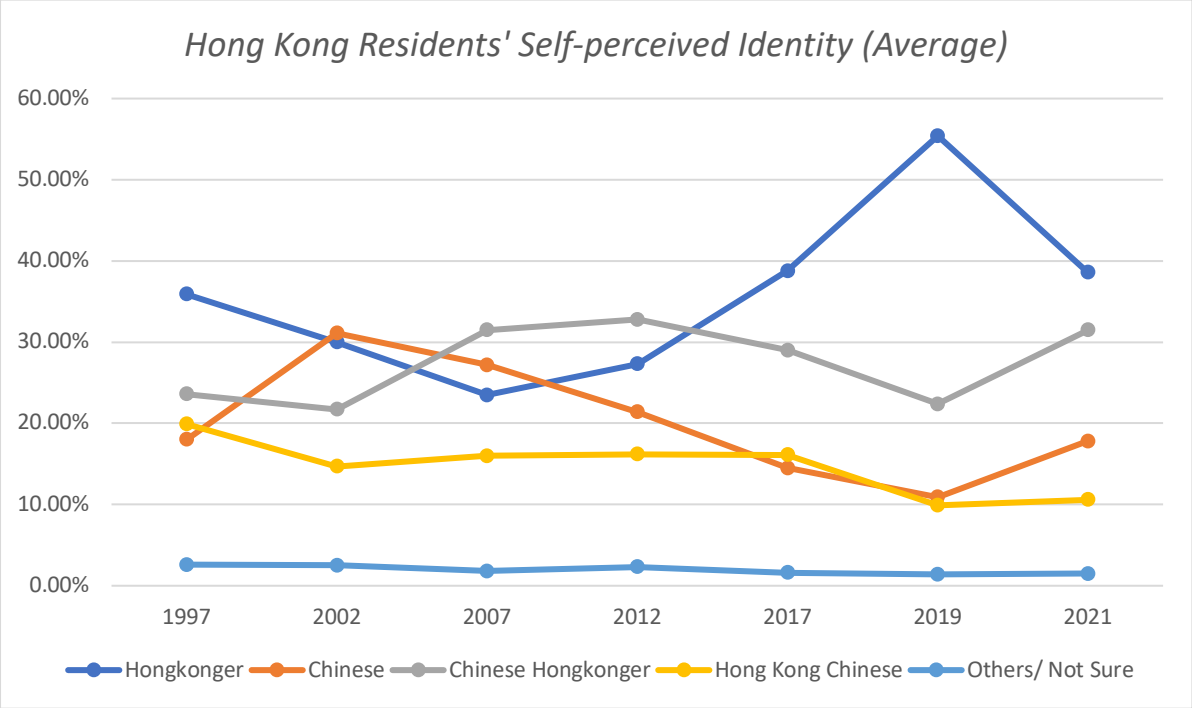


Fig. 1.2. Trend graph showing Hong Kong residents' self-perceived identity from 1997 to 2021 (HK Public Opinion Research Institute 2022, Illustrated by Author 2022).

At the same time, postcolonial nostalgia (e.g. Rosaldo 1989) has been commonly felt in HK, as citizens suffered from a sense of loss and temporal disorder engendered by the events of 1997. This served to awaken the sense of social belonging and the need to search for an identity (Fu & Desser eds. 2000). Museums, under such circumstances, may

work as public spaces for citizens to 'experience' the city and its history, and construct a much needed cultural and civic identity by making the abstract and invisible concepts observable and tangible. Museums as a social space may also be creatively manipulated by the general populace to construct alternative narratives, challenge the assimilating 'official history', and assert their own ideas of identity.

In a deeply stratified postcolonial society where different forces, whether nostalgic colonialists, liberalists or pro-Chinese nationalists, are wrestling in the social arena to maximise their influence on public opinion, museums are indeed one of the most important social agents through which their goals can be activated and materialised. Actually, museums have immense potential to either further such division, or act as a social glue that leads to a harmonious and multicultural society. Since the 1997 handover, the HK government has been aware of this and thus established a number of museums to promote and redirect the sense of localness and belonging firmly within the larger Chinese nationalist project. This research will investigate the response to that state-level activity from the grassroots and private sphere, which has started to manipulate the concept of the museum to articulate alternative narratives and privilege local history and culture. For these reasons, museums can be seen as arenas of political, cultural and identity contests between different social forces in postcolonial HK.

Museums in Hong Kong

Vickers (2003: 49) suggested that the relative stability of British colonial rule in HK was achieved by downplaying historical and cultural consciousness, discouraging democratic movement, and encouraging economic development. Since the 1980s, however, the uncertain future of HK forced the colonial government to adopt an active

intervention policy in building up civic identity, historical consciousness, and cultural sensitivity amongst the HK public. Museum development therefore peaked in the 1980s-2000s, during the most vigorous period of transition and decolonisation (See Fig. 1.3 below).

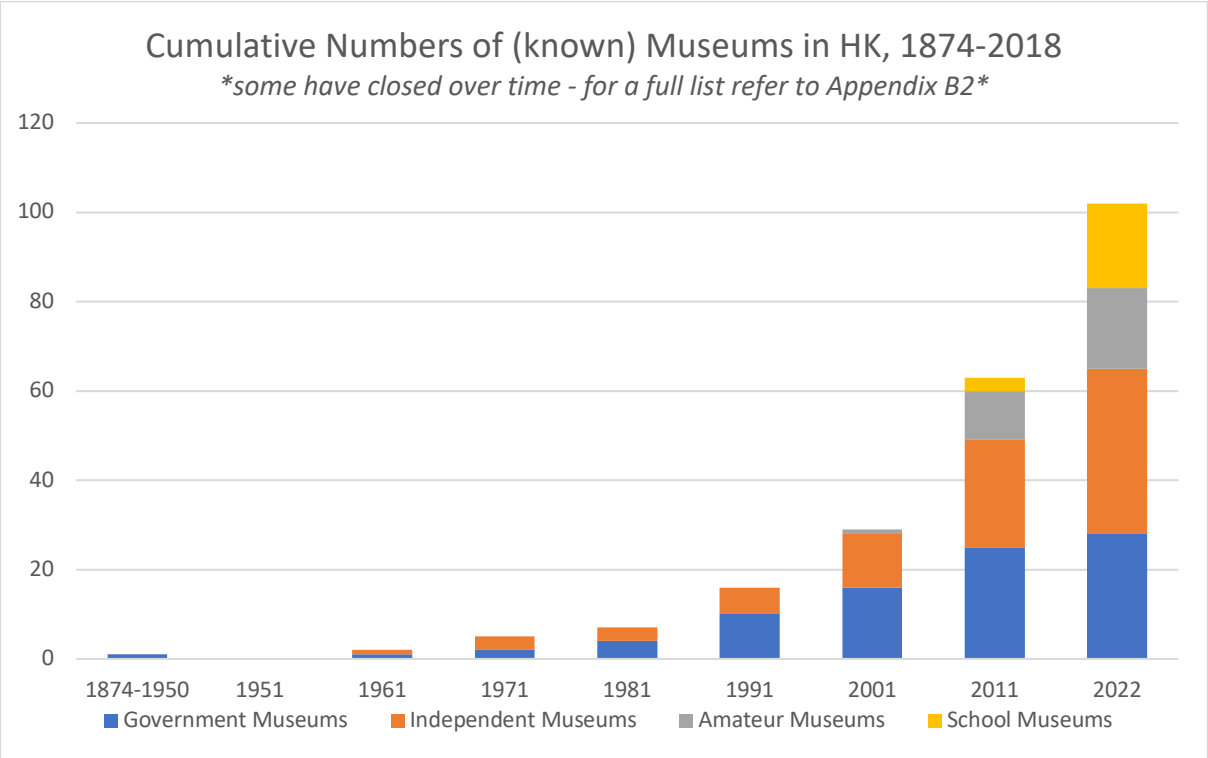


Fig. 1.3. Cumulative bar chart showing numbers of (known) museums in HK, categorised into government, independent, amateur and school museums as in this study (Illustrated by Author 2022).

Before British colonisation, there was no modern museum-like institution in HK, since it was still just a fishing village. As a concept, museums are conventionally understood as 'western' and modern creations that were only introduced by the 'west' into China in the late nineteenth century during the Qing dynasty (Denton 2014; Lu 2014). However, some Chinese scholars attempted to trace the origin of museums in China to the Temple of Confucius. It was built a few years after the philosopher's death in 479 BC, and was essentially a location for the veneration of his former residence and belongings (Su 1995, quoted in Varutti 2014: 25). The British colonial government was involved in the development of museums in HK since the early days of its administration. In fact, the

first museum in HK was founded in 1873 at the City Hall. The nature of the museum was ambiguous as it was governed by the quasi-official City Hall committee and was not well attended or maintained. After its closure in the early 1930s, HK would not have a museum until the 1950s.

British administration resumed in HK in 1945, after the brief Japanese military occupation since December 1941 during the Second World War. In 1953, as the city was still rehabilitating from war destruction and displacement, a Museum and Art Gallery was founded by the University of HK, which was the first non-governmental museum. From the 1960s onwards, museum development accelerated as the government found it beneficial to "help increase literacy and strengthen national identity" (Ding 2011: 4-6).

By establishing the City Museum and Art Gallery in 1962, the HK government became actively involved in museum development. The government established another thirteen museums in the next 35 years, including the major public museums of History, of Science and of Heritage.[18] Currently, the official count states that there are fourteen governmental museums and five museum-like 'cultural venues' managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, but my research shows that if we include non-governmental museums there are up to a hundred museum-like institutions in HK. Similar to those in other parts of the world, museums and collecting in HK have always been politically-charged, but such issues are especially politicised in the currently stratified HK society under ever-increasing Beijing influence (e.g. Watson, R.S. 1998; Sala 1999). For example, the recent announcement of the Hong Kong Palace Museum project, which would essentially be a 'branch museum' of the one in Beijing, was seen as an effort to extend mainland Chinese political influence and instil a sense of Chinese patriotism

[18] These three museums were redeveloped during the 1990s, in the years of political transition. See Chapter 2 for further discussion.

amongst the HK public, especially when local cultural elements originally planned were scrapped to make way for the museum (Dapiran 2017: 274-275). This is in line with the cultural policy that encourages the expansion of the museum sector in mainland China. As a result, the number of museums in the People's Republic grew exponentially from just 300 in 1990 to more than 3,000 in 2012 (Clifford, M. et al. 2013: i).

Twenty years after the end of British colonial rule, apart from the establishment of eleven new governmental museums, a complete overhaul of the permanent exhibitions in five major museums is also under progress (Zhang et al 2016). These are all in line with the cultural policy which encourages the expansion of the museum sector in mainland China. Previous research on museums in HK focused mainly on major or 'national' (governmental) museums (Stokes-Rees 2006; Carroll 2005; Lin 2007; Chan, W. 2008; Ng 2009; Dimache et al 2017; Ryu 2018 etc.). The rapid development of non-governmental museums in HK after 1997 – among them are more than 50 established in the short timeframe of 20 years – has been overlooked. This intriguing phenomenon might be seen as a response to current politics and decolonisation.

While some scholars have argued that museums in the 'west' are irrelevant (Janes 2009), the trend in HK and mainland China suggests the opposite. Museums, especially private ones, are encouraged by the PRC Government in mainland China to enrich the public's socio-cultural lives and involve more people in the preservation of cultural heritage (Song 2008). The number of privately established museums in HK has also grown exponentially since 1997. Many of these museums were set up by the public voluntarily without governmental support. Why do people feel the need to create local museums outside of the governmental system? How can we explain for this phenomenon with the existing Eurocentric literature and approaches on museology and museum anthropology? Does this reflect an increase in the local HK 'museum-mindedness' (Kreps

2003: x, 23), that is the consciousness and particular way of thinking about museums and their purposes?

1.3 – Literature Review

Conceptualising Museums

The concept of the museum is commonly understood to have its origins in early modern Europe although some look back even earlier to the Egyptian, Greek and Roman Mouseion in the classical world. The so-called 'cabinets of curiosities' (Alexander et al 2017: 2-4), which were essentially private collections founded by members of social elite, became popular in early modern Europe and could be construed as the immediate predecessors of 'modern' museums.[19] The proliferation of museums after the nineteenth century is often portrayed as part of a wider cultural shift inspired by international exhibitions (such as the Great Exhibition in London of 1851), facilitated by the emergence of disciplines such as anthropology and archaeology, and underpinned by colonialism.[20] Many such institutions were preoccupied with concepts such as the scientific ordering of humankind, evolutionism, universalistic conceptualisation of heritage (e.g. Pearce 1995; MacKenzie 2009). Museums have also been seen as a civilising and governing tool spread by colonialism into the imperial peripheries.[21] Since decolonisation was intensified in the mid-twentieth century, these institutions have been increasingly buffeted by contemporary sociocultural demands and constantly searching for their social relevance.[22] Nevertheless, as the literature focuses mostly on museum developments in

[19] See Findlen (1994), Swann (2001), Arnold (2017) for further discussion.
[20] See Breckenridge (1989), Van Keuren (1989), Coombes (1994), Henare (2005) for detailed discussion.
[21] See Cohn 1996; Anderson 2006; Harris 2012 for discussion on museums in the imperial peripheries.
[22] Such trends include using museum as space for engaging source communities (e.g. Peers and Brown eds. 2003; Watson, S. ed. 2007; Lynch 2011; Onciul 2015), for decolonisation (e.g. Lonetree and Cobb eds. 2008; Lonetree 2012), and for promoting social activism (e.g. Message 2014, 2017; Sandell 2017).

the 'western' world, museum-like institutions in other parts of the world are often overlooked (Kreps 2003). In this thesis, I will examine Chinese ancestral halls, which have been most extensively developed in Southern China (Potter 1970; Cohen 2005).[23] Can these ancient exhibition spaces be seen as embodying the indigenous mode of representation and museological model in Chinese culture?

Due to be revised imminently, the official international definition of museums dates back to 2007 and stipulates that they "acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit" (ICOM 2018). Yet, due to the diversification, professionalisation and specialisation of museums, scholars are still divided on the taxonomy and definition of museums, which is exemplified in the current unresolved debate on the official ICOM definition of museums (e.g. Icke-Schwalbe 2017: 207-211).[24] What constitute a museum ultimately concern its philosophical assumptions and organising principles. Museums have the capacity to take on new forms animated by local and regional experience and cultural identity.[25] I will investigate how museum as a concept in HK has been digested and reinvigorated into museum-like institutions in the non-professional sphere.

[23] Ancestral halls represent the Confucian familial tradition of ancestral worshipping. See chapter 3.
[24] In view of the diversification of museum-like institution and its scope of work, ICOM proposed an alternative museum definition in 2019, but 70% of its members refused to vote for it (ICOM 2019). On 24th August 2022, the ICOM Extraordinary General Assembly approved a new museum definition. The current definition reads: "A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing." (ICOM 2022) See Kreps (2003), Message (2006), Hohenstein and Moussouri (2017) for discussions on museum-like organisations.
[25] See Denton (2014), Lu (2014), Choi (2017) for examples of alternative museum-like institutions in China and HK are springing up all over China and HK. Mathur and Singh's edited volume provides further case studies of indigenous influences on museums in India (eds. 2015, especially pp. xiii-xiv).

Transforming Museums & Museology

Museums are social institutions and an important part of civil society (Karp et al eds. 1992). Although museums were first perceived as institutions for enlightening the public and advancing the morals of the society, they were also used as a governing tool by states to educate and transform their people into ideal citizens (Bennett 1995). Duncan (1995) has argued that museums may resemble a 'secular temple' that 'civilises' visitors to behave in a specific 'museum-appropriate' manner. In the same vein, J. Smith (2014: 81-90) has pointed out that through engaging with exhibits in museums visitors are put into a state of mind of reflection and contemplation. Through this 'Museum Effect' (Alpers 1991), they are thought to become better people. In this thesis, I ask whether the same also apply to HK. How, if at all, have museums been transformed in HK and China since the 1990s?

In fact, several scholars have observed an acceleration of museum development in China since the 1990s.[26] Most museological literature on China recognises that the concept of museum was once, and is still synonymous with 'modernity' (e.g. Liang 1983; Varutti 2014). They also largely take functional perspectives and see museums as having an inherent duty to provide 'psychological and cultural product' services (Sun 2007), as well as to propagate "patriotism, socialism, and the revolutionary traditions among the broad masses of people" (Li, P. 2002). HK has also experienced an accelerated development of museums in the period immediately prior to and following HK's reversion to China in 1997. Yet, the popularisation of museums in HK seems uneven. Some, especially the younger generations, have been actively engaging in the diversification of museums. These enthusiasts are often collectors themselves and are

[26] This coincided with the consolidation of the Reform and Opening Up Movement in the hitherto closed country. Refer to Harris (2012), Denton (2014), Lu (2014), Varutti (2014) for further discussion.

active in advocating a more comprehensive heritage preservation policy in HK. But at the same time, Lu (2014: xiv) found that there were still locals that perceive museums as places only for "people who can read *fanshü* ('western' books)'. Academic studies of museums in HK are heavily oriented toward government museums, particularly toward their narration of history and art.[27] My research thus seeks to supplement the current literature by examining non-government museums and how they are transforming museology in postcolonial HK.

Museum, Nostalgia, Memory, Heritage and Historical Consciousness

The concepts of nostalgia, memory, heritage, and historical consciousness are complex and related fields of experience and scholarship, which are closely related to museums. MacDonald (2013) has suggested the term 'memory-heritage-identity complex' to account for the expansion of public and academic preoccupation with the past, the musealisation and fetishisation of everyday and folk life, and a shift from nation-state to more cosmopolitan memory forms as frames of memory (cf Arnold-de Simine 2013). This is what she calls a 'memory phenomenon' in Europe (Arnold-de Simine 2013). Memory is inherently linked to nostalgia, as the latter is constituted by personal consequences of historicising sensory experience, desire and longing, (Seremetakis 1994: 4). With the 'prevailing motives of erasing the gap between nature and culture, resemblance and identity, signifier and signified', nostalgia has been characterised by S. Stewart (1993: 23) as a utopian desire. In the nostalgic process, memory of the treasured past is often fetishsised, romanticised and enshrined in museums, sometimes even presented as part

[27] See Ren (1997); Carroll (2005); Ng (2009); Man (2010); Stokes-Rees (2011); K. Law (2014); Rodner and Preece (2015); Dimache et al (2017); Ryu (2018) for more on museums in HK. These studies tend to focus on museums' relationships with issues of identity and politics. No study has thus far looked at the localisation of museums in HK as a cultural phenomenon, a key research area for my thesis.

of 'heritage' and collective memory. Yet, different generations subscribe to different collective memories. Indeed, heritage is a complex of institutions and practices which embodies the spirit of the social group and constitutes collective representation of a society's cultural tradition – of a given time and context (Hall 1999). It incorporates all elements that can represent identities in the public sphere (Anico & Peralta eds 2009). When elevated to the national level, as a result, heritage embodied in artefacts is open to re-interpretation. Such re-interpretation of heritage, as well as its construction, is heavily embedded in power politics. L. Smith (2006), for example, exposed the hegemonic 'authorised heritage discourse' currently institutionalised in most societies, which served to undermine alternative and subaltern understandings of 'heritage'. Constructed through social and cultural processes with cultural tools such as museums, she argued that the discourse was heavily based on 'western' elite cultural values, the so-called technical expertise, and aesthetic judgements (Smith, L. 2006).

Ultimately, the emergence of nostalgia, memory and heritage involves consciousness of possessing a past and history, understanding of the past, and factors that shape those understandings, i.e., historical consciousness (Seixas 2004).[28] According to Charles Stewart (2017), it is one of the signature concepts of 'western modernity' but culturally specific. Others argue that historical consciousness can be acquired in museums, as visitors are able to resort to both historical thinking and memory in making sense of the past and defining the historical 'us' in contrast to 'otherness' (Gosselin and Livingstone eds 2016). For example, Wallace-Casey (2017) found that when empowered to engage in historical inquiry in community history museums, students established personal relevancy to the past based upon evidence and in the process developed their

[28] The term is also often used interchangeably with memory, historical thinking, and a sense of the past.

historical consciousness. Similarly, Williams (2007) found that the 'memorial museums' designed to commemorate atrocities were important devices that shaped public historical consciousness and constructed national collective memory. Message (2014) also argued that both national and tribal museums in America were sites of 'conscious culture' – or 'agenda' museums – used especially by the indigenous people to achieve cultural revitalisation, preserve heritage, and develop sense of community.

Scholars have also observed an emergence of historical consciousness in HK in recent years. As early as the 1990s, Abbas (1997a) has already observed that HK's transition to Chinese sovereignty has created an element of 'loss' and rupture and an unresolved identity crisis. This state of confusion involves the development of techniques to avoid being absorbed into a space of disappearance – including reverting to a nostalgic mentality of the colonial days (Abbas 1997a). Thus, Abbas (1997a) first identified a 'culture of disappearance' affecting postcolonial HK – a reactionary and malign culture posited on the imminent disappearance of the colonial way of life, threatened by the alien incoming culture of the mainlanders. Ten years later, Ng (2009) suggested again that in HK, the fear of cultural and historical obsolescence has provoked a societal nostalgia and a 'desire for history' since the late 1990s (Ng 2009: 45). This rise of nostalgia engendered sentiments toward a romanticised and idealised British colonial past (Ho, G. 2013). As Arnold de-Simine (2013) argues, museums exemplify current historical consciousness and challenge the ways of remembering the past. They can be seen as collective and public forms of remembrance. Realising their potential, government museums in HK are definitely responding to the increased desire for history and nostalgia in the city. For example, through recreating a 'true' HK experience with recreated street scenes and shops, the government HK Museum of History evokes nostalgia and longing amongst the visitors (Ng 2009: 50). Nevertheless, while these museums facilitate memory-making to

respond to the rising demand for nostalgic heritage in HK, they also encourage forgetting (Stokes-Rees 2006: 307): certain more contentious historical events such as HK's civic movements triggered by the 1989 June Fourth Incident are not included in the narrative. Is the emergence of new non-government museums in HK related to the aforementioned sense of 'loss' and the resulting rise in historical consciousness in the postcolonial era? Can we see this as a 'memory phenomenon' (cf. MacDonald 2013) in HK?

Colonialism, Power and Representations in Museums

The development of museums has been intrinsically linked to European colonialism and to a significant power imbalance between the colonial rulers and colonised indigenous people. According to many scholars, such an imbalance is often established, exercised, and maintained through various devices such as colonial collecting, museums, and their representations (Barringer and Flynn ed. 1998). As a complex and ongoing cultural process, colonisation is not some homogenous ideology that dominated the colonised, but an array of romanticising, sentimental and exoticist discourses produced out of dynamic interaction between the colonising and colonised peoples (Thomas, N. 1994). Museums have first been established to display the acquired spoils from overseas and glorious symbols of geopolitical power, and in turn mobilise public support for further expansionist ambitions (Thomas, D. ed 2010). MacKenzie (2009: 5, 265) has observed that the colonial national museums prospered in the British Empire have been part of the Victorian cultural civilising project across imperial territories, motivated by the desire to represent a 'western' view of the world in colonies, and completing the desire to order the world scientifically and hierarchically back at home. As many authors have noted, museum exhibitions in the past and present produce

discourses and imageries – exoticising or assimilating the 'other' – based on existing cultural assumptions and knowledge (e.g. Karp and Levine eds. 1991). For example, Cohn (1996) argued that the British Orientalists' study and exhibition of indigenous culture within museums in India were used to portray the colonised people as inferior, thus legitimising colonial rule. Similarly, Guha-Thakuta (2004) showed how relics and objects displayed in heritage sites and museums in colonial and postcolonial India were linked with the authority of the nation and the demands of nationalism.

Bennett (1995, 2004, 2005, 2017) has discussed extensively on the subject, drawing on Foucault's framework of governmentality. He argues that early evolutionary museums and their contemporary equivalent should be understood not only as places of instruction but also as reformatories of manners, or 'civic laboratories'. They are places where distinctive relations of power have been overtly at work, embedded in various institutional practices. Duncan (1995) echoes this when discussing the civilising effect of museums, for producing self-regulating and proud citizens who would identify with their nation and heritage. In addition, museums have also been used by certain social classes to strengthen their social positions. For example, through creating museum collections as culturally valued objects, and disseminating 'true', authenticated knowledge, dominant social groups were able to assert and reinforce social division and hierarchies with early English museums (Hill 2005). Authors in a recent collaborative volume (Bennett et al 2017) concurred and demonstrated that museums remained to this day important sites for the exercise of new forms of authority through collecting, ordering and governing.

As the power to define the nature of the past and construct the distinctions of taste (Bourdieu 1984) is among the most significant instrumentalities of rulership, museums would be ideal sites for the Beijing-influenced postcolonial HK government to govern –

by instilling a Chinese representation of HK history and culture. As Mathews et al (2008) showed, authorities deemed postcolonial HK necessary to unlearn its British colonial affiliations and learn how to 'belong to the (Chinese) nation'. In light of this, a Foucauldian framework of power and control seems suitable in my examination of the HKSAR government's act of establishing and overhauling museums in the postcolonial period. In such sense, museums in HK may be seen as 'doubly colonial' (Harris 2012) – influenced by both British and Chinese modes – and active arenas for competing ideologies, power and influence. But, as Foucault (1981: 92-102) argues, where there is power, there is always resistance. For example, indigenous users of colonial museums in India displayed robust immunity to the disciplinary power embedded in the cultural institutions created by the colonisers (Singh 2009), and museums were used by Tibetan political dissenters to challenge the official Chinese representation and establishment of an alternative view of their nation (Harris 2012). Following this, I will treat non-government museums in HK as potential sites of resistance to the official histories and representations constructed by the Beijing-influenced postcolonial HK government.

Contemporary museums outside of the 'west' are still deeply influenced by 'western' concepts, beliefs, practices, and norms (Wu 2006). For example, Oscar Ho (2014) argued that museum development in HK suffered from infrastructural weakness and the prolongation of the colonial mind-set and influence on curatorial practices. Furthermore, Kreps (2003) argued that the ongoing hegemony of 'Eurocentric' museology (*sic.*, p.x) served to marginalise the diverse museological behaviours in postcolonial Indonesia, where indigenous curatorial approaches were discouraged as they did not comply with the 'modern, western' museum methods. On the other hand, Bhatti (2012) and authors in Mathur and Singh (2015)'s edited volume show how museums have thrived under indigenous cultural influence in postcolonial India, having been appropriated with the

subaltern view as houses of *ajaibs* (wonders). Furthermore, Kreps (2006) shows how indigenous cultural transmission and heritage preservation concepts can be integrated into mainstream, museum-like institutions. Her research shows that museums can exist and function differently from those in the 'west'. In my thesis, I aim to find out whether HK, as a postcolonial city, is still embracing the 'Eurocentric' museology that has informed the establishment of earlier museums and the professional training of their staff, or whether it is embracing influences from indigenous exhibiting and curating practices. The conscious decision of local curators and demands from the public for an alternative museology could suggest the rise of a particular form of museum-mindedness (cf. Kreps 2003) in a postcolonial city. So, I shall examine HK's museum development with special attention to the confluence between indigenous Chinese and 'western' colonial modes of representation.

Nationalism and Identity: Government and Non-government Actors in Museums

According to Benedict Anderson, the museum facilitates a sense of *belonging* to a distinct, bounded, and sovereign community through the construction of a homogenising narrative of history, tradition, and culture, which the concept of nations is based on (Anderson 2006: 6). Museums are places where participants, including both curators and visitors, define boundaries of identities, as well as co-construct perceptions of self and of others.[29] This means that museums can be used as ideological instruments either to consciously indoctrinate or to enlighten and liberate (Kreps 2003). In fact, in HK there are people who think that government museums are part of a grand neo-colonial schema to 're-educate' the HK public on the 'correct' identity and history in the postcolonial era.

[29] See Fladmark ed. (2000), Harris (2012), Dimache et al (2017) for more on museum and identities.

The point could be further clarified with Bourdieu's (1977) theory of habitus. Habitus, according to Bourdieu (1977), is a system of schemes and strategies that is made unconscious and natural in a society so that people would generate socially acceptable practices in response to social demands. Museums are fundamental in the shaping of habitus as they can make people conscious of both their history and of their identity (Leung 2004). In particular, objects collected and exhibited in museums, embodying the 'idea' of the state for people, may unite a populace with a collective national identity (Kaplan ed. 1994; Taylor 1995). Thus, simultaneously influenced by the British colonial legacy, local nostalgic memories and the mainland Chinese nationalist perspectives, museums in HK could be seen as active arenas of decolonisation and identity construction, with power and politics inherent to the various attempts of representations. This is especially true for government or national museums, as they often represent dominant national values and identity and act as significant symbols in the nation-building process.[30]

In the context of HK, and the same in this thesis, government museums are synonymous with national museums. National museums first emerged in Europe in the nineteenth century. They were treated as 'treasure houses' that held important collections for the nation and its people (Mason 2007). They are instrumental in helping to construct the 'boundary' of a nation and facilitating nationals to 'imagine' their national communities (Anderson 2006). According to Mason (2013), they are far from obsolete in our age, as they are useful in perpetuating ideas of cosmopolitanism, globalisation, and multiculturalism. This thesis will examine how identity politics influenced the government and non-government actors in setting up museums.

[30] See Knell et al eds. (2011), Aronsson and Elgenius eds. (2015) for more discussion on national museums.

The investigation on local, often non-government or private actors in the museum and cultural heritage industry is relatively recent. In this respect, Candlin's work (2015) looking at small, non-government, local 'micromuseums' in the UK is instructive. She concluded that micromuseums featured more personalised collections and transparent curatorial approaches, making visitors play a more important role in shaping the museum experience and co-producing knowledge which reflected their own interests and identities. In contrast with major institutions, Candlin also noted that many micromuseums used exhibits to maintain or further their ties with the people associated with their creation, thus securing their relevance to local groups and communities. This shows how diversified museums in the 'west' are in terms of their organising mechanism, display strategies, and modes and representation. It is obviously the opposite of homogeneity. Levin (2007)'s edited volume echoed this by revealing how small local museums could support a great weight of cultural prestige for the community. He also noted that the rise of small local museums in the US might be due to the American cult of individualism, and an associated nostalgia as a way of distilling local community and localised past. In contrast to what Kreps (2003) observed in Indonesia, where curators were keen to make their national museums more 'professional' according to 'western' standards, authors in these two volumes also observed that small independent museums were less likely to pay attention to modern museum theory, updated conservation methods, or new exhibition techniques. This neglect of 'established industrial professionalism' in an increasing number of small independent museums perhaps prompted Knell (2016) to call for a more democratic, post-institutional museology aiming at freeing the museum concept from its acquired characteristics and the control of the museum profession. Indeed, this approach is more suitable for my analysis of non-government museums in HK, which, as outlined before, do not necessarily conform to the

definitions of museums set by ICOM.[31] In this context of a 'micro-museum boom' as a worldwide phenomenon, I ask whether it has influenced HK.

Government and non-government museums in HK

The government has long been the creator and funder of museums in HK and across China since the foundation of the PRC. Non-government museums are a relatively new phenomenon.[32] Accordingly, scholarly works on museums in HK and China has focused mainly on major government museums. Using the HK Museum of History (HKMH) as an example, Stokes-Rees (2006) argued that the creation of new national museum reflected the themes of nationhood, identity, and autonomy. In particular, she found that design elements in the museum were manipulated to represent, negotiate, and construct national historical narrative, as well as a singular identity for the HK territory and people (Stokes-Rees 2013).[33] Above all, Ng (2009) noted that although the government museum responded to the societal nostalgia and the 'desire for history' since the late 1990s, it more importantly served to inscribe a specific political ideology. Actually, she found the museum emblematic of the authority and legitimacy of the post-British colonial regime. Similarly, Ryu (2018) argued that the HKMH's permanent exhibition exemplified how the unique 'Hongkongness' prevalent before the 1997 handover was replaced by Chinese ethnocentrism and the patriotic nationalism that was forced onto the territory. This was especially so when elements that might foster a more local, HK-based identity was deliberately downplayed. In fact, the whole *raison d'etre* of the HKMH, Sala (1999) claimed, was to help construct a new historical and identity narrative of the past, by

[31] For the current definition see section 1.1 under subtitle "De-colonial and Re-colonial.
[32] In China, non-government museum is rather a disguised state monopoly, as those 'private museums' are mostly subject to indirect government control (Varutti 2014: 45)
[33] This 'singular' identity, given HK's colonial history and derivative culture diverged from mainland China, proves problematic.

downplaying sensitive colonial legacy (e.g. K. Law 2014) and emphasising cultural and historical unity with the 'motherland'. The latter, Carroll (2005) explained, also stemmed from the political need of the HK government to redirect the sense of localness and belonging within a larger, pan-Chinese nationalism. Dimache et al (2017) find that the government was successful in using HKMH as an educational base for instilling visitors with a common identity and 'master narrative' while boosting political legitimacy for the central authorities. Identity construction is of course a major achievement of HK government museums. Does this provide the spark to recent exponential development of non-government museums in HK?

On the rise of non-government museums in HK, Choi (2017) has evaluated the eco-museum project at the Lai Chi Wo village and found the heritage conservation model highly useful in instilling agency and power amongst the marginalised rural community as well as providing localised narratives of the past that compliments those exhibited in government museums. Chan, W. (2008) has documented the rivalry of two local non-government museums in Tai O Fishing Village. Unlike other museums, they are not 'divorced from people's lives' because they are located at homes and are the 'ablest to represent local culture'. Together, these studies present different approaches that contribute to a sense of place and identity for the local community. They also emphasise on the painstaking processes and dedications of various non-government actors in setting up their own museums. For example, reflecting on the private museum industry in HK, government museum-worker Chan, K. (2017) admitted that while it was difficult to establish private museums in HK with the public's relatively lethargic responses towards cultural appreciation, the increasing proliferation of non-government museums in HK was nevertheless a vivid testimony to the increasing maturity of cultural development in HK. Yet, the above literature fails to explain the overall implications of

their emergence in such a postcolonial city like HK, which has a persisting identity conflict influenced by the mutually exclusive forces from the national and local, the colonial and postcolonial, and the 'western' and Chinese backgrounds.

In this thesis, I aim to deconstruct and problematise the established and essentially 'western' understandings of museums. I will revisit the concept of museum and its role in modern societies and explore its relationship with cultural consciousness and identity development in a postcolonial setting. I will examine the HK government museums, a traditional Tang Ancestral Hall and its neighbouring government museum, in addition to three non-government museums in HK: the independent and private HK Maritime Museum, the amateur 'community' museum St Mathias Journey, and the Queen's College History Museum. These museums are chosen as case studies since they represent different nodes in a continuous spectrum which includes, on the one end, museums influenced by an indigenous museological model associated with Chinese ancestral halls, and, on the other end, like government museums, museums still upholding the 'western' colonial museum professionalism.

1.4 – Methods and Methodology

In order to study this subject ethnographically, I chose to focus on five museum-like institutions in HK to answer my research questions, namely Tang Ancestral Halls and Tang Clan Gallery (chapter 3); HK Maritime Museum (chapter 4); St Mathias Journey (chapter 5); and Queen's College History Museum (chapter 6). I have spent a total of ten months conducting fieldwork in HK, and took reference from museum ethnographies such as those of Sharon MacDonald (2002, 2013), Christina Kreps (2003), and Shaila Bhatti (2012). I will discuss specific references and their usefulness in the subsequent case study chapters. Anthropology uses the microcosm to illumine the macrocosm, the

particular to illustrate the general (Firth 2004: 18). Both approaches of focusing on one particular museum (e.g. Gosden et al 2007; Lubar 2017), and drawing insights from a number of museums (e.g. Harris 2012; Candlin 2015) to shed light on wider connected issues are common in the anthropological and museological scholarship. The rationale behind my decision to take the latter approach is that while the selected museums yield distinct insights, they are simultaneously indispensable in informing the overarching themes of indigenous modes of representation, localisation of the museum concept, as well as their relationship with postcoloniality.

I have adopted an ethnographic approach to studying the aforementioned museum-like institutions as a cultural phenomenon in HK by conducting an in-depth, focused fieldwork research. Over the course of ten months of fieldwork, I have used four qualitative methods – interviews, participant observation, museum analysis, and archival research – to gather research data. This literature review has encompassed Chinese museum theories, issues in contemporary Chinese philosophy and patriotic nationalism, ancestral hall, as well as government publications and policy papers that discuss the development of museum and heritage industry in HK. A critical examination of all these available materials is essential to contextualise my analysis of museums in the contemporary HK sociocultural and political environment. With my language ability to read both Chinese and English, I have also drawn on different perspectives offered by Chinese literature found in libraries and archives in HK. Those work has further been supplemented by continued communication with my research participants by email and in social media forums, as well as through library and archival research. I adopted a bottom-up ethnographic approach in the field, and then an interpretivist approach towards the examination and synthesis of my research data.

Firstly, I have conducted interviews with cultural policymakers, museum founders, owners, curators, board members, staff, clansmen in the Tang Ancestral Hall, as well as museum visitors. I believe that all people engaging in activities with museums – whether planning, curating, or visiting – are active agents in the social processes of meaning creation and perception, which are influenced by their own cultural and historical experience and affiliation. As I find the 'museum-making' trend of non-government museums in HK most informative, I have focused on the curatorial intention and organising rationale of the creators, i.e. the museum-makers themselves. Most of these interviews are semi-structured, but most of the times our discussions would diverge and build on the responses. A diverse range of informants have helped me grasp the different perspectives with respect to their relationship with the museum. Although I could prepare work to be done in the field as I already have an existing network of friends working in the sector, snowballing has helped me reach more informants. Informal chats have helped me gain access to some remarks and observations otherwise would be missed in formal interviews. As 'ethnographicness' is not intrinsic to the encounters themselves but to be derived from judgements made through a retrospective conversion of the learning, remembering and interaction (Ingold 2014: 386), I have also been reflexive as a researcher, and paid attention to the meaning-making potential of the transcription and transformation of different data. This is especially pertinent to this thesis as interviews were carried out in Cantonese (the dominant language in HK) and I had to translate them into English while transcribing the data.

Secondly, I have conducted participant observations in museums and during their events. Because collaborators [34] differ in willingness and capabilities for verbally

[34] In this thesis, the term 'collaborator' refers to research collaborators. Instead of research participants or informants, 'collaborator' fits my research better because of the

expressing cultural information and assumptions (Pelto and Pelto 1978, quoted in Briggs 1990: 8), it is truly important to pay equal attention to both emic and etic evidence, which could be obtained from two methods that complement each other – interview and observation (Boellstorff et al. 2012: 94). Carrying out participant observations has helped me gain both 'observational' and 'subjective' understanding of informants by identifying their behaviour and putting it into context (e.g. Schutz 1967, quoted in Seidman 2006: 9). Apart from observing and noting down the remarks made by visitors, I have also followed them around and observed their interaction with museum exhibits. I find it especially useful to join in museum guided tours to observe how visitors interact with docents as well as the displays. As communications and representations in museums are far more than just language, I have paid extra attention to observing and recording different modes of communication in museums, by using photographs, video- and audio-recordings and written records. These observations, supplemented with reviews on museum comment books and the social media (TripAdvisor and Facebook), have formed a more comprehensive picture of how visitors may perceive the same exhibitions differently. For independent and school museums, I have been able to join the institutions on a full-time basis during fieldwork, which allows me to get an 'insider' perspective. In fact, in many cases in the school museum (chapter 6) I was an active participant in the museum-making process. The role helps give me deeper insights, and access to collaborators and information. In order to be self-reflexive in analysing the museum's development, I have talked to various stakeholders in the museum to ensure that I have captured all perspectives.

collaborative nature of my fieldwork. In the process, knowledge has been co-created and shared in participant observations and interview (discussion) sessions.

Thirdly, I have analysed museums through their exhibits and exhibitions in the context of their mission, spatial configuration, staff arrangement and visitor base. From the choice of language to the selection and positioning of exhibits, I take the assumption that everything *in* and *of* the museum communicates messages, which can reflect certain rationales and intentions. Nevertheless, I have found that Stokes-Rees' (2011) proposal to 'read the exhibits like text' risks to miss out the multi-sensory aspects experienced by visitors in the museum environment (cf. Kratz 2011). Therefore, in most of the museum-like institutions that I have analysed, I have done some preliminary sketches of their exhibitions and displays and noted down my own experience (e.g. sound, lighting, atmosphere). I have also taken photos and videos of the exhibitions as well as jotted down notes on how a visitor would understand the displays. These data are analysed alongside those acquired from interviews and participant observations to form a holistic picture of the museum's development and its positioning in the HK cultural and heritage industry. They communicate important messages that curators and the museums wish to convey to visitors. Moreover, one of the museums I chose to focus on no longer exists in its original format due to insufficient funds. To understand the evolution and development of non-government museums, I looked at the 'previous life', or different 'iterations' of these museums. I was able to reconstruct these display environments including floorplans of exhibition cabinets and displays with existing literature as well as audio-visual records. With different videos I was able to track changes in exhibition focus and then explore why with my collaborators. As Tucker (2014) reminded us, analysing museums' authored works such as mission statements, museum websites and online exhibits could illuminate ways in which museums position themselves and engage with their communities. Message (2006), for example, based her analysis of new museums

heavily on the rhetoric and language they used to portray themselves. I have therefore also consulted their documents and websites in my research.

For ancestral halls, apart from adopting historical anthropological analysis using early ethnographies, primary sources, and archival records, I have also brought descendants of Tang Clan back to their Ancestral Halls to see how they perceive their interaction and relationship with their ancestors through the exhibition space and artefacts. I have also interviewed local clan elders and villagers to evaluate whether these Halls may be seen as ancient prototypes to public museums in HK, and the processes of museumisation with these Halls. Analysing the space and artefacts displayed in these halls and participating in their festivities have also helped me get a sense of how the ancestral hall tradition has survived and changed through time.

While analysing data and writing up my thesis in Britain, I continued to keep in touch with my collaborators in HK and went back to the city for three follow up visits between 2018-2021. In these trips I conducted some follow up interviews with my collaborators and consulted some archival materials. Using the sketches I made in the field, I was able to create floor plan drawings of the museum exhibitions for analyses.

Although the exhibition that I analysed for St Mathias Journey (chapter 5) was already closed at the time of my fieldwork, I was able to talk to the curator (my collaborator) to ascertain his curatorial rationale, his memory of the exhibition and where collections were displayed. In a sense, data is presented through the museum creator's perspective: his intentionality, his interpretation of what people perceived about the exhibition, and his meaning-making process.

In this thesis, in certain occasions I anonymised names of my collaborators either at their request, or due to the sensitivity and critical nature of their comments.

1.5 – Outline of Chapters

This thesis consists of seven chapters, in which I examine an ancestral hall and four museums in postcolonial HK.

Chapter 2 – The Colonial Legacy: An Overview of Government Museums in Hong Kong

Following a comprehensive introductory chapter in which I have introduced HK, set out my research questions and discussed relevant literature, I begin my thesis with a brief overview of government museums in HK. I review and analyse in chapter 2 the impacts of the HK government and their museums on the general development of the museum sector in the city. Data in the chapter come from government archival records, government policy documents and consultation reports to make sense of the larger picture. Such analyses are supplemented by insights from the interviews with government museum workers and policy makers I have conducted. This sets the background for later discussion on non-government museums in HK.

Firstly, I argue that these museums have exerted a prodigious influence on HK society, especially in stimulating museum-mindedness among the public. They have contributed to the eventual emergence of non-government, private museum-like institutions. Indeed, some of which arose in reaction against the government museums. Secondly, I point out that the HK government has introduced the concept of a 'museum' and established a basic museum culture among the HK public, amid the rise of the middle class and improving quality of life (cf. Bourdieu 1984). Thirdly, I argue that government and non-government museums in HK are complimentary. Non-government museums can afford to be more liberal and critical in their narratives and deal better with sensitive topics. They act as the 'last line of defence' for local heritage and memories deemed inappropriate for commemoration in government institutions. They are repositories of

HK heritage that offer HK people the chance to learn about their past, formulate their identity in the present, and ponder on their future. In summary, I demonstrate how government museums have attempted to cultivate and facilitated historical consciousness and museum-mindedness amongst the public and indirectly sparked the emergence of privately established museums in HK.

Chapter 3 – Ancestral Halls: The Tang Ancestral Hall and the Tang Clan Heritage Gallery

In chapter 3, I examine whether ancestral halls can be seen as indigenous precursors to the public museums in HK. Since their emergence a millennium ago, ancestral halls have been symbols of the Confucian familial tradition of ancestor worship developed most extensively in Southern China. In these exhibition-cum-ritual spaces, distant and intangible lineage relationship is displayed, forged, kept and transmitted. Through collecting and displaying material culture, including ancestral tablets that symbolise the eternal ancestral presence, heirloom artworks and other ritual objects, ancestral halls serve as unifying hubs for clansmen across generations sharing common ancestors. Could we consider Chinese ancestral halls as an indigenous museum model prior to the introduction of museums from Europe? How far has such cultural transmission method influenced subsequent museum development in HK? Are museums nowadays supplementing the traditional functions of ancestral halls? The chapter is based on the case study of the Tang Ancestral Halls in Ping Shan village, HK. Data in this chapter were acquired from semi-structured interviews with clansmen and former government curators, as well as participant observations of clan rituals during my ethnographic fieldwork in the summers of 2018 and 2019.

To begin with, I argue that ancestral halls are exhibition spaces that constitute 'precursory museums' in Chinese clan-village societies (cf. Kreps 2003). They collect, preserve, exhibit and educate visitors about cross-generational blood relationships. Through the material culture preserved for display and used in rituals performed in the Hall, villagers are turned into clansmen and a clan identity is forged. Under HK government promotions aimed at instilling Chineseness among the public, ancestral halls are portrayed as embodying a common 'Chinese' past for all HK people. Since then, they have become a 'temple' to 'the common past' in postcolonial HK (cf. Duncan 1995). I have also examined a former colonial police station in the village which has been transformed into the 'Tang Clan Gallery', a professionally curated museum. Comparing the two institutions, I argue that the traditional ancestral hall relies on knowledgeable elders rather than objects to tell stories. In a space of historical significance and symbolic value, material culture is enabled by human interlocuters to transmit vital historical and cultural information. Just as a museum collects objects, I suggest that an ancestral hall gathers or even 'collects' people. However, since ancestral halls are becoming increasingly obsolete, I argue that museums have inherited the traditional functions of ancestral halls in HK. Museums and ancestral halls are thus shown to be two intertwined concepts. Museums in postcolonial HK society can be seen as akin to ancestral halls. Ancestral halls of the past can be construed retrospectively as having been museum-like.

Chapter 4 – Non-government Independent Museums: The Hong Kong Maritime Museum

Having introduced the museum-like characteristics of ancestral halls, I turn to discuss three non-government museums in HK, starting with the independent HK Maritime Museum (HKMM) in chapter 4. The independent museum was set up by the private sector in 2003. Non-government, independent museums in HK are museums

whose premises, governing bodies, and collections are founded, owned, and directly managed by independent organisations entirely separate from the government bureaucracy. To what extent are independent museums different from HK government museums? How do HK independent museums engage with the public? How is history and culture interpreted and represented differently in government and independent museums in HK? Data in this chapter was acquired from semi-structured interviews with curators and museum officials, exhibition analysis, as well as participant observations of museum activities when I was based full time in HKMM in August 2018. I also took reference from my prior volunteering experience at the museum.

Firstly, I argue that the amphibious HKMM in its waterfront setting can be seen as a 'pier', an intermediary that connects the past to the present, the abstract to the concrete, a locality to the world, government and non-government actors, Chinese and HK historical narratives. Through collections, displays and curatorial intentions, HKMM emphasises the importance of HK's maritime story. Secondly, I argue that private independent museums can compensate for the shortcomings of government museums in HK, by creating a space for discussing more sensitive topics, by bridging the gaps in such specialised subject areas as maritime history and by embracing social responsibilities. Thirdly, I argue that HKMM's development is a perfect example of how the development of museums is symbiotically related to the specificities of postcolonialism and decolonisation in HK. It is a museological hybrid which incorporates both 'western' perspectives and those of the Chinese in its interpretation of local maritime development through the past millennium. Whether it was a "Chinese" or HK maritime history is nuanced, although HKMM's permanent and special exhibitions increasingly interpret indigenous and long-term local history from a Chinese perspective.

Chapter 5 – Amateur 'Community Museums': St Mathias Journey

To fully understand how the bottom-up nature of the museum boom phenomenon has emerged in HK, I then examine, in chapter 5, amateur 'community' museums in HK – self-initiated and often one-person museums founded by non-professional grassroots of the community. I chose the case of St Mathias Journey, a museum founded by HK heritage enthusiast Mathias Lee. Why do members of the public, particularly collectors in HK, turn themselves into 'museum-makers'? How do such community museums contribute to the forging of an alternative HK identity? Does their emergence reflect rising 'museum-mindedness' among the HK public? I acquired data in this chapter through semi-structured interviews with museum-maker Mathias Lee between 2018-2019. Mathias also encouraged me to refer to his social media page, where he uploaded photos, videos and blog posts on his collecting and museum journey. As his 'museum' was in process of regeneration when I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork, exhibition analysis is based on Mathias' verbal account of his latest iteration of exhibition.

Firstly, I argue that museums of this sort of museum-like institution acts as repositories of collective memory. Through collecting and exhibiting 'Old Objects' (舊物), Mathias seeks to create a buffer zone that alleviates social division, grievances, and the identity crisis in postcolonial HK. Instead of focusing on historical and aesthetic values as in mainstream museums, Mathias' 'Old Objects' are appreciated as 'common mementos' of the past, representing countless ordinary stories of their humble owners that are relevant to contemporary visitors. Those visitors are then encouraged to rethink the meaning of HK identity and culture by gazing upon the artefactual evidence of the lives of those who preceded them. Secondly, I argue that the unique curatorial style of *St Mathias Journey* can be seen as part of a localised museology. Without being steeped in the theories of museum anthropology, Mathias has subconsciously created a multi-

sensory experience by encouraging visitors to touch the exhibit and 'walk into' the jam-packed display scenes, highlighting the 'vintage smell', as well as playing period music. He prefers to transmit cultural knowledge through word of mouth and in response to the objects exhibited in the built environment he has created in the museum. In such ways, amateur 'community' museums in HK are more personalised, humanistic and interactive than government and larger non-governmental/private museums. Mathias believes that his efforts are vital in trying to compensate for the incompetency of HK government museums, especially in their lack of human touch and social relevance. *St Mathias Journey* shows the owner's journey of collecting and exhibiting; it is also a journey for HK people to retrace and learn from their ancestors' historical footsteps, and thus to reflect on what it means to be a Hongkonger.

Chapter 6 – Museums in Schools: Queen's College History Museum

My last case study was based on Queen's College History Museum, a school history museum set up in HK only in the last decade. In the past 15 years, there has been more than twenty six school history museums (校史館) set up by schools in HK within their campus to collect and interpret school history, traditions and achievements. In chapter 6, I explore the emergence of school history museums in HK through the case of Queen's College History Museum (QCHM). As an alumnus of the school, I was appointed honorary curator to oversee its development since its establishment in 2013. Why would schools divert their resources to set up museums? Why are they only set up in the past fifteen years but not earlier? Who are these school history museums for? Data in this chapter is drawn from my own curating and museum experience, as well as semi-structured interviews with school officials, students and other alumni.

Firstly, I argue that the emergence of school history museums is triggered by an identity crisis in a rapidly changing socio-political environment, which is the result of HK's decolonisation. Alumni of various schools who have advocated for the museums are actively searching for their own 'roots', their history, heritage and identity as they struggle to cope with the accelerated pace of change. These museums can be seen as by-products of the alumni's hope to preserve remnants of the 'good old days'. Secondly, I argue that the emergence of school history museums reflects a growth of public historical consciousness in post-handover HK. In addition, instead of using museums as a medium of practical instruction, schools in HK are more eager to use them as a tool to establish their own historical narrative, which is ultimately tied to ideological and moral education. Thirdly, I argue that school history museums in HK are hybrid institutions: they embrace the 'western' concept of displaying heritage in an exhibition space, and at the same time Chinese values such as filial piety, treating the space as a cohesive, inward-looking institution that celebrates achievements of predecessors, visualises heritage and relationships, and 'gathers people'.

Chapter 7 – Conclusions

In the concluding chapter, I will summarise and draw together the key arguments and findings of each chapter in light of the original research questions and relevant anthropological theories and literature on museums reviewed in this chapter. Firstly, I will argue that the rise of non-government museums is a uniquely postcolonial phenomenon in HK, emphasising the fluid exchanges, collaborations and mutual-influencing relationship between the government and private forces in the local museum sector. I have also found that non-government museums in HK are potential sites of resistance to the official histories and representations constructed by the Beijing-

influenced postcolonial HK government. Secondly, I will argue that the values, morals and social functions upheld by ancestral halls are still influencing current museums in postcolonial HK. Museums have inherited their traditional functions in HK: as a channel for the HK public to 'trace their roots'. Thirdly, I will argue that as social and cultural constructs, postcolonial museums in HK are hybrid institutions that represent different points in a continuous 'museum spectrum'. They embody characteristics of both 'western' colonial museums and Chinese ancestral halls. They are crucial spaces in the postcolonial cultural arena used by HK residents to construct history, interpret culture, and shape identity.

2

The Colonial Legacy

An Overview of Government Museums in HK



Fig. 2.0. The first premises of the Hong Kong Museum of History, housed in a former British Army Barracks which now hosts the Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre (AMO 2022).

When one asks a local resident about museums in Hong Kong (HK), most of them would be able to name the Museums of Art, History, Heritage, Science and Space – the five large-scale government museums. This is natural, given that the HK government remains the principal provider and funder of museums, galleries, and heritage sites in the postcolonial city. Contrasting government museums with non-government museums in HK enables me to put the discussion in a wider context. This chapter will review and analyse the impacts of the HK government and their museums on the general development of museum sector in the city. I will demonstrate how government museums have attempted to cultivate and facilitate historical consciousness and museum-mindedness amongst the public. I will point out how this indirectly sparked the

emergence of non-government museums in HK; the relationship between government and non-government museums is one of the main research objectives in my thesis.

As Emily Stokes-Rees (2006) has noted in her doctoral research on government museums in HK, the major obstacle I have to face is that these institutions and their workers – civil servants – are conservative and reluctant to be interviewed. Perhaps not wanting to risk their stable career, or because their supervisors have adopted a 'no interview' policy to avoid any political consequence, most current government museum workers have refused my interview requests. So, I could only interview one current serving government official, and several former government museum workers, who I know personally.[1] The museums have also refused my requests to conduct visitor research in their premises. Some security staff have even monitored me with a suspicious eye when I was studying the artefacts and displays. Worse, most government records of the past 20 years are closed to the public, as HK still does not have any archive law or legislation 23 years after the handover. As a result, in the present research I have decided to critically review those archival records that I have been able to gain access to, including government policy documents and consultation reports, so as to make sense of the larger picture. Such analyses will be supplemented by insights from the interviews I have conducted. First, I shall review relevant literature and elucidate the definition of 'government museums' used in this thesis.

[1] Refer to Qin (2015), who wrote of political pressure and self-censorship hidden in the procedures when government is involved in the museum sector. But since most of the former government museum workers I was able to conduct interviews with only left civil service in the past 10 years, their insights are still up-to-date and thus applicable to my research.

Definitions and Literature Review

Museums are spaces where the state addresses citizens and constructs the nation through narratives and objects. Bennett has written extensively on the subject, drawing on Foucault's framework of governmentality (Foucault 2007). He argued that early museums were used as a governing tool by states to educate and transform people into ideal citizens who would monitor and regulate their own conduct (Bennett 1995: 8-9). Their contemporary equivalent, on the other hand, should be understood not only as places of instruction but also reformatories of manners, or 'civic laboratories' – in which distinctive relations of power were overtly at work, embedded in various institutional practices (Bennett 2004, 2005, 2017). Since its governing sovereignty and relative autonomy makes it comparable to a (city) state broadly defined, government museums in HK are essentially state museums. They are perfect examples to reflect the intricate relationship between museum, politics and power.

I define government museums in HK as museums whose premises, governing bodies, and collections are founded, owned, and directly managed by the HK government.[2] I use the term 'governmental' to refer to efforts and actions of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSARG) principally (unless otherwise specified), and 'non-governmental' or 'non-state' to refer to the actors that do not belong to the state or governmental apparatus. As explained in the introductory chapter, HK is organised politically under a unique 'One Country, Two Systems' policy that offers the city administrative, political, judicial, and economic independence from China, which it is formally part of. However, successive governments in postcolonial HK have sought to bring the 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1977) of HK closer to that of mainland China.

[2] Refer to Chapter 1 for detailed discussion on museum definition and classification.

Although the HKSAR Government inherited the British colonial cultural policy characterised by its 'arm's length principle' and 'checks-and-balances' strategies, it gradually adopted a 'postcolonial' cultural governance torn between 'political centralisation and market orientation', ultimately aimed at reducing the degree of social and cultural democracy in HK (Ho 2017).

Cultural policy in HK is in the hands of the HKSAR government but is at the same time subtly influenced by the political and national agendas of the PRC government, such as decolonisation and integration policies. Decolonisation is a complex concept in HK's context. While the HKSAR government has no official policy to 'decolonise' in traditional sense such as removing practices of the former colonial government, in practice not a few of their decisions regarding heritage and other issues could be seen as achieving such goal. This includes choosing what historic buildings to conserve (and what not). For example, the demolition of a highly symbolic ceremonial "Queen's Pier" in 2008 could be interpreted as an act to erase colonial memories and symbols (Henderson 2008, Ku 2012, Gallagher 2021).[3] On the other hand, integration policies with the PRC could be seen as one of the ways to achieve decolonisation. As HK has not become independent after the departure of the colonial government, but instead has joined the PRC as a Special Administrative Region, 'decolonisation' essentially includes assimilating its residents and the values they uphold to the new 'motherland'.[4] However, the HK community is deeply divided over such integration or decolonisation policies, as reflected in the renewed

[3] The pier was constructed in modern utilitarian style in June 1954 which replaced an older structure constructed in 1925. It was a highly symbolic ceremonial area for the British Royal Family visiting HK and for British governors to assert their authority on arrival. Its demolition gave way for a reclamation project.
[4] Government advocation for 'National Education' (that teaches Chinese patriotism and nationalism), 'Mother-tongue Education', Chinese-themed exhibitions in its museums, 'cultural' exchanges between mainland Chinese and HK citizens, People's Liberation Army Summer Camp for university students, and the more recent and controversial HK National Security Law (2020) and National Anthem Bill (2020) are all examples of policies pushing for integration with PRC, and thus decolonisation.

violent protests since June 2019. Senior HK government official and scholar C.W. Ng (2014) has once attributed progress made by his postcolonial government in local cultural heritage to the changing international environment, which favours heritage preservation, and mainland Chinese government's renewed enthusiasm in cultural heritage for building up soft power. While the extent of progress on heritage in HK, especially when it involves cultural democracy, is debatable, it is important to understand that any discussions on museums in postcolonial HK must be placed against this bigger picture, for they are an integral part of this search for history, heritage, belonging and identity amongst the HK people.

Literature on HK museums focuses mostly on governmental museums, especially the HK Museum of History (HKMH). It is one of the most interesting institutions to study since its changing narratives and interpretations on local history, culture and identity lead to heated discussions from the civil society. This essentially captures the way HK has developed and shapes the way HK identity has been developed after the 1997 handover. From an instrumentalist point of view, government museums are effective educational bases for instilling sense of belonging amongst local HK residents and thus boosting political legitimacy for the ruling authorities. Reviewing all government museums as a whole, Carroll (2005a) found that they stressed on the common cultural origins of HK and China yet attempted to whitewash the past and depoliticised the present. However, he also concluded that they were largely successful in fostering sense of belonging amongst citizens, making discussion of identity issues possible, creating a museum culture in HK, and constructing the global image of a cosmopolitan postcolonial HK. Similarly, Zhang et al (2018) argued that HKMH constructed a relatively harmonious colonial imagining by excluding any conflictual events. Ng (2009) also pointed out that, for local visitors, walking through the exhibitions evoked nostalgia and longing for the

romanticised past of the city, as HKMH sought to promote a uniform experience by manipulating memory and appropriating everyday experiences, thus producing governable homogeneity among citizens. In her thesis, Stokes-Rees argued that both the HKMH and Heritage Museum were primarily established as instrument of national identity. This could be seen as culmination of and monument to the HK evolving history, as they were both established after the 1997 handover (Stokes-Rees 2006). In particular, she stressed how HKMH used spatial design, storytelling, multimedia and strategic sequencing to bring out the narrative of the 'nation' and produce a singular identity for HK and its people – one that could maintain the distinctive status as a dynamic outpost of 'western' capitalism but also embrace the Chinese 'motherland' (Stokes-Rees 2011). On the contrary, Man (2010) found that there were ever-changing ''internal'' battles of cultural identities in the government Museum of Art (HKMA), which she termed a 'museum of hybridity', reflecting the co-existence of its permanent collection of traditional Chinese works of art and special exhibits of 'western' masterpieces.

Scholars from mainland China and Taiwan generally find HK government museums, especially HKMH, good technical cases to study curatorial and display methods. For instance, Wu (2014b) compared and analysed the ethnological displays in HKMH and found that, through embodying Lingnan (嶺南, South China) cultural characteristics in an authentic and apolitical manner, the exhibition successfully triggered collective memory amongst audiences and thus increased their sense of participation. Studying the HKMH 'history tunnel' representational method, Li (2008) concluded that the exhibition reflected not only historical facts but also, through the events curators picked and portrayed, the subjective belief that HK and its people were pragmatic, peaceful and proactive. This 'reconstructed' history might aim to weaken the sense of injustice in colonial history and, at the same time, strengthen the common cultural traditions of HK

and South China. All of these, in addition to highlighting the economic booms in the history of HK, met the HKSAR government's vision of development. Comparing the contemporary gallery of HKMH to that of Shenzhen Museum in mainland China, Sui (2016) found that the former could afford to adopt a micro, visitor-oriented narrative to interpreting its own history because it did not have any 'special historical mission', political requirement, nor development framework directed by the Beijing Government.[5]

Although the degree of curatorial freedom enjoyed by government museums in HK is undoubtedly greater than any average Chinese city, most HK scholars highlight that there are still political motives behind exhibitions in government museums. For example, Wong (2015) argued that HKMH's permanent exhibition was a top-down, 'politically sanitising' or 'de-politicised' version of local history carefully constructed by bureaucrats and vetted to avoid political controversy or the ruling authority's political legitimacy being challenged. It was a form of political education which linked up the historically inconsistent exchanges and connections between HK and the mainland to construct a current political consensus that HK had always been politically, ethnically and geographically inseparable from Chinese in history. This was unacceptable to Law (2014), who criticised HKMH for representing a history closely following traditional Chinese nationalism, and emphasising national dignity and the people's identification with and loyalty to the nation. To Law, HKMH has become a tool for the Chinese regime to engage in soft power diplomacy. Nevertheless, through visitor studies, Dimache et al (2017) found that visitors did tend to follow the 'master narrative' trajectory offered by the museum, and experienced subtle changes in identity perception on HK *vis-à-vis* Mainland China after visiting. These scholars were primarily critical of how governmental

[5] Shenzhen Museum is a state museum set up by the mainland Chinese government in Shenzhen, a 'Special Economic Zone' bordering HK. See O'Donnell et al (2017) for detailed analysis of the city of Shenzhen.

museums in HK increasingly resembled governmental mouthpieces, and thus failed to address the contentious issues that troubled the relationship between Beijing and HK people. Interestingly, the above arguments contrasted with what Rodner and Preece (2015) concluded – that HKMA had 'sold itself out' and became a mouthpiece for economic rather than political interests. They criticised the business-centred approach of HKMA in its blockbuster exhibition with Louis Vuitton (2009), which blurred the line between art and commerce. Although the exhibition was a logical and successful endeavour to entice the culture-shy public into the museum, it also relinquished its meaning-making power, and placed itself in a role of servitude to the neoliberal economic forces, to become a holding place more similar to a shop than a museum.[6]

These arguments inform my subsequent discussions in the chapter. To begin with, I will trace the origin and development of government museums in HK, highlighting the changing role they play in HK society. As the authorities have started renovating such exhibitions since the early 2010s, it is a perfect opportunity to study the (re)representations and (re)making of history and heritage in light of the changing political, social and economic conditions. I will then look at how new governmental museums are developed, before analysing the distinct characteristics of governmental museums.

2.1 Government Involvement in Museums in HK

Museums in Colonial HK: From 'laissez-faire' to active involvement

Before delving into the specific roles of the Government in the contemporary museum sector, it is essential to understand the historical background and development

[6] There is a long history of the cross-over between shops and museums, see eg. Walter Benjamin (2002) The Arcades Project.

of museums in HK. The development of modern museums – both in the imperial metropolis and colonies at the peripheries – has been intrinsically linked to colonialism.[7] The British Empire is an especially good example: museums have been seen as a key institution and part of the apparatus of good colonial governance. They are repositories for information and the homes of various academic and scientific disciplines in documenting the colonised land and its peoples (e.g. Cohn 1996; Hevia 2003; Guha-Thakuta 2004; MacKenzie 2009; Mathur and Singh 2015; Prakash 1994' Richards 1993). In HK, government involvement in museums could be traced back to the early days of the colony. Before British colonisation, HK was only a minor fishing village with no substantial buildings of any sort, let alone a modern museum-like institution.[8] Alongside the development of the city of HK with the creation of administrative structures and an infrastructure to support this burgeoning built environment, the first museum in HK was founded by British colonists in 1873 at the City Hall (Fig. 2.1), where the city's civic centre was located. Simply known as the 'City Hall Museum', it remained the only public museum in the Colony until the 1950s.[9] The nature of the museum was ambiguous as it was governed by the quasi-official City Hall committee, which was, like the building, mostly subscribed by European inhabitants of the Colony. Thus, together with the theatre and library in the City Hall, the museum represented a 'western', Victorian way of cultural life. As a part of the 'colonial architecture', this museum was akin to British 'municipal museums', which were simultaneously 'improvers' of working class, tools to bring civic pride and reputation to town, and central to regulating social and cultural fabric of

[7] See for example Karp and Levine eds. (1991), N. Thomas (1994), MacKenzie (2009), D. Thomas ed (2010) on museums and colonialism. See also Chapter 1 for detailed discussion on this subject.
[8] See chapters 1, 3 for discussions on HK history and ancestral halls' museum characteristics respectively.
[9] Although some other local institutions like the Bacteriological Institute (HK Government 1910: L61), King's College (HK Government 1926: O11) and St Mary's School (HK Government 1940: O19) also tried to set up museums, they were of private nature and closed to the public.

Victorian urban society (Hill 2005). To play its role, the British Colonial Government in HK provided financial support to this institution. As early as 1868, before the museum was established, HK Governor R.G. MacDonnell was "anxious to support any scheme likely to secure a Museum and Library at the City Hall" (HK Government 1880: 728), and records showed the City Hall Museum and Library received an annual grant of $1,200 from the local colonial government from its establishment through to the 1910s (HK Legislative Council 1904: 351). They were by no means the only stakeholder or sole proprietor of the City Hall but it was a collaborative effort between the government and the civil society. In its early days, the curators and subscribers of the City Hall were all Europeans, so it was organised in line with prominent 'western' philosophies at the time like Darwinian evolutionism, and with an explicit interest in collecting the natural and 'indigenous' 'specimens', or artefacts, of the Far East (The China Review 1876: 72). The museum had a broad, regional, and almost encyclopaedic focus instead of a more restricted and local scope. This remained unchanged until its final days, as by the 1920-30s a report noted that its exhibits were "not very extensive and of a miscellaneous nature" (Museums Association 1934).



Fig. 2.1. The first museum in HK at City Hall opened in 1873 (Wright and Cartwright eds. 1908: 162)

Owing to what were perceived by colonial settlers as "unpleasant habits and appearances", ethnic Chinese were actively excluded from visiting the museum until 1881 (The Colonial Office, CO 129/192, 1881: 443).[10] From 1881 until the 1900s however, it was fairly well-visited by the local population, and there were even records of school visits (HK Legislative Council 1892: 103; 1906: 476). Although the museum was designed by Europeans for their cultural life in the colony away from home, compared with the library in the same building which was chiefly used by Europeans, by the early twentieth century the museum was in fact mainly visited by Chinese inhabitants of HK (Wright and Cartright eds. 1908: 162; HK Legislative Council 1910: 19).[11] Unfortunately, by the 1920s, the museum was criticised as being ill-managed and ill-attended (HK Legislative Council 1922: 147; 1929: 198). A report prepared by the Museum Association (1934) in Britain stated that HK "represent[ed] the low-water mark of museum provision in the British Empire". The museum was finally closed in 1932, when the City Hall was demolished (HK Government 1932: 486-487). At this point, urged by its legislators who proclaimed that it was "no longer a matter for private enterprise [but] a matter for the Government" (HK Legislative Council 1922: 132), the Government took over its collections and acted on the recommendations of a Commission to start planning for a new colonial museum in a rebuilt City Hall. Significantly, the new museum was to be "confined to HK and Chinese interest" and to avoid being another "repository for odds and ends from every corner of the globe" (The Colonial Office, CO 129/569/10, 1938: 10-11). In other words, a 'universal' museum in the style of the British Museum was deemed

[10] Since then, a separate morning time slot was allocated to Chinese visitors while collections were also labelled in Chinese. It should be noted that the exclusion of local indigenous populace from museums was not peculiar to HK but was also experienced in British India and other parts of the British Empire.
[11] By 1908, average monthly Chinese and non-Chinese visitors of the museum being about 29,321 and 844 respectively (Wright and Cartright eds. 1908: 162), which was around 11% and 8% of the total Chinese and non-Chinese population at the time (Hong Kong Government 1908: N2).

unsuitable for HK. Since then and until now museums developed in HK have mostly been culturally specific: related to the city and to local Chinese culture. However, this plan was never realised due to the "slump in business and property values" (The Colonial Office, CO 129/559/12, 1936: 6) and the onset of the Second World War.

The British colonial government's 'laissez-faire' museum policy carried on following the brief Japanese military occupation during the Second World War (1941-1945). As HK was primarily known as a commercial centre rather than a cultural one, the general lack of cultural institutions in HK was criticised by scholars like philosopher Tang Jungyi, who, arriving in HK from mainland China to seek political refuge from communist persecution in 1949, found HK "meaningless" and a "historically empty place". He commented that HK was a city where culture could not be experienced since "no notable libraries, museums, academic symposia or societies [could] be found [but only] traded goods" (Fröhlich 2017: 71). Waves of migration from mainland China following the Chinese Civil War as well as influences from the communist political movements such as the Cultural Revolution put further pressure on the post-war society and led to several riots and social instabilities in the 1950-60s. From the 1960s onwards, numerous socio-political reforms were carried out by the government to cope with the rising internal demand for public services and the external pressure towards decolonisation. The establishment of the City Museum and Art Gallery (CMAG) in 1962 marked the beginning of active government involvement in museum development in HK. Similar to the 1930s report, the Colonial Secretary, a European colonial official, decided that CMAG should focus on local interests instead of being encyclopaedic.[12] It was housed in the City Hall

[12] The Colonial Secretary wrote in 1959, that "[t]he Art Gallery should contain works of art in all fields … which should either be of particular local interest historically … or be the work of local artists … illustrating the general development of art in China, as this is fundamental to one side of the local culture" (Burgess 1959: 1).

and managed by a government Museum Select Committee who favoured art more than history (Fig. 2.2). As then curator Mr Ho Ching Hin reminisced,

> *"The Museum then was still administered in ways similar to small English towns, where the local museum and public library were lumped together as an attachment to the city hall. … both the exhibition and storage facilities were inadequate, and the few history or ethnography exhibitions had to wait for their turn after other art exhibitions." (Ho 2005)*





Fig. 2.2. (Left) The City Museum and Art Gallery in 1963 (HKU collections)
Fig. 2.3. (Right) HK Museum of History at Star House, 1976 (Ho, K. 2005)

Towards the 1970s, as the economy of HK improved, the government was able to expand and diversify its museum and cultural services. The rapid economic development also led to the rise of an educated middle-class in HK, which encouraged the development of the local cultural scene (cf. Bourdieu 1984). Nevertheless, as an aftermath of the politically motivated riots in the 1950-60s, HK government's adopted an arm's length principle to try 'not to offend anybody'. Its reactive cultural policy would offer short-term consultation and support only when the culture and art circles made explicit requests (Ho 2017: 59-60). The 1970s to 1997 saw the establishment of a further thirteen museum-like government institutions under the Urban Council in urban areas and Regional Council in the New Territories.[13] In the 1970s, CMAG was becoming more and more popular. One of its last exhibitions, the "Early Man at Work" (April-June 1974), received

[13] In the same period, only seven museums were founded by private bodies in HK (full list in Appendix 1). the Urban Council (Regional Council in rural areas) oversaw public culture at a local level (Ho 2017: 60).

42,578 visitors during its 59-day opening period (Salmon 1974: 86, 90). In July 1975, it was split into the HK Museum of Art and the HK Museum of History. The Museum of History was essentially 'evicted' from its former premises in the City Hall and moved into a temporary rented commercial space of about 700m^2 at Star House, Tsim Sha Tsui (Fig. 2.3, previous page). The museum coexisted for some time with tourist shops that sold Chinese calligraphy and ethnic clothes, a Chinese Tea House, and even a fortune-telling stall (Ho, K. 2005). According to a research collaborator who worked as a curator at the time, this was due to the councillors being "keener on the museum of art than us museum of History, as they liked "beautiful stuffs" but looked down on subjects like history, anthropology and archaeology."[14] Nevertheless, it hosted some 30 temporary exhibitions to promote local history and culture, which attracted on average 300,000 visitors annually between 1975-82 (Ho 1988: 143).[15] In 1982-3, the Museum of History finally moved into its own premises in Kowloon Park, occupying two old structures of the former Whitfield Barracks, which housed its galleries, storage and office spaces, and a lecture hall. However, the space was still too small for a permanent exhibition, so the museum curated its own thematic temporary exhibitions as well as loaned exhibitions from mainland China and abroad. The Government provisioning of museums in this period was seen first and foremost as a social and leisure service for the public. As a government official recalled,

> *"There was no clear cultural aim or 'purpose' for the museum. The colonial government merely recognised the need to set up more exhibition spaces and put up more exhibitions, since historical events (riots and social instabilities in the 1950-60s) proved that for the society to advance holistically, culture and art services are essential."*[16]

[14] A. Ip, Interview, HK, June 2018.
[15] There is no record of past audience engagement or visitor profiles and how they may have changed over time. To my knowledge, contrary to the European-oriented 'City Hall Museum' set up in the 1873, undoubtedly the post-WW2 HK museums had HK Chinese residents as audience in mind.
[16] C.W. Ng, Interview, HK, July 2018.

This showed that, at the time, the colonial government was still under the influence of old ideas that museums were civilising and governing tools in the imperial peripheries which had particular effects on the working classes and the colonised, and could diffuse political unrest by fostering the appreciation of art (e.g. Cohn 1996; Anderson 2006; Harris 2012). [17] In this environment, a number of other major government museums were established since the 1980s, including the Space Museum (1980) and Museum of Science (1991). In addition, the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) was set up in 1976 to coordinate previously private archaeological and conservation endeavours, and gradually expanded to maintain historical buildings and sites. [18] In order to improve existing exhibitions and museum services, government museum curators were commissioned to visit other museums around the world. For the Museum of History, they finally decided that "the best formula is to have a permanent exhibition that could group together our various collections on the development of HK, as well as some thematic galleries towards the end of the exhibition that would be constantly updated as we further build up our collections."[19] With the completion of an extension building in 1989, the museum opened its first permanent exhibition *The Story of Hong Kong* which followed a timeline of its development, beginning with natural history and archaeological artefacts, moving to the section "New Territories Village Culture," [20] followed by a depiction of a turn-of-the-century urban street, and concluded with a section on the Japanese occupation and commercial products developed in HK,

[17] This is similar to Pitt Rivers' Victorian paternalism in which he hoped that 'evolution rather than revolution' would be the result of his museum in Oxford (cf. Gosden et al 2007).
[18] While similar institutions might have existed in other parts of the Empire, like India, in the 19th century, archaeological efforts were in the hands of amateur archaeologists (e.g. missionaries) and universities until the 1970s. The first major archaeological excavation in HK was carried out in the 1955, when a 2000-year-old, Han-dynasty ancient tomb was accidentally discovered in a construction site. It was then excavated by members of the HK University under supervision of Professor F.S. Drake, then head of Chinese Department.
[19] A. Ip, Interview, HK, June 2018.
[20] Display includes an interior of a farmer's house, a portion of a junk, and display cases filled with nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century clothing.

ultimately celebrating HK's "much-vaunted entrepreneurial spirit" (Watson 1998: 173).[21] The exhibition's emphasis was on the "development of HK from a fishing village to an important metropolis" while the "people and life of HK (made) up the central theme" (HKMH 1991: 25). Scholarly reception towards this permanent exhibition was fairly positive. For example, Taiwanese scholar Xu (1996: 3) praised the museum's objectivity in interpreting HK history despite the exhibition was developed under the British colonial government, although he remained sceptical whether this neutrality could be maintained through the handover under communist Chinese influence. With further democratisation and localisation of HK towards the end of British colonial era, it was planned that the museum would be redeveloped in the years of political transition to prepare for the handover. With a unique history in which HK mediated cross-cultural contacts between China and the 'west', there is a hybridity in HK museum models – 'western'/ colonial vs. HK Chinese/ local – which we will investigate in the following chapters.

While this first permanent exhibition laid the foundation for subsequent development of the museum as well as provided an officially sanctioned historical narrative, the museum management attitude and curatorial approach was very different from now. A government curator reminisced, "Museums in the 1980-90s were definitely more passive as we reckoned that visitors would naturally be drawn in with our professional and high-quality exhibitions. We did not care about 'selling' our exhibition to the public or … even visitor numbers. We reckoned that it was the visitors' own loss if they chose not to visit our museums. In retrospect, we were a bit arrogant and condescending" (Chan in Dao 2019). It was precisely because of the high-handed attitude that a museum-going culture did not develop, and public response was mediocre. The

[21] Most of these sections and scenes were reused in the second permanent exhibition of the museum, which was unveiled in 2000 in a new purpose-built building on Chatham Road.

government curators soon learnt their lesson and became more proactive and engaging in their exhibitions and public programmes. Nevertheless, as we will see in the following chapters, the perpetuation of civil service mindset was one of the reasons why government museums still failed to engage with the local context. Could this have motivated private individuals and institutions to set up their own museums?

The Postcolonial Museum Development

Since the handover in 1997, museums have served different purposes for the new regime. The previous colonial aims of cultural and heritage policy, such as increasing public awareness of HK history and promoting civic-mindedness so as to counter the renewed and politicised local interest in Chinese affairs, become obsolete (Carroll 2005a). Replacing these aims are the postcolonial needs to use history to define and celebrate HK's new cultural and political status while also promoting HK as a vital part of China as well as to forge and redirect the sense of locality and belonging within the framework of (mainland) Chinese nationalism devised by Beijing (Carroll 2005a). Although the museum and heritage sector in HK is still mainly supported by the government, it is increasingly shared by non-governmental organisations like the HK Jockey Club, which has the financial capability to fund projects, or heritage-focused charities like The Conservancy Association. [22] The private sphere has been gradually 'catching up', demonstrated by an ever-increasing number of non-government private museums set up since the 2000s. This is perhaps due to an increasing 'museum-mindedness' (Kreps 2003: x, 23), which is in part attributed to what Ng (2009: 45) terms 'societal nostalgia' and 'desire for history' in HK in the late 1990s, fuelled by the fear of cultural as well as

[22] The Jockey Club and Conservancy Association are non-government organisations in HK.

historical obsolescence.[23] I shall explore the reasons for the rise of non-government, private museums in HK in the next few chapters through a number of case studies.

To further centralise museum coordination efforts, the Leisure and Cultural Service Department (LCSD) was established by the HKSAR government in 2000, which took over all museums formerly managed by the Urban and Regional Councils (Table 2.1). In addition, various government departments have realised the usefulness of museums and galleries in cultivating public interest and transmitting HK government policy information. As a result, a number of departmental museums have been set up as 'tools of governance' (Fig. 2.4).[24] Realising the positive impacts on cultural tourism, local councils have also endeavoured to establish museum-like exhibition halls and galleries to highlight local traditions, the latest of which being the *Fa Pau Exhibition Hall* (花炮展覽館, Fig. 2.5) which explains local traditions related to floral shrine and *Tin Hau* Temple in 2013.[25] Operating its own historic monument grading system separate from the mainland China, the HK government, through the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO), plays the leading role in deciding what (and what not) to preserve, and is inclined to 'revitalise' such monuments into cultural and social-economic projects.[26] Although the government traditionally has focused on tangible heritage like historic buildings, archaeological sites and material collections, an intangible heritage office was set up under the AMO to preserve local intangible cultural heritage in the mid-2000s. As of

[23] For detailed discussion on museum-mindedness refer to section 2.2.3.
[24] Departmental galleries are set up by disciplined forces, the Home Affairs Bureau, Housing Authority, Department of Health, Civil Aviation Department, Urban Renewal Authority, and Planning Department.
[25] Tourism in HK started in the very early days of the Colony (Hurley 1897) It is more "Chinese" than mainland China, where 'western' tourist could travel to and get a glimpse of the 'old' China that was no longer available (Carroll 2005: 79). It is one of the most important industries in HK now.
[26] In mainland China, the PRC Ministry of Culture and State Administration of Cultural Heritage issue regulations guiding the implementation of the Cultural Relics Protection Law. The Ministry of Public Security, General Administration of Customs, and the State Administration for Industry and Commerce also take part in cultural heritage matters by setting up special administrations and museums at local levels. Offices for the protection of cultural relics are grassroots organs to conserve and administer local archaeological sites and artefacts. (Hoffman ed. 2006: 499-500; Lau 2011).

March 2020, museums and heritage sites managed by the AMO include the HK Heritage Discovery Centre (Fig. 2.6), Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery (to be discussed in Chapter 3), Wun Yiu Exhibition Hall as well as seven Heritage Trails that link various declared monuments, archaeological sites and historic architectures. To improve accessibility, information panels are uploaded online for visitors who could not get to the sites.

Table 2.1. Government Museums in HK as of 2022 managed by LCSD and AMO, and under public-private partnership (Table created by Author, 2022).[27]

Name (Organisation)	**Opened in**	**Category**	**Department**
HK Museum of Art	1975 ('91)	Art	LCSD
[B] Museum of Tea Ware	1984	Art	LCSD
HK Museum of History	1975 ('98)	History	LCSD
[B] Lei Cheng Uk Han Tomb Museum	1957	History	LCSD
[B] Sheung Yiu Folk Museum	1984	Ethnology	LCSD
[B] HK Museum of Coastal Defence	2000	History	LCSD
[B] Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum	2006	History	LCSD
[B] Fireboat Grantham Gallery	2007	History	LCSD
HK Space Museum	1980	Science	LCSD
HK Science Museum	1991	Science	LCSD
HK Heritage Museum	2000	Ethnology	LCSD
[B] HK Railway Museum	1985	History	LCSD
[B] Sam Tung Uk Museum	1987	Ethnology	LCSD
[B] Law Uk Folk Museum	1990	Ethnology	LCSD
HK Film Archive	2001	Art	LCSD
HK Heritage Discovery Centre	2005	Archaeology	AMO
Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery	2007	Ethnology	AMO
M+ Museum	2021	Art	PPP
Hong Kong Palace Museum	2022	Art	PPP

[27] [B] – Branch Museums; The HK Museum of Art and Museum of History were relocated several times, their current buildings were opened in 1991 and 1998 respectively.







Fig. 2.4. (Top Left) HK City Gallery, Planning Department (Photo by Author, 2018)

Fig. 2.5. (Top Right) Fa Pau Exhibition Hall, Home Affairs Department (Photo by Author, 2018)

Fig. 2.6. (Bottom Left) HK Heritage Discovery Centre, Antiquities and Monuments Office (Photo by Author, 2018)

The postcolonial development of the HK government museums is marked by continued professionalisation and increasing connection with the international museum community, both in terms of standards and agenda. As a senior government official commented, "since the 1990s … the [museum] profession have sought to align their mission and code of ethics with that of museums in the 'west' – that museums are institutions that collect, research, educate and conserve artefacts."[28] This matches with the International Council of Museums' (ICOM) definition of museums, as the LCSD museums have become members of the Council not long after. Furthermore, international museum consultancies are involved in planning the HK government

[28] C.W. Ng. Interview, HK, Jul 2018.

museums, while the LCSD has organised annual International Museum Day since 2001 and two Museum Summits in HK in 2017 and 2019. As a European museum professional currently working in HK remarked, the museum sector in HK was "developing so quickly" and he was "excited to be here to [cast] a much bigger impact on the local art scene and museum industry (sic)".[29] As the HK government realise the importance of museums in furthering the city's cultural capital and 'soft power', they are committed to maintaining a leading role in local museum development as they announced the M+ (Contemporary Art) and HK Palace Museum projects, albeit in a new management approach. Moreover, as the permanent exhibitions of existing museums remain unchanged over the years and are becoming increasingly obsolete (Dimache et al 2017; Huang 2017; Weng 2017), the last decade has seen the HK government initiating a complete overhaul of the permanent exhibitions in the Museums of Art, Science, Heritage, and History. Public engagement is stressed in this process, and the latest display techniques and museum design concepts are used. The development of HKMH deserves special scrutiny as its development reveals the relationship between museums, coloniality and identity construction as well as the politics of and power-relationships embedded in representations.

HK Museum of History (HKMH)

To prepare for relocation to its present premises in 1999, HKMH partnered with international museum consultancy Andre & Knowlton Associates (Ting and Ng 2004: 10) and Verner Johnson since the early 1990s to plan for its first permanent exhibition, *The Hong Kong Story*. A purpose-built museum building (Fig. 2.7) and accompanying exhibit

[29] F. Knothe, Interview, HK, Sep 2018. The term 'museum industry' is used in HK is synonymous to 'museum sector' or 'museum scene'. For example, the HKSAR government officially recognised the status of 'cultural and creative industries' in the 2000s including archive and museum services (Ho 2017: 65). See Ho (2017) for comprehensive discussion.

design concepts for the new permanent exhibition were developed and tailored by Canadian exhibit designer Jean Jacques Andre (Verner Johnson 2016). This could be seen as part of a global shift in which 'starchitects' and transnational design companies were competing for museum projects worldwide and the modernist museum would become a global brand. However, after the British left in 1997, the Provisional Urban Council declared the previously agreed project unsatisfactory. The HKSAR authorities realised the need to construct a new narrative of the past, one that should downplay colonial influence and emphasise cultural and historical unity with the 'motherland'. As then councillor Annie Wu proclaimed: "There are two versions of history … the British version, and the Chinese version. Now that HK has been reunited with the motherland, we should adopt the Chinese version of history to show our gratitude" (Sala 1999: 63).



Fig. 2.7. Exterior view of the Hong Kong Museum of History (LCSD 2021).

After a consensus was reached, the exhibition opened in 2000. It resembled a 'time tunnel' that outlined the natural environment, folk culture and historical development of HK from the Devonian period 400 million years ago up to the handover in 1997. This mode of representation subsumed and reduced British colonial period into just a short

interruption of the Chinese history of HK. "Cleverly shunning a romanticised discourse of important social events under British colonial rule" (Jiang 2009: 14), the museum attributed HK's successful modernisation and development into a world-class metropolis to its citizen's so-called 'Lion Rock spirit'. The 'spirit' includes core values and qualities that HK people agree with, such as assiduousness, resilience, flexibility, perseverance and solidarity.[30] The exhibition went to great lengths to highlight the continuous presence of China in HK, especially the close connection between the greater "Han" culture and the native one in HK, so as to incorporate HK's past into China's national history (Ng 2009: 48). For example, local "ethnic" material culture became part of an assertion of Chinese national identity. However, opinion surveys (2008: 227, 2011: 19. 2013: 25) recurrently showed that visitors pay more attention to the more locally-focused and contemporary galleries, and their favourite were "Folk Culture in HK" and "Birth and Early Growth of the City". Featuring over 4,000 exhibits, 750 graphic panels, and several dioramas and multimedia programmes, the exhibition had eight galleries spread over two floors.[31] In terms of display methods, it relied heavily on recreated historical scenes that had disappeared when the city was modernised. With *fin-de-siècle* Chinese ancestral halls, and medicine and pawn shops faithfully rebuilt, visitors could immerse themselves in the period and "participate in history" (Chiang 2008: 91). This immersive panorama and spectacle were highly attractive to visitors as they could walk into history (cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991). Equipped with special audio-visual and lighting effects when visitors entering the scenes, the exhibition provided a multisensory visiting

[30] The term 'Lion Rock spirit' stems from a popular 1970s television drama entitled 'Below the Lion Rock', which was named after one of HK's iconic landmarks, the Lion Rock (Hill). The series dramatised how the poorest families who lived in the public housing estates and squatter huts below the Lion Rock persevered and worked hard to the rebuild HK in the aftermath of the Second World War. See Mak (2013)'s doctoral thesis for detailed analyses of the 'Lion Rock spirit' and identity formation in HK.

[31] Just like entering a time-travel tunnel, each thematic gallery traces the chronological development of HK.

experience which aimed to trigger visitors' memories or imagination of the past (Su et al 2009: 105). At the time, the exhibition was a 'pioneer in the field' and presented history so innovatively that

> *"a lot of mainland Chinese museum curators visited the exhibition and imitated its presentation style of an 'immersive past' featuring replicas and street scenes. I remember attending a National Cultural Heritage Administration meeting in mainland China in the 2000s when administrators were reminded not to copy such presentation style anymore to avoid museums in mainland China 'all looking alike'."*[32]







Fig. 2.8. (Top), Fig. 2.9. (Bottom Left) Similar recreated primitive fishing scenes could be seen in both HKMH (Top) and Yantai Museum (煙台市博物館; Bottom Left, constructed 2007-09) (Chan 2016b: 53).
Fig. 2.10. (Bottom Right) Recreated street scenes seen at Kai Ping Museum (Photo by Author, 2018).

[32] A. Yau, Interview, Shatin, June 2018.

As another government curator said, "this affirms HK's position as a 'window' for China"[33] – not only in trade, but also in museum development. Li (2008) was one of the mainland Chinese museum workers who saw HKMH as a 'breakthrough'. For her, the exhibition demonstrated that quotidian and ethnological objects could also be under the museum spotlight.[34] Today, the main mission of HKMH is to "collect, preserve, research, and interpret collections illustrating the history of HK and South China" (HKMH/LCSD 2020a).[35] Openness, creativity and 'focus on people' are among the many values the museum claims to embrace (HKMH/LCSD 2020a). Nevertheless, as public opinion holds that the current permanent exhibition is increasingly outdated, it fails to attract returning local visitors (Tse and Lau 2011: 35-37; Chan 2015: 628). As an ex-government curator has reminded me, government museums are constantly fighting for resources amongst themselves and with other departments, so lobbying the government to fund a complete overhaul of the exhibition is no easy task.[36] Since 2018, a new permanent exhibition for HKMH is being planned, and is scheduled to be completed by 2022. To achieve this, the Museum has initiated a consultation exercise since 2015 with museum experts, docents and educational, youth and academic organisations (LCSD 2020). According to its online updates (HKMH/ LCSD 2020), the museum vows to bring about a "brand new museum-going experience", by adopting a "people-oriented" approach, covering people from all walks of life irrespective of gender, age, profession and nationality. It also plans to use innovative ways and new technologies to present artefacts. Notably, the museum has

[33] Chau, Interview, Shatin, June 2018.
[34] From my observations during fieldwork new museums in mainland China, such as Yantai Museum (Fig. 2.9) and the recently renovated Kai Ping Municipal Museum (Fig. 2.10) continue to adopt a similar mode of representation by constructing replicas and street scenes (Fig. 2.9, see also Sui 2016, Chan 2016b).
[35] By 2004 the museum has already built up a collection of over 84,000 items which are classified as natural history, archaeology, ethnography, and local history collections (HKMH/LCSD 2004; HKMH/LCSD 2020b). Refer to Chapter 5 for discussion on the impact of government museum's inflexible acquisition criteria.
[36] A. Ip, Interview, HK, June 2018.

carried out extensive research and artefact collection campaigns to acquire "fragile memories" and stories of HK people from all walks of life to reflect changes that the society has undergone, and also to add a more 'human touch' to the exhibition.[37] The museum also seeks to establish a collaborating relationship with local collectors by inviting them to share their collections. Remarkably, a teacher has observed that the museum is "paying close attention to make sure that the new exhibition is useful to schools and adaptable to their curriculum".[38] All of these measures could be seen as responses to public demand for more 'humanistic' museums and the trend already prevalent in private museums like the HKMM, whose exhibitions and display methods are more updated.

In terms of contents, the new exhibition promises to take visitors on a journey through time, reliving major historical moments but also covering lighter topics that would rekindle childhood and collective memories of HK people, depict social trends and narrate changes in people's livelihood in terms of clothing, food, housing, transportation, entertainment and education. The new exhibition also aims to reflect on the changing relationship between HK and mainland China. More specifically, it will explore HK's role in maritime trade and coastal defence during the Ming and Qing dynasties, HK Chinese people of pre-war lower and middle classes, Mainland-HK relations since the founding of 'New China' in 1949, as well as Chinese and 'western' festivals celebrated in HK. A series of thematic galleries will be embedded in the exhibition, in which unprecedented focus is to be placed on non-Chinese communities who have helped to build HK, and overseas Chinese communities originated from HK. They will also focus on achievements of veteran politicians who have left their marks in the development of HK and shed light on

[37] Lee, Interview, Aug 2018, HK. 'Human touch' was mentioned by a research collaborator, Mathias Lee, who curated an amateur museum. See chapter 5 for the case study.
[38] Tan, Interview, HK, Jun 2018.

the relationship between climate change and social development. These themes will be changed periodically, introducing the 'novelty' elements that local HK visitors demand. Thus, the new way of presenting and representing HK is more diverse than the previous exhibition. According to a research collaborator who has attended a consultation meeting, "it's not just like this is how the government sees or want to see HK", as the museum seeks to engage with "minority communities … [who would not only] bring in a wealth of oral histories, artefacts and documents … but also [act as] long-term guardians of the projects … [and help develop] a more community-minded collection."[39] Through the new exhibition, the museum hopes to illustrate HK people's diverse and complex sense of identification, demonstrate their perseverance and adaptability, and emphasise HK as a city of cultural diversity. In fact, after 20 years of attempted cultural and political assimilation, the relationship between HK and mainland China has worsened, as evidenced by several large-scale, prolonged demonstrations in 2014, 2016 and 2019 resulted from heightened political tensions and public dissatisfaction. It is reasonable that HKMH chooses to improve this relationship by evoking collective memory that is unique to HK while continuing to explore the intertwined destiny between HK and mainland China. It is also time for HKMH to transform into an inclusive space that celebrates diversity in recognition of HK's non-ethnic Chinese communities.

The New 'Cultural Assemblage' under 'Public-Private Partnership'

As a government official has commented, government structure has found itself "too big and far-stretched an organisation" and is gradually "shunning the previous (colonial) policy where it had a strong presence in the community".[40] It is seeking change:

[39] Knothe, Interview, HK, Sep 2018.
[40] C.W. Ng, Interview, HK, July 2018.

to become more of a "facilitator" instead of a "provider" of museum and cultural sectors (LCSD 2012: 5). As a result, the last decade saw the government trialling a new form of 'cultural assemblage' such as the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD), which among other cultural venues contains the M+ museum and the HK Palace Museum. Both museums are established on government instead of private initiative, with the former financed by the government and the latter by a private organisation, the HK Jockey Club, in terms of building and maintenance costs. Unlike conventional government museums in HK, they are excluded from the civil service and managed by independent governing bodies (WKCD) to make sure that public funds are used appropriately.[41] It is anticipated that this 'public-private partnership' model will give these museums a free-hand to follow its own course of development. However, WKCD also suffers from criticisms, such as its mainly foreign management team being removed from the inhabitants and lifestyle of HK, as well as being administratively 'top heavy' as decisions are often made without public consultation (Vigneron 2016b: 87).

The M+ Museum

As a modern and contemporary art museum dedicated to collecting, exhibiting, and interpreting visual art, design and architecture, moving image, and HK visual culture of the 20th and 21st centuries, the M+ museum aims at reflecting HK's 'unique time and place' by building on the city's historic balance of the local and international (WKCD 2020a). Its orientation, whether towards images and artefacts from HK, China or beyond, is a contentious issue, with concerns that the institution might focus too much on a 'global' vision of art and forget local art practitioners, and that it would become a political

[41] In many respects, they resemble the governing system of HK Maritime Museum, a private museum which has been financially supported by the government since 2010. See chapter 4 for detailed discussion.

scapegoat for exhibiting too much politicised art or become a bastion for Beijing to control the local art scene (Vigneron 2016b: 89-91).[42] Similarly, Qin (2015) recorded a growing feeling of 'nervousness' in HK's art community that art could potentially provoke Beijing. Compounded by political pressure and self-censorship hidden in government procedures, these contentions threaten the curatorial independence of M+. Some, including Lars Nittve, former Director of M+, argued that these problems could have been alleviated if HK had a more developed museum culture (Qin 2015). I concur with Ho (2014) that ultimately these problems are linked to the infrastructural weakness and continuing prevalent 'western'-dominated thinking in HK, including the colonial mindset, imbalance of power and disproportionate influence of 'western' curatorial practices.

The HK Palace Museum

Museums and collections in HK have always been politically charged, especially under ever-increasing Beijing influence since 1997 (Sala 1999). The Palace Museum project, involving the exhibition of treasured works of art from the Beijing Palace Museum at Forbidden City, was announced in 2016 after a deal was already struck between the HK and mainland Chinese authorities without public consultation, making it particularly controversial.[43] Critics emphasised the political considerations behind such a deal, and criticised the project serving more to further Beijing's interests in assimilating HK into its grand narrative of Chinese nationalism than local interests in rediscovering HK identity and culture (Cheung et al 2017; Liu 2017). Others argued that it could essentially be seen as a 'branch museum' of the one in Beijing, which was used to extend mainland Chinese political influence and instil a sense of Chinese patriotism in the HK public, especially when original plans for local cultural elements were scrapped to make

[42] This is a recurring problem that art museums in HK have faced from as early as 1997. For example, Kong and Mok (1997) provides a comprehensive critical review on HK Museum of Art's collections.
[43] Sun (2018)'s thesis provides a comprehensive review on the Palace Museums in Beijing, Taiwan and HK.

way for the museum (Dapiran 2017: 274-275). A government official has agreed that in "using HK as its 'window' to the world, this is bound to be the first 'exported' museum of China, who is attempting to export its museum-running model in the long run like what Guggenheim is doing".[44] 'Exported' museums and exhibitions not only create a 'labelling effect' classifying the original museums as major cultural organisations (Amsellem 2013: 48), they also help a state to establish soft power in the global arena, which undoubtedly is part of Beijing's calculations in the HK Palace Museum project.[45] Moreover, China is known for using museums as a delicate means of displaying power and creating political control, and the establishment of the Palace Museum in HK allows Beijing to bring HK into the orbit of a new power that resembles Imperial China (Sun 2018: 55-57).[46] To minimise public opposition, the new museum authorities try to downplay mainland Chinese influence. An official argued,

> *"Until now interpretations and explorations in museums have been largely dominated by 'western'-centric ideas, lots of ancient civilisations and cultures have been excluded and depreciated. I think HK, as a unique place between east and 'west', with our language and thinking system, has a space to deal with these issues. For example, with the treasured "Scroll of Five Bulls" (五牛圖), we can try to explore how the Chinese civilisation viewed bulls over the ages, how and why such views changed, how that affects our current understanding of the animal."*[47]

So, the official missions of the museum are not only to foster understanding and appreciation of Chinese art and culture, but also to promote dialogue among world cultures, connecting people's lives and experiences between the past and present through objects selected from Beijing Palace Museum's collections. In this way, it seeks to develop HK into a cultural metropolis (WKCD 2020b). The museum plans to install

[44] Chau, Interview, Shatin, Jun 2018.
[45] Before exporting museums, the Chinese state has already set up cultural organisations overseas such as the Confucius Institute. A public educational organisation under the Ministry of Education of the PRC, it is aimed at promoting Chinese language and culture internationally and facilitate cultural exchanges.
[46] See also Vickers (2007), Harris (2012) for further discussion on museums and political control in China.
[47] C.W. Ng, Interview, HK, July 2018,

thematic exhibitions that introduce visitors to the history, people and architecture of the Forbidden City, and reveal various facets of life at the imperial court as well as its vibrant art collecting culture (WKCD 2020c). However, a former government museum worker has criticised the Palace Museum,

> *"which plans to … display only borrowed collections to draw attraction, does not meet the "collection" criteria as a museum. It does not exist to preserve our heritage in HK. Simply exhibiting others' collection makes it a gallery, not a museum."*[48]

Thus, the two newest government-initiated museums to be constructed in WKCD are the HK Palace Museum that celebrates Chinese imperial heritage, which is unknown to peasants and fishermen in HK at the time, and the M+ Museum which favours contemporary Chinese art over potentially controversial local art. While no official document or correspondence is released that prove mainland Chinese intervention, it is quite apparent that all these strands of development demonstrate how the HKSAR government sees Chinese heritage as the correct heritage to be displayed in HK. To many cultural enthusiasts in HK, 'more museums are better than less', so they have to, though reluctantly, accept the fact that in postcolonial HK, local HK history and heritage could only claim second place. While the impacts of these museums' exhibitions and narratives remain to be seen, they are bound to be new socio-political arenas for interpreting history, inventing traditions and constructing identities in the postcolonial HK society. This is in line with the government's policy to use cultural and arts districts as landmarks for establishing HK as a creative city (Ho 2017: 67). Together with the new private museums, the government envisages that they would stimulate growth of the cultural sector, add diversity, and offer new opportunities for collaboration between museums (LCSD 2016:

[48] A. Ip, Interview, June 2018; see also The Stand News 2017.

13). These projects also show the government's continued interest in taking a leading role in HK's developing museum sector as well as acting as a patron of art and history.[49]

To set a foundation for the discussion of three non-government museum cases in the next chapters, I will highlight several general observations on HK government museums and their characteristics.

2.2. Postcolonial Development under Mainland China's Influence

As museums are ideological institutions, they could be used to build up national identity, interpret a nation's history, portray a certain national image, and thus shape the society's understanding of itself and future development. Although the operation of HK government museums along with the city's political system are separate from mainland China, there are signs that they are being subtly influenced by HK government needs, which in turn are influenced by the Beijing government and its national goals. On the surface, HK government intervention in the museum sector is minimal compared with mainland China. For government museums, only a universal set of 'Museums Regulation', first enacted in 1983, is in place governing their use and maintenance (HK E-legislation 2020).

Despite the petition of HK Curators Association since the early 2000s, there is still no museum law or registration system in HK, so non-government museums are unregulated.[50] Senior government official C.W. Ng (2014: 24) has explained that there is no definitive policy guide from the government to direct the museums in its curation, since government policy is relatively lenient under the legacy of their (previous) "passive, so-called 'laissez-faire' cultural policy", which "leaves it to individual government

[49] Funding for all these projects is raised locally in HK and has nothing to do with the Beijing government.
[50] The Association is a quasi-union, unofficial organisation formed by mostly government museum curators.

museums for their own direction and development" while "their social purpose … is still being figured out." However, scholars like Ho (2017: 67) has argued that following the 1997 handover the postcolonial HK government has actually adopted a seemingly laissez-faire policy orientation to conceal its true cultural policy direction: to recapture the power of cultural governance. The latter narrative is more convincing as a former front-line government curator has revealed that, when choosing exhibition topics,

> *"government museums would think about the purpose of holding such exhibition - such as the need to collaborate with the National Antiquities Commission (of mainland China), whether there is some specific message we need to get across or specific target to achieve, like if a certain high-ranking official would like to hold such exhibition …"*[51]

In fact, immediately following the handover, the first Chief Executive of the new HKSAR government Mr Tung Chee-hwa stressed the need for HK people to learn and adopt Chinese culture.[52] Naturally, the first goal of postcolonial government museums in their 5-year plan was "to actively promote the public's understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture and heritage" (Urban Council 1997: 12). With this "important mission" in mind (Ting 2005: 68), since 1998 HKMH started to introduce artefacts from the 'motherland' and organise yearly special exhibitions on different themes of Chinese culture and history (Ting 2011: 9, Table 2.3). Government policy, and hence museum curation, then follows the principles that HK is connected to mainland China through culture and Chinese culture is a basis for interpreting HK culture (Ho 2017: 63-66). More recent annual missions of HKMH illustrate the continuation of this policy. They change from subtle statements like "(to) promote inquiry, interpretation and understanding of the history of HK" (LCSD 2013: 32) and "to promote an understanding of local history to

[51] K. Chu, Interview, HK, Sep 2018.
[52] Mr Tung said, "as we face the historical change of being reunited with China, for every individual there is a gradual process of getting to know Chinese history and culture, so as to achieve a sense of belonging" (Clarinet, October 16, 1997; quoted in Watson 1998: 175).

enrich people's identity and enrich people's cultural lives" (LCSD 2014: 32) to increasingly blatant statements like "to promote better understanding of Chinese history (including but not limited to local history) that enhances HK people's awareness of their identity" (sic, LCSD 2015: 56). As a result, out of a total of 26 special temporary exhibitions (Table 2.3) organised by the HK Museum of History in the past five years (2014-2019), half of them (13) focused on mainland China while approximately one third of them (9) had a HK focus. The government initiative to establish the HK Palace Museum is another example of this agenda. It is apparent that the government is trying to introduce Chinese heritage and culture that is alien to many in HK, emphasising the ties between HK and China, in order to accelerate decolonisation and achieve further cultural integration. Nevertheless, individual curators try to make exhibitions with an explicit mainland Chinese focus more relevant to HK people. A government curator explained,

> *"for the Chaozhou wood engraving exhibition (2018) we collaborated with the Guangdong Provincial Museums, we tried to link the exhibits with the Chaozhou diaspora in HK, hoping that visitors could better relate the exhibitions with their daily lives and the multicultural HK society." (Cheung in Dao 2019)*

This shows how some exhibitions could be decontextualised, and that extra efforts are needed to make them relevant and interesting to the majority of the HK population. The history, identity and culture of HK is constructed primarily on a precarious balance of embracement between the East and 'west', and innovation and tradition. As Watson has rightly pointed out (1998: 175-176), museums and heritage are important elements in the campaign to claim and retain the "special status" of HK in the postcolonial era – it is different because it is an "advanced commercial centre operating at the cutting edge of the world capitalist system, while at the same time it preserves elements of a bucolic, traditional culture that has long since disappeared across the border in socialist China". With increased numbers of propaganda exhibitions in the last 5 years (see table 2.3) like

"*The Road to Modernisation – 70 Years of the PR of China*", "*HKSARG's Celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the Reform and Opening Up of the Country*" (2018), and "*Exhibition of the 25th Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Basic Law of the HKSAR*" (2015), it appears that the HKSAR government museums are 'pledging loyalty' to the mainland Chinese regime. Even the seemingly straightforward and informational special exhibitions like "*Majesty of All Under Heaven: Eternal Realm of China's First Emperor*" (2012) were subtly infused with messages that encouraged local HK residents to embrace their Chineseness. For example, the three interactive, multi-media displays positioned at the beginning of the special exhibition symbolically constructed a notion of HK identity as unified with Chinese identity, while the exhibits reflected an existing national discourse about China's power and grandeur in its history of unification and hence encouraged visitors to physically embody and perform that such unification (Gruber 2014: 150-151). That explains why many are fearing that soon HK will follow the footsteps of mainland China in that publicly-funded museums are required to follow strict ideological guidelines (Vigneron 2016b: 96).

It must be stressed, though, that HK government museums' focus on Chinese art, history and archaeology were established in the colonial era as early as the 1960s.[53] Back then, the Colonial Secretary, Director of Urban Services, chairman of the Museum and Art Gallery Select Committee as well as the curators of the CMAG were all Europeans (MAG 11/64 in HKRS41-1-10205-1, 1965: 177), who themselves might be interested in collecting Chinese 'curiosities'. Their decision to focus on the Chinese aspect of HK heritage could be seen as an extension of colonial mindset of being custodian of a fading

[53] The City Hall Manager decided that the archaeological collection to show "the extent and achievement of Chinese culture", while the ethnographic collection should reflect the "life and environment of the local indigenous farming and fishing population … before these matters changes beyond recognition" (Document 8' in HKRS 163-9-78, 1963: 1-2). This reflects a 'salvage ethnography' attitude prevalent in colonial HK.

Chinese culture, and derived from their colonial, orientalist worldview of interpreting Chinese culture. Nevertheless, this matches up with Beijing government's preoccupation with Chineseness. So conveniently, the HK Chinese officials and curators of the postcolonial HKSAR government extend and re-appropriate the pre-existing focus on Chinese culture to increase their ruling legitimacy and further Chinese national goals like patriotism and nationalism. As such, many of my research collaborators, who are all cultural and historical enthusiasts in HK, find it disappointing that government museums have overlooked local HK art, history and culture. Frustrated by this, some therefore go on to establish their own museum-like institutions that focus on HK heritage and collective memory. I will explore this kind of museum-like institutions in postcolonial HK in detail in chapter 5.

2.3. Professional and Resourceful, but Restricted and Bureaucratic

Although some government curators strive to make museum exhibitions more relevant to HK locals, it is not always possible; one significant restraint of government museums is that, although more professional and resourceful, they are less flexible. As government museums are publicly funded, they must justify the use of resources and ensure exhibitions are appropriate and beneficial to most of the public. They do not have the freedom enjoyed by non-government museums, which "can do whatever they want – they make their own experience … (can) afford to take risks … (have) no boxes to tick and no requirements to fulfil."[54] As government curators in HK are civil servants with a more secure career, in case of conflicts of ideas it is unlikely that they would risk jeopardising their own career prospects to uphold curatorial freedom. "Curators are only responsible

[54] Knothe, Interview, HK, Sep 2018.

for 'carrying out orders' under pre-set exhibition frameworks," claimed a government curator.[55] Others have spoken of how government curators are conscious of "making sure history and artefacts are interpreted 'correctly' and being sensitive with the use of words, and even colour scheme in the design" (cf. Kratz 2011).[56] As civil servants, government curators must follow government narrative and any cultural agenda, hidden or apparent. While there are no reports of self-censorship happening, the degree of curatorial freedom enjoyed by government curators is questionable. As a result, a former curator

> *"opened a gift shop shortly after [she] resigned from the government museum, as [she] wanted to have that 'curatorial freedom' – the liberty of choosing where and how to display [her] 'products'. [she] would care about how [her] customers, like visitors, thought of [her] 'exhibition', from which [she] gather a sense of satisfaction. These are all qualities [she] could not get in government museums - you do what you are told to. You do not get to choose the exhibition theme, … your boss would tell you how you curate them. You follow the instructions."*[57]

The former curator's experience is an example of explicit government control of curatorial practice in HK. Despite recommendations from an international consultancy report (Lord & DTT 2003: 7) for the HK Government to keep an arm's length from its museums on resource allocation, staff, and procurement flexibility, as well as to forge more direct connections with the community and other stakeholders, the current management model is still very much top-down and inflexible. The LCSD publishes its corporate business plans and lists of annual goals every year, which government museums then must follow. For example, on the occasion of the Beijing Olympics in 2008, all government museums curated Olympics-themed special exhibitions (Su et al 2009: 105). This explains why HKMH has put up more and more Chinese-themed special exhibitions over the past 5 years (table 2.3), as it is the Department's directive "to stimulate our audiences to explore the history of China and the rest of the world" (LCSD

[55] P. Tong, Interview, HK, Oct 2018.
[56] A. Yau, Interview, HK, Jun 2018.
[57] K. Chu, Interview, HK, Jul 2018.

2017: 42). As a result, qualities that help improve museums such as creativity, flexibility, diversity, dynamism, engagement, innovation, and in some cases 'risk-taking' are prone to be compromised in favour of political correctness and perceived professionalism.[58]

Year	Exhibition Title	Focus
2019	*Glistening Treasures in the Dust – Ancient Artefacts of Afghanistan*	Foreign
	The Road to Modernisation – 70 Years of the PR of China	China
2018	*Gilded Glory: Chaozhou Woodcarving*	China
	HKSARG's Celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the Reform and Opening Up of the Country: 'Joint Development, Shared Prosperity'	China
	Ying Wa College Bicentenary Exhibition – A Legacy to HK History	HK
	Through Thick and Thin: 150 Years of the Hong Kong Fire Services	HK
	An Age of Luxury: the Assyrians to Alexander	Foreign
2017	*Miles upon Miles: World Heritage along the Silk Road*	China
	Longevity and Virtues: Birthday Celebrations of the Qing Emperors and Empress Dowagers	China
	The Legend of Hong Kong Toys	HK
2016	*Mare Nostrum: Roman Navy and Pompeii*	Foreign
	Across the Oceans: the Local Connections and Global Dimensions of China's Maritime Silk Road	China
	Inspiring Insights into Dr Sun Yat-sen and His Time	China
	Connecting UK & HK: A Review of Its Aviation Development	HK
2015	*The Exhibition of the 25th Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Basic Law of the HKSAR of the PR of China*	China
	Every Object Tells a Story	HK
	"The Rise of the Celestial Empire: Consolidation and Cultural Exchange during the Han Dynasty" Exhibition	China
	Pictorial Exhibition on "China's War of Resistance against Japan"	China
	Journey for Active Minds: Jockey Club Museum Programme for Elderly	HK
	Radiant Ming 1368-1644 through the Min Chiu Society Collection	China
2014	*A Century of Fashion: Hong Kong Cheongsam Story*	HK
	The Aftermath of the First Sino-Japanese War: The Lease of the New Territories and Weihaiwei	HK
	"Historical Imprints of Lingnan: Major Archaeological Discoveries of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao" Exhibition	China
	Assimilation into Han Culture: The Ancient Funerary Pottery of Guangxi	China
	The Tastes of Hong Kong - Local Food Culture Exhibition	HK
	"Treasures from Tsarskoye Selo, Residence of the Russian Monarchs"	Foreign

Table 2.3. Special exhibitions of HK Museum of History between 2014-19.

[58] The LCSD and AMO have regular job openings to recruit government curators through the civil service bureau. These curator job openings are usually subject specific (art/ history/ science etc.). A relevant university degree is normally expected, while prior experience in museum is optional but advantageous. Successful candidates are normally chosen through rounds of interviews. Senior officers and managers of LCSD/ AMO, however, could be bureaucrats themselves in charge of political decision-making.

Nevertheless, curatorial style and the ways museums are managed are ever evolving. For example, museums were not considered as much of an educational space as nowadays since the 2000s. A 1997 Urban Council policy-document has proclaimed that "a museum is not a business nor is it primarily a pedagogical institution, nor a part of the entertainment industry (sic), although it is all these things in part" (p.3). Furthermore, there were no guided tours or museum volunteer programmes until the 1990s.[59] In stark contrast, by the end of last decade former Chief Curator of HKMH Joseph Ting (2011) emphasised HKMH's educational role as the "second classroom" for pupils to supplement and consolidate knowledge acquired in school, as well as the ideal location for adults to pursue free-choice and life-long learning. More recently, in 2016 senior government curator Chan Shing Wai emphasised government museum's effort in "edutaining" the visitors – so that they could "learn something subconsciously in these leisure activities" (Chan in Yung, TVB 2016). More importantly, as my research collaborators reminisced, there was no sense of professional museum planning back in the 1980s, as what we have today. Government museum staff came from all backgrounds but none of them were trained in museology or museum studies.

> *"Exhibitions were not planned in terms of chronology or themes but only a compilation following directions already set by our supervisors. … the primary aim was to focus on how to curate, present and introduce our existing collections."*[60]

Curatorial activities were collection-based and so exhibitions were collection-, instead of visitor- or education-oriented. Only when government museum staff seconded to professional training overseas came back with more dynamic curating methods as well as updated museum planning and management experience did modern curation begin in HK. By then, regular curator production meetings were held to brainstorm the

[59] As of 2018, four first-come-first-served, 1.5-hour public guided tours (two in Cantonese, one in English and one in Mandarin) are provided free of charge every day at the HK Museum of History.
[60] A. Yau, Interview, HK, Jun 2018.

exhibitions' themes and 'selling points', adopting a 'marketing' approach to 'sell' museum projects. Government curators found that the resulting exhibitions were significantly well-attended when visitors' perspectives were taken into account. However, government exhibitions remained fairly didactic, univocal and static up to the last decade.[61] In 2010, the ground-breaking travelling exhibition of the digitised "Along the River during Qingming Festival" (清明上河圖) scroll (Fig. 2.11), complete with computer animation, was brought to HK by the Museum of History from Beijing; the exhibition was highly successful and well-attended.[62] Since then, government museums and even some non-government museums have been increasingly proactive in developing digital presentation of their collections, and incorporating interactive elements with the latest technology in their exhibitions.[63] For example, in 2018 both the HKMH and HK Science Museum provided Virtual Reality games for visitors to explore 'luxury treasures of the Assyrians' and understand aviation theories. Furthermore, despite the increasing number of exhibitions related to mainland China, those museum exhibitions that focus on HK are more 'down-to-earth' (貼地) now than in the past.



Fig. 2.11. HKMH exhibited a digital "Along the River during Qingming Festival" scroll (BBC 2010).

[61] As HKMH's second generation permanent exhibition opened in 2000 demonstrated in section 2.1.2.
[62] A. Yau, Interview, HK, Jun 2018.
[63] For example, non-government HK Maritime Museum featured a computer-animated Chinese painting-scroll "Pacifying the South China Sea" (discussed in Chapter 4); while the Queen's College History Museum reconstructed its previous school campus with computer technology (discussed Chapter 6).

2.4. Museum-mindedness, Museum Cultures and Museum Communities



Fig. 2.12. "The Legend of HK Toys" special exhibition (Photo by 1705th Scout Group HK 2017).

It is important that government museums should try to create as much resonance in different stakeholders of the society as possible since the senior government official has explained that they position themselves as "comprehensive" museums that cover society-wide, macro topic areas, and cater for large numbers of visitors.[64] More 'down-to-earth' exhibitions and utilisation of modern technology to create engaging contents prove to be successful in building up a museum audience over the years. For example, by showcasing around 2,000 sets of toys familiar to HK people or made locally, *The Legend of HK Toys* (2017, Fig. 2.12) explored the evolution of toys in the past century and the way industrialists transformed HK into a toy kingdom. This extremely successful special exhibition attracted a record-breaking number of visitors, not least because the topic touched upon each social strata and multiple generations of HK people.[65] It also featured a play area which encouraged visitors to "immerse in play and at the same time ponder

[64] C.W. Ng, Interview, HK, Jul 2018.
[65] The museum recorded a total of 150,000 visitors in the first month of unveiling the exhibition, bringing the daily average to a historical high of 5,000 visitors (Ming Pao 2017).

the meaning of toys", as well as a free souvenir toy made in HK which visitors could bring home as a reminder of what they learnt in the exhibition. The exhibition celebrated the entrepreneurial and 'can-do' attitudes that defined the industrial success of the city – qualities that HK people are proud of. One visitor noted in her blog her delight at revisiting many childhood toys, "exclaiming 'wow' at the sight of every single one of them (每件見到都嘩嘩聲)" (*Xiao Enzi* 2017). As Assistant Director of LCSD Chan Shing Wai explained, opting for a more engaging approach "that would create resonance amongst visitors … brought the museum closer to the public, and responded to their needs for curiosity and entertainment." (Chan in Dao 2019) The impact of government museums in the last 20-30 years could be seen in a rising number of visitors and visitor comments, which, either positive of negative, show that visitors are more interested and engaged with exhibitions and museums. Despite all its shortcomings, government museums are one of the most instrumental forces in the development of a museum community in HK, as well as instilling 'museum-mindedness' (Kreps 2003: x, 23) amongst the HK public.[66] Although museums do play a role in expanding their audience base, it is unfair to attribute the lag in museum development just to the institutions, since the cultural mindset of HK people plays a part in this too.

> *"Museums in HK are not as successful as they could be, and I would attribute this to the lack of collections. What could we exhibit to attract visitors? … our budget does not allow us to buy collections available on the market. Would HK people rather the government use billions of dollars to build public housing estates or acquire some collections? The answer is apparent: housing."*[67]

It is clear from this statement that museum and cultural development has a low priority in HK society. However, the sociocultural root that leads to the lag in museum development in HK could ultimately be explained by HK's historical circumstances.

[66] Refer to Chapter 1 (introduction) for detailed discussion in museum-mindedness.
[67] *A. Ip, Interview, June 2018.*

Compared with many places overseas, HK does not have a longstanding local identity, since most of the inhabitants in early colonial HK only have treated the city as a place of transit or a stepping stone for economic success, where they could earn enough money and retire back to their native villages in mainland China. The sense of a HK identity only really started in the 1960s, and the generation born at this time increased the demand for museums, since museums for them, descendants of immigrants, were places to explore and reflect on one's history and identity. Museum development is also related to local economy, considering whether the government has enough funds to develop museums, whether public could afford leisure time to visit museums, and their willingness to donate funds and artefacts to museums. These favourable factors only started to emerge in HK in the 1980s as the local economy improved the local quality of life and led to the emergence of a middle class. Under such circumstances, the earlier generations of HK people, who more often than not were fighting for their own survival in the society, were naturally not interested in museums. This is reflected in the opinion surveys on museums (2011b: 12-16), in which non-visitors of museums were more skewed (46%) towards senior citizens (aged 50 or above), and the elderly (aged 60 or above) showed lower awareness on all museums. Worse, there was no relevant policy adopted by either the British colonial or HKSAR government to create incentives for the emergence of a museum culture.[68] As early as 2008, the HK Curators Association criticised the long and futile discussions of government committees; without professional participation, they not only failed to create a more favourable environment for museum

[68] A government curator suggested, "for example, people might actively consider donating their objects to the state or setting up museums to house them for public good due to high inheritance tax collected in the 'west'; while successful businesses might consider financially supporting museums to get tax reduction, improve corporate image and contribute to cultural development." (Chau, Interview, Shatin, Jun 2018)

development and alleviate the problems faced by existing museums, but also led to the stagnation of local cultural and museum development (Tang 2007: 51-52, 63).

Nevertheless, with a still current tradition of minimal public participation in museums, the contributions of government museums in building up museum-mindedness in HK have been vital. They have been 'pioneers' who have introduced the idea of the 'museum' and created a widespread presence of 'museums' amongst the HK public. With more government museums, as well as large scale and popular exhibitions, more visitors are attracted to museums and private collectors start to realise that their own collections could also draw in visitors. As a former government curator has recalled, they have received "requests for government assistance to set up museums to house individual collections, and even requests to turn one's house into a museum".[69] By taking the lead in the museum sector, setting an example on what professional museums are, and demonstrating their social influence and cultural potentials, government museums have inspired private collectors and individuals to set up their own museums. Some realise that this could be a way to achieve their personal ambition with their collections, including that they could 'do a better job' than government museums, which they consider boring and bureaucratic.[70] Responding to their demands, HKMH encourages the involvement of local collectors in planning their new permanent exhibition, and a government official explained that he had advocated "using the atrium of HKMH to fulfil a 'public history' role – that the museum would provide resources and technical support to enthusiastic individuals and organisations so they could curate their own exhibitions."[71] However, some critics label these policies as 'pseudo-cultural democracy'

[69] A. Yau, Interview, Shatin, June 2018.
[70] As early as 1999, critics had already complained that "Government organisations tend to maintain stability at the expense of flexibility" (Chan 1999: 53). The impact of this and rise of non-government museums is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.
[71] C.W. Ng, Interview, HK, Jul 2018.

in the forms of 'constant consultation' and 'implying the opening up of cultural governance' (Ho 2017: 64-65).

With cultural critics voicing their concerns and taking initiative, one may easily conclude that HK now has a fairly developed museum sector. The fact is that visiting museums is still one of the least favoured leisure activities for most HK residents. As local HK artist Chris Chan pointed out in a TV interview, a lot of HK people, even if they had nothing to do, would not think of visiting a museum exhibition (Chan in Yung, TVB 2016). On the surface, one may be easily misguided by the high visitor numbers (Table 2.2), even compared with some overseas museums, into thinking that HK has a mature museum-going culture. The truth is, although it has made significant progress within the past two decades, the museum-going culture in HK is still in its infancy. Museums continue to be seen as a space for the 'educated' and elites. An opinion survey (2011a: 20-21, 63) found that the majority of visitors made only one visit to museums in a year while most young people visited museums only "because of their schools' arrangement", and nearly half (45.5%) of the visitors could not specify a time for their next visit to museums. Other surveys found a significant and positive relationship between education level and visitation frequency of local museums in HK (2011b: 13; 2014: 14), just as Lu (2014: xiv) found that there were still locals who perceived museums as places only for "people who can read *fan shue* ('western' books)". Various government policy documents have also identified public apathy towards financial donations to museum and heritage sector, and vowed to work on encouraging sponsorship, establishing a museum membership scheme and fostering a culture of donation amongst the public (LCSD 2012:7, 2013: 15, 2014: 17, 2015: 31, 2016: 21, 2017: 21). Cultivating 'museum-mindedness' involves not only expanding museum audience, but also developing public appreciation towards museums, and a society-wide consensus to treasure and embrace the city's museums as vital

cultural assets. Increased voluntary public donations to museums, visitor numbers as well as public participation in museum programmes like volunteering are all indicators of progress. The following table (2.2) indicates the rise in visitor numbers since 1996.

Table 2.2. Approximate total attendance in LCSD museums versus total HK population, 2001-18. [72]

Year	**1996**	**2001**	**2006**	**2011**	**2016**	**2018**
Attendance	2,672,200	4,252,745	4,248,200	5,180,000	3,994,778	6,281,000
Population	6,217,556	6,759,500	6,900,700	7,103,700	7,374,900	7,482,500

To build up a museum culture, it is necessary to cultivate the sense of museum-mindedness and public interest from one's childhood. As Wong and Piscitelli (2019: 430) have demonstrated, after visiting museums young children in HK have strengthened their cultural engagement and citizenship, gained familiarity with and affection for museums. Another example is school librarian Fong, a self-proclaimed 'museum fan'. He has tried to visit all museum exhibition and participated in their programmes in HK, and even taken the initiative to set up a blog listing out all exhibition and programmes for fellow enthusiasts. He reckoned his passion for museums began in his childhood in the 1980s-90s, when his mother found museum-visits beneficial to his upbringing and took him to government museums as a 'free-of-charge weekend leisure activity' (Fong in Yung, TVB 2016).

Realising the need, the HKSAR government has made it compulsory for students to go to museums as part of their curriculum since the 2000s. In response, a policy maker recalled that "government museums proactively communicated with us and tried to see how their services could coordinate with the curriculum. We also started developing a

[72] Attendance Data: 1996 (Urban Council 1997, Annex IV: 1); 2001 (HKSARG 2002b); 2006 (HKSARG 2007b); 2011 (HKSARG 2012b: 401-408); 2016 (HKSARG 2017b: 321-324); 2018 (LCSD 2020). Population Data: 1996 (HK Census and Statistics Department 1996: 13); 2001 (HKSARG 2002a); 2006 (HKSARG 2007a); 2011 (HKSARG 2012a: 424); 2016 (HKSARG 2017a: 290); 2018 (HKSARG 2019: 287)

'museum education framework' so schools could coordinate better with museums".[73] However, a former government curator criticised that "teachers were half-hearted at best – the resulting visits were like 'sheep-herding' and were focused mainly on the contents pupils could learn from the museum, instead of the museum culture."[74] To resolve the issue, the government attempted to instil museum-mindedness amongst young people by introducing topics like the origin of museums, "what do museums do", and "visit courtesy in the museum" in their own children's museum guide book (LCSD 2018b, LCSD 2019b). Instead of merely bringing students to museums, teachers have suggested that government museums could collaborate with local schools to train student museum guides in order to satisfy individual educational needs, while more and more schools have taken the initiative to set up their own school history gallery, archives or even museums.[75] Indeed, this is bound to be a long process as museums have very different social images in the community in HK compared with the 'west'. They have a far less important role to play in people's cultural lives and are not as thoroughly integrated as in overseas into the curriculum, academia and daily lives (e.g. Wong and Piscitelli 2019: 429-430). As a former government curator commented,

> *"You could conclude that when visitor numbers did not improve even though museums in HK were made free to enter a few years ago. This is mainly because HK people do not see museum visits as part of their habits and leisure. … Furthermore, museum volunteering is very popular overseas, but it is not so in HK. … It is a matter of time."*[76]

2.5 – Summary

To summarise this chapter, I argue that government museums in HK have exerted a prodigious influence on the society, especially in stimulating the emergence of museum-

[73] Tan, Interview, HK, Jun 2018.
[74] A. Yau, Interview, Shatin, June 2018.
[75] Refer to Chapter 6 for further discussion on School Museums in HK.
[76] A. Yau, Interview, Shatin, June 2018.

mindedness amongst the public, thus contributing to the emergence of non-governmental, private museum-like institutions in HK. The city has a relatively short urban history, yet a unique colonial experience as a middleman for the world to gain access to China, and a transient place for Chinese migrants. So, the need for a local identity and general awareness on heritage is low and they have been developed rather slowly. With accelerated urban renewal and development since the late 1970s, the HK government museums were established, just in time, to salvage through collecting fieldwork a lot of urban and rural heritage that was under threat of disappearance due to changing socioeconomic circumstances.[77] Building on such collections, in the following decades these government museums established the 'textbook' historical narratives on the city's history and its relations with China and the world, characterised by discourses of 'East meeting the west', 'long Chinese and short British', 'reunification equals rebirth and better future' (Zhang et al 2018) as well as the 'Lion Rock spirit'.[78] Therefore, government museums in HK could be seen in a Foucauldian sense, or as Bennett (1995, 2005, Bennet et al 2017) argued, a tool of governance. While the government hopes that their museum narrative would in turn mould a homogenous HK Chinese identity that celebrates 'blood thicker than water' relations with brethren in the mainland and aids postcolonial governance, recent political unrest proves that the efforts are in vain. 23 years after the handover, HK still suffers from identity dilemma (cf. VonCannon 2021), while political and cultural tension with mainland China have increased to a breaking point.

After all, government museums have introduced the concept of the 'museum' and established a museum-going culture amongst the HK public, amid the rise of middle class

[77] See Chapter 4 for discussions on salvaging heritage objects by private collectors and museum-makers.
[78] See footnote 30 for further details on the 'Lion Rock spirit' in HK.

and improving quality of life. In other words, they have given a 'first impression' of museums to the public. However, this contributes to the nowadays widespread mentality amongst the public that museum provision is part of government remit, which leads to the public's reluctance to financially support the museum institutions themselves – as will be evident in the non-governmental museum case studies in the following chapters. This is drastically different from the museum culture in the 'west', where a mature museum donation culture is in place. Nevertheless, as polarised as it might sound, the works of government museums are able to 'inspire' potential cultural and heritage enthusiasts on ways to preserve heritage and present collections, or even 'compel' some to do on their own as they criticise the government of not doing enough, disagree with the government 'agenda', or are frustrated with the bureaucratic and inflexible government museum system. Some, as will be discussed in later chapters, are not content with the display techniques and approaches to exhibitions. Indeed, as discussed in this chapter, exhibitions in governmental museums in HK tend to be didactic and univocal. That being said, these permanent exhibitions are being renovated and the museums are more conscious in adopting a 'human-oriented approach' shifting from merely curating exhibitions to public involvement like hosting education and outreach events. Displays are also promised to become more interactive and engaging.

With a steady flow of financial resources from the government as well as cultural resources from their collections built up throughout the years, government museums remain the leading provider of museums in the City, who is able to shape its heritage and cultural development until now. Nevertheless, the rapid development of non-governmental museums in HK after 1997 – with more than 50 established in the short timeframe of 20 years – should not be overlooked. I argue that this intriguing phenomenon should be seen as a response to current politics and decolonisation. It

should also be seen as a result of nostalgia, rising historical and cultural consciousness, and the continuing identity dilemma. In response to this development, the HK government has started allocating financial resources, since mid-2000s, to assist a then private museum – HK Maritime Museum – almost 150 years after its colonial predecessor first supported the first HK City Hall Museum in 1874. Although receiving government grant every year in addition to renting a government premises on preferential terms and with symbolic rent of $1 per annum, the museum is not founded or managed by the government and in return only need to satisfy certain regulations set by government which ensure the funds supplied are used properly. Such arrangement, in a senior government official's words, was the 'turning point' in government provision of museum services in HK. Since then, the line between government and non-governmental museum is blurred. The latest major cultural complexes founded in HK, including the PMQ and Tai Kwun, the M+ Museum and the HK Palace Museum, are run in the same way – government-subsidised but privately-managed.[79]

This brings us to the core issue in this chapter – the relationship between government and private museums in HK. I argue that the inefficiency of government museums drives the creation of non-government museums. Because of this and many other reasons that we will explore in the next chapters, grassroot actors felt compelled to set up their own museum. I will show how in HK, grassroot museum-makers have embraced a different idea of museology than the official and professional curatorial practice found in government museums. Nevertheless, in the end, government and private museums in HK can supplement each other's shortcomings. Government

[79] PMQ (former Hollywood Road Police Married Quarters) and Tai Kwun (former Central Police Station complex) are 'revitalised' into cultural complexes featuring museums and galleries, arts & crafts shops and performance spaces. They are partly subsidised by the government but managed by separate trusts and are obliged to submit to certain government regulations – an arrangement similar to the HK Maritime Museum.

museums are well-resourced and have political support from the ruling regime. Bound by their official stance, government museums are often used as a 'tool of governance' – especially for the state to communicate a particular kind of messages, and to shape the development of identity and culture. As a result, there is very little chance for them to jump out of this restriction and engage critically with challenging history and politically-sensitive issues. Private museums could shoulder this burden. Without much 'historical baggage' and often only responsible to their patrons, they are not bound to taking the 'official' interpretations of history and identity, and hence can afford to be freer and more critical in their narratives and better deal with sensitive topics. Those who are critical to government museums (e.g. Law 2014) must have failed to realise the inherent nature and indeed the *raison d'etre* of these state museums – criticising them as being 'nationalistic' is akin to criticising fast food as being unhealthy, a characteristic inherent in their being. As decolonisation or assimilation to mainland China accelerates and government museums inevitably fall into victims of political correctness and self-censorship, private non-government museums in HK could act as the 'last line of defence' for local heritage and memories deemed not appropriate to be remembered in state institutions. They are timeless repositories, much akin to an ancestral hall or 'modern temples' for HK heritage, that could offer HK people the chance to learn about their past, formulate their identity in the present, and ponder on their future. In the next chapters, I am going to further elucidate and analyse the development of these institutions through the cases of HK Maritime Museum, St Mathias Journey and Queen's College History Museum. But first, we should dig deeper and look at ancestral halls, as I will show how they could be considered precursory museum-like institutions in HK.

3

Ancestral Halls

Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Halls and Heritage Gallery

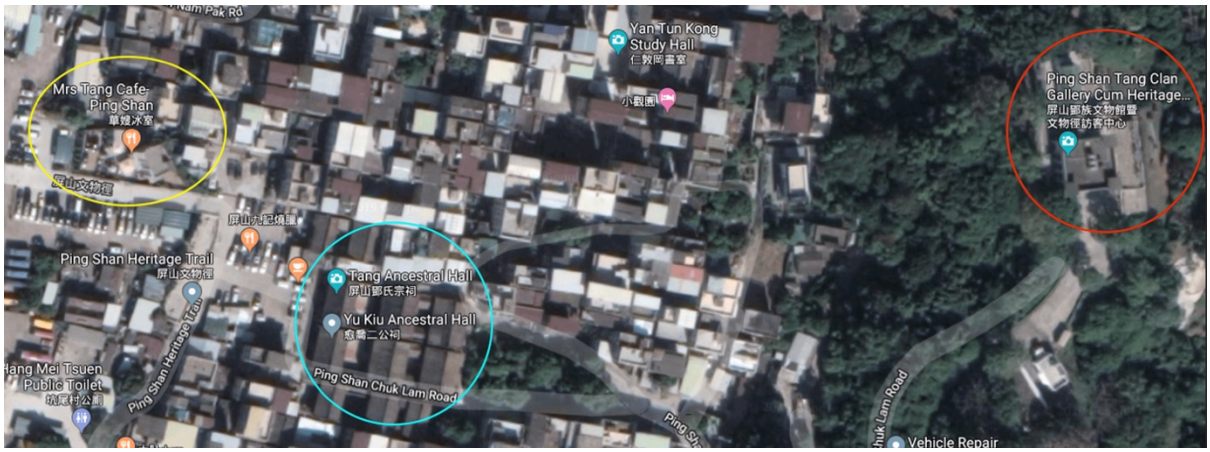


Fig. 3.1. Locations of Mrs Tang Café, Tang Ancestral Hall, Tang Clan Gallery in Ping Shan (Google Map).

It was a hot, sunny summer day in Hong Kong (HK). Just as I was enjoying an iced lemon tea at *Mrs Tang Café* (Fig. 3.1) in the millennium-old Chinese village of Ping Shan [屏山], a middle-aged mother – a foreign tourist – approached the waitress with her sweating son. Pointing towards the Tang Ancestral Hall, she asked, "Excuse me. Is that the Tang Clan Gallery?" The waitress answered calmly, "No, that is our Ancestral Hall, the Tang Clan Gallery is that colonial-style structure up on the hill." A bit embarrassed by her mistake, the mother continued, "Thanks, I thought it was the Gallery as I could see some display boards in there!" Later, the waitress explained to me that it was not the first-time visitors mistook the Ancestral Hall (Fig 3.2, 3.4) as the Gallery (Fig. 3.3).[1]

This brief ethnographic encounter reveals the complex relationships between an ancestral hall and museum. On the one hand, the Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall and the Tang Ancestral Hall were proposed as historic buildings when HK was transitioning from a

[1] For example, Phanos, an exchange student from Greece found it difficult to navigate the Trail. He also found the limited information provided on the artefacts confusing. (Oriental news, 20 Nov 2015)

British colony into a Chinese 'Special Administrative Region' in the run-up to handover in 1997. They were finally listed by the HK Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) as monuments in 2001. Nevertheless, the 'curatorial authority' of the Halls remained in the hands of Tang clan. Could they be construed as 'indigenous museum-spaces'? On the other hand, the Tang Clan Gallery was established in a politically contentious former colonial police station in the village in 2007. They were all parts of the first HK 'heritage trail' (Fig. 3.6) established in Ping Shan. [2] How do Tang Clan Gallery and the Tang Ancestral Halls interact with each other? Do they provide evidence of indigenous museology in HK?





Fig. 3.2. (Left) Display in Tang Ancestral Hall (Photo by Author, 2018).
Fig. 3.3. (Right) Display in Tang Clan Gallery (Photo by Author, 2018).





Fig. 3.4. (Left) Tang Ancestral Hall. (Photo by Author, 2018).
Fig. 3.5. (Right) HK Heritage Museum. (Photo by Author, 2021).

[2] Following an initiative from the HK government and subsequent collaboration with the villager-clansmen, a 'heritage trail' was set up for Ping Shan in the 1990s that linked up various monumentalised historic buildings. It is part of the government scheme constructing a local HK identity amongst residents following the 1967 riots, as the lack of sense of belonging to HK was found to be an underlying cause (Lo 2013: xvi).



Fig 3.6. Map of Ping Shan Heritage Trail produced by the Antiquities and Monuments Office, showing locations of Tang clan historical buildings mentioned in this chapter (AMO 2019).

In this chapter, I will investigate the historical and contemporary roles that ancestral halls play in preserving local memories, passing on cultural knowledge and establishing identity amongst clansmen and villagers. I will also unveil possible museum-like characteristics and knowledge-transmission mechanisms of ancestral halls, which will inform the following chapters in this thesis. I will discuss these with regards to the process and impacts of the recent 'museumisation' of ancestral halls in HK. I aim to explore how the concept of museums is culturally charged and how the development of

museums is fundamentally a cultural phenomenon. Essentially, the case will demonstrate itself a cross-fertilisation of 'western' and 'indigenous' museological models.

Literature Review

In studying Chinese ancestral halls and their legacy, I take reference from literature on ancestral worshipping, houses and sacred spaces that are turned into museums, heritage, and indigenous museology outside of the 'west'.

First emerging in the Song dynasty (960-1279), the ancestral hall is an ancient Chinese institution and the centre for ancestral worshipping, a tradition that underpins the Chinese civilisation.[3] It is commonly recognised as the 'social glue' that connects the clan-village society in rural China and the symbol of Chinese clan culture (Baker 1979, Tu 2017). Embodying the hegemonic neo-Confucian ideal of social harmony and stability founded on filiality, virtue, and collaboration, the ancestral hall has been a core element in the formation of a pervasive, flexible, and enduring sociotechnical system as well as a key device in the normalisation of the late imperial world order in China (Bray 1998: 11, 31). Veneration of ancestors provides an essential link between the living and the dead, and it reminds clansmen their place in the succession and their responsibilities (Fowler and Fowler 2008: 152, Hughes and Hughes 1950: 21). Through the rituals, a sense of fraternity and identity could be instilled amongst clansmen, which helps to maintain the social bonding that holds together the clan (Yang 1967: 29; Gao and Zhang 2017: 51).

[3] Some scholars classify it as religious practice intertwined with Confucian values (Jackson 1907: 17-18; Chao 1983: 121-123; Baker 2011: 121). Other scholars emphasise that it involves only 'veneration' of ancestors in the hope that they might "continue to aid their descendants" (Bokenkamp 1996: 253). Shrines had been built near tombs in Greater China since antiquity (Wang 2011: 1). In the late 12th century, philosopher Chu Hsi (朱熹) described that ancestral shrine served to "revive, purify, and expand Confucian family rituals" (Chu Hsi, trans. Ebery 1991: xxi-xxiv). By the nineteenth century, Ancestral Halls have become the centre of activity of villages in Guangdong region (Ball 1903; Faure 1989: 4; Lo 2013: x).

Being the physical manifestation of kinship relations and embodying the unity, history and identity of the clan, its primary functions of maintaining the clan's unity are achieved through paying respect to ancestors (敬宗收族) and connecting preceding and following generations (承上啟下) (Chu et al 2016, Gao and Zhang 2017, Zhou 2018, Liu 2018, Gan 2018).

Throughout the past eight hundred years, ancestral halls have evolved to serve several key roles in the society. Firstly, ancestral halls serve a spiritual role and act as a memorial space where ancestral rituals are carried out. In traditional clan-village societies, a male clansman's life would begin at the ancestral hall, when his name was recorded in the genealogy after the 'lantern-lighting ceremony' (點燈; Fig. 3.7).[4] His life would end with a funeral at the hall, after which he would be represented by a wooden tablet, which an elder would draw a 'dot' to associate the deceased's soul with it (Granet trans. Freedman 1975: 175). There he becomes an ancestor: his life took on a new form and relationship with his family thereafter. The 'ancestral tablets' symbolise the spirit and presence of distant but common ancestors, and are arranged in order of precedence in shape of a pyramid. It is configured in such a way that when descendants look on the tablets while offering sacrifices they might see their ancestors embodied in it, thus satisfying the need for longing and keeping the departed in constant remembrance (Chao 1983: 116).[5] Such an 'accessioning process' may remind us that when objects enter a museum they are turned from private to public sphere, i.e. they are no longer just personal mementos, but further extend into shared past amongst the public and fuel

[4] According to my collaborator, this practice is continued to this day in Ping Shan (G. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019).

[5] The altar of tablets merged separate identities to form the 'ritual centre' of the whole lineage (Baker 1968: 63-66). Recent ancestors are usually first revered in a household shrine before entering the ancestral hall, so clansmen do not usually share living memory with ancestors worshipped in the Halls (Freedman 1979: 165). Tracing common ancestors allow clansmen to maintain political and social unity (Baker 2011: 276).

nostalgia. The tablets and the hall, indispensable to the complex rituals of ancestral worshipping, are representations of kinship and physical evidence of lineage unity (Baker 1968: 61,90). For example, an old gentleman of the Ping Shan Tang clan said that it would be difficult, if it were not for the yearly ancestral sacrifices when people could see it vividly, to understand just how closely they are related to everyone else (Potter 1970: 127). As such, when clansmen 'collect' their ancestors in form of tablets, they are simultaneously highlighting kinship with the dead and constructing an imagery of collective ancestry that forms a lineage (Ajimer and Ho 2000: 173-185).

Secondly, ancestral halls serve a political role and act as the clan's 'diplomatic centre" that deal with external relations.[6] Their scale and magnificence are a direct representation of how well the clans have been doing economically. This is still true for today as clansmen, whether still living in the village or not, would pool resources to maintain their native village's Ancestral Hall (e.g. Aijmer and Ho 2000: 37). By installing tablets of successful, powerful, and wealthy men in the hall, clansmen not only pay tribute to the glory but also keep that glory in their attention permanently, enhancing the lineage's own prestige (Baker 1979: 92). This demarcates the clan's status in the locality (Faure 1989: 7). It gives clan elders power to make decisions on clan matters and carry out "clan regulations", to a point that they resemble basic regional legal institutions (cf. Freedman 1970, Li 2016). Conveniently, memberships of ancestral halls also serve as boundaries to demarcate 'Us' from 'Other'. No wonder my collaborators to this day still commonly refer to the Hall affectionately as "A Kung".[7] Thirdly, at the centre of clan and village life, ancestral halls are usually used as venues for social occasions including clan

[6] For example, ancestral halls organised resistance to colonial control, detailed in section 2 of this chapter.
[7] "A Kung" (阿公) is translated as "the common grandfather". Clansmen call each other brothers and sisters as they share a common ancestor. Ancestral Hall symbolises the clan's corporate personality (Hu 1948: 64).

meetings (Fig. 3.9), wedding ceremonies and solstice celebrations. In fact, their role as the central meeting place for a clan-village society is what sets them apart from Chinese temples.[8] In presence of ancestral tablets, meetings in ancestral halls are in essence "timeless commensalities uniting the dead and the living" (Aijmer and Ho 2000: 271). Furthermore, they also serve to promote education and help "enlightening" (教化) clansmen (Huang and Huang 2013).[9]





Fig. 3.7. (Top Left) Lantern-lighting Ceremony at Kam Tin Tang Ancestral Hall (HK Memory).
Fig. 3.8. (Top Right) Tat Tak Pirmary School at Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall between 1931-1965 (Flickr).



Fig. 3.9. Heritage Trail Meeting in Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall (AMO 2010).

[8] A HK Colonial Official once wrote, "A *Ts'z T'ong* (Ancestral Hall) … is not a temple at all. It is a meeting place for the clan … [It] is used as the discussion place where any topic which concerns the village as a whole is discussed, and it is also usually the place where … district officers [colonial government officials] are received when making an official call on the village." (HKRS156-1-4772; 14 Jul 1955)
[9] It is common for Halls to double as schools, such as the *Tat Tak* Primary School housed in Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall (Fig. 3.8, 1931-1965) where modern, 'western'-style education was provided to local villagers. There has been a strong association between museums and education too. Refer to chapter 6 for detailed discussion.

Shrines and temples have a lot in common with museums: they both house and display objects, which are used for ritual purposes (cf. Pomian 1994, Duncan 1995, Singh 2015). Indeed, they both have the potential to become *lieux de memoire* – sites of memory – a term coined by Pierre Nora. According to Nora (1998), sites of memory are places or artefacts where people express a collective shared knowledge of the past, on which the group's sense of unity and individuality is based. They are created by the interaction between memory and history, where collective memory crystallises and secretes itself. Can Chinese ancestral halls also be seen as 'sites of memory'? Most important in the concept, according to Nora, is the intent to remember (1989), which makes it similar to the concept of historical consciousness. How could this concept explain the 'museumisation' – i.e. the conversion of historic buildings into museum-like display spaces – in postcolonial HK? In fact, we can observe a similar trend in other sacred spaces in the world. For example, monasteries in the Himalayas are developing museums of their own to display their collections to visitors as well as believers (SOAS, 8-10 November 2018), shrines in India were monumentalised during the colonial era (Kulshreshtha 2018: 50), while Christian churches such as Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral have opened their treasures to visitors in form of permanent exhibitions or even mini museums. In fact, numerous Chinese scholars have suggested that ancient Chinese shrines could be seen as 'precursory museums' peculiar to China, on the ground that they have exhibited and venerated items (Su 1995, quoted in Varutti 2014: 25). Similarly, we can easily find parallels between the 'western'-originated concept of public museums and the ancestral halls. Duncan (1995), for example, has suggested that museum is rather similar to a religious space or a 'secular temple' as museum-going in our modern world is akin to a ritualised practice: we behave in certain ways such as lowering our voice and contemplating objects respectfully in the atmosphere of learning. Through the collection

and display of material culture, including ancestral tablets, heirloom artworks and other ritual objects, ancestral halls are unifying hubs for clansmen across generations sharing common ancestors. It is only through these display-cum-ritual spaces that a distant, and intangible lineage relationship could be forged, kept, and transmitted. Could ancestral halls be seen as fulfilling the function of modern day 'museums' in pre-modern Chinese society? [10] And, more importantly, are museums nowadays supplementing, or even replacing the traditional functions of ancestral halls?

The present-day memory and heritage phenomenon is one of the many motivations that have fuelled the conversion of sacred spaces and historic buildings into monuments and museum-like spaces. In *Present Pasts*, Huyssens (2003) uses the concept of palimpsests to explore the erasure and reinvention of memory and amnesia in our age: an increasingly global, musealised, and mediatised phenomenon. The new memory phenomenon is also characterised by the fact that the past has become part of the present as the boundary between the two has been significantly reduced. It involves multiple interpretations and representations of history and its material witnesses: monuments, buildings, and artefacts. The Ping Shan Heritage Trail is a good example as local historical houses are 'declared' monuments. How are the interpretations of ancestral halls and the former colonial police station changed as they are absorbed into government rhetoric and approach to heritage? Michael Herzfeld has investigated monumentalisation and heritage in cities around the world. He (2009) first uses the *Monti* neighbourhood in Rome to explore the effects of gentrification, neo-liberal economics, globalisation, and organised religion on cultural heritage. According to Herzfeld, the changing social fabric

[10] As elucidated in the introduction chapter, cabinets of curiosities – products of the Age of Enlightenment in the 'west' – are perceived to be the precursors to modern public museums (e.g. Findlen 1994; Swann 2001; Arnold 2017, Alexander et al 2017). Ancient imperial Courts in China and the Chinese literali also kept private collections; refer to introduction chapter for detailed discussion.

of the area – a 'cultural reserve' – has resulted in the eviction of existing residents, artisans, and trades people. As he traces the resistance of the community, and how friction between the past and present is developed when both cohabit in the same urban space, Herzfeld exposes the "irony of heritage": that it entails the commoditisation of history and destruction of a local society in the name of preservation (2009: 310). In a more recent monograph, Herzfeld (2016) traces the struggle of the *Pom Mahakan* community in Bangkok against the government's attempt to evict them and modernise the area. The community claims that they are the guardians of a "true, quintessential Thainess," which is embodied in the spirits of the shrines across the community. Throughout their resistance, the community adopted rhetorical, personified, and political strategies to achieve their aims. Similarly, neo-liberal economics and urbanisation in HK has led to the migration of Tang clansmen out of Ping Shan, their ancestral homeland. At the same time, the once private Tang heritage have been made public by the government. How does Tang clan's view on heritage lead to frictions with the British colonial and postcolonial Chinese governments in HK?

Although the transformation of spiritual centres into museum and exhibition spaces is becoming a global trend, the process of transformation and their curation varies greatly according to local culture. For example, museums could take on an 'indigenous' form 'disguised' as cultural centres, meeting spaces and spiritual homes. In this regard, Kreps' (2003) study of *pusaka* concept and *numa morie*, sacred objects and houses in Indonesia, is most useful to this chapter. Similar to the Chinese ancestral halls, *numa morie* become sacred owing to the presence of *pusaka* heirloom objects (Kreps 2003: 52-78). Furthermore, Kreps (2003: 23-42) goes on to argue that societies outside of the 'west' have their own means of interpreting and appropriating museological concepts to fit into their own cultural patterns: they are museum-minded in their own ways. She also shows

how indigenous cultural transmission and heritage preservation concepts have been integrated into mainstream, 'western'-style museum-like institutions (Kreps 2006). In other words, exhibition spaces do not need to be designated a museum to be one: they can be considered museum-like according to their functions and organising principles. Simpson (2001) provides another case of indigenous museology: the *haus tambaran* in Papua New Guineas. She argues that these "cultural storehouses" can be seen as indigenous museum-like models that facilitate cultural transmission in non-literate societies where people relied on oral traditions and the communicative power of objects for recording and disseminating their history and lore (Kreps 2006*:* 113). In the same vein, Okita (1982) argues that altars, shrines, and temples in Nigeria that honour ancestors, carry out rituals and ceremonies, and display and store treasured artefacts could be seen as basic museums; they are symbolic spaces that embody and transmit socio-religious ideas. Other indigenous museum models include *chitrashalas* (painting galleries) in ancient India that act as means of education and enjoyment (Ambrose and Paine 2018: 6), Maori meetinghouses and 'custom houses' in Eastern Solomon Islands that preserve culturally important objects for future study and are doubled as communal gathering place (Mead 1983: 98-99), and several different indigenous museum models in the south-west Pacific (Stanley ed. 2008). Collectively, the literature shows that museums and cultural centres are constantly changing and adapting to the needs of their societies. I will examine in this chapter how ancestral halls resemble museums in this regard.

This chapter is based on the case of the Tang Ancestral Halls in Ping Shan, HK. Ping Shan is an ancient Chinese village with at least 900 years of history located in the north-western part of the New Territories, HK. There are more than 50 ancestral halls – big and small, historic, and recent – in HK (Appen. B4). In part due to British colonial policies, traditional Chinese clan-based social structures and ancestral worshipping did not suffer

from adverse political purge during the Cultural Revolution in mainland China. They were, however, eventually disrupted by the force of capitalism in the late 20th century (eg. Potter 1968). The more historic ancestral halls have been refurbished and declared monuments by the HK government since the 1980s. I chose the Tang Ancestral Halls because they are supported by a dedicated 'museum' – the nearby Tang Clan Gallery [屏山鄧族文物館]. Both are part of a heritage trail created and managed by the HK government Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO).[11] Such juxtaposition allows me to explore the relationship between ancestral halls and museums, and the nuance between local and 'western' as well as colonial and postcolonial modes of representation. They offer us a lens to investigate how such an ancient institution has operated in the past and present. The group of ancestral halls in Ping Shan consists of *Tang Ancestral Hall* [鄧氏宗祠], and *Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall* [愈喬二公祠], which stands immediately next to the former. Both Halls were refurbished in the 1990s with assistance from the government. Although most villagers and clansmen have moved out and are living in urban HK, clan rituals and functions continue to take place, when these 'diaspora' would keenly return to the village to celebrate the occasions (Lo 2007: 37). The Tang Clan Gallery was opened in the mid-2000s in the nearby former colonial police station. Built not long after the British occupying the New Territories in 1899, the building is now a declared monument under the HK Government. It is used as a 'mini-museum' to house an exhibition of artefacts related to the village life of Tang clan. Thus, it enables us to juxtapose the 'indigenously'-curated but government-advised Ancestral Halls, and the government-curated but clan-influenced Tang Clan Gallery.

[11] These buildings have already caught the attentions of the British HK government prior to handover in 1997. Designation of buildings as heritage sites tells us what the state wants to preserve and remember of the past, and how it imagines the past (Svensson 2006: 5). Refer to Chapter 1 for detailed discussion.

Data to be presented in this chapter has been acquired from semi-structured interviews with clan elders and clansmen, as well as participant observations of clan rituals during my ethnographic fieldwork in the summers of 2018 and 2019 in Ping Shan, HK. With the invitation of a helpful key collaborator, I was able to witness the rehabilitation ceremony of *Tat Tak Communal Hall* [達德公所], which is similar to what clansmen have organised after the Tang Ancestral Halls were renovated in 1991. To get a holistic understanding to the process of 'museumisation', I have also interviewed three government museum workers who has worked on the projects. Historic photographs often reveal a wealth of information words alone could not describe. For example, using a series of photographs of execution scenes following the Boxer Rebellion in 1900-1901, Hevia (2003) studied how 'western' imperial powers undertook a pedagogical project to influence Qing China without directly colonising the nation. Since Ping Shan was already a prominent village when the British first occupied the New Territories in HK, it was relatively well-documented and photographed by British colonists. Following his research method, I have conducted archival research in the HK Public Records Office, The National Archives, and the National Libraries of Scotland. I have been able to retrieve invaluable photographs, journals and correspondences of colonial officials that show the historical displays at the Tang Ancestral Halls.

To provide a background for later discussion, I will start by elucidating the changing roles of ancestral halls with respect to the social structures in the past and present Chinese societies, and more specifically in HK. I will then look at the specific case of Ping Shan Tang Clan and their Ancestral Halls, and elucidate how the Halls have been 'museumised'. The spatial configurations and architectural features of the Halls are duly examined, as a lot of cultural knowledge are engraved in the buildings. I will then argue

that, enabled by objects displayed and social interactions, ancestral halls produce lived spatial experiences, nurture identities and confer a specific feeling on clansmen and visitors. I will also elucidate and analyse the Tang Clan Gallery in terms of its organising principles and exhibition. Lastly, I will analyse and discuss on the overlapping narratives, functions and characteristics of ancestral halls and museums.

3.1 Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Halls, Hong Kong

Ping Shan Tang Clan

The Tang Clan has long been recognised as a major clan in the New Territories (Siu and Siu 1982: 41-49; Matthews trans. Chiu 1991), even before HK was created as a British colony in 1842. Originally from Jiangxi Province [江西], Ping Shan Tang Clan moved into Ping Shan in the opening years of the Northern Song [北宋] dynasty (960-1127) (So 2008: 7-8; Siu 1982: 41). The fifth generation of the Clan constructed the Tang Ancestral Hall in the fourteenth century and Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall in the early sixteenth century (C. Deng et al 2012: 66, Su 2012: 26). Since then, membership of the ancestral halls became an important symbol of inclusion; the most severe punishment clansmen could receive from the head of clan was expulsion from the ancestral hall (Faure 1986).[12] Ethnographer Faure (1989: 6) recorded that history, genealogy and lineage were very important to the clansmen not only because they served to hold the clan together but also because they conferred certain exclusive financial and ritual rights that demarcated 'village-insiders' from 'outsiders'. As a participant observer, I also found that members of the Ping Shan

[12] The Tang Ancestral Hall is a "lineage ancestral hall" [宗祠] of which all Ping Shan Tang clansmen are members. *Yu Kiu* Ancestral Hall, is a "branch ancestral hall" [家祠] set up by two eleventh generation brothers: Tang Yu-sing [鄧愈聖] and Tang Kiu-lum [鄧喬林]. Strictly speaking, only the descendants from their households could claim membership (Su 2012: 26). But since it was established some 500 years ago, so most Ping Shan Tang clansmen are potentially related and eligible for membership.

Tang Clan were very proud of their long history and relatively complete genealogical records. One of the elders also repeatedly told me how many times important government officials, including the first and last governor of HK (New Territories), visited the Tang Ancestral Hall.[13] Prior to the visit of Henry Blake, first governor of HK's New Territories, to Ping Shan, the British colonial government sent administrator James Lockhart to conduct a complete survey of the area in 1898 (Fig. 3.10, 3.11).[14] According to Lockhart's personal journal,

> *"About 30 gentry of the whole community dressed in the gayest robes arranged in a roll received Mr Lockhart and the party. We were led to the finest building which we have seen in the district." ("Journal of Inspection through the Newly Leased Territory", NLS acc.4138/3c2, 1898: 51-52).*

Yet, government relationship with the indigenous Tang clansmen soon worsened when the latter met at their Ancestral Halls to discuss objection to British occupation (Groves 1969: 43; S. Deng 1999: 3; Hase 2008: 45-46). In other words, the Ancestral Halls became sites of active native resistance to colonisation. Later, the British colonial administrator returned to Ping Shan in 1899 after putting down native resistance. They chose to read out their 'proclamation', or terms and conditions of colonial rule, to the gentry in Tang Ancestral Hall. For the next hundred years of colonial rule, the Halls became a 'site of memory' for the Tangs (Nora 1998). The British colonial government did not attempt to make it a monument until they were about to leave HK in 1997. On the contrary, the postcolonial Chinese HK government was active in co-opting this site of native resistance (against colonial occupation) into their pro-Chinese historical and cultural narrative. Apart from political spaces, the Ancestral Halls continued to be diplomatic spaces. For example, during my fieldwork, I learnt that *Invest HK*, a HK government department, requested to bring 150 foreign visitors to have traditional

[13] S.F. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, 18 June 2018.
[14] Refer to the Colonial Report (CO129/289, 1898: 212) and Airlie (2010) for a full account of the visit.

"Poon Choi" feast at Tang Ancestral Hall "in order to learn more about HK traditional culture and village culture of the New Territories" (C.L. Tang to H.Y. Tang, Pers. comm. 15 June 2018).[15] It is clear that, given the central position it played in the clan-village society, ancestral hall was used as a political, 'ambassadorial' space. This was achieved, in part, by displaying important cultural objects in prominent locations of the hall.



Fig. 3.10. HK Governor Henry Blake visited Kun Ting Study Hall a year after Lockhart, in 1899 (Colonial Office 1899, CO1069/446).



Fig. 3.11. Ping Shan in 1905, showing the Police Station (now Tang Clan Gallery; yellow), Ancestral Halls (red), Kun Ting Study Hall (green) (Colonial Office 1899, CO 1069/451/08, illustrated by Author).

[15] In fact, this tradition started in the early colonial period. Tang clan elders are still proud of visits made by Governor Henry Blake in 1899 and nearer in time, Governor David Wilson and Chris Patten, as well as the first Chief Executive of the post-1997 government Mr Tung Chee-hwa (S. Tang 1999: 99) in the 1990s.

Historic Displays in the Tang Ancestral Halls

Even before entering Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Halls, there are already several artefacts that help transmit cultural knowledge. Firstly, the commemorative poles outside the hall entrance indicate that several clansmen have been successful in imperial examinations. A colonial official was told in his visit to the Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall in 1962 that they were not taken down at the death of the scholar to remind his descendants of his talents (HKMS178-1-44, HK Public Records Office). According to my collaborators, the absence of a high door threshold (steppingstone) at the entrance used to be a privilege only enjoyed by elites of imperial China, and therefore signifies the high social status of Tang Clan when the Hall was built.[16] The main pair of Chinese literary couplets at Tang Ancestral Hall engraved on wooden boards specifies the Tang's origin in Nanyang and their first achievement in Eastern Han Dynasty. The secondary and horizontal couplets are written with Chinese writing brush on red paper. The former details the biography of the two ancestors the Hall is dedicated to (Tang Fung-shun and Tang Man-li) and instructs descendants to respect ancestors and clan traditions. The latter represents the clan's collective wish for fertility and affluence to maintain the ancestral worshipping tradition.[17] Similarly, several literary couplets adorn the entrance of Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall and show its history. The primary couplet begins with 'Yu' and 'Kiu', the first names of the brothers who have established the Hall. The secondary couplet begins with 'Tat' and 'Tak', which reflects its historic use (1931-1961) as a private village school for Tang children.[18] The tertiary couplet painted on the two sides of the

[16] S.F. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018.
[17] The configuration of couplets is common in most Ancestral Halls in Southern China. See appendix 4 for my own translations of the Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall's primary couplet (translation 36), secondary couplet (translations 3, 35), and horizontal couplet (translation 29).
[18] See appendix 4 for my own translation of the literary couplet (translations 37, 39), the long Chinese literary couplet at the entrance of Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall (translations 27, 40), the couplet on the two sides of the worshipping altar (translations 34, 42).

worshipping altar (Fig. 3.12) serves to instruct descendants the importance of filial piety and ancestral worshipping. According to a collaborator, the secondary and tertiary couplets are changed every spring and autumn during the ancestral worshipping rituals.[19] This serves as a biyearly reminder to ritual attendants the continuation of tradition and their duties as clansmen. Certainly, clan elders often use these couplets as well as wall paintings in the entrance halls (Fig. 3.13-3.14) to explain vital cultural knowledge such as clan origin, legends, rituals, achievements and its long history (e.g. Lo 2013: xxii). These objects are also used to assert clan elders' authority. But more importantly, they all help to construct a clan identity based on a sense of duty and achievements in society.



Fig. 3.12. Ancestral Tablet Altar at Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall (Photo by Author, 2018).

[19] K.P. Tang, Interview, HK, August 2018.



Fig. 3.13-14. Wall Paintings in the Ancestral Hall (Photo by Author, 2018).

Historically, the central hall of Tang Ancestral Hall was used for entertaining guests, so it was highly decorated. For example, surviving photographs taken in 1899 show that a pair of embroidered 'birthday hangings' were displayed in front of the central doors and on the left wall (Figs. 3.15-3.18).[20] Accompanying them were four scrolls of Chinese ink painting, and on the left wall six scrolls of Chinese calligraphy. All of these are lost today. A collaborator pointed out that these hangings were "brought out as a decoration to the Ancestral Hall to make it more imposing, and let people have something to look at".[21] But I argue that the display of the hangings has underlying political intention. Hevia (2003) demonstrated that photography itself was an imperial mechanism for the 'reterritorialisation' of China since the nineteenth century. In a series of public execution photographs and detailed photographic documentation of the once 'forbidden' imperial palace in Beijing, 'western' imperial powers disenchanted the Qing monarchy, demonstrated their own power, and taught the Chinese a "much needed lesson" (Hevia 2003: 273). Similarly, taken following the suppression of native resistance to colonial occupation in HK, these photographs in Ping Shan showed the British Governor reading

[20] One of the Birthday Hangings is now kept by the AMO. See Section 3.2 for further discussion.
[21] G. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019.

a 'colonial proclamation' to the submissive native clansmen. The ideas of 'China' and 'Chineseness' were consolidated at this time in the late nineteenth century, as people started to 'imagine' themselves as 'Chinese' when the 'others' – 'western' imperial powers – scrambled for spheres of influence and concessions in China (cf. Anderson 2006).[22] I argue that these displays were collectively used by Tang clansmen to assert their Chineseness amid British colonialism. Together, these Chinese cultural displays allowed the clan elders to project their identity to visitors and the young clansmen. In other words, as a diplomatic venue, the Ancestral Hall carries with it an exhibiting function.



Fig. 3.15. (Top left) Birthday Hangings in front of central doors in 1899 (Colonial Office 1899, CO 1069/446/57).
Fig. 3.16. (Top right) Birthday Hangings displayed on the left wall in 1899 (Colonial office 1899, CO 1069/446/51).

[22] Chineseness means tradition, custom, practice, living style, culture, religion and attitude that make one 'Chinese'. Refer to chapter 1 (introduction) for detailed discussion and definition.

Fig. 3.17. (Bottom left) Birthday Hangings displayed during Governor Blake's Visit (Colonial Office 1899, CO 1069/446/50).
Fig. 3.18. (Bottom right) One of the Hangings collected by Tang clan resurfaced in the early 2000s (AMO 2010).

According to an elder who was born in the 1930s, other displays in the Hall included around forty title boards [高腳牌; Fig. 3.19], which were placed in the central hall. They represented the achievements attained by Tang ancestors, such as first place in literati [文舉人] and military [武舉人] examinations. They served as a source of inspiration and motivation to all descendants.[23] During my fieldwork, a Tang elder told me that the central hall featured a geomancy sculpt-work "crab protected by two officials" (Fig. 3.20), which meant two lucky people protecting Ping Shan (Lu et al eds 2013: 105). Pointing at the front-facing beams in the central hall, he said:

> *"The hill behind the village is like its shell, and these two green lights in front of the Hall are like the eyes. You could see this legend painted in the Hall. This has been here since the Hall was first built. If you have not sat here and chatted with me, you would have never known this."*[24]

This shows that architectural elements of the Hall were part of the 'displays' that were designed to store cultural knowledge and tell stories (e.g. Yang 1967: 40). This is similar to what Stokes-Rees (2018) found in the case of Museum of Macau: a museum's architecture and design – its spatial layout and strategic sequencing – are active agents in constituting knowledge, experience and communicating meaning. Indeed, both museums and ancestral halls are built as symbolic structures (cf. Giebelhausen ed. 2003).

[23] Clansmen used to carry these 'banners' in wedding processions in front of the sedan chair sent to fetch the bride, proclaiming the honour and prestige of the group (Potter 1968: 166). Similar plaques are now displayed in the nearby Kun Ting Study Hall (Fig. 3.16), also part of Ping Shan Heritage Trail.
[24] S.F. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018.



Fig. 3.19. Title Boards displayed in Kun Ting Study Hall (Photo by Author, 2018).



Fig. 3.20. "Crab protected by 2 officials" engraving on central beams (Education Bureau n.d.).

The most important historic 'display' in the Hall is undoubtedly the ancestral altar (Fig. 3.12) at the rear hall, where 124 ancestral tablets are neatly aligned on eight shelves in a pyramidal shape. The pyramidal configuration shows ancestral hierarchy, or the

seniority of the ancestors – the more distant the ancestor, the higher his tablet is placed. This is essentially the clan genealogy made visible: the tablets constitute a visible representation of the clan's long history and the relationship of the living and the dead (Yang 1967: 41). Apart from the visual effect, ancestral tablets themselves also store vital historical information that enable clansmen to trace their links to the 'first ancestor'. On the tablet the name and honorary title of the ancestor it represents is engraved, and on its back (or a paper inserted in the tablet) are the birth and death years of the ancestor. Each tablet represents an ancestor's spirit. It satisfies the longing when an ancestor dies and could no longer be physically seen and respected. It is also a medium by which the relationship of the living with the dead could be continued. When the descendants look upon the tablet, "one could almost hear the voices of the dead speak out from the altar … urging the living to respect the foundations built by the predecessors and to achieve even greater glories" (Yang 1967: 41). Jackson (1907: 14) noted that clansmen saw their ancestors embodied in the tablets, after the 'ancestral tablet' dotting ceremony: when the writer breathed upon the pencil and wrote a dot on the piece of wood which turned it into the ancestral tablet. This reflects the important nature of the ancestral tablet and its 'life' in an ancestral hall. In such way, ancestors are kept in constant remembrance. On either side of the ancestral altar is a Chinese literary couplet painted on wooden boards along with other figures that reminds clansmen of their origin and express the clan's collective wish for ancestral blessings.[25]

Turning the Ancestral Halls into Display Spaces

Since the opening of their doors to public visitors in 1997 and being declared monuments in 2001, a few new displays have been added to make the historic buildings

[25] See Appendix 4 for translations of the couplets (translations 4, 41).

more visitor friendly. Tang clan remains the owner of the Ancestral Halls even though they were declared monuments. Any changes in the Halls needs to be approved by the Ancestral Hall committees.[26] At the entrance of both Tang Ancestral Hall and Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall, two metal plaques were erected by the Tang clansmen and government respectively. Apart from stating the origin of the Ancestral Hall, the bilingual metal plaque (a in Fig. 3.21) erected by Tang clansmen emphasises the clan's ownership of the Hall and the clan's aim to "promote an appreciation for the heritage and culture of China". The government plaque, on the other hand, emphasises the building's status as declared monument. Both plaques describe the unique architectural features of the Hall. At the entrance of Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall, some historical information about Ping Shan was written up in Chinese language by an enthusiastic Tang clansman on a piece of laminated paper.[27] This shows how museumisation of the Ancestral Halls have been actively supported by the indigenous Tangs.

As discussed in the last section, we know from some historic photos that scrolls of Chinese paintings and two birthday hangings used to be displayed in Tang Ancestral Hall. A replica of this birthday hanging (c in Fig. 3.22), illustrated with brief historical information, is now displayed at Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall. In their original place at Tang Ancestral Hall, the government has installed eight bilingual information panels (1-8 in Fig. 3.21) to outline its historical background and significance. The first two panel (1-2 in Fig. 3.21) explains the origin of the clan and emphasises their status as the "first most important settlers in the New Territories" from mainland China.[28] With the help of a few

[26] A. Yau, Interview, Kowloon Tong, August 2019.
[27] Upon further investigation, the paper was authored by clan elder Mr Tang Kwan Chi, who used to dedicate his afternoons regularly to providing guided tours to group visitors, or sitting at the Hall in case visitors wanted further information. But since he has mobility issues and therefore had to move out of the village, he no longer sits there daily at the time of my fieldwork.
[28] Similar information is also available in the Tang Clan Gallery (for detailed discussion see Section 1.2.3).

'work-in-progress' photographs, the next two panels (3-4 in Fig. 3.21) emphasise how salvage building materials, traditional craftsmanship and modern techniques have been employed to restore the Hall to its "original splendour". Nevertheless, the brief text did not explain important indigenous cultural concepts like "Rehabilitation Ceremony" (開光) and "Ridge Purlin Lifting Ceremony" (上樑), which symbolise the Halls' restoration. Three other panels (5-7 in Fig. 3.21) introduce the architectural features of the Hall and assert that it is "still actively used for ancestral worship, festival celebrations, ceremonies and clan meetings". This means that the building is still an active focal point of ancestral rituals after museumisation, instead of becoming obsolete and a mere museum space. The last panel (8 in Fig. 3.21) introduces Ping Shan Tang villages and conveys that the erection of ancestral and study halls "indicate[s] the unity and prosperity of the clan". At Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall, the government has installed four panels that briefly explain the history of the Hall (1-2 in Fig. 3.22) and point out the thirteen attractions of the Ping Shan Heritage Trail (3-4 in Fig. 3.22). Yet, overall speaking, the panels fail to explain the abstract process of how the Ancestral Hall becomes, as it claims, the "focal point for the unity of clansmen". It has to be experienced through participation in clan rituals and the socialisation in the process, as what I was able to experience when invited to observe the rituals.

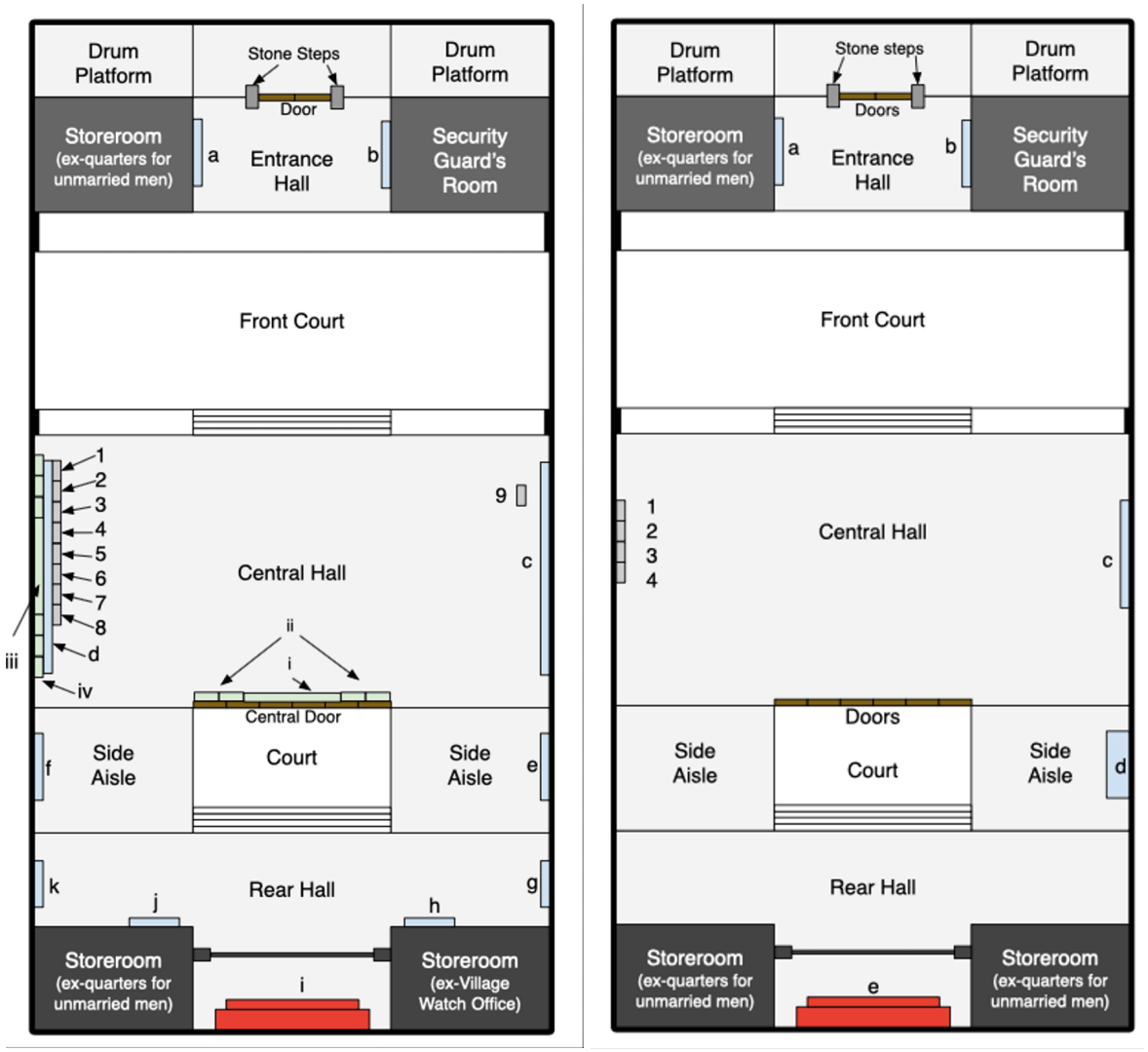
The most important artefacts placed by the Tangs in the centre hall are the Qing imperial examination achievement boards of Tang Yung Keng [鄧蓉鏡] (i in Fig. 3.21) and Tang Kiu Ngok [鄧翹嶽] (d in Fig. 3.21).[29] They demonstrate the success and influence Tang ancestors had in the past and inspire descendants to aim high. Besides, the Tangs

[29] The aforementioned Birthday Hanging that was present in Governor Blake's visit was presented by Tang Yung Keng when he was an accomplished official.

display on each side of the walls six wooden plaques engraved with ancestral instructions presented by other Tang villages to commemorate the Hall's numerous refurbishments (iii, c in Fig. 3.21).[30] Similarly, artwork presented by Tang branch in Jishui [吉水] entitled 'Scenery of Rivers and Mountains' [江山情景] adorns the wall of the side aisles. It features a village embraced by several hills and rivers, which probably represents the origin of Ping Shan Tang Clan eight centuries ago. They also display six framed certificates and letters that showcase the achievements of their Ancestral Hall (iv in Fig. 3.21). In the wake of HK's assimilation into China after more than a century of British colonisation, the plaques celebrate the continuing connections between Ping Shan Tang Clan and their brethren in mainland China. They further demonstrate the Tangs' Chineseness. A metal plaque recently erected by the Tangs shows their historical narrative as well as a list of nearly seventy accomplished ancestors. According to the plaque, it aims at "remembering the contributions of ancestors toward the clan and serving as encouragement and example to descendants". In contrast to the government panels, the Tang narrative primarily emphasises Tang clan's resistance against the British "intruders" in their occupation of the New Territories. It also claims that the British destroyed numerous achievement boards along with other "precious artefacts" in the Ancestral Hall after the resistance was crushed. These episodes are not mentioned anywhere in the government panels or exhibitions. This shows how the clan and government have contrasting historical narrative when interpreting HK heritage, and a very much different focus for commemoration. Together, these displays represent history that the clan chooses to present and is proud of. To clansmen, they also convey important ancestral instructions

[30] See Appendix 4 for my own translations of the plaques on the right wall (translations 22, 23, 24), plaques on the left wall (translations 21, 25, 26). All of them were presented by other Tang villages in HK and mainland China.

like living in harmony, supporting education, living a virtuous life, as well as practicing filial piety through ancestral rituals.



Figs. 3.21-22. Floor Plans of Tang (left) and Yu Kiu (right) Ancestral Halls (Illustrated by Author, 2018).

After passing through the side aisles, visitors would then enter the rear hall, where the ancestral altar is placed in the centre (i in Fig. 3.21). Not only is the clan genealogy made visible, but also a physical testimony to the longevity and history of the clan. On either side of the altar are decorations commissioned in the 1990s to celebrate the rehabilitation of the Ancestral Hall. They include a pair of embroidered artworks that feature auspicious scenes (g, k in Fig. 3.21) and a pair of Chinese calligraphy plaques "filial piety" and "brotherhood" [孝弟] (j, h in Fig. 3.21). According to my collaborator, Chinese

calligraphy plaques with the same words have already been used since at least the 1970s. With these displays and the ancestral altar, elders can conveniently teach descendants the two most important virtues in a clan society: to respect elders and to live in harmony with fellow clansmen. According to my observation in the field, this usually happens after ancestral rituals and feasts, when clan elders would gather in and around the Ancestral Hall to reminisce about the past and discuss current affairs. Some might even investigate the genealogy records (Shiu 2014: 111). It is the time when most of the clan legends and genealogies are passed down orally (Faure 1989: 6), as clansmen traditionally use stories to record their ancestors' lives and maintain their relationships with ancestors. For example, the story-legend of "Mong Yuet Kung" (夢月公), the Tang ancestor buried in a 'Feng Shui grave' at Nim Wan (稔灣), HK, was only passed down from generation to generation orally (Liu 2007: 1-2). Through stories and ancestral altar, ancestors exist both in descendant's memory and daily lives. In addition to the rituals, they serve to instil a sense of history and pride on descendants, which in turn encourage them to respect their clan identity.

3.2 – Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery

Near the Tang Ancestral Halls is the government-run Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery cum Visitor Centre (Fig. 3.24). Converted from a century-old former colonial police station in1996-97 (Liu et al eds. 2007: 398-400), it was in part a political move to appease Tang clansmen, who had criticised the building as damaging local *Fengshui* (geomancy) since it was built by British colonists in 1905 (Fig. 3.23, Lu et al eds. 2013: 68-70). Yet, a Tang collaborator told me that they in fact wanted the police station to be demolished, so "turning the police station into a museum and making it part of the Ping Shan Tang clan

heritage was only a compromise. [They] had no other choice but to accept it."[31] This shows how the appropriation and usage of heritage buildings can be contentious. As a result, the exhibition space is highly political. Just before the museum was formally opened by government officials, the Tang clan held a 'rehabilitation ceremony' (開光) with monks and offerings at precisely 1:38pm on the 14 April in 2007 – a 'lucky time' according to *Fengshui* beliefs (Fig 3.26).[32] The building was not only 'rehabilitated' after renovation works, but also after almost a century of British occupation. By organising the elaborate ceremony at the museum and partaking in the curation of its exhibition, the clan had transformed the former colonial structure into one of their own. The presence of monks and offerings suggests that the secular colonial police building has, via a religious ceremony, been repurposed as a space that commemorates colonial injustice and celebrates restored fame for the clan. It stands for Tang clan victory against repressive colonial rule: "the best witness and memento … that could educate our descendants not to forget our painful history [of being suppressed by colonial government]" (Liu et al eds. 2007: 438).[33]

[31] S.F. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018. The Tangs originally opposed to the building's proposed accreditation as a monument in HK. This attitude has gradually changed: now the regarded it as a "commonly recognised cultural symbol" (Lo 2013: xx). See Liu et al eds (2007) and Lu et al eds (2013) for a comprehensive account of Tang Clan's 'struggles'.

[32] A. Yau, Interview, HK, June 2018. Rehabilitation ceremonies are usually organised to celebrate the completion of construction or renovation of clan buildings. During my fieldwork, I was able to observe the 'rehabilitation ceremony' for Tat Tak Communal Hall of the Heritage Trail (Fig. 3.25). The ceremony was officiated by Taoist monks, with food offerings and clansmen bowing to the altar. The ritual doubled as a social occasion when clansmen – even those who have moved out of the village – would gather, and elders would reminiscent about the past.

[33] Ping Shan Police Station was built after local anti-British resistance in 1898 (Potter 1968: 165). So, Tang Clansmen saw it as "a base to supress us Chinese … [and] a symbol of colonialism." (Liu et al eds 2007: 398).




Fig. 3.23. (Left) Ping Shan Police Station in 1905 (CO 1069/451/09)
Fig. 3.24. (Right) Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery in 2019 (Photo by Author, 2018).




Fig. 3.25. (Left) 'Rehabilitation Ceremony' of Tat Tak Communal Hall in 2018 (Photo by Author, 2018).
Fig. 3.26. (Right) 'Rehabilitation Ceremony' of Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery in 2007 (AMO 2010).

Tang Clan Gallery Exhibition

Guided by the bilingual information panels and a pre-set visiting route, the thematically arranged gallery "illustrates the history, customs, and cultural life of the Tang Clan with various relics from the villagers on display" (AMO 2017). Exhibits are all labelled in both English and Chinese. They are arranged to fit with the colour-coded information panels on the origins, way of life, economy, marriage, festivals and ceremonies, and education of Ping Shan Tang Clan. Donors of individual artefacts are duly acknowledged with labels and a large golden plaque in the reception area. These serve to lend authenticity and emphasise the indigenous-government collaboration. According to a former curator at the gallery, the government has encouraged villagers and clansmen

to source objects from their households that could represent their history and culture. Throughout the whole planning process, the government regularly consulted the Tang Clan elders and village representatives on the museum design, storyline as well as artefacts to be displayed. They wanted to be sure that the exhibition could represent the voice of the clan in terms of their presence in local history, and to make it more relevant to the clan. In the process, Tang clansmen prepared numerous proposals and letters.[34] Meetings, being treated as important affairs, were held at the Ancestral Hall in the presence of the head of clan and village.

> *"Deciding what to display was a delicate matter. Apart from the usual curatorial considerations … we need to consider whether displays would infuriate clansmen, and whether a particular elder's contribution has been featured too much. We have to maintain a balance. Still, they [clansmen] have a lot of opinions. For example, they insisted that the roof be painted green to represent a crab [i.e. Ping Shan] that is still alive instead of having been cooked."*[35]

This perfectly sums up the degree of indigenous participation and agency in this museum space: a 'contact zone' between the Tangs and the outside world (cf. Clifford 1997, Boast 2011). As my collaborator elaborated, curatorial processes with source communities were difficult, similar to what scholars found in other museum spaces (e.g. Peers and Brown eds 2003, Karp et al eds. 2006, Phillips 2011, Krmpotich and Peers 2013). Just as the membership of an ancestral hall was used to demarcate villager from the outsider (Faure 1989: 6), Tang clansmen also view the museum as a tool to assert their exclusive rights and history in Ping Shan. For example, my collaborator suggested that the name of Tang Clan gallery was originally only a 'visitor centre' for Ping Shan heritage trail, and the clansmen were dissatisfied that "Tang Clan" was omitted and

[34] Tang clansmen sent a series of written suggestions to the AMO to ensure their voices are represented. They "demand[ed] sufficient autonomy in general design and planning of Tang Clan 'museum'" and negotiated that the institution should be "co-managed by both Tang Clan and AMO … any party may not carry out unilateral plans and force the other party to accept" (Liu et al eds 2007: 454-460).
[35] A. Yau, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018.

underrepresented (Fig. 3.28). They demanded "Tang Clan" should be featured in the gallery's name to highlight that Ping Shan "belonged to us prior to British colonisation".[36] The same group of enthusiastic clansmen also requested to display the word "Tang", the surname of the clan, on an embroidered pane in a prominent position immediately visible from the entrance (c in Fig. 3.27, Fig. 3.29).

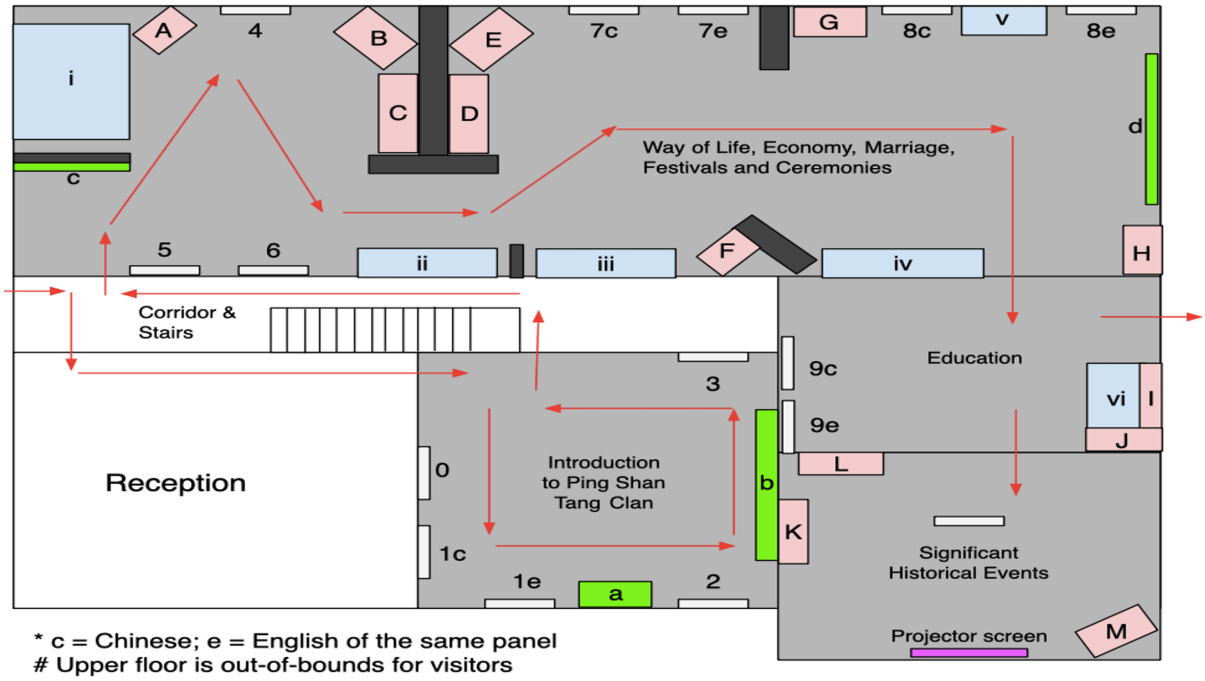


Fig. 3.27. Floor Plan of Main Building, or Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery (illustrated by Author, 2019).



Fig. 3.28. (Left) Signage of the Gallery: the original name of "Ping Shan Heritage Gallery" on the left was finalised to "Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery", as 'agreed by the villagers' (AMO 2010).

Fig. 3.29. (Right) Character "Tang" (c in Fig 3.27) on display at Tang Clan Gallery (Photo by Author, 2018).

[36] K.C. Tang, Interview, HK, June 2018.

The exhibition starts with a mock-up foam board entrance of the Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall (Fig. 3.3; b in Fig. 3.27; 3.30), which explains the origin of the Clan. Benjamin argues that "authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from substantive duration to its testimony to history it has experienced" (1969[1936]: 221). It follows that this 'replica' version represents the history that an 'authentic' Tang Ancestral Hall has experienced, thus pairing the Clan Gallery to the Hall. Moreover, it was recorded that Tang Clan saw the museum as a 'commemorative gallery' (紀念館) for their clan-starting ancestors, the clan's longevity and vibrant culture (Liu et al eds 2007: 421). Thus, I argue that Tang clansmen have treated the gallery as another 'Ancestral Hall', which is also built to celebrate ancestral success and the clan's prosperity. Not coincidentally, the exhibition frequently quotes oral history materials acquired from clan elders. The general design of the gallery, which features exposed wooden-coloured beams, Chinese relief patterns and silk partition, helps to create an 'old' and 'traditional' atmosphere. These Chinese architectural elements coexist with the original colonial, 'western' architectural elements of the building such as fireplaces and verandahs. They represent the hybrid nature of the building and indeed the history of HK.[37] All of these helps to create the sense that visitors are learning about the heritage of the Clan, just as Tang clansmen, through the words of elders and artefacts in their Ancestral Hall.

[37] These 'western' architectural elements could not be removed as the building is listed as a monument by the HK government. Refer to Chapter 1 for detailed discussion on HK's culture and history.



Fig. 3.30. Ancestral Hall mock-up viewed from reception area and introductory room (Photo by Author, 2018).

The introductory panel (0 in Fig. 3.27) emphasises that the history and artefacts of Tang Clan "not only symbolise the folk culture, but also reflect the traditional and unique characteristics of HK's New Territories". This shows how the exhibition aims to construct an imaginary common HK heritage based on a pre-colonial Chinese past that not many HK people have living memory of, or actual association with, for most of them are migrants or their decedents from mainland China or abroad (cf. Cheung 1998, 2000, 2010). In the exhibition text, the Tangs are also portrayed as migrants themselves from ancient China (1c, 1e, 2 in Fig. 3.27). This serves to reinforce Tang Clan's link to mainland China and their claim to authentic Chinese culture (cf. Ward 1968).[38] To this end, the Tangs once suggested that the gallery should use their "millennium-long history as an example to spread our [sic] ancestors' patriotic spirit", and specifically requested that "texts should give justice to [Chinese] nationalism and avoid illustrations that

[38] The Tangs' own publications (e.g. Liu et al 2007, Lu et al 2013) display a strong pro-Chinese and anti-British (colonial) stance. Examples of terms used include "British barbarians" (S. Tang 1999: 2), "British ghosts" (S. Tang 1999: 22) and "British imperialists" (S. Tang 1999: 30). The government narrative in Tang Clan gallery is much more neutral. See Chapter 1 for discussion on the concept of Chineseness.

romanticise [British] colonialism and its historical perspectives" (Liu et al eds 2007: 496). The Tangs even proposed raising the Chinese national flag at the gallery everyday as the colonial police would raise the British flag every day before the 1997 Handover (Lu et al eds 2013: 79). This shows how Chineseness is expressed through text, design of space, and artefacts.

In addition, a replica genealogy of Ping Shan Tang Clan (a in Fig. 3.27) is displayed on a small wooden 'lectern' in the middle of the room. The genealogy is a very costly and precious primary historical document that records births, deaths, and marriages, which clansmen would base their social relationships on (Freedman 1971: 28). According to my collaborators, it used to be accessible by the clan leader only. Making such 'private' document available to the public shows that clansmen accepted that their genealogy is not only Tang's heritage but also representing the common heritage of HK. In other words, it is used to claim authentic indigeneity of Tang Clan as well as, on a different level, the long history of HK prior to British colonialism. The last information panel in this room (3 in Fig. 3.27) introduces the *Feng Shui* (geomancy) of Ping Shan, which clansmen believe supports the continuing prosperity of their clan.[39]



Fig. 3.31. Long exhibition room in the main building (Photo by Author, 2018).

In the next room, the exhibition introduces Tang Clan's "Way of Life" (4 in Fig. 3.27) with some obsolete household items (A,B,C in Fig. 3.27) provided by the clansmen-

[39] The Tangs see their homeland as configurated as a 'crab' (Ping Shan) protected by a hill (Ping Shan Hill) overlooking endless fields fed by countless streams (used to be in front of the Ancestral Hall). See Knapp ed. (1992), Knapp (1999), Knapp and Lo eds. (2005) for discussion on the geomancy concept and rituals.

villagers, such as a century-old Chinese style wooden bed (i in Fig. 3.27).[40] Clansmen are described as leading a 'simple life' living in 'traditional Chinese buildings' completed with 'traditional Chinese furniture', thereby creating a traditional Chinese 'other' in the 'East-meets-west' historical narrative promoted by the government and its tourism board (cf. Cheung 1999). This description of "way of life" is frozen in time and removed from present, as most of the clansmen have moved out of the village, and those remaining have rebuilt their ancestral houses into three-storey modern buildings. In such way, the gallery also acts as a memory repository for Ping Shan villagers, where young clansmen could learn about village life in the past. Nevertheless, the senior clansmen did not find the displays nostalgic. For example, one of my collaborators commented that the exhibits were "nothing interesting, I have even used them when I was young. … It is just like visitors would find our Ancestral Hall fascinating… it is normal for me as I would sit here whenever I am free."[41] This means that what is quotidian and 'normal' for the clansmen has been exoticised; a sense of fascination and discovery has been created for the visitor.[42] At the same time, ethnographic objects that are regarded obsolete and rejected by clansmen are exhibited to recreate village life. Another collaborator explained,

> *"I do not think we clansmen would deposit valuable things, like photographs and calligraphy of our Ancestors, in the Tang Clan gallery. These are objects important to us … those you see there are not that important to us although you outsiders might find them interesting and special. They are just things that we no longer use at home or at work, so we could spare them and loan them to the gallery for display."*[43]

My collaborator made two important points here – that the objects were not 'special', as he would not entrust the museum with objects that he considered valuable.

[40] Other exhibits include baby seat, ceramic bowls, land lease, cricket-fighting tools, wine jar etc. Mathias Lee collected and displayed similar items in his amateur museum. See Chapter 5 for further discussion.
[41] K.M. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018.
[42] See Chapter 5 for discussion on a sense of fascination and discovery in an amateur 'community' museum.
[43] K.C. Tang, Interview, HK, June 2018.

We can observe an obvious difference in the value system between government curators and clansmen. Artefacts are considered valuable for the former because of their ability to represent lifestyle and culture of the clan-society, while the latter tend to value personal stories embedded in the objects and photographs (cf. Edwards 2001, Morton 2015). As the other collaborator continued, "I would rather keep my heirloom at home and introduce them to my descendants, it is meaningless to just display them in the Gallery … [when] not a lot of people know the stories and memories attached."[44] In other words, there are two key differences between the gallery and ancestral hall: that artefacts displayed are decontextualised, and the limited texts are inadequate to 'activate' the cultural knowledge embodied.

> *"[Artefacts themselves] do not tell you much about the development of our clan, and details like … which ancestor has achieved prominent official position. For example, who would know who this birthday hanging was for, and how it was relevant to the Tangs, just by reading these few lines on the panel? I would rather bring guests to the Ancestral Hall."*[45]

Therefore, although the exhibition might appeal to tourists, Tang clansmen did not find it useful for exploring their own heritage. A Tang clansman told me that he has only been to the gallery twice, primarily to show his guests the views of Ping Shan. He would not visit the gallery himself as he found it easier to ask his own grandparents and elders about the clan's past.[46] Clearly, clansmen still prefer to learn from their parents, grandparents, and elders, or by participating in clan rituals. Nevertheless, perhaps the next few generations of clansmen would find the gallery more useful to 'trace their roots' and learn about the past, as elders might have passed away and cultural traditions unsustainable. Traditions that have vanished include farming, which has ceased to be practised in Ping Shan. However, continuities in the 'traditional' aspects of 'village life'

[44] K.P. Tang, Interview, HK, August 2019.
[45] K.P. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019.
[46] G. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019.

are emphasised in the next two panels "Culture and Customs" and "Economy" (5, 6 in Fig. 3.27), which are supported by a number of local farming tools (ii in Fig. 3.27).[47] The exhibition then turns to describe past and present wedding traditions in Ping Shan (7c, 7e in Fig. 3.27), with a red bridal wedding costume (E in Fig. 3.27) and other bridal accessories (D, F, iii, iv in Fig. 3.27).[48] To further illustrate 'festivals and ceremonies' such as rituals and traditions related to ancestral worship (8c, 8e in Fig. 3.27), the gallery features a replica of the birthday hanging dated to 1872 and once displayed in Tang Ancestral Hall (Figs. 32-34, d in Fig. 3.27). When the gallery was first opened in 2007, the original hanging was displayed and became the highlight collection of the gallery. According to my collaborator, it was moved due to the suboptimal display environment. Another replica is currently displayed in Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall, which further ties the ancestral hall to the Tang Clan Gallery.

The exhibition ends with two other rooms on education (9c, 9e in Fig. 3.27), with artefacts donated by clansmen (I, J, vi in Fig. 3.27), and on 'important historical events' (K, L, M in Fig. 3.27), which features a Tang Clan oral history video playing on loop. Together, they show that clan rituals are ancient practices that strengthen the bonds among the members of the lineage to this day. Tang Clan Gallery shows how Tang clansmen have appropriated the idea of heritage and, more importantly, 'museums' to their own ends.

[47] Farming tools exhibited include waterwheel, plough, threshing frame, and grain spreader.
[48] Bridal accessories include two wooden betrothal gift boxes and a bridal palanquin. As a collaborator pointed out, bridal possessions and marriage accessories are considered private and sometimes even heirloom items in traditional Chinese culture (K.P. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019).





Fig. 3.32. (Left) The original Birthday Hanging displayed when the Gallery first opened (AMO 2008).

Fig. 3.33. (Centre) The Birthday Hanging now on display at the Gallery is a replica (Photo taken by Author, 2018).

Fig. 3.34. (Right) A replica of the Birthday Hanging was also on display at Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall, which is now replaced with another replica (Photo by Author, 2018).

3.3 – The Ancestral Hall as Precursory Museum-like Institution

When explaining why there was no 'western' style 'museum' in ancient Chinese society, a museum professional once attributed it to the fact that "Chinese culture is inherently inward-looking", so collectors preferred to keep their collections in private.[49] My Tang collaborators shared similar views. When asked why, having such long history and heritage, the Tang clan had not set up museums for themselves earlier in the past, a collaborator explained,

> *"Perhaps it is because the older generation, or in general Chinese, are more conservative. They will tell you if you ask, but they would usually not brag about themselves or their past."*[50]

But have we looked in the wrong direction: trying to search for 'museums' in 'western' sense in a non-'western' world? Do ancestral halls have museum-like characteristics in the past and present?[51] HK museum professionals I spoke to were sceptical about the idea. For example, one commented, "Ancestral Halls do not 'collect'.

[49] A. Yau, Interview, HK, June 2018.
[50] G. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019.
[51] Since the advent of New Museology (Vergo ed. 1990), the meaning and definition of museum is ever-expanding as the institution tries to adapt to new demands in our age. See Chapter 1 for further discussion.

Their 'collections' like ancestral tablets were created by the clan … they were not open to the general public until recent."[52] Another opined, "We usually perceive museums as collecting 'artefacts' – something that are from the past, obsolete, and 'dead'."[53] These collaborators, just as scholarly literature to date, have focused merely on the artistic and historical value, or ritual and symbolic aspect of ancestral halls. Its sociocultural role – as a space that enables transmission of historical and cultural knowledge as well as identity development – is rarely investigated.

According to the professional body International Council of Museums (ICOM), modern museums are "non-profit, public, and permanent institutions in the service of society which acquires, conserves, studies, communicates and exhibits heritage of humanity and its environment" (ICOM 2019).[54] Since their emergence in ancient China, ancestral halls have been non-profit and permanent organisations. In fact, they even act as welfare cooperatives in service of the clan village society, as a collaborator told me that unmarried and poor clansmen used to dwell within Tang Ancestral Hall in the past.[55] Ancestral halls are open to the village public (clansmen) – the ancient unit of administration. However, they were not open to any casual visitor from outside the village prior to becoming a listed monument. For example, a Tang collaborator told me that a dozen of clan elders used to enjoy sitting on the steps and long benches at the entrance, which was like "guarding the hall". "If you were a person of a different surname (non-Tang), or even if you looked unfamiliar to them, they would not let you in."[56] In fact,

[52] A. Ip, Interview, HK, June 2018.
[53] H. Chau, Interview, Sha Tin, June 2018.
[54] This definition is due to be updated. Also, there is currently no official, legal definition of 'museum' in HK. See Chapter 1 for further discussion.
[55] K.P. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019.
[56] S.F. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018. According to my collaborator, the concepts of cultural tourism was unknown to the older generations. Fearing that their property rights would be taken away, they guarded the Ancestral Hall fiercely from being included in the Heritage Trail. But the younger generations

historically and even nowadays China is composed of "cells of localism" which do not readily unite with each other, and therefore a temple serves its local community but holds little or no interest for anyone outside the area (Baker 2011: 194). In other words, a clan's ancestral hall is important and performs roles as 'precursory museum' to that clan only.

Although collecting and exhibiting have never been their primary functions, as the key cultural institution that preserves and transmits clan history and culture in clan-village societies, ancestral halls still acquire and display heritage. For example, the Tang Ancestral Halls displayed achievement boards and artworks that are symbolically significant for perpetuating clan identity. These objects are essential to the clan and are often treated with utmost respect. During the Cultural Revolution, clansmen in Jiangmen risked their lives to protect ancestral objects in the hall as they represented their identity, while a woman in *Gutsyn* rescued four ancestral tablets and kept them as heirlooms (Ajimer and Ho 2000: 167-168). Scholars argue that instructions of ancestors, boards of officials and clansmen with exceptional achievements all contribute to instil a sense of expectation from the clan (e.g. Chao 1983; Li 2015; Zhou 2018). They also serve to motivate descendants to become better people and embrace Confucian virtues like filial piety, charity, frugality, respect for elders, harmony, diligence, and integrity. It is through worshipping rituals and the objects present in their own Ancestral Hall that enable congregations of clansmen to strengthen the continuity and solidarity of lineage. The exhibits are also vital in transmitting historical information.

For example, couplets at the hall entrance commonly reflect the origin of the clan and its history (Wang 2011: 3), while memorial boards could be used to trace the broad pattern of development of wealth and importance in the lineage (Baker 1968: 32). Wall

perceived saw their heritage as bargaining chip to deal with the government, and revitalise local economy. (K.P. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019).

paintings which normally show scenes from quotidian moments, folk, historical stories as well as the nature (Liu 2015: 1-11) are in fact artistic manifestations of utopian ideals, living conditions, social values and wishes for blessings (Huang 2010). Sometimes, they also carry historical information like origins of the clan and geomancy configurations. They are devices historically deployed to show clansmen, who are mostly illiterate (Lu et al eds 2013 Vol. 1: ii-v), memorable parts of their history and origin. To a certain extent, commonplace illiteracy did place a higher burden of representation on the objects in the hall. To this day, vital cultural information and lineage history are still passed on orally from elders to descendants.

Ancestral Halls as "Representational Spaces" and Social Spaces

One of the most important tasks of the ancestral hall as a lineage organisation is to record clan history both in form of a formal register (genealogies) and through objects displayed in the hall.[57] But in terms of immaterial concepts like clan identity and sense of belonging, which are built on ancestral worship and memorialism (Baker 1968: 48), ancestral hall is equally important in providing a space where *villagers* could be morphed into *clansmen*. Worshipping ancestors in the hall could assert, renew, and strengthen sentiments between clansmen on which social order and stability lie (Chao 1983: 129). As such, they are examples of what Henri Lefebvre (1991) calls "representational spaces" that produce lived spatial experiences and nurture place-based identities (Svensson 2006: 12). I argue that this is enabled by objects in the ancestral hall and achieved through two means: spatial experience and social interactions.

[57] According to my collaborators, clan registers were kept in the Ancestral Hall, a tradition that could be traced back to Song and Yuan dynasty (Baker 1979: 175) since Tang Ancestral Hall was first constructed.

In Ping Shan, Ancestral Halls embody both family and place identities (Svensson 2006: 10). The space itself and objects displayed enabled rituals to be conducted and cultural knowledge to be transmitted. Thus, a clan identity is fostered. In such way, I argue that ancestral halls share museum characteristics. To begin with, the grandeur and sheer scale of the halls reflect the economic resources poured in by the preceding generations. This indicates the clan's economic success and social status – something that have shaped the proud Tang Clan identity. As a collaborator put, "by looking at one's own Ancestral Hall, one can understand their own origin and achievements of their predecessors."[58] A clansman who had already left the village claimed that "the Ancestral Hall visually connects me to my distant past, … it has inspired me to search for my own roots."[59] For another young clansman in his 30s, Ancestral Hall is the symbol of cultural inheritance. "It enables us to introduce to descendants and visitors about our culture and long history."[60] This shows that the prominent existence of the hall, with its appearance embellished by elaborate engravings and adorned with sculptures, offers clansmen a sense of pride to be part of the social group. Of course, objects displayed in the ancestral halls are also important in this process as they are embedded with clan history and memories. As a collaborator put, the Hall was built to "honour the objects inside", so "the structure and objects inside complement each other, and are equally important in representing the heritage of Tang clan."[61] Another collaborator saw the historic building as "hardware" vis-à-vis the "software": lifestyle and memory of the clan represented by artefacts and graphics.[62] Their co-existence offers a holistic spatial experience for visitors and descendants to understand the clan's history and heritage.

[58] K.P. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018
[59] S.L. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018
[60] G. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019
[61] A. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018.
[62] G. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019

Secondly, both rituals and mundane activities carried out in this unique space play an important role in transmitting cultural knowledge and helping clansmen attain and perform their identity as Tangs. I have observed first-hand how clansmen used rituals as opportunities to educate their children and grandchildren about clan culture and their meaning. For example, during the autumn worshipping in September 2018, almost two thirds of the participants brought along their children to the ceremony.[63] Parents used this opportunity to instil on the young a sense of clan identity and filial piety. From my observation, most children were curious and inquisitive about the purpose and procedures of the ceremony, as well as how old the ancestors were in relation to themselves, especially after bowing to the ancestral altar. It is also where younger clansmen begin their 'apprenticeship' on conducting rituals and clan traditions. For example, as a collaborator recalled, elders would teach him the 'procedures' of the rituals, who should worship first and the 'scripts' needed to be read. "We are all Tangs; we are all related, as our uncles … they would definitely support us to inherit clan matters."[64] Indeed, the elder who hosted the ceremony I observed even invited a pair of young siblings to light the firecrackers, which signifies the beginning of the rituals (Fig. 3.35). Without the space, various clan rituals would seem at best decontextualised. The opportunity to participate in the traditional ancestral rituals have no-doubt a prodigious impact on the participating children – the 'future of the clan' as one elder described. Most of my collaborators said they learnt about their clan heritage from clan elders and ancestral rituals:

> *"I learnt about all these from our elders when I was young. They enjoyed chilling out on two long benches in front of the Ancestral Hall after dinner every evening reminiscing the past. If they hadn't been there, what would we know? Also, the Hall*

[63] Most of these participants have moved out of the village to urban areas in HK.
[64] G. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019

is essential, as most of what they said just would not make sense without referring to the Hall."[65]






Fig. 3.35. (Left) Siblings lighting firecrackers during Autumn worshipping. (Photo by Author, 2018).
Fig. 3.36. (Centre) Father teaching sons the meaning of bowing to Ancestors (Photo by Author, 2018).
Fig. 3.37. (Right) Clan elders enjoy sitting by the entrance of the Ancestral Hall (Photo by Author, 2018).

In the case of Ping Shan, rituals function as symbolic processes aimed at bringing cohesion amongst the clan-village community (cf. Turner 1977). It is also through participation in such clan activities that villagers construct their clan identity and become clansmen (cf. Connerton 1989). For example, a collaborator expressed that he felt more attached to events held in Ancestral Hall and he was still very attached to the ritual of distributing pork to clansmen during spring and autumn worshipping. "When I was little, I was curious as to why I could get free pork and so I asked my father. He told me that it was because I was part of the clan."[66] (See Fig. 3.36) In fact, this shows that ritual activities held in the Ancestral Hall not only enable socialisation into the group, but also trigger the curiosity of clansmen to find out more about their own heritage, history and cultural traditions. Another collaborator told me:

"When I saw interesting objects while chilling outside the Ancestral Hall, I would ask someone – usually my grandmother – to find out more about it. Like this wooden

[65] *S.F. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018*
[66] K.P. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019.

> *plaque in the central hall, she told me that we got it when an ancestor was an important official in the Qing Dynasty. And she also said that the Hall's high door saddle reflected the high social status of our ancestors as visitors would need to bow symbolically when walking over it."*[67]

But more importantly, as a collaborator explained, Tang elders used to enjoy gathering and chatting in front of the Ancestral Hall, where children used to play (Fig. 3.37). So, the Hall can be seen as an intergenerational 'contact zone' (cf. Clifford 1997), where cultural heritage is passed on orally from generation to generation. But as most clansmen no longer live in the village, the oral transmission tradition becomes less viable. Several Tang elders have resorted to writing down topics that they would have shared with descendants in the Ancestral Hall.[68] But written works cannot replace the Hall as a 'timeless' structure that underpin the whole clan-society organisation amid external changes. It serves as a symbol of clan identity: a 'node' that connects clansmen vertically across generations, and horizontally across branches and families. This is especially important for the present and future generations who no longer live in the village:

> *"I find it important to bring my children back to the village … to maintain the tie. But it has changed a lot, so much that the Ancestral Hall remains the only structure unchanged – where my children could experience and encounter what I, and many other generations of the clan have in the past. As it remains unchanged, it connects the clan, and can help us pass on our history, customs and identity to future generations."*[69]

In other words, spatial experience in the ancestral hall – a "representational space" that has stood firm against tides of changes – is indispensable for clansmen to maintain their ties with the clan. That is why it is inevitable that the ancestral hall's social function is becoming more important nowadays: it is how most clansmen who have moved to urban area or even overseas retain and perform their clan identity. They would come

[67] G. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019.
[68] Since the 1990s, the ever-increasing presence of researchers in Ping Shan have led to rising self-consciousness amongst clansmen of their own history. Since then, several volumes (S. Deng 1999, C. Deng et al 2012, Lu et al eds 2013 etc) have been published by enthusiastic clansmen who are keen to present their own narrative in clan history and culture amongst those of ethnographers and government materials.
[69] A. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018.

back to Ping Shan to participate in ancestral worshipping and share the ritual food afterwards. For a lot of them their aim was not to eat the ritual food, but to visit old friends.[70] This is what I have observed during the autumn worshipping rituals. As my collaborator pointed out, he "attends worshipping rituals as they are useful occasions to meet friends and family members who ... have moved out of the village already," as he enjoyed this "sense of togetherness".[71]

Nevertheless, it is inappropriate to simply equate ancestral halls to museums. While a purpose-built museum or gallery would usually utilise its space to exhibit as many artefacts as possible, the Ancestral Hall would leave out spaces for its original purpose – as a meeting place for the clan community. The hall only features minimal texts on information panels, leaving visitors room to interpret, imagine and think for themselves. The Ancestral Hall is more a space for gathering people, while the museum is more a space for gathering artefacts. In an ancestral hall, people interact with objects to unlock cultural knowledge and enable its transmission. In other words, objects only play a secondary role as 'triggers' in ancestral halls, whereas artefacts in a 'western' style museum is comparatively more important than the human interlocuter in the knowledge transfer process. The ancestral hall represents a an 'indigenous' Chinese model of cultural transmission, which explains why most of the Tang clansmen I spoke to did not find the 'western'-style Tang Clan Gallery useful on its own. One found the Gallery "more like a storage room for obsolete objects [no longer used in the village]. It is very new and has not long enough a history to replace the Ancestral Hall as the centre and focal point of the extended clan family. Well, perhaps in a few hundred years' time."[72] From the clansman's

[70] See also Lo (2007) on Tang clan tradition of 'Sik San Tau' (Post Tomb-sweeping Feast).
[71] G. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019.
[72] A. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018.

point of view, objects are not important without people. This suggests that clansmen are still adapting to the concept of museum as an institution for cultural transmission. It is still relatively new and not mature enough to rival the traditional institution. Moreover, as another clansman remarked,

> *"History presented in Tang Clan Gallery are usually individual facts. It provides a generally agreed historical narrative upon which a clan identity could be established. One could however not get in-depth knowledge from the exhibition, like which generation or branch one is part of. So, I think a 'Key Man' – Clan Elder – is needed to provide a narrative that stitches these together into a story. Otherwise, they appear to be a mess. [Elders] are like 'living museums' and 'speaking artefacts', whom you could learn about your past … [When they] pass away, it is like losing a book one has only finished halfway through."*[73]

Often found in Ancestral Halls, elders are traditionally regarded as the knowledgeable and respected gatekeeper to clan culture and heritage. That is why a collaborator pointed out that the two Ancestral Halls compared with artefacts in this Tang Clan Gallery are like hardware compared with software – both are indispensable in preserving Tang heritage. This shows how ancestral hall is not only a representational space but also a social space where clansmen gather for all kinds of ritual, celebratory, and reunion events. It is a place for people to interact with one another and with objects relationally and in a mutually enhancing manner.[74]

3.4 – Museumising Tang Ancestral Halls as 'HK Heritage'

Historically, the clan was an identity-charged method used by the state to maintain regional stability (Faure 1989: 29; Lin and Yen 2016: 70). Ancestral worship once had an important role in reinforcing unity of family and regulating social moral order, with the

[73] K.P. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019.
[74] This is how some amateur 'community' museums have positioned themselves: both as a representational and social space to gather objects and people. See chapter 5 for further discussion.

ancestral hall at the symbolic centre of this social-binding institution. Although ancestral worshipping in HK has survived relatively intact, kinship and ancestral worshipping in village life is gradually in decline due to the presence of outsider-tenants in village, urbanization, 'westernisation', and changing social organisation that encourage individualism (Baker 1968: 214; Baker 1979: 214-217; Svensson 2006: 14).[75] While some of the 170 ancestral halls in HK are declared monuments and retain their purpose as a worshipping space, many of them are much less active and some have fallen out of use.[76] Many of my more senior collaborators lamented that the younger clansmen did not understand, appreciate, nor care about their own clan heritage and culture. But more importantly, they attributed this to the decreasing number of clansmen still living in the village, as many decided to move to urban areas.[77]

At the same time, more and more ancestral halls in both HK and mainland China have been 'musealised' or 'monumentalised' in the past twenty years (Guangdong Province Administration of Cultural Heritage 2013).[78] Indeed, museum might be able to provide a similar but secular kind of environment to reorient family-focused society to a more state and community-focused identity, while at the same time preserve the material culture and heritage once proliferated in obsolete ancestral halls. Furthermore, as cultural identity and traditions transcend political borders, many ethnic Chinese in HK and overseas seek to maintain ties with their ancestral villages in the mainland China by

[75] Through ethnographies (e.g. Doolittle 1866, Jackson 1907, Yang 1959), we can conclude that ancestral halls in mainland China held very similar status as those in HK prior to the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s (Wu et al 2017: 16-20; Svensson 2006: 1). HK, a former British colony, was shielded from the Cultural Revolution. See Appendix 2 for a full list of known Ancestral Halls in HK as of 2022. Such ban only started to relax recently. While most Halls continued as solely social institution in mainland china (Tao et al 2015), some are 'revitalised' as museums (e.g. Chen 2016, Lin and Yen 2016, Li 2015).
[76] Refer to footnote for process of conversion to monuments in HK, which is different from the PRC.
[77] K.P. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, July 2018.
[78] For example, with financial support from Yu clansmen in HK, the Yu Ancestral Hall in Kaiping, Guangdong was able to set up the "Southern Cantonese Yu Clan History Gallery", and two other related galleries.

providing funds to support restoration and renovation of their ancestral halls (e.g. Mau 1989, Ajimer and Ho 2000). On the other hand, some lineage association offices in urban HK and overseas Chinese communities also feature ancestral altars, in a way to imitate the Clan's Ancestral Hall (Kuah-Pearce 2011). In other words, the material and conceptual format of the ancestral hall is adaptable to new contexts.

I argue that museumisation has brought prodigious changes to the nature, function, and modes of representations of ancestral halls. Since being declared as monuments, the Halls increasingly resemble modern museum-like institutions. To begin with, the general atmosphere in the Ancestral Halls has changed: once a popular leisure spot for clansmen, they are now mostly vacant and quiet. Security guards are present at the building to enforce the visiting rules which are written on signs: "keep quiet", "don't smoke and consume food or drinks while touring the building". These are essentially etiquettes of visiting a modern 'museum space' (cf. Duncan 1995, Singh 2015).

Secondly, there is an observable change in the means of cultural transmission in the Ancestral Halls since they were 'museumised'. Although the more important cultural events like feasts and rituals ceremonies are still held in Ping Shan, the everyday intergenerational interactions that used to be the main means of cultural transmission is becoming obsolete.[79] In the past, meaning of displays in the Ancestral Hall were conveyed with only minimal words but heavily relied on oral tradition and architectural features. In fact, in the field, I felt like I was being socialised into the clan-village society just as I was talking to my collaborators. The elders were 'teaching' me their clan history, customs, and culture as if they were teaching their younger clansmen. They taught me about the

[79] K.P. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019.

decorated wooden beams and animal figures on the roof, and the red bricks that acted as 'red carpet' at the entrance.[80]

Without the Ancestral Hall as material witness, they could only refer to photos to explain about what happened in the past (cf. Edwards et al eds 2006). Nevertheless, some concepts and rituals need to be experienced to have the full impact. I was lucky enough to be invited to visit one of the private branch Ancestral Halls by a collaborator to observe changes that museumisation would bring to the halls (Fig. 3.38-40).[81] Although this branch hall I visited featured entrance couplets, plenty of architectural features and an ancestral altar, without textual information panel I was not able to learn much about them. It follows that Svensson (2006: 14) described Ancestral Halls in mainland China as 'silent monuments' since the 1980s as the younger generations could not read the meaning of traditional ornaments and symbols, which had either been forgotten or suppressed.



Figs. 3.38-39. (Left, Right) Closed Family & Branch Ancestral Halls, Ping Shan (Photo by Author, 2018).

[80] The features of the Ancestral Hall my collaborators introduced to me in 2019 is very similar to what clansmen introduced to government officials in the 1950s (HKMS178-1-37, HK Public Records Office).
[81] Several branch Ancestral Halls in Ping Shan are not listed as monuments and remain closed to the public.



Fig. 3.40. My collaborator's Branch Ancestral Hall (Photo by Author, 2018).

Thirdly, in the museumisation process, the Tang Ancestral Halls have become a monument not just for the clan, but "shared cultural resources of all HK people" (Cheung 2007).[82] On the one hand, despite museumisation, the Tang Ancestral Halls are 'living monuments' for the clan. They are still being actively used for their original purposes as a 'living heritage', while the clan retains their 'curatorial authority' in the space and private property rights. Nevertheless, tension always exist between new demands from museumisation and old ways of doing things. For example, a clansman said it would be inappropriate to stage an 'exhibition' in the Ancestral Hall, as that would damage its atmosphere and image, rending it an 'exhibition gallery', which would be disrespectful to ancestors being revered there. "So, currently we only allow the government to place a small number of information panels in the Hall as a gesture of goodwill."[83] Another clansman thinks that the Hall should be kept as it is in the past, as historical everyday

[82] As explained in section 3.1, Ancestral Halls were originally exclusive and inward-looking institutions in the past. Social and ritual involvement in the halls confers a kind of identity and belonging to the clan.
[83] K.P. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019.

objects should be seen in context in historical buildings.[84] Clansmen have also used the heritage trail as a bargaining chip when negotiating with the government for other affairs (e.g. Cheung 2010, Lu et al eds 2013: 350). All of these lead to the reinvention of traditional culture and identity in Ping Shan (cf. Lo 2013). For instance, inspired by the 'museumisation' of the two Tang Ancestral Halls, a Tang elder and his son turned their own 'ancestral house' into a 'community museum' by filling the rooms with artefacts and heirlooms (Figs. 3.41-42, S. and K. Tang 2016). They faithfully restored the house without any governmental assistance into its original setting over 180 years ago, because "it [the heritage] is from [their] great-grandfather and [they] ought to pass it down to the next generation" (Y. Zheng 2019).[85]



Figs. 3.41-42. "Former Residence of Imperial Scholar" in Ping Shan (Y. Zheng 2019).

On the other hand, the once exclusive Tang heritage is undoubtedly no longer private; it has been absorbed as part of a holistic HK heritage. The contemporary HK society has placed further emphasis on history and culture heritage: both ingredients for constructing a post-handover identity in a "materially rich but culturally lacking urban Hong Kong society" (Liu 2007: 16). Selecting and freezing historic buildings like ancestral

[84] G. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, August 2019.
[85] The Tang family hoped to show visitors village lifestyle in the past but also his family's [high] social status (Lu et al 2013, Vol 1: xx-xxi). It was open several days a week for pre-arranged guided visit in 1993-2016. The family regarded it as a 'living classroom' (活課室) and 'village museum' (鄉村博物館) (Lu et al 2013, Vol 2: 43, 161). The building was recognised by the government as a Grade 2 Historic building in 2010 (AAB 2019: 24). See Chapter 5 for a detailed study of an amateur 'community' museum in HK.

halls is a process of objectification and decontextualisation, in which items of the past are pre-selected for the present (cf. Cheung 2010). Ancestral hall has been reinterpreted by the HK government as a symbol of the pre-colonial HK past: an 'indigenous' culture before the arrival of the 'western' colonisers. It is frequently visited by foreign tourists looking forward to experiencing Chinese culture, and officials often invite distinguished guests of HK to the hall. This also demonstrates that ancestral halls still act as ambassadorial space. Through the narrative created by the government on information panels, clansmen are identified simultaneously with Ping Shan, Tang clan, HK and China (at least culturally). Participation in heritage tourism, like setting up the heritage trail, donating artefacts, and acting as volunteer guides also fostered this identity construction process (cf. Cheung 1999). As my collaborator suggested, he did believe that their Ancestral Halls – the biggest and oldest in the city – could *represent* the history and rural culture of pre-colonial HK.[86] Another collaborator wrote in a publication that visiting Tang Ancestral Halls allowed visitors to understand that HK culture was already developed maturely 850 years ago (Lu et al eds 2013: 49). It seems that the government's goal is well achieved.

Sharing their private heritage with the HK public has also brought revitalisation to Ping Shan Tang Clan. Since being designated as a Heritage Trail, the village of Ping Shan has turned into, as my collaborator called, an 'open-air museum' to 'educate visitors on the history of Tang clan with artefacts like the ancestral tablets, and intangible heritage performed like rituals and lion-dancing'.[87] Hetherington (1996) once studied how Stonehenge in Britain could be seen as a 'museum without walls' – a heterotopic space (cf. Foucault 1986) – a site that invites visitor participation through utopic spatial play in the ordering and interpretation of culture. Ping Shan village, as an 'open-air museum',

[86] S.F. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018.
[87] A. Yau, Interview, HK, June 2018.

certainly invites such participation with its rituals held in the space. As a Tang clansman pointed out,

> *"Most of the time when you visit a museum you feel like the objects inside are 'dead'. … In our Ancestral Hall, objects are still used in rituals for our clan … the hall will keep being used in perpetuity; unless all of us Tang clansmen were dead!"*[88]

In other words, the ancestral hall museological model ensures objects are continually used, so that heritage is passed through generations using artefacts and rituals that transmit cultural knowledge. Museumising Tang Ancestral Halls and sharing their heritage with the HK public not only ensure that the Tang story could be transmitted in perpetuity, but it also benefits the local economy and revitalises the declining village. Benefiting from the Heritage Trail, Ping Shan's economy has changed from agriculture and small-scale factory to heritage tourism that supports small businesses.[89] As a clan elder recalled, as the village leader in the 1990s he suggested to other clansmen to accept the government's proposal of listing the Ancestral Halls as monuments based on the assumption that developing heritage tourism could facilitate local economic development.[90]

3.5 – Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed the relationship between ancestral halls and museums through the case of Tang Ancestral Halls and Tang Clan Gallery in Ping Shan, HK. I argue that although not its *raison d'etre* and by no means its only function, ancestral halls were indeed exhibition spaces, and can be seen as 'precursory museums' in pre-

[88] A. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018.
[89] Several restaurants, such as the Mrs Tang Café (refer to introduction of this chapter) sprung up near the Ancestral Hall since it opened its doors to the public in 1993.
[90] S.F. Tang, Interview, Ping Shan, June 2018.

modern Southern China. Ancestral halls collect, preserve, exhibit, and educate visitors about relationships: cross-generational blood relationships are made visible and tangible through the space, ancestral tablets, memorial plaques, and sometimes even photographs of ancestors. They mark the beginning and end of the earthly lives of its 'collection': the clansmen. A slight difference is that they are people who have been alive, and who will eventually acquire their clan and cultural identity through the 'exhibits' in the hall. I argue that the object-human relations in an ancestral hall create an after-life for both, as the collections both represent and perpetuate the clansmen (cf. Kopytoff and Appadurai 1986, Kuchler 1987, 1988). As ancestral hall enables clansmen to live beyond their earthly lives, it is thus an important venue that trigger the interest and curiosity of people to explore about their past, and tangible evidence for village elders to explain and transmit cultural knowledge to descendants. Through displaying their collection and conducting rituals with them, ancestral halls serve to pass on cultural practices and maintain cultural significance just like collections in modern museum-like institutions. They can remind and shape one's identity as a clansman. This ability to connect the living and the dead, the present and the past, is the connection between ancestral halls and museums. Both are created in anticipation that the institution and objects will live beyond the lifespan of their founding curators.

With the introduction of modern museums from the 'west', ancestral halls are thus conveniently 'museumised' and turned into monuments. Under government promotions aimed at instilling Chineseness amongst the public, these monuments are portrayed as embodying a common history for HK people. But since museumisation, the ancestral hall risks losing its place as 'contact zone' amongst descendants of different generations, which is important for the traditional ways of cultural inheritance: oral transmission and apprenticeship. Instead, it has become a different kind of 'contact zone', akin to other

museum-like institutions, that allows HK and foreign visitors to learn about traditional Chinese clan-village culture and lifestyle. Furthermore, although ancestral halls used to be physical embodiments of clans and important centrifugal force for their members as they kept clan history, lineage, and traditions alive, it will no longer be so in modern times, especially with social organisation in HK and Southern China not clan-based anymore. In such times of unprecedented socioeconomic changes and museumisation, I argue that the museum could act as a 'modern Ancestral Hall', or 'time(less) capsule' to introduce heritage to descendants and visitors. On the other hand, feeling lost in rapid changes and suffering from identity confusion since decolonisation, the HK public may find museum a useful channel to 'trace their roots' – find out who they are and what came before them – just as an Ancestral Hall could do to its clansmen.[91]

As I have argued in the chapter, the case of Tang Ancestral Halls vis-à-vis Tang Clan Gallery perfectly illuminates the complex relationship between ancestral halls and museums. In terms of modes of representation, the former relies on knowledgeable elders, rather than objects, to tell stories. It is a space with historical significance, symbolic values and material culture that allows such transmission and inheritance of vital historical and cultural information. On the other hand, the Tang Clan Gallery is organised on modern 'western' museum principles, relying on objects and supported by brief exhibition texts and graphics, to represent history and lifestyle of Tang Clan. Yet, it does not mean that objects or gallery guides are dispensable to Ancestral Hall and Tang Clan Gallery respectively, for my collaborators have pointed towards the importance of objects in Ancestral Hall in understanding history conveyed orally by elders, and gallery guides in Tang Clan Gallery are needed to provide in-depth details of the exhibits. An

[91] See Introduction for a detailed discussion on the identity confusion in HK.

ancestral hall gathers people, while a museum collects objects. This is reflected in the different spatial organisations of the Ancestral Hall and Tang Clan Gallery – the former leaves more space for social events and gathering and at first glance artefacts look more like decorations, while the latter is organised around objects. In the following chapters, I will first examine different kinds of non-government museums in HK and then examine how they are related to ancestral halls.

4

Non-government Independent Museums

The Hong Kong Maritime Museum

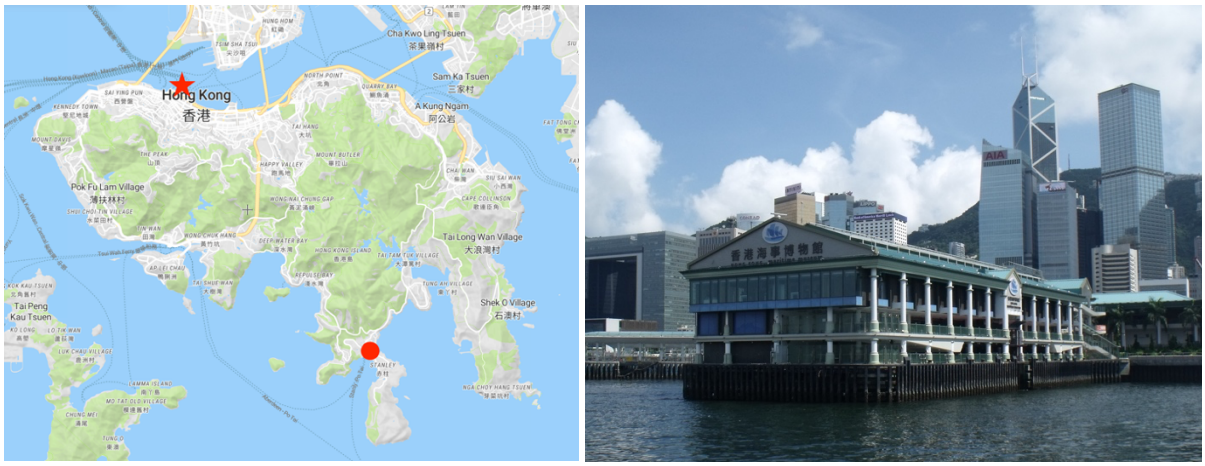


Fig. 4.1. (Left) HKMM in Stanley (Circle) and Central (Star) (Google, Illustrated by Author, 2022).
Fig. 4.2. (Right) The current premises of HKMM, converted from a working pier in Central (Wikipedia).

> *"Welcome to the Hong Kong Maritime Museum. I am your museum guide, Joseph. We are a non-government independent museum founded by shipping companies in Hong Kong (HK), dedicated to preserve our local maritime heritage…"* My introduction was soon interrupted by a curious visitor, *"Oh, I thought all museums in HK are managed by the government … These shipping companies must be so rich that they choose to invest in a business that doesn't make money!" (27 August 2016, Conversation between the author and a visitor, HKMM, Hong Kong)*

By August 2016, I had already been a museum volunteer at the Hong Kong Maritime Museum (*HKMM, 香港海事博物館)* for three years; but this was by far the most challenging question I was posed. I was not able to give an answer to that visitor that day and indeed it turned out to be one that was pertinent to my research questions. The founding Director of the HKMM once argued that Hong Kong (HK) was not a museums-orientated society: few HK people were willing to finance museums as cultural capital due to the prohibitively expensive property market (Davies 2012a: 30-31). Yet, as of

2022, there are at least thirty independent museums operating in HK.[1] Given such an unfavourable environment, there must have been substantial motivation for their founders to take on such a 'mission impossible'. In this chapter I ask: why were most of these independent museums established just as HK entered the postcolonial era? To what extent are their perceived purposes different from the HK government museum agendas?[2] Are these all connected to HK society's identity dilemma in the postcolonial period?[3] Do independent museums offer an alternative understanding of history and culture?

I will answer these questions through the case of HK Maritime Museum, a non-government, independent museum set up and funded by the shipping sector in 2003 at the beginning of HK's postcolonial period of 'museum boom'. It has successfully petitioned for government funding since 2010 and yet has remained independent in its operation. In 2013, HKMM relocated from its founding site in Stanley, an ancient fishing village in southern HK, to a pier in Central, a business district on the northern coast of HK island (Fig. 4.1-4.2). Not only does HKMM focus on local maritime heritage, but it also takes up a self-elected position to narrate the maritime history of South China (HKMM Report 2018-19: 2). I choose this museum because of its transformation since receiving government subsidy in the 2010s, which sheds light on how independent museums survive in HK. In this chapter, I will first define what a maritime museum is and how it construes maritime history with reference to relevant literature. After that, I will trace HKMM's development and analyse its exhibitions. Critical discussions follow as I focus on three key areas of this case study and argue that HKMM can be seen as a 'pier': both

[1] See Appendix A for a full list of known and operating museums in HK. Examples include the Museum of Medical Sciences (Lo 2014) set up by the HK Medical Society, Museum of Education (Chen 2011) set up by the HK Education University, and the Po Leung Kuk Museum (Lo 2017) set up by the orphanage charity.
[2] Refer to Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion on HK's government museums and their agendas.
[3] Refer to Chapter 1 (introduction) for a detailed discussion on HK people's ongoing identity dilemma.

literally as an actual pier and more metaphorically as a museum that is a site of transition. With cement pillars supporting the pier on the seabed, HKMM is half on land and half in the sea and attached to HK's central business district. It is an amphibious museum in a location that itself encapsulates the history of HK. Built on a maritime trading culture, it is also firmly cemented to mainland China, which is in its land-based proximity. Rather than a museum as a static, territorially bounded secular temple of nationalism (cf. Duncan 1995), I will demonstrate how HKMM doubles as a 'pier' for connecting people, objects, and ideas.

Data in this chapter was collected in a six-week fieldwork period in 2018 when I attended HKMM daily to carry out participant observation of sessions in museum operations, a major special exhibition launch event, and a series of educational activities. In this period, I also conducted exhibition analyses, archival research, as well as semi-structured interviews with museum staff and visitors. My analyses are supplemented with my prior experience and observations there as a museum volunteer at HKMM between 2013-17. All of these help me understand how exhibitions and engagement events are linked to cultural values and social norms particular to HK.

Definitions and Literature Review

I define non-government, independent museums in HK as institutions whose premises, governing bodies, and collections are founded, owned, and directly managed by independent organisations entirely separate from the government bureaucracy.[4]

[4] This definition is similar to the one adopted by HKMM itself in 2008: "a museum … operated by a charitable trust, company limited by guarantee, or a limited liability company owned by a charitable trust, a registered society or similar legal entity and with some or all of its funding from non-government sources" (HKMM 2008: 15-16; Attachment 3: 2). Refer to Chapter 1 (introduction) for detailed discussion on HK government bureaucracy and museum management.

Independent museums in HK differ from amateur 'community' museums by the fact that the former normally keep a permanent team of professional curators with a substantial working budget and permanent buildings funded and administered by professional sectors.[5] They are usually more specialised than the governmental museums, focusing on a particular area that reflects the interest of the organising bodies. In this chapter, I will explore the implications of differences on exhibition narrative, curatorial strategies and organising principles of independent museums. Since I aim to find out the intentions of these 'museum-makers', I shall focus more on the intentions of museum curators and the administrators.

As discussed previously in Chapter 1, the social world of HK is a cultural hybrid of both 'western' and Chinese traditions. While Song (2008) found that the operational aspects of many private museums in mainland China were founded on personal interest and individualism, such as the owners' desire to reinforce the public's attachment to traditional culture and to legitimise their own collections, one major difference is the lack of regulations and cultural policy by the HK government towards independent museums (e.g. Leong 2013, Ho 2017).[6] For example, Kong (2011) concluded that HK Cattle Depot, a heritage site turned cultural space, had failed to realise its full potential because of the fractured governance, overlapping responsibilities and little coordination between government departments. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how HKMM – an independent museum in HK – fits with these observations. Since their establishment in 2003, HKMM's operation has always been independent from the government bureaucracy. Officially speaking, they are not restrained by government stance, narratives, and agendas, despite being funded by the government. In their own words,

[5] Refer to Chapter 5 for detailed discussion on amateur 'community' museums.
[6] Refer to Chapter 2 for detailed discussion on HK government cultural policies and museums.

> *"HKMM is proudly independent – it is part of its DNA … has always prided itself on being part of the global, not-for-profit, museum sector, seeking to take the 'road less trodden' in exhibition and public programming – a boutique, specialist approach, rather than the more mainstream."* (HKMM Report 2018-19: 6).

Maritime history and their museums have traditionally been linked with nationalism, such as celebrating colonial expansion, military progress, projection of state soft power and influence. Through comparative analyses of maritime museums in Holland, Britain, Germany, America, Australia, Singapore and Macau, Anderson (1988, 1990) concluded that the spirit and style of these museums relate to each society's intimate connection with the sea, thus they could be seen as responses to the past experiences and current demands of their societies. A nation's story could be drastically different when viewed from a maritime, sea-based perspective instead of a land-based, territorial perspective, as I will discuss later in this chapter. Maritime museum could explore history in multiple themes including commerce and trade, social and cultural exchange, warfare and conflict, and the technological advancements brought about by maritime development. This applies to the HKMM, which, in addition to recounting the story of the maritime history of HK, explores the "national story of who Hongkongers are, how they have made themselves into what they are today, and the values they share" (Wong 2019: 40-41). But according to Fusaro (2010), maritime history as a subject area has, in the last two decades, undergone a 'cultural turn' and shifted away from 'national' to 'global' focus with wide-ranging comparisons.[7] In such way, maritime history nowadays is global in the sense of a 'total history' which crosses the boundaries of other disciplines (Polonia 2010). For example, Anthony and Schottenhammer's edited volume (2017) has investigated China's role in East Asian maritime history, which emphasised

[7] A similar shift, the 'global' turn, has occurred in the study of history, which features an increasing interest in trade and interconnectedness versus old national territory presentations of history. See for example Balachandran (2017), Byrne (2018), Drayton and Motadel (2018).

how the maritime silk road transcended borders and civilisations. Participating in this trend are many maritime museums which strive to provide new perspectives on maritime heritage from a cross-disciplinary and transnational perspective. For example, Leffler (2004) found that maritime museums in the US and UK were expanding their points of focus to explore how the sea affected 'ordinary' people and reflect how social history concerns affected representations of national identities and values. This also rings true for HKMM, which, through the theme of HK as a 'port city', explores all aspects of local life including trade and commerce, globalisation, maritime technology, migration and immigration (HKMM Report 2015-16: 3). More specifically, HKMM aspires to "place HK inside China's larger maritime story and to embed that story inside … today's shared maritime world" (Davies 2012a: 39). In this chapter, I will analyse how these themes are developed in HKMM in terms of displays, interpretation, and narratives.

Although it is a 'young' museum of only 20 years old, HKMM has already attracted much scholarly attention. Lo (2013) studied the relationship between the HKMM library and museum. He found that they complimented each other to give access to a whole story to the audience and enable better lifelong learning and social inclusion in museum programmes. Wong (2019) analysed the connection between the spatial design and the preservation of cultural heritage at HKMM. She demonstrated how HKMM deployed both serial and orbital structures along a temporal trajectory of HK's history as well as museum exhibits that acted as rallying and bonding icons in creating feelings of national solidarity and establishing a HK identity based on the concept of 'East Meets West' and social values of tenacity, resolve, and perseverance. She also argued that what set HKMM apart from other museums in HK was their focus on viewers' participation in the processes of knowledge transfer and interpretation through interactive display kiosks. There are several other accounts that have focused on tracing the museum's development.

Conner (2017) narrated in brief the development of the museum and its highlight collections, pointing out that partnership between HK government and shipping sector was a major factor in the museum's continuing success (p.2). The second HKMM Director Richard Wesley (2013) concurred, referring to the HK maritime sector as a "unique museum incubator" as he argued that HKMM was only possible due to the unparalleled growth of the HK-based shipping sector after the Second World War. In another paper, he demonstrated how 'community' matters to HKMM – from its establishment by the shipping community to the importance of maintaining close relationship with its patrons in the wider HK community (Wesley 2018). Other people involved in HKMM, such as the founding Chairman Anthony Hardy (2005) and HKMM trustee William Waung (2015), also contributed to the records, with the former emphasising the element of 'coincidence' in HKMM's collection development (Hardy 2013). In 2012, the founding Director, Stephen Davies (2012a), analysed the general lack of maritime museums in Asia. He attributed the difficulties of setting one up in HK to the deep-rooted Chinese cultural bias against seafarers, a deficiency exacerbated by nineteenth-century European imperialism that downgraded indigenous maritime traditions as inferior. Nevertheless, that did not explain why the nearby former Portuguese colony of Macau, whose population was also always Chinese dominant, had a maritime and fishing museum since 1919 with significant naval backing, while the British colonial government in HK did so little to protect the city's maritime heritage.[8] In another paper, Davies (2012b) also discussed the complexity of HKMM's curatorial planning due to the contentious aspects of HK's colonial

[8] For example, Davies accused the HK government of "destroyed the sites of the docks and dockyards that had been the core of its early prosperity, eradicated all but a paltry few hundred metres of the historic shoreline, and bulldozed every vestige of the traditional waterfront warehouses, … bade a blind goodbye to the last remnants of some two millennia of working Chinese sail, watched a traditional fishing sector that goes back millennia dwindle towards oblivion whilst simultaneously obliterating the floating community which had given it life" (Davies 2012a: 27-28)

past, which included the role of the Royal Navy, the opium trade and other legacies from 'western' imperialism. Nevertheless, most of the above literature came from professionals involved in HKMM, such as its founders, board members, curators, and directors. Through critical analyses of HKMM's permanent and special exhibitions, my study adds to these scholarly discussions in terms of whose heritage HKMM shows, its role as mediator between the maritime sector, government, and society as well as how HKMM has taken up social responsibility and promoted museum-mindedness.

4.1 Early Development of the Hong Kong Maritime Museum

The Founding of the Museum

According to records of the HK Legislative Council (LEGCO) meetings, a maritime museum for HK was suggested numerous times as early as 1996, but no further action was taken.[9] Finally acting on this idea was Anthony Hardy, a 40-year veteran international shipping company executive who originated from Britain but settled in HK. During his time in HK, he started collecting Chinese art and visiting museums.[10] As the founder of the museum recalled, "I was thinking at least a year before I retire … what would be some sort of contribution to HK. … every major port in the world seems to have a museum, and HK did not."[11] He and the other founders were "inspired by a fierce belief

[9] For example, the Economic Services Branch mentioned the possibility of setting up a maritime museum at the Cruise Centre in Urban Core Area (Economic Services Branch 1996); and the HK Amateur Rowing Association suggested the government plans for the waterfront to include "maritime museum featuring replicas, or originals, of the craft that used Hong Kong's harbour in bygone days" (HK Amateur Rowing Association 1998: 2). In the 2000s, a maritime museum was proposed in one of the West Kowloon Reclamation Concept Plan entries that received honourable mention (Planning and Lands Bureau 2000: 6-7); and the government Planning Department (2000a: 5, 2000b: 3-4) itself suggested to develop a maritime museum at Wan Chai waterfront or Aberdeen Harbourfront.

[10] Hardy's collection of historic painting relating to the trade between China and the 'west', hailed as "the finest of such collection in private hands", includes detailed views of ports, maritime encounters, triumphs and disasters, portraits of ships, and personalities of the China trade, largely within the period 1770-1870 (Conner 2017: 2).

[11] Hardy, Interview, HK, Aug 2018.

in the contribution of shipping to the port city of HK" (HKMM Log, Apr 2018: 3), and intended "to rescue [HK's] maritime heritage from neglect" (HKMM 2008: 5, 17). Clearly, the founders saw this 'neglect' as "more to do with civic society's dissatisfaction with government. There's a HKMM because the government didn't deal with it."[12] The museum is therefore a manifestation of their interest to participate and 'fill in the gap' in the HK museum sector. In other words, the original idea to set up HKMM was related to civic pride, a 'salvage' mentality in relation to local heritage, and the founder's personal ambition to create a personal legacy. Together with Tam Kwong Lim, a local Hongkonger who also had a lifetime career in the shipping sector and a collector of historical maps, the duo started planning the museum (Tam in Dao 2020a). At the beginning, only Hardy had museum experience, having been a board member of an American maritime museum. Hardy was also able to gain financial support from 82 HK and international shipping companies, which supported the museum's running cost for the first five years (Yu 2012; Conner 2017: 2). The source of funding and support influences HKMM's exhibitions, most notably in showing a "sense of professional nostalgia" and "celebrating the big shipping families".[13] This professional nostalgia may be connected to romanticised constructions of the past and the celebration of personal achievements: which could be construed as a form of self-promotion. As a former curator explained,

> *"Shipping and ship building … represents a huge part of HK's road to prosperity. … As these maritime giants, like the Tung family, have the financial resources now, the next thing they look for is a place to display their industries' stories of success."*[14]

In other words, the intention of setting up a Maritime Museum for HK resembles the intention of the grateful clansmen in setting up an ancestral hall to memorialise their

[12] Wesley, Interview, HK, Aug 2018.
[13] Wesley, Interview, HK, Aug 2018.
[14] Sze, Interview, HK, Jul 2018.

forebears, and to demonstrate their own wealth and social status.[15] Just as clansmen use ancestral halls to display their clans' glorious achievements in history, the HKMM could be seen as a 'public relations project'. As such, HKMM Company Limited and Trust were formed in 2003, with trustees drawn from HK's international shipping community, academia, and government officials in their private capacities (HKMM 2008, Attachment 2: 7). "So, it was set to be, from the beginning, a private museum *owned* by the … shipping companies and individuals".[16]

From Private Museum to Government Subsidised Museum

Initially, HKMM relied on sponsors from the HK shipping community and some occasional heritage funds from non-government organisations.[17] But the management soon realised that donations from the HK shipping community (approximately 78% of the budget) was unreliable, as they had fluctuating business cycles. Furthermore, it was difficult to "convince potential donors of the survivability and credibility of a museum if there is no evident government financial support" (HKMM 2008: 8). In other words, the success of independent museums still relies on government 'endorsement' through favourable policy and finance.

> *"Stanley [ed: where HKMM was located] would go nowhere; it would just be a little jewellery box that in the end you would scale down to take over as a gallery … But I thought HK deserved better … I couldn't see that the shipping community would divvy up in perpetuality to a small jewel box in Stanley … [and even if they would] 2009-10 was the worst shipping year since 1912 – shipping community could not give out any more money to museum."*[18]

[15] Refer to Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion on ancestral hall and their museum characteristics.
[16] Hardy, Interview, HK, Aug 2018.
[17] For example, the 'Lord Wilson Heritage Trust' enabled the museum to acquire many of its early collections such as local nautical charts and Qing Dynasty scroll "Pacifying the South China Sea" (HKMM 2008: 5).
[18] Davies, Interview, HK, Aug 2018.

By the late 2000s, the small private HKMM soon realised that the only way for them to survive was to develop and expand: without additional support, the museum was to close by the end of 2011 (HKMM 2008: 8; Attachment 4: 6). So, it requested significant subsidy from the HK government, which turned out to be a difficult battle. The then Museum Director recalled that "LCSD [tried] to explain why HKMM shouldn't have support, because HK [government] museums are wonderful … 2006 had seen the Director of Audit reported on government museums as an enormous waste of money … [they] just felt threatened … They were not friendly…"[19] Based on the inefficiency of HK government museums, HKMM convinced the government that partially publicly funded yet mainly private-managed was the best model, as mainly publicly financed models "cannot return good value for money" (HKMM 2008, Attachment 4: 2, 5).

After HKMM's persuasive presentation at the LEGCO and a members' visit to the museum in 2008, the LEGCO voted that the Government should support HKMM. The government responded favourably and stated that "HKMM set a successful example of operating as a private museum" (HK Legislative Council 2011: 5). Furthermore, Legislators urged the government to "expedite the development of a standard mechanism for supporting private museums" (HK Legislative Council 2008: 66), and "promote a level playing field between publicly funded museums and privately funded museums" (HK Legislative Council 2010a: 8). The Home Affairs Bureau of the HKSAR Government responded by stating in their policy initiatives that

> *"from the cultural policy perspective, we welcome and encourage the establishment of private museums, which complement publicly-funded museums in maintaining a diverse, pluralistic and vibrant cultural ecology in HK and are conducive to our*

[19] Davies, Interview, HK, Jul 2018. Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), a government department in charge of all government museums, as well as the Antiquities and Monuments Office which manages monuments and historic buildings in HK. Nonetheless, in HK's legislature it was members of the LEGCO instead of governmental departments, who vote on whether projects would get funded. Further discussion in Chapter 2.

development as a cultural hub in the region" (Home Affairs Bureau 2008: 6).[20]

With this change in government policy, the HK government finally agreed to provide HKMM with the vacant pier in Central (Fig. 4.4) it had asked for, with nominal annual rent, to meet its relocation and conversion costs, as well as to grant it an annual operational subsidy of HKD 4,429,000.[21] Since 2018, the annual government subvention was increased to HKD 6,000,000, which accounts to, on average, a quarter of the HKMM's annual income (HKMM Log, Apr 2018: 3). This subsidy, in addition to the provision of a prime location on the harbourfront, enabled HKMM to grow into a comprehensive thematic museum that encompassed everything maritime. The HKMM is to date the only successful case of 'public-private partnership' in the provision of museum services in HK. In the following sections, I will explore how HKMM is not only located on a pier but can also be seen as a 'pier' that connects people, objects, and ideas.





Fig. 4.3. (Left) Murray House in Stanley, site of HKMM between 2003-2010 (Wikipedia).
Fig. 4.4. (Right) Central Pier development in 2010. The third closest pier to the viewer was allocated to HKMM (Wikipedia).

[20] Despite a slight push in 2010, the Government still has not followed up on developing a standard mechanism for supporting private museums in HK as of 2022 (cf. HK Legislative Council 2010c: 3-4). Requests from these museums are still considered on a case-by-case basis.
[21] Central is an administrative district in HK, where the Central Business District is located. There are ten ferry piers that connect HK island to Kowloon peninsula and other outlying islands. Refer to Chapter 1 (introduction) for general discussion on the geography and information of HK.

3.2 – Analysing HK Maritime Museum's Exhibitions

Many elements of the current permanent exhibitions of HKMM in Central could be dated to the permanent exhibition first opened in Stanley in 2005. Consisted of two 250m^2 galleries, the Stanley permanent exhibition was curated by the founding Director Stephen Davies and designed by a HK-based interior architecture company (HKMM 2008, Attachment 2: 8). Through maritime paintings and ship models, the Ancient Gallery documented the maritime history of South China from the Han Dynasty to the 1870s (Fig. 4.5-4.7, Waung 2015). It traced the development of shipping world in ancient China, Chinese maritime interactions with neighbouring states, and maritime trade clashes between Europeans and China. The Modern Gallery examined the evolution of maritime technology in China, HK's development into a leading container and passenger port, and outlook into the future.

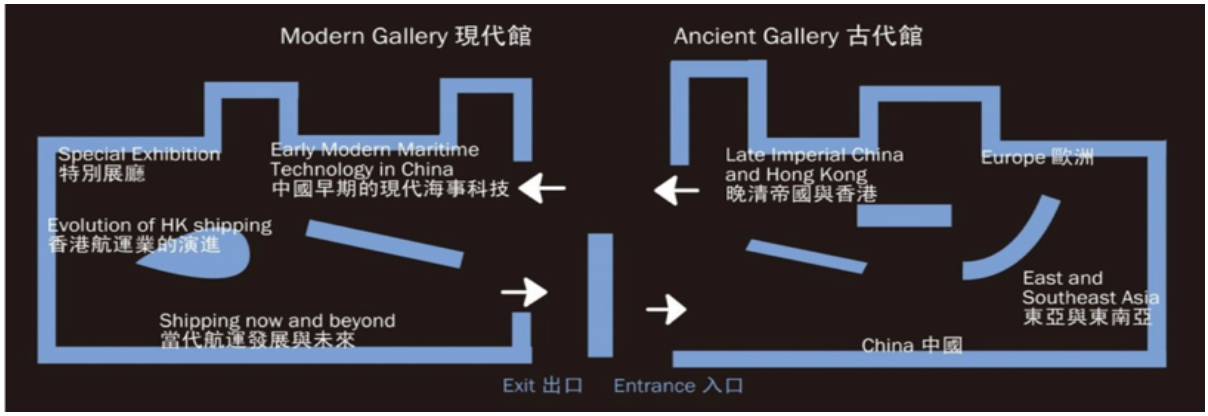


Fig. 4.5. HKMM's permanent exhibition in Stanley, 2005-2012 (Waung 2015).



Fig. 4.6-4.7. HKMM Ancient (Left) and Modern (Right) exhibition galleries, Stanley (Basmajian n.d.).

The current HKMM is situated at Central Pier No.8. Converted from a working pier, it was first opened in 2013, with fifteen galleries across three floors, and office and storage space below them. The three floors are colloquially called A-C 'decks' to give the museum a more maritime flavour. Located on a pier, the HKMM was successful in blending its surrounding environment into the exhibition. In addition, a multimedia sound system was installed throughout the museum that played sounds of sea waves, ship's horns, sea gulls and sail-making. All these multi-sensory aspects reinforce the museum's maritime focus and provide a unique opportunity for visitors to experience maritime heritage 'in situ' (cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 389; Wong 2019). One of the central theses of the museum is that "HK's story is in many important ways its maritime story … the heart of any 'HK Story' is 'the view from the sea'" (HKMM 2008, Attachment 2: 10; HKMM 2008: 4). Indeed, HKMM's building, and its location materially reinforce the history of HK presented. At the museum, visitors can literally 'view' HK's story not only from artefacts contextualised in a pier-turned-museum, but also from the busy harbour and nearby piers that encapsulate HK's success: its status as a hub that connects HK to the world. From a different perspective, the 'decks' could be seen as different layers of understanding HK's maritime story: its rich seafaring history since antiquities (C Deck), HK colonial purpose as an entrepôt and strategic stronghold for Britain's maritime empire (B Deck), as well as Sino-European exchanges in culture and maritime technology (A Deck).

The visitor entrance, ticket desk and reception area are on B deck. As HKMM is not a government museum, it charges admission fees to help maintain financial independence (HKMM Log, Apr 2018: 16). From the museum comment book, many visitors were surprised that the museum was not owned by the government. "The

museum should not be privately owned! It should be government owned!".[22] Leslie, a local HK visitor, questioned the need for admission fees on the museum comment book: "Why do we still have to pay HKD 30 admission fee when the HK government is the main funding body?".[23] Another local HK visitor, Cheung Wai Hung, commented that "Hong Kong Government is too greedy, asking for money in museum".[24] This lack of enthusiasm in paying for museum admission further demonstrates the general disinterest, as identified earlier in this chapter, among the HK public to finance museum and cultural development.

At the reception area is also a big plaque detailing the HKMM's mission: "to promote a greater knowledge of HK, China and Asia's maritime history and the vital role that ships and the sea play in our past, present and future. We do this by providing the community and visitors with an exceptional museum experience and opportunities to learn about HK's heritage and how it links with the rest of the world." It is important to note that HKMM not only preserves the maritime heritage of HK, but also places it within the wider context of China, Asia, and the world. So, HKMM strengthens the official narrative promoted in government museums which portrays HK's pre-colonial history and cultural connection to the 'Chinese motherland' that stretches far beyond the British colonial period.

The permanent exhibition was curated by the founding Director Stephen Davies and designed by international consultant Haley Sharpe (Home Affairs Bureau 2011: 6, Waung 2015). It starts on C Deck with *Traditional Maritime China* (C1, see. Fig. 4.8), which aims to illustrate "the most important developments of China's unique maritime

[22] Anonymous, HKMM Comment Book, 8 Jan 2014.
[23] Leslie, HKMM Comment Book, 28 Jun 2013.
[24] Cheung Wai Hung, HKMM Comment Book, 30 Dec 2013.

history … of some 8,000 years". HK was not mentioned at all. The exhibits in the first cabinet, including a 2,000-year-old funerary boat excavated in mainland China, further illustrate how the gallery has very little to do with HK at all. In fact, HK, then part of the Nanyue Kingdom that stretched from present-day Guangdong to Vietnam, was only recently conquered (112 B.C.E.) by the Han 'Chinese' Empire when these exhibits were first made (206 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.). It was a time when HK was considered by the elites in China Propre as part of a different, uncivilised, and foreign 'culture'. Rather than deconstructing and exploring indigenous maritime culture, this part of the exhibition subscribes to the official Chinese historiography which assumes HK as part of a homogenous Chinese history. The displays, arranged in four horizontal cabinets with minimal space in between, communicate to visitors a homogenous and uninterrupted Chinese history and civilisation from a maritime perspective.

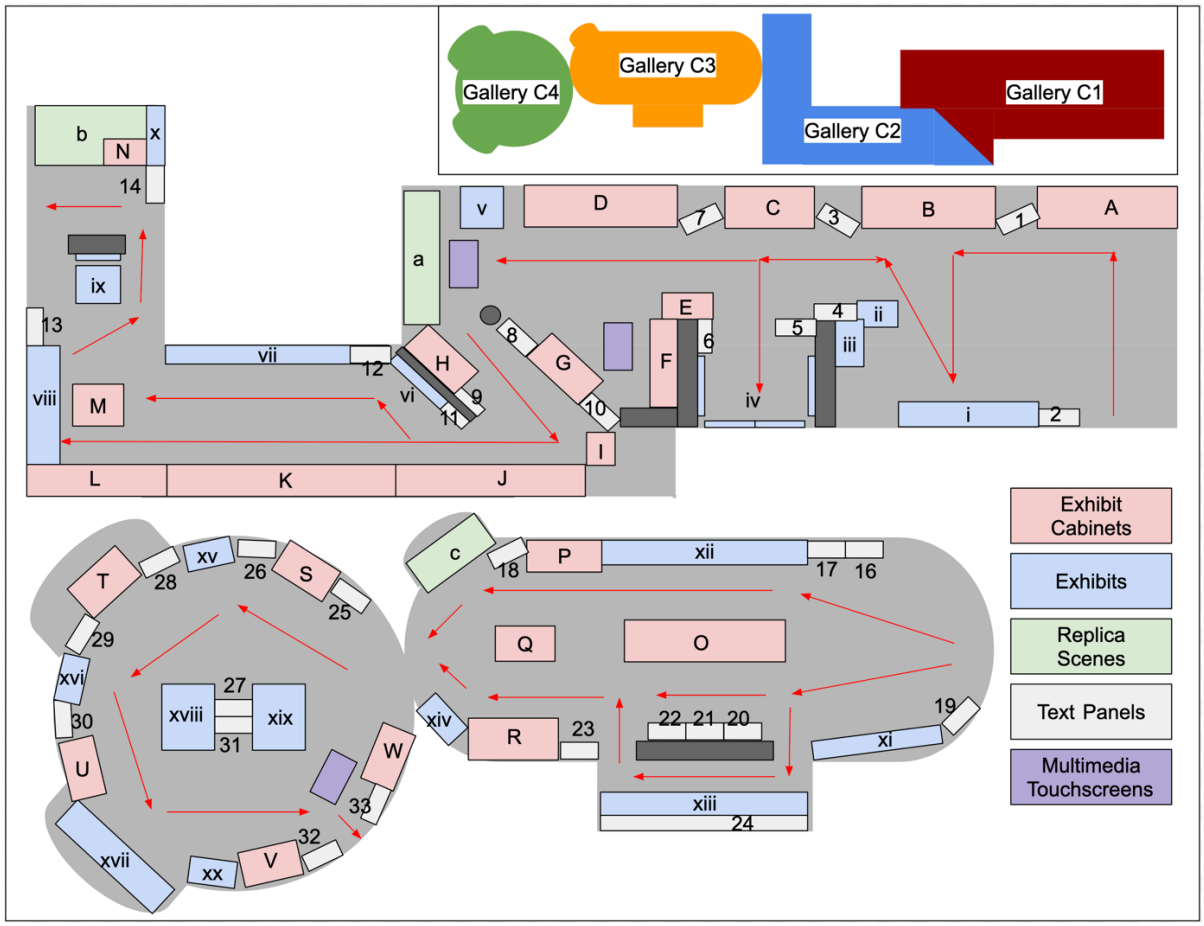


Fig. 4.8. Cabinets (A-W), Stand-alone Exhibits (i-xx), Replica Scenes (a-c), Text Panels (1-33) and Multimedia Touchscreens (purple) on C Deck (Galleries C1-C4). Red arrows denote routes commonly taken by visitors (Illustrated by Author based on visit in Jan 2021).

The next cabinet traces the consolidation of Chinese naval architectural tradition in ancient dynastic China with ten period ship models reconstructed by the museum. To strengthen the trade and commerce perspective, the gallery also features four Chinese-port paintings**,** a Japanese reproduction of Ricci's 'Map of the Ten Thousand Countries of Earth', the first practical Chinese nautical chart 'Selden Map', and Ming-era porcelain (c.1445-1521) excavated in HK.[25] Material culture in HKMM facilitates what Benedict Anderson (2006: 6) has argued, the imagination of belonging to a distinct, bounded and sovereign community through the construction of a homogenising narrative of history, tradition and culture. Through these trade objects, HKMM not only illustrates the early international exchanges between China and the world, but also emphasises on the role of HK as "an important port for … maritime trades" before British colonialism.[26] In other words, HK is portrayed as an integral part of Chinese trade in this shared 'past'. Kavanagh's edited volume (1991) shows how museum labels, signs and publications expose the ideological perspective of the text writer and convey socially constructed views. Furthermore, Sharon MacDonald, through her ethnography of a science museum exhibition (2002), shows how meaning-making does not end with the curator's labels. Rather, it starts from there and invites visitors to participate in the process. On the replicas, Han Byung-chul (2017) has pointed out that rather than 'western' 'cult of the original', the Chinese idea of preservation is continual reproduction: there is no difference between original and replica. In other words, HKMM is renewing the Chinese maritime history and culture that is outside living memory through reproducing ship

[25] Both maps and the excavated porcelains were part of different special exhibitions, which were later added to enrich the permanent exhibition.
[26] This text was part of a later addition from a special exhibition, which signifies the museum's changing perspective to be discussed in section 4.4.1.

models and artefacts. With such choice of words in this gallery as "consolidates", "grows", "dominance", "maritime greatness" to describe Chinese maritime progress, I argue that in the process HKMM aims to project a positive image of the Chinese maritime past. Nevertheless, the extensive amount of replica ship models on display still fails to make the 'imagined past' relevant to those who live in the present. For example, comments in the visitors' book indicated that the gallery's attempts to reconstruct and 'imaginatively portray' a distant Chinese past were irrelevant to contemporary visitors (HKMM Comments Book, 1 Apr 2018).

This positive past is destabilised on a few occasions in the following exhibits. Although beyond living memory, the story of explorer Zheng He (鄭和) is taught in local Chinese history curriculum as an example of China's ancient maritime glory (HK Education Bureau 2022). As a Ming dynasty diplomat who established Chinese maritime trade routes with Southeast Asia in 1407-33, Zheng's story is featured extensively in HKMM too.[27] Since 2013, the maritime routes have been reinterpreted by the Chinese government to promote its 'Belt and Road Initiative' (e.g. Frankopan 2016, Deepak ed. 2018, Xing 2018). Nevertheless, the museum's narrative emphasises Zheng's Muslim, non-Han Chinese origin visually with his Muslim name in both English and Arabic (Hajji Mahmud Shamsuddin). This is regarded an attempt to deconstruct and problematise Zheng's status as a 'Chinese' national hero, which fits with the Chinese narrative of "peaceful internationalism" (cf. Wade 2005: 10). However, HKMM did not address Zheng's acts of 'proto-colonisation' and violence in Southeast Asia (Tan 2015, Wade 2020).

[27] Refer to Liu et al eds. (2014) for a comprehensive discussion of Zheng He's life and voyages.



Figs. 4.9-4.10. Gallery C1 (Top) features many ship models, and C2 (Bottom) features many traded goods (Photos by Author, 2018).

The second gallery (C2, see Fig. 4.8), "*The China Trade*", features some of HKMM's most prized collections, which were provided by the museum founder and his wife. The gallery aims to convey how "China was never as isolated from the world as it is commonly believed" during the Canton Trade period (c.1757-1842).[28] In contrast to the previous gallery, there is an abundance of 'western' ship models and traded goods, which collectively illustrate the Canton Trade System between European East India Companies and Qing China**.** Unlike the HK government museums, which adhere to the 'official historiography', HKMM has chosen a different perspective. Hostilities like Opium War and resulting treaties are portrayed as results of the ongoing trade imbalance and cultural difference. For example, the exhibition text stated, "in the West, [sic.] capturing a ship during a period of war was considered acceptable; in China, it was sea banditry". The Chinese failures at the two Sino-British (opium) wars of 1839-42 and 1856-60 were omitted and downplayed. On a similar panel at the government Museum of Coastal Defence, the British were vilified, "the British took full advantage of the location of Hong Kong to expand their opium smuggling activities, making the situation more critical in South China". Contrary to the official Chinese historiography, HKMM's exhibition duly pointed out that opium 'was in fact first introduced into China from Arabia in the Tang dynasty as a medicine. [29] Furthermore, the eventual Chinese addiction to opium was juxtaposed with the British 'addiction' to tea. Discussing the aftermath of Opium War, the government Museum of Coastal Defence pointed out that "Qing government was forced

[28] A similar text panel at the government Museum of Coastal Defence emphasises that "China had been a self-sufficient country with little need for foreign commodities. Chinese emperors therefore saw foreign trade a favour granted to the foreigner (視貿易為嘉惠外人的賞賜)".

[29] In mainland Chinese historiography, the 'unequal nature' of trade and 'western' (particularly British) exploitation of Chinese market with a prohibited drug (opium) is often magnified and condemned as unethical. This element overshadows the other trade problems at the time such as cultural differences (relatively liberal free trade concept of the Europeans in contrast to the tributary and trade-as-a-concession mentality of the Chinese) and trade imbalance between Chinese and the 'western' powers (cf. Gelber 2004, 2006). This historical narrative is adopted in by all HK Government Museums.

[by the British] to sign our country's first unequal treaty in modern history…". The emphasis on "unequal" nature of the treaty follows the official mainland Chinese narrative. In HKMM, the word "unequal" describing the treaties was not present; no official name of the wars was mentioned in the English text despite "opium" war was mentioned in Chinese text. I argue that these are not mere discrepancies in texts, but intentional omissions and inclusions that aim at appealing to different audiences.

According to museum staff, exhibition texts were first drafted in English in 2010-13 by then Museum Director Stephen Davies, and later translated into Chinese. The text was then studied and approved by an "independent panel test review committee" consisted of the two founders, Anthony Hardy and Tam Kwong-lim, a former Chief Curator of the government Museum of History, a former senior HK government official, a former HK Judge, and an academic (Waung 2015). Speaking of the "approved" and nuanced histories with regards to opium, curator Stephen Davies (2012a: 42-43) emphasised that "there are other "takes" on the opium business that should not be elided merely because one approach has become received wisdom". This shows that when the permanent exhibition was curated between 2010-2012, HKMM, as a non-government independent museum, retained curatorial freedom and did not have to follow government historical narratives. I argue that the English text, which provides a more nuanced narrative, is aimed at international and HK visitors who could read English. Providing a more factual, neutral account of the events, the Chinese text is aimed at mainland Chinese and HK visitors who prefer to read in Chinese.

Indeed, words in museums could be used with pedagogical aims in mind to influence visitors, just as Hevia (2003) has pointed out how 'western' imperial powers used to influence China without directly colonising the nation through a series of

photographs taken during the Boxer Rebellion, but contemporary museum visitors are anything but *tabula rasa*. Influenced by previous museum experience and historical narrative they subscribe to, visitor feedback on HKMM's interpretation of challenging history remains mixed. For example, B. Hob from Germany, was disappointed that HKMM tried to avoid politics and red tape: "the reason for the opium wars … ought to be explained here much more clearly".[31] On the other hand, during my fieldwork, I overheard mainland Chinese visitors who were intrigued by the tea and opium trade and exclaimed, "Really? The most traded goods were tea? I thought it was opium!" There is a clear contrast between views of visitors from mainland China, who are familiar with the official historiography adopted in state museums, and HK-based curators who have access to a wider range of sources and relatively less curatorial constraints. Indeed, this part of history is so well-known among local HK and mainland Chinese visitors that visitors are almost expecting the museum endorsing their version of history.

The 1846 journey of the Chinese Junk *Keying* from HK to Britain, complete with artefacts from the adventure and a lifelike model ship, is used as a transition to the next gallery: 'Sea Bandits' (C3, see Fig. 4.8, 4.11**)**. This gallery was almost completely revamped by 2018, since HKMM first opened in 2014. Axiomatically, it was originally about "sea bandits" operating in the South China Sea as well as the different perceptions on piracy between China and the 'west', which ultimately led to war. The story of Cheung Po Tsai, a nineteenth century HK-based pirate, is retraced with one of the museum's prized artefacts, the *Pacifying the South China Sea* scroll painting. Originally, on the opposite side of the storyline were several merchant ships paintings, which were 'targets' of piracy. Together with the voyage of *Keying*, they marked the transition of the exhibition from

[31] B. Hob, HKMM Comment Book, 17 Jun 2013.

Chinese to HK maritime history. While the scroll stayed, the original pirate wax figures and an interactive pirate-hunting game were removed by 2015. As a former curator put, "we can't risk being like HKMH whose permanent exhibition stays the same for 20 years; otherwise, we can't attract visitors."[32] This shows that such independent museums like HKMM would evaluate themselves against government museums in HK and strive to provide a better museum experience. Replacing them are another two cabinets of goods traded between China and the world and a collection of 34 paintings recording the porcelain production process in Qing era. These installations come from HKMM's special exhibitions, which aim to highlight the cultural and technological exchanges resulting from the Chinese maritime 'Silk Roads'. This is a theme heavily promoted by the P.R.C. under the Belt and Road Initiative (e.g. Frankopan 2016). These exhibits occupy a central location under the spotlight in the gallery despite their irrelevance to the exhibition chronology. While HKMM does not admit it is under any pressure to align with the mainland Chinese national cultural agenda, as I will discuss in the next section (4.3), there has been an observable change in exhibition narrative since 2014.

The next key collection – the bronze, Chinese 'General' Cannon once used to fight the British in the first Opium War, has drift into the partition where the scroll is exhibited**.** Despite displaying this key artefact, HKMM has made no attempts to trace the development of the Opium War and its impact on HK. The war was crucial to the foundation of HK as the territory was ceded to the British in 1842 following the Chinese defeat. Contrary to HKMM, the story of Opium War is heavily featured with a short film and several battle models in the government-run Museum of History. The transition here from the pirate to the HK gallery is instead provided by materials on piracy in HK waters.

[32] Sze, Interview, HK, Jul 2018.

Such a lack of reference to Opium wars but an emphasis on pirates shows that whilst receiving government funding, HKMM is not obliged to actively promote government narratives.







Fig. 4.11. (Top Left) Gallery C3 after its transformation from a pirate gallery into another 'China trade' gallery. (Photo by Author, 2018).

Fig. 4.12. (Top Right) The 'General' Cannon, which saw action in the Opium War. (Photo by Author, 2018)

Fig. 4.13. (Bottom) With an abundance of local artefacts, curators still chose to display various ship models in Gallery C4, which traced the development of HK's Victoria Harbour (Photo by Author, 2018).

In '*Creating Victoria Harbour*' (C4, see Figs. 4.8, 4.13), the exhibition finally turns to HK's own maritime story. Although most relevant to HK, this gallery is the smallest in HKMM. Firstly, the museum acknowledged that "[w]hen the British annexed HK in 1841, there was a flourishing community of some 6,000 inhabitants working as fishermen, farmers and artisans; … coastal defence forts and a customs station to oversee the vital inshore passage", but not merely a "barren rock" early British colonists could find (Curzon 1894: 428, quoted in Hayes 2006: 187).[33] HKMM chose to focus on the development of HK's harbour, "the bedrock of HK's success – from a mere 'roadstead' to

[33] Early British colonists found HK merely an "unhealthy, pestilential, and unprofitable barren rock", "a colony ... composed of raw materials, and unlicked into civilization" (Curzon 1894: 428, quoted in Hayes 2006: 187), thus overlooking any meaningful local culture and civilisation.

Victoria Harbour, made possible by colonial trade and administration". Themes featured are related to the harbour's various functions – as an early shipping port which led to the creation of a modern shipping sector in China, and as a maritime traffic hub supported by growing passenger (coolie) trade and ocean-going traffic. Victoria Harbour's port facilities, management, workers and policing are then explored. The gallery also touches on docks, slipways and shipyards in Victoria Harbour, emphasising that "HK shipwrights had been building junks and sampans for hundreds of years when the British first annexed HK Island in 1841". After that, the gallery details the destructions brought by typhoons to HK and shelters constructed as precautions.[34] Although the museum has curated a similar special exhibition in 2016, none of the materials are integrated into this part of the permanent exhibition. This makes a sharp contrast to the swift effort of integrating Chinese trade objects into Gallery C3 from the maritime silk road exhibition that connects to the Chinese national cultural agenda of promoting the BRI. The gallery ends by tracing Victoria Harbour's naval connections before, during and after the Second World War. Overall, artefacts in the gallery, including harbour artworks, ensigns and models of visiting navies, create a metropolitan and international image of Victoria Harbour.

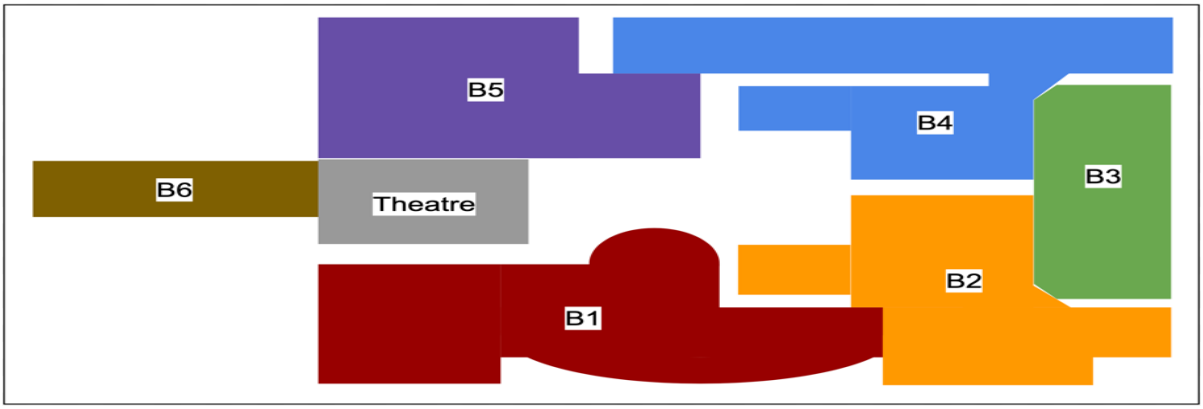


Fig. 4.14. Six galleries on B Deck (Illustrated by Author, based on visit in Jan 2021).

[34] *"In the Midst of a Storm: HK's Early Typhoons"* featured a video clip of historical elements and interview with the then Director of HK Observatory, historical scientific instruments, and a historic Typhoon Signal ball.

The next gallery, 'China's First Maritime Modernisation', is located one floor up on B Deck (B1, see Figs. 4.21), as the exhibition's focus shifts back to China again. It begins with a bronze statue of Li Hongzhang (李鴻章), the Qing China diplomat who conducted most negotiations with 'western' powers and introduced the modernisation movement. Nevertheless, his involvement in negotiating the Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong Territory (1898) and his several visits to the colony are omitted. The other side of the storyline involves the 'western' participation in the Chinese modernisation, such as the British-controlled Chinese Imperial Maritime Service.[35] The exhibition then explains the failure of Chinese modernisation with its naval defeat in the Sino-French (1884) and Sino-Japanese Wars (1894). Although the displays are not ungenerous in mentioning the participation of foreigners in such Chinese modernisation, none of them are made relevant to HK, despite its important roles as the main recruiting base and in educating bilingual Chinese staff for the Fuzhou Naval Colleges and Imperial Maritime Service. HK only comes up once when a set of decommissioned lights from a lighthouse is exhibited along with a signal cannon.

The exhibition then features a 'wall' of ship models neatly arranged in a corridor opposite to the gallery on sea survival and maritime safety. The collage (Fig. 4.16) is meant to match with the themes 'saving lives' and sea survival, although the link is weak. Most of the model ships displayed are containers and oil tankers, while none of them has caption label. During my fieldwork some former curators told me that the models came from shipping companies which sponsored HKMM. Opposite to the collage was a HK-built "Choy Lee" wooden lifeboat suspended from the ceiling (β in Fig. 4.21 in p.190). Visitors

[35] The Chinese Imperial Maritime Service was a "Chinese government department, but was led and mainly staffed by foreigners … [and was] highly successful despite its British bias" (1 in Fig. 4.21). Despite the wealth of materials of this organisation, the HKMM only exhibited a few charts and paintings in relation to the Service (i in Fig. 4.21).

are first introduced to "sea lanes and the rules of the road" with several types of ship lanterns made in HK, as well as salvage and sea rescue missions in HK. The exhibition includes two large-scale and memorable accidents on the sea related to HK.

Gallery B2 is split into two parts, on *HK Ships and Shipyards* (B2-1) and *Making of a Modern Port* (B2-2, see Fig. 4.21). Having a theme somewhat overlapping with certain areas in 'Creating Victoria Harbour' (C4), the first part of Gallery B2 "describes the port's story … [and] the myriad of people employed in the port [of HK]". The gallery has a few displays on ship engines, unlabelled models of the Royal Naval Dockyard and various other commercial dockyards in HK, which have all ceased to exist. However, such connection is not particularly strong. The second part, '*Making of a Modern Port* (B2-2)' starts with an interactive game 'loading the container ship', which, from my observation, is very popular among children. The gallery traces the port of HK's historical development from post-war reconstruction to the emergence of the modern shipping community and into an intermodal super-hub today. To visualise the evolution, the exhibition features artefacts such as historical maps, photographs of the docks and port facilities, ship models, and a large model of HK's busy Kwai Chung Container Port. On the other side, the Harbour Viewing Gallery (B3) features huge glass windows that offer a panoramic view of the busy Victoria Harbour. With a carpet map on the floor and interactive monitors connected to the museum's radar system, the gallery "tells the story of the vibrant, bustling world of an international harbour" and the evolution of its shoreline.

Gallery B4 is again divided into two parts. Firstly, 'Carrying People' (B4-1), focuses on marine transport which facilitates movement of mankind, and the stories of different kinds of passengers. The exhibition starts with coolie trade and the indenture system,

which has led to the creation of a large overseas Chinese diaspora. HK has not only been a port for labour and passenger transit, but also a port of refuge, most famously for Chinese and Vietnamese after their civil wars**.** These topics touch on nostalgia and collective memory of the common HK citizenry, for many have experienced to be, or indeed have been personally connected with refugees. Similarly, ferry services within HK, as well as to nearby port cities**,** is another theme that local visitors would find resonance. During my fieldwork in 2018, I observed first-hand how members of the older generation reminisced about the quick breakfast they had on ferries before going to work, while younger visitors learned about the importance of vehicular ferries before the construction of cross-harbour tunnels, which they might not have seen.

The second part, 'Water Sports' (B4-2, see Fig. 4.21), begins with two artefacts hanging from the ceiling – an old dragon boat once raced in HK (Fig. 4.18) and a fully-rigged windsurfing board used by the HK team at London Olympics in 2012**.** The gallery explains how HK, under both 'western' and Chinese influence, has been successful in water sports and promoting Dragon Boating to the world. Such narratives further portray HK as a cosmopolitan city where the East meets 'west'. Although the origin and culture of Dragon Boat racing are omitted, the exhibition celebrates HK's successful athletes, such as Lee Lai-shan, who won the first Olympic gold medal for HK in 1996**.** The rest of the gallery introduces the art of model boat building, the popular HK leisure 'boat trips', the "past greatness" of the HK shipbuilding sector, and diving in HK. Together, Gallery B4 celebrates the long history, great diversity, and success of water sports in HK.







Fig. 4.15. (Top Left) Gallery B1 with a Chinese sculpture and lighthouse relics (Photo by Author, 2018).

Fig. 4.16. (Top Right) Collage of model ships connecting Gallery B1 and B2 (Photo by Author, 2018).

Fig. 4.17. (Bottom) Objects used by immigrants in Gallery B4-1 (Photo by Author, 2018).

The top, A deck (Fig. 4.22) hosts the popular KM Koo Ship Bridge Simulator, a mini shipping and maritime theatre, Galleries A1 (maritime communications) and A2 (navigation and meteorology). As a former HKMM curator put, the galleries were "very 'shippy', you actually have to be interested in ships… most people are un-maritime-conscious".[36] This highlights the importance of HKMM's mission to educate the HK public on this neglected sector. The many decommissioned maritime communication equipment on display (Fig. 4.19) added to the 'deck' system and panoramic view of the

[36] Davies, Interview, HK, Aug 2018.

harbour offer together an 'in-situ', 'on board' maritime experience for visitors (cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 389). Similarly, back on B deck, the last two galleries of the permanent exhibition, "*Underwater World*" (B5), "*Sounds of the Sea, People of the Sea*" (B6), originally intends to explore the ocean through the equipment of professional divers and excavated artefacts of underwater archaeologists (Fig. 4.20). Visitors are encouraged to touch and interact with diving gears for a tactile experience that supplements the largely ocular mode of knowledge transfer in HKMM. However, the exhibition fails to show the relevance of maritime topics to visitors. For example, a visitor found it difficult to perceive the relationship between exhibits and HK, as "most of them are out of touch of most HK people's daily lives".[37] Galleries B5 and B6 were replaced in 2019 by a new section "Humans and the Ocean", which overviews maritime activities in the past 6,000 years through selected objects from other galleries.







Fig. 4.18 (Top left). Dragon Boat sports collections in Gallery B4-2 (Photo by Author, 2018).

Fig. 4.19 (Top Right). Maritime communications equipment in Gallery A1 (Photo by Author, 2018).

Fig. 4.20 (Bottom Left). Diving equipment in Gallery B5 (Photo by Author, 2018).

[37] Raymond, HKMM Comment Book, 28 Sep 2014.

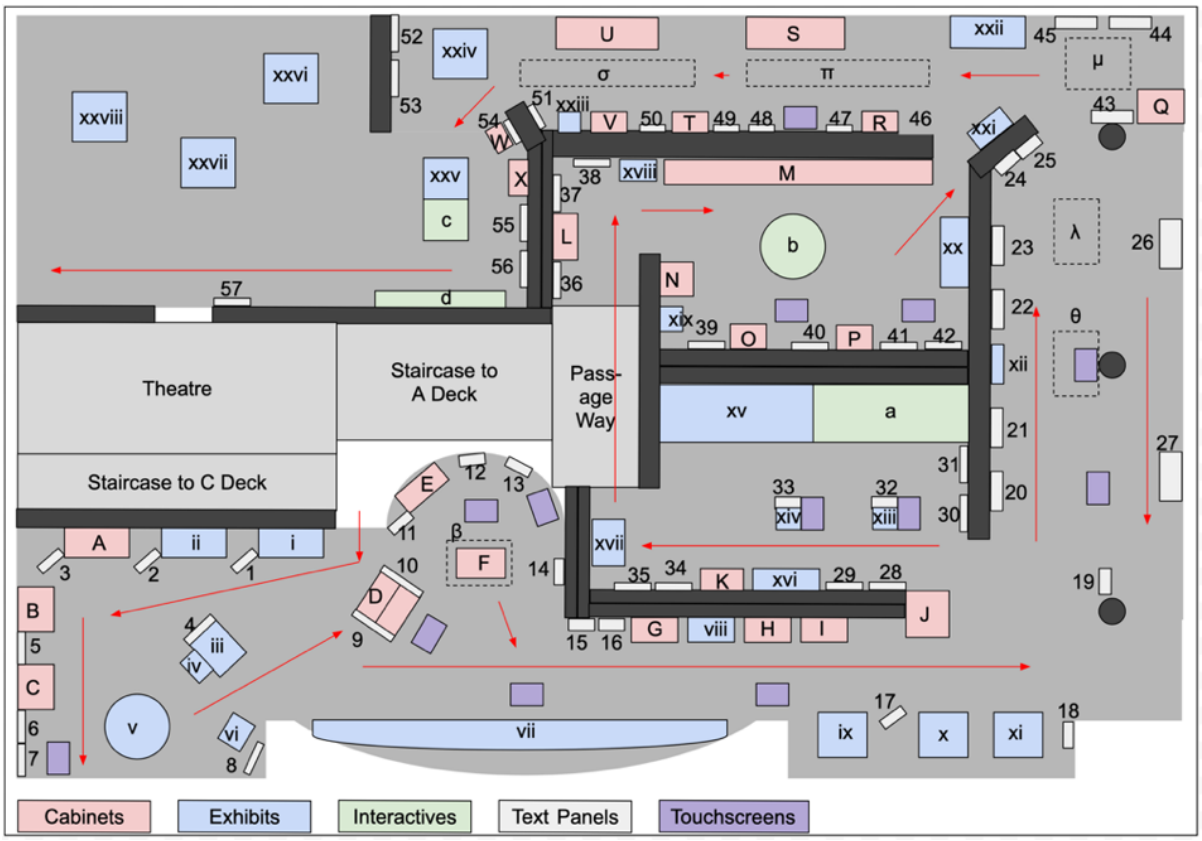


Fig. 4.21. Cabinets (A-W), Stand-alone Exhibits (xxvii), Interactives (a-d), Text Panels (1-57) and Touchscreens (purple) on B Deck (Galleries B1-B6) (Illustrated by Author based on visit in Jan 2021).

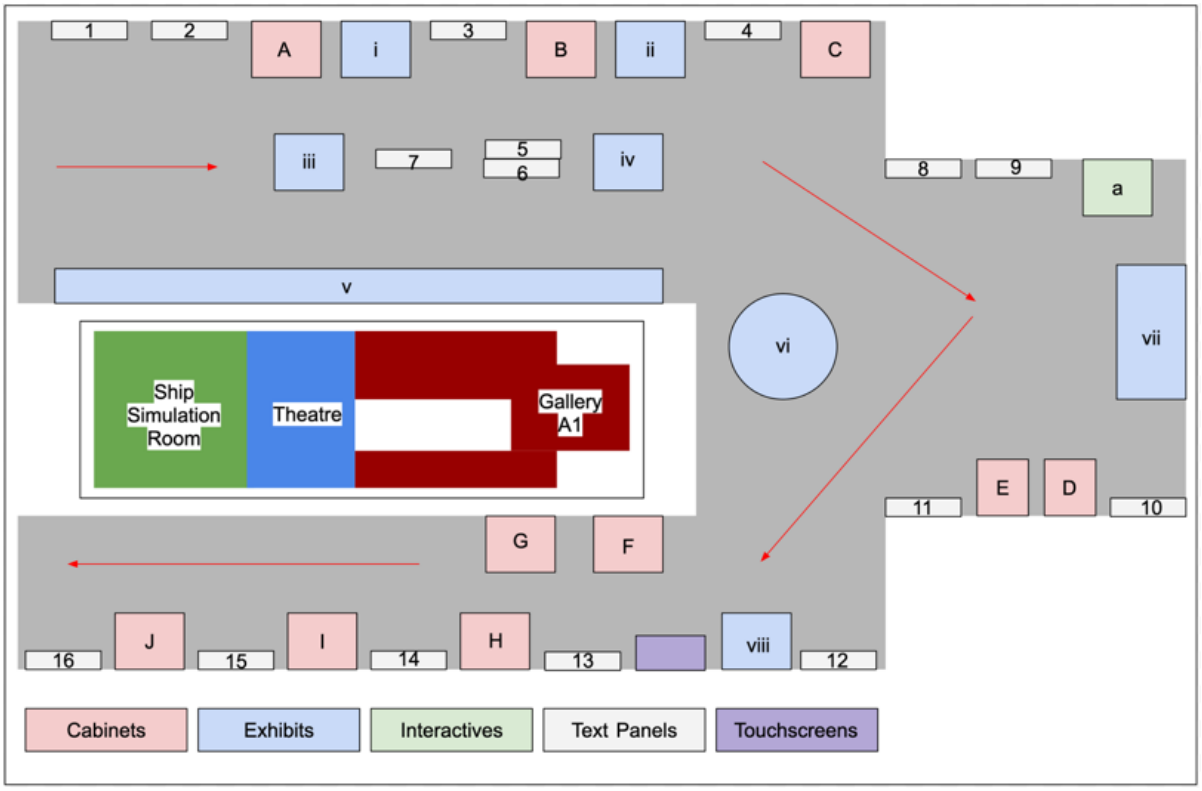


Fig. 4.22. Cabinets (A-J), Stand-alone Exhibits (i-viii), Interactive (a), Text Panels (1-16) and Multimedia Touchscreens (purple) at Gallery A1 (Illustrated by Author based on a site visit in January 2021).

4.3 – Whose Heritage to Show: 'Hong Kong' or 'Chinese' Maritime History

In the museum feedback book, I found several critical comments that had been left by visitors. On the one hand, visitors from HK suggested that the museum should keep "adding more about port history + maritime history of HK (not China please!) (sic)".[38] On the other hand, visitors from mainland China wanted more Chinese elements in the museum. For instance, one requested further elaborations in the history of the Sino-Japanese War,[39] as well as the current Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy garrison.[40] One even questioned why Navy battles between Chinese and Japanese forces in South China Sea around HK during the Second World War was not mentioned, "despite HK being part of China".[41] These comments show a clear division of demands from local HK and mainland Chinese visitors. In essence, HKMM is trapped in the identity dilemma of HK following its decolonisation – should a maritime museum in HK prioritise or even focus exclusively on HK maritime heritage? Or rather, should it be viewed as part of larger Chinese heritage?



Fig. 4.23. Logo of HKMM (HKMM Report 2013-14: 1).

[38] Anny Wong, HKMM Comment Book, 21 Nov 2017.
[39] Pan H.M., HKMM Comment Book, 5 May 2013.
[40] Anonymous, HKMM Comment Book, 30 Aug 2014.
[41] Anonymous, HKMM Comment Book, 19 Nov 2017.

With an icon fusing images of a junk and yacht, HKMM's logo (Fig. 4.23) reflects their vision to represent both Chinese and 'western' maritime heritage based in HK. Nevertheless, the Chinese 'junk', a world-famous icon which most Hongkongers would relate to, is not included in the current display, even though a local fisherman has donated a model of his own fishing junk to the museum in the late 2000s (Wong 2019: 36-37, Ta Kung Pao 2008; Davies 2012a: 37; Fig. 27). The museum's mission statement, displayed prominently in the lobby, reflects HKMM's 'self-appointed' custodian role of not only the maritime heritage of HK, but also of South China. HK only had limited political significance in the long history of China and was at the cultural periphery of the Han culture most of the times. In this context, why would the museum adopt this rather defocused mission to promote a greater knowledge of not only HK, but also China and Asia's maritime history? HKMM's permanent exhibitions in both Stanley and Central begin with displays about the distant Chinese past and with artefacts that have little connection to HK. According to the founding Director who curated both exhibitions,

> *"I started with China because … there were good customer relations reasons for doing this: it was post-1997, you got to be real. HK is into messages about its central Chineseness, so … (sigh)".*[42]

This shows how, even though HKMM does not have to follow the government historical narrative, they align themselves to appeal to visitors and potential donors. It is true that when these permanent exhibitions were curated (2003-05 for Stanley, 2008-13 for Central), over half of the HK population embraced their Chinese identity (Table 4.1). However, that does not explain why HKMM's more recent special exhibitions – which were curated by a local HK Chinese curatorial team – reflect a shift in the scale of alignment between local HK and greater China, when more of the HK population identify

[42] Davies, Interview, HK, Aug 2018.

themselves with local HK identity and less with Chinese identity (Table 4.1, Figure 4.24). By examining the themes of special exhibitions (Table 4.2), we could conclude that HKMM, since its establishment, has been a 'centrist' in its narrative but is now increasingly leaning towards the greater Chinese cultural assimilation narrative.[43]

Table 4.1. Hong Kong residents' average self-perceived identity from 1997 to 2021. The identity category "Chinese Hongkonger" reflects the individuals' primary identification with Hong Kong and is vice versa for the category "Hong Kong Chinese" (HK Public Opinion Research Institute 2022).

Year/Identity	1997	2002	2007	2012	2017	2019	2021
Hongkonger	35.9%	30%	23.5%	27.3%	38.8%	55.4%	38.6%
Chinese	18%	31.1%	27.2%	21.4%	14.5%	10.9%	17.8%
Chinese HKer	23.6%	21.7%	31.5%	32.8%	29%	22.4%	31.5%
HK Chinese	19.9%	14.7%	16%	16.2%	16.1%	9.9%	10.6%
Others	2.6%	2.5%	1.8%	2.3%	1.6%	1.4%	1.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

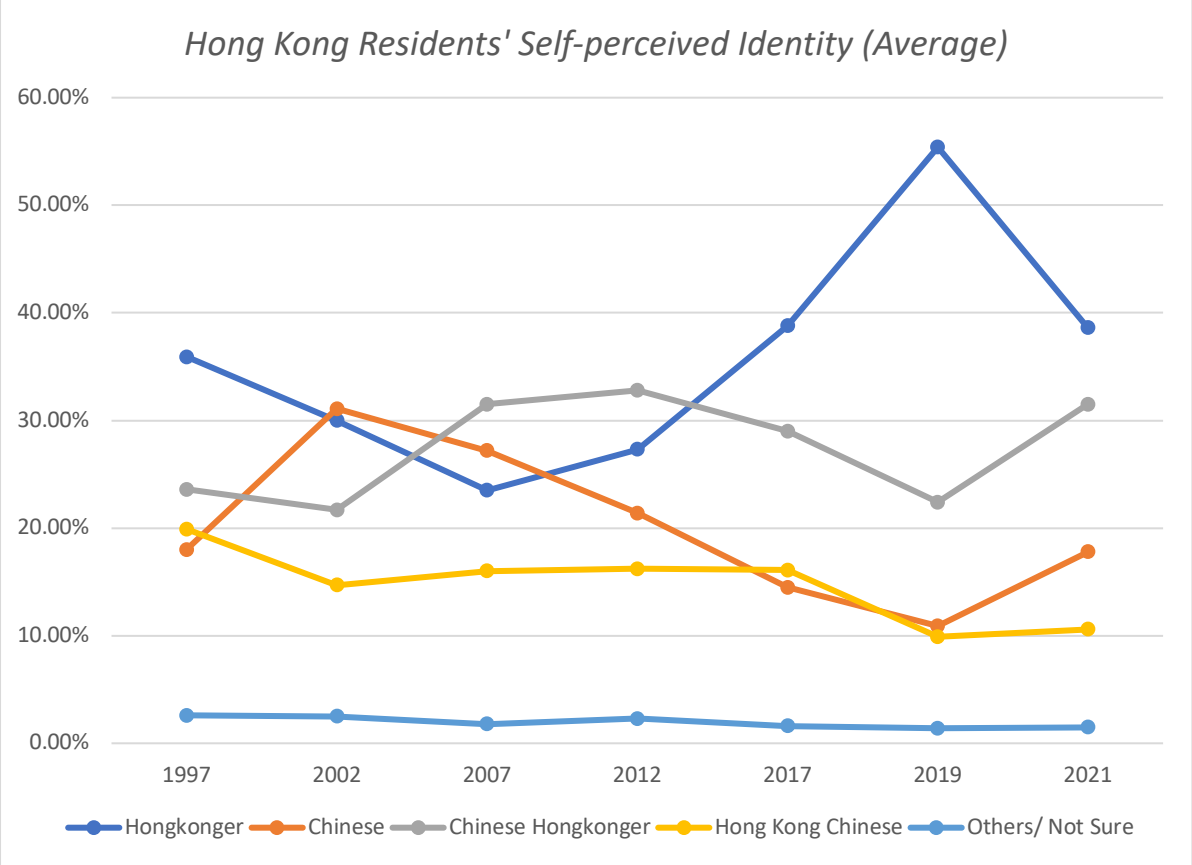


Fig. 4.24. Trend graph showing Hong Kong residents' self-perceived identity from 1997 to 2021 (HK Public Opinion Research Institute 2022).

[43] I compiled this table of all special exhibitions held by HKMM between 2006 and 2020 from its website.

Table 4.2. Special Exhibitions at Stanley (2006-2010), Central (from 2013) (HKMM, Waung 2015).

Year	Special Exhibition Title	Focus
2020	*The World on Paper: From Square to Sphericity*	China, World
2019	*The Dragon And The Eagle: American Traders in China… 1784 to 1900*	China, World
	Humans and the Ocean	China, World
	Passions for Shipbuilding	HK & China
	Beyond Sailing: Chinese Junks in Hong Kong	HK
2018	*East Meets West: Maritime Silk Routes in the 13th – 18th Centuries*	China, World
	Cultural Encounters in Maps of China	China, World
	"Water in the Balance" Exhibition	World
	Silver Age: Origins and Trade of Chinese Export Silver	China, World
	Activating Local Records – the Story of High Island	HK
2017	*Hong Kong, at the water's edge (Rogan Coles photography)*	HK
	On Sharks And Humanity	World
	Pirates of the South China Sea: Chasing Cheung Po Tsai and Port Cities	HK & China
	To See a World in a Grain of Sand: Ancient Maritime & Overland trade	China, World
	Being Water - An Exhibition of Photographs by Basil Pao	HK
	Coastal Watch Project - Turning the Tide Against Marine Litter	World
2016	*Out of the Blue' Photographic Exhibition (Guest Exhibition)*	World
	In the Midst of a Storm: Hong Kong's Early Typhoons	HK
	One Man's Legacy: Lee Fook Chee's Photographs, HK in the 50s	HK
	Corals: Our Underwater Living Treasures	World
	Shahzia Sikander: Apparatus of Power	HK
	In Search of Prosperity via Victoria Harbour 1842-1945	HK
	Trading China: Paintings of Porcelain Production in the Qing Dynasty	China, World
2015	*Asian Monsoon*	World
	Made in Hong Kong: Our City. Our Stories	HK
2014	*Palaces on the Seas: The Golden Age of French Ocean Liners*	World
	Selden Map & Other Treasures from University of Oxford	China, World
	Hong Kong's Plastic Disaster	HK
2013	*Through the Lens of John Thomson: HK & Coastal China 1868-1872*	HK & China
	Around the World in 8000 Days: Travel with Michael Palin … Basil Pao	World
	A Tale of Two Ventures: Wah Kwong at 60	HK
	We Are Like Vapours: Pacifying the South China Sea	HK & China
2010	*Fathoming the Sea*	World
2009	*Religious Beliefs & Practices of HK Maritime Community*	HK
	Farewell to Sails: 40th Anniversary of Last Voyage of Commercial Sail	World
	Unseen Riches: Special Collections of HKMM	World
2008	*French-Ships - Friendships*	World
	Racing for Gold: The 2008 Olympics Water Sports	HK & China
	Star Struck: History of Star Ferry	HK
2007	*HK – Maritime Focus*	HK
	Exploring Maritime Art	World
2006	*Piracy and the World of Zhang Baozai (Cheung Po Tsai)*	HK
	Sail Past: The Photographs of William Heering	HK

Special Exhibitions

Since receiving government funding and relocating to Central Pier 8 in 2013 and until 2020, HKMM has organised 30 special exhibitions (Table 4.2, Figs. 4.25, 4.26). 11 of

which focused on HK, 8 related only to China and the world, 3 featured both HK and China, and another 8 concerned the rest of the world and global issues. 2016-17 was a clear demarcation in the shift from a more balanced local (HK) and Chinese focus to a more Chinese focus, which local visitors struggled to relate to. A number of these Chinese-themed exhibitions were collaborative projects with the Guangdong Provincial Museum in mainland China,[44] an example of which was "*Maritime Silk Routes in the 13th – 18th Centuries*" (2018). It was a world-touring exhibition curated by Ministry of Culture of the PRC, which "encouraged understanding of the development of maritime silk roads along the southern coast of China" (HKMM Log, 2018.0: 11). HKMM had to adapt it to local audience by adding HK-excavated artefacts dated to Song-era (c.960-1279) to illustrate the role of HK in the global maritime silk routes. Nevertheless, most of the exhibitions were essentially irrelevant to HK. Even the opening ceremony of the exhibition was conducted only in English and Mandarin, but not in Cantonese spoken by 88.9% local Hongkongers (CIA 2020). These caused critics to raise an eyebrow over the intention of the exhibition (Cheng 2018, pers. comm.).[45] Together with other China-World themed special exhibitions (red in Table 4.2), HKMM claimed that "HK was the traditional shelter and food supplier for voyaging merchants" and "a port known for exporting and re-exporting" before British arrived (HKMM Log, Apr 2018: 28; Jan 2019: 13). The founding Director, who retired in 2012, found the narrative increasingly (mainland) Chinese, propagandistic and inappropriate:

[44] Since 2015, HKMM has notably increased connections with mainland Chinese museums. In addition to more special exhibitions with a Chinese theme, HKMM signed a memorandum with the China Port Museum in Ningbo as "sister museums" in 2017 (HKMM Log, Winter 2017: 4).

[45] This resembles the HKMH's special exhibition on Chaozhou wooden clogs that curators had to artificially inject some local elements to make them relevant to HK visitors. See Chapter 2 for further discussion. Other examples include "The Silver Age: Origins and Trade of the Chinese Export Silver" (2017) exhibition, which the HKMM co-organised with the HKSAR Government and Guangdong Museum. The exhibition showed HK's "close relation with other silver manufacturing centers in China" (HKMM Log, Nov 2017: 4, 20).

> *"What is this maritime silk road stuff? … it's [a] 2000s invention, there's no such thing! … And the majority of people on this route was never Chinese! How can you tell that was as if you've already brought it to a museum as a vector of ideological prejudice?"*[46]

Through special exhibitions in more recent years (since 2017), HKMM emphasises trade and commerce, reinforcing HK as an economy-first city and China's window to the world. HKMM also seeks to establish a narrative which connects HK further to China by stressing its longstanding history as a supply station and port in the "Maritime Silk Road" between China and the world (HKMM Log, Apr 2018: 28; Jan 2019: 13). This is, according to a former HKMM curator, "a tendency … to consider a really rather small, extraordinarily parochial and not globally very significant place to be very much more important than it is … the 'small town syndrome'".[47] It rings true that what stands HK apart from the rest of the cities in China is its colonial and cosmopolitan heritage, so showing how it links with the rest of the world is important. However, this link is relatively modern having only taken place in the past two hundred years – in fact, the name Hong Kong was not even used before then. So, I argue that attempts to connect HK to the ancient 'maritime silk route' are at best politically motivated. A former curator stressed that she would not have taken such decision:

> *"I think that HKMM is increasingly sinicised (中國化) under the influence of Belt and Road Initiative. … Although that may bring support from mainland China on an executive level, I do not think the museum need to go down this way. I think now it is a bit 'over', that everything must be related to Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Inevitably, government museums need to align their exhibitions to the Initiative, but HKMM is a non-government museum… I hope they could restore the previous balance and re-focus [the museum] on HK."*[48]

A senior HKMM official commented that the curatorial decision-making process in HKMM was complex: "I think it's just chaos, I don't think there's any view. … it's all about

[46] Davies, Interview, HK, Aug 2018.
[47] Davies 2018. pers. comm.
[48] Un-named research collaborator, Interview, HK, Jul 2018.

the pushing and the forces and the influences … and how they could be resolved".[49] During my fieldwork, however, I could find no concrete evidence that curatorial freedom of HKMM was interfered directly since they started receiving government subsidy. Nor was there evidence that the increasing inclination towards a more China-centric narrative and focus was involuntary. Still, despite the downward trend, local HK visitors accounted for over half of the total visitations in HKMM by the end of 2015 (Table 4.3), which meant that there was no reason why the museum should make their exhibitions less locally focused. So, I argue that HKMM being 'sinicised', exemplified in the increasingly advertising the Belt and Road Initiative and 'Maritime Silk Road' agenda, is due to neoliberal market economy pull factors, although the museum management, external advisors, and board members in the curatorial and acquisition committees also play an important role in this shift in balance. The museum needs external funding for exhibitions, which is conveniently provided by BRI-funded organisations.

Table 4.3. Visitor Profile up to 2015 (Davies 2012: 45; HKMM Report, 2013-14: 4; 2014-15: 17).

Origin	**Local HK**	**Mainland China**	**Rest of the World**
By 2012	75%	10%	15%
By 2014	70%	6%	24%
By 2015	55%	16%	29%

It is wrong, however, to brand HKMM as blindly following HK government's (and in turn PRC Ministry of Culture's) national cultural agenda (cf. Thorp 1992, Shepherd 2006, Harris 2013). To start with, HKMM seeks to challenge the rigid 'unified Chineseness' framework in numerous ways, such as the aforementioned problematised ethnicity of 'Chinese' maritime 'hero' Zheng He and relatively neutral stance in the Opium War narrative.[50] Nor has HKMM been overlooking HK topics and research areas completely.

[49] Wesley, Interview, HK, Aug 2018.
[50] Refer to Section 4.2 in this chapter for further discussion on Zheng He's case and Opium War narrative.

In 2015, in response to popular demands, HKMM has planned to reconfigure B Deck to create a greater focus on the development of the Port of HK (HKMM Report 2015-16: 2;).[51] Furthermore, the museum has petitioned to the HK Government for more space to create new permanent galleries on local ferry heritage and HK coastline's redevelopment (HKMM Log, Nov 2017: 3). A former HKMM curator explained that

> *"[her] vision was for HKMM to focus only on Victoria Harbour … it represents HK, and all the stories start here. … there is only one Victoria Harbour in the world and interested researchers must come to HKMM. It makes HKMM unique."*[52]

Nevertheless, according to the same research collaborator, this proposal was rejected by Board members and senior management of HKMM, who found the scope 'too narrow'.[53] As of 2020, none of the suggested changes in the document was implemented. Instead of redeveloping their permanent exhibition, HKMM chose to invest in public history information gathering (HKMM Report 2017-18: 6). In 2017, the museum carried out an oral history research project which focused on the culture of the local fishing community at High Island, HK. Yet, the museum again tried to bend a simple HK project to the Maritime Silk Road, as it described the aim as "to forward the discussion of how HK's role as a fishing village and trading centre [that] transformed and her specific role along the Maritime Silk Road in Asia-Pacific" (HKMM Log, Jun 2017: 4).

Furthermore, there were several special exhibitions in HK topic areas (Table 3), including HKMM's most popular special exhibition of all times, according to both staff and visitors (as reflected in comment books), "*Made in HK*" (2015). Sponsored by the HSBC bank, the exhibition featured an introductory video, displays on trade and commerce, and

[51] Proposed content includes fishing in the Pearl River Delta, the movement of HK communities from ship to shore in the 1980s, traditional port employment and the impact of containerisation from the late 1970s, relocation of port facilities and land reclamation. (HKMM Plan 2015: 10)
[52] Sze, Interview, HK, Jul 2018.
[53] Sze, Interview, HK, Jul 2018.

The People's Wall on which different generations of HK people recounted their life stories. The centrepiece was a 360-degree projection display tracing "HK's key moments in history" (HKMM Log, Spring 2015: 7). HKMM's display included some of the more controversial events vetted out by HK government museums, such as demonstrations in HK during the June Fourth Incident in 1989, and the "Umbrella Revolution" (Occupying Central Movement) in 2014. On the contrary, the regime did not want citizens to remember these events through government museums. Through their omissions, visitors were encouraged to "remember to forget" (Harris 2013). As a former curator recalled, "[Although] the donors (HSBC) were quite conservative and tried to mitigate potential negative consequences. … we advocated to [include these events] because they are part of our history."[54] This shows how the independent nature of HKMM allows it to take more risks in its curation, although they still need to take into account concerns and interests of their donors and governing boards.[55] I argue that the exhibition's popularity could be attributed to how it appeals to the collective memory and nostalgia of HK people, triggered by such HK-manufactured goods as plastic flowers, Barbie dolls, 'egg lamps', willow patterns, bamboo scaffolding, and 1970s HSBC lion-shape saving boxes. Its appeals helped to double the annual HKMM visitor number from 94,453 to 181,637 (Table 4.4, 4.5). This style of display and the 'collective memory' concept are also popular in amateur 'community' museums in HK.[56]

[54] Sze, Interview, HK, Jul 2018.
[55] Comparing his independent museum to government museums, the founding Director of HKMM criticised in 2008 that the government museum system "fail[ed] to ensure adequate curatorial independence in decision making as to what to exhibit, how and when", noting that the "future of the museums and heritage sector in HK lies in decoupling it from being a part of, and therefore under the direct control of Government", which was "trammelled by bureaucratic red tape" (HKMM 2008, Attachment 3: 14).
[56] Refer to chapter 5 for a detailed discussion on HK amateur 'community' museums and their curatorial styles.

Table 4.4. Number of visitors at HKMM after relocation to Central and receiving significant government subsidy since 2013 (HKMM Report 2015: 27, 2017: 23, 2019: 23).

Year	**2013-14**	**2014-15**	**2015-16**	**2016-17**	**2017-18**	**2018-19**
Visitors	76,639	94,453	181,637	133,495	133,381	129,942

Table 4.5. Number of visitors at HKMM at Stanley between 2015 and first half of 2012 (Waung 2015).

Year	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**
Visitors	25,277	47,187	60,955	36,618	33,817	33,027	36,768	14,738





Fig. 4.25. (Left) American Traders in China special exhibition (Photo by Author, 2018)

Fig. 4.26. (Right) Activating Local Records special exhibition (Photo by Author, 2018)

Collections

In terms of collections, HKMM had nothing to begin with but had an acquisition policy that was hugely influenced by the collecting interest of its founding Chairman and other members of the Board of Directors. As collectors themselves, they loaned and later donated their collections for display. This explains the rather non-local scope of the museum. The *Trading China* (2016) special exhibition provided a further example to prove the close connection between management's interest and HKMM's curatorial decision. The special exhibition was based on a donation from the founding Chairman's late wife: 34 eighteenth-century paintings of porcelain productions in Jingdezhen (Fig.

4.28). In addition, this shows how local collectors entrust the museum with their collections (cf. Pomian 1990).

In addition to fine art collections, ship models form the bulk of HKMM collection. When it was first founded in 2003, HKMM ordered many ship models, which remain on display now. Through reconstructing these historical ship models, the museum tries to visualise maritime history related to China that is out of touch to most in HK, as well as "to reflect the long sea-going maritime tradition of China" (Tam in Dao 2020a). Like the fine art collections, "all these … models of how we imagine Chinese past would've been, I can't just put all of them in a backroom, because this was the baby of one of the Board of Directors, … an argument you cannot win."[57] So, HKMM also needs to cater to other donors' preference in its curation. As well as getting recognised with donors' panels in each gallery, shipping companies also sent many ship models to be displayed all over the museum.[58] But supplementing these models are more and more local maritime artefacts, a collection that HKMM is gradually building up from seafarers' donations.

> *"Many retired sailors wanted to deposit objects they had used in their career like ship's light and sailor ID card, hoping that we could keep the objects for them in perpetuity. Unlike the government museums which had a more stringent accession policy, HKMM acquired most of them."*[59]

Although many would see these objects as obsolete, they are treasures to their owners (cf. Reno 2009). They embody memories and experience, so the owners found it difficult to throw them away (cf. Miller and Parrott 2009). This above testimony shows that people in HK increasingly see museum as an ideal final 'resting place' for their own collections. Museums are usually seen as legacy institutions, which is a common feature

[57] Davies, Interview, HK, Aug 2018.
[58] Tong, Interview, HK, Oct 2018.
[59] Tong, Interview, HK, Oct 2018.

in 'museum-conscious' societies (cf. Kreps 2003). In other words, HKMM is seen as a repository of local maritime heritage.





Fig. 4.27. A local fisherman donated a model of his fishing vessel to HKMM, which was displayed in the first premises in Stanley but excluded from the current exhibition (Ta Kung Pao 2008).

Fig. 4.28. Jingdezhen porcelain production paintings donated by the founding Chairman's wife, now displayed in HKMM's permanent exhibition (Photo by Author, 2018).

Challenging Histories

Established in the postcolonial city of HK, it is also imperative to explore how the HKMM has dealt with challenging histories – especially the aftermath and effects of colonisation.[60] While the founding Director, when curating the current permanent exhibition, has intended to show how "the domination of the world's maritime story by the 'west' is, as it were, a blip on the timeline" (Davies 2012a: 23), Libby Chan, the current Chief Curator, once has stated that HKMM "seeks to introduce different interpretations and angles of understanding history to visitors. For example, whereas [their] '*Pacifying the South China Sea*' scroll only showed pirate Cheung Po Tsai's defeat and surrender to

[60] Colonial campaigns relevant to the British acquisition of HK such as "Opium Wars" have also been posing challenges to museums in the 'west'. For example, Conner (2017: 5) recorded that "Not long ago, the 'Opium Wars' … were often regarded as a subject to be avoided if at all possible. In the year 2000, when the British Library opened a major exhibition to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the East India Company's foundation, its organisers were criticised for omitting the subject of opium; a display case rectifying this omission had to be added at the last moment."

Qing authorities, the museum has another painting dated two years earlier which showed the pirate's early triumph in the Battle of Chek Lap Kok against the Qing navy" (Chan in Dao 2020b). However, in reality the museum is much more passive in dealing with the topic of colonialism. For example, when being asked about "from who's point of view would you be describing the Opium War" in a radio interview, HKMM's Director stated that

> *"[w]e haven't actually … taken a side … it's really coming from a factual basis and … artefacts to try and tell the stories … what we really wanted to do is to have a more nuanced and sophisticated exploration of some of these issues and get people to talk and debate. … that's the role of a modern museum" (Wesley in Chiverton 2013)*

I argue that HKMM, being well aware of the contentious nature of such topic in contemporary HK, has sought to occupy the middle ground and focus on the less political side of the narrative, such as trade and social exchange between the British and Chinese Empire at the time. That would avoid dissatisfaction from their more pro-Chinese sponsors like the HK government and some shipping companies, or being branded as a 'puppet' of the government by following the narratives in government museums. As a result, exploration of colonial matters in the permanent exhibition remains minimal, while the only special exhibition that directly addressed the effect of colonialism was *Apparatus of Power* (2015) curated by contemporary artist Shazia Sikander, which invited visitors to explore colonial complexity in Asia, both historical and current (HKMM Report 2015-16: 7). Nevertheless, this centrist stance attracted criticism from some mainland Chinese visitors like Hi Yichun, who found the museum "unconsciously diluting the bad marks during the colonial period… [不著意淡化殖民時期的劣跡]".[61]

[61] Anonymous, HKMM Comment Book, 12 Mar 2014.

The history of trade in HK is materially presented in the unusual premises where HKMM is located: a working pier. This amphibious structure materially and architecturally represents the *history* of HK. Its location and form encapsulates HK's maritime activities and makes HKMM a kind of a museum of itself. It emphasises that HK's history could be thought about differently: in relation to the sea, the exchange of people, ideas and culture that happened; rather than a land-based, territorial concession to the British. While historically China has connected to the world through HK, HK has connected to the world through its harbour. So essentially, the history of HK, and specifically the history of Victoria Harbour, plays an important part in Chinese heritage. Collections and displays in the permanent and special exhibitions encourage visitors to rethink HK's heritage from the maritime perspectives. In terms of themes, HKMM is (both rhetorically and literally) a 'floating' museum, a pier, and a bridge: its focus shifts from local HK themes, to wider Chinese elements with global perspective. I argue that the shift in this balance towards greater Chinese elements and HKMM's increased reliance on government funding is not merely a coincidence.

4.4. An Intermediary between Government and Private, Sector and the Society?

Since 2013, the HK government has become a major stakeholder of the HKMM, as the museum started to receive substantial government funding and the use of its current premise on government land with only a token annual rent.[62] Since becoming a major stakeholder, various departments of the HK government have offered extra assistance to

[62] The relocation of HKMM from Stanley to Central was only made possible by contribution of HKD 114.8 million from the HK Government which covered planning and conversion costs of the pier (and only HKD 29.6 million from the HKMM Endowment Trust to cover staff and operational costs, equipment and collections). Thereafter, HKMM also received HKD 4.4 million annual maintenance subsidy from the HK Government (HKMM 2013-14 Report: 3).

the HKMM. For example, government museums loaned several artefacts for permanent display in HKMM, and provided conservation service on some of HKMM's fragile artefacts (HKMM Log, Jul 2019: 24). Apart from requiring HKMM to submit annual financial statements and review with a range of "key performance indicators" (see Fig. 4.29) to prove that they have used government financial resources appropriately, the government has no control on HKMM's curatorial decisions and development.[63] Nevertheless, HKMM admitted that "ultimately [their] continued growth and development is inextricably linked to the government's policy towards [them]" (HKMM Report 2015-16: 2; 2018-19: 3). Indeed, the then HKMM Director revealed to me that HKMM "have a huge problem of underfunding, and sometimes even have to compromise to get funding", although he did not mention what the compromise was.[64]

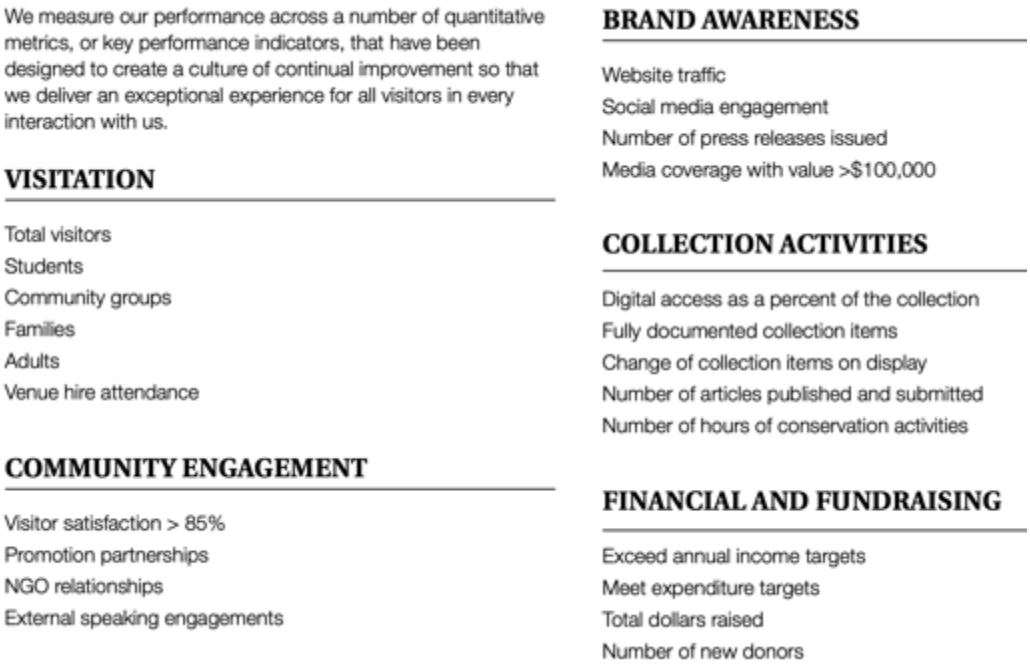


Fig. 4.29. Key performance indicators of HKMM (HKMM Plan 2015: 16).

[63] When governmental support to HKMM was still being formulated, members of the HK Legislative Council argued that the Government should "promote curatorial independence and institutional autonomy in the development of private museums and … avoid suppressing flexibility in the operation of such museums" (HK Legislative Council 2010c: 4). Members also hoped that "HKMM would be able to operate independently according to its own principles without being interfered by the Administration" (HK Legislative Council 2011: 9).

[64] Wesley 2018, pers. comm.

Table 4.6 (Below). Annual total income versus government subsidy of HKMM between 2013-19 (HKMM Report, 2013-14: 11; 2014-15: 26; 2015-16: 26; 2016-17: 22; 2017-18: 22; 2018-19: 22).

Year	***13-14***	***14-15***	***15-16***	***16-17***	***17-18***	***18-19***	***19-20***	***20-21***
Income	16,282K	34,081K	20,402K	18,695K	20,381K	24,129K	19,168K	17,946K
Subsidy	4,429K	4,429K	4,429K	4,429K	4,429K	6,000K	8,000K	7,909K
%	27%	13%	22%	24%	22%	25%	41.7%	44%

Although HKMM is increasingly financially reliant on the government as can be seen in the above table (4.6), it is still drastically different from government, individual and school museums in HK in their corporate nature. For example, due to the lack of a museum registration system in HK, HKMM is registered as a limited company and "operate[s] as a business corporation" (HK Legislative Council 2011: 6).[65] Apart from government subsidy, HKMM's principal donors remain the shipping sector. The museum set up a marketing team in 2014 (HKMM Log, Nov 2014: 7) to "serve the sponsor" who often have their own expectations,[66] to "sell" museum events and exhibitions, and to "attract visitors through the doors".[67] The marketing team is also responsible for maintaining corporate connections and encouraging donors to participate in museum activities. In 2014, the museum joined the Corporate Sponsorship Programme, and encouraged shipping companies to help support public education programmes such as the annual Maritime Awareness Week cum HK Seafarers Day (HKMM Log, Nov 2014: 5).[68] As I learnt from one of the principal sponsors to HKMM, the HK shipping sector is aware

[65] Apart from the HKMM Limited which manages and operates the museum on a day-to-day basis like employment of staff, the museum is also governed by the board of trustees of the registered charity HKMM Trust, which is the policy development body and legal owner of all museum assets; as well as the registered charity HKMM Endowment Trust which oversees the museum's treasury function, investments and disbursements (HKMM Report 2014-15: 23).
[66] Sze, Interview, HK, Jul 2018.
[67] Choy 2018, pers. comm.
[68] I was able to observe the museum's Seafarer Day in 2018, when the HKMM education team organised multiple activities around the museum that appealed to both family and individual visitors, such as nautical object handling (e.g. sextants), ship simulator, knot workshop (manned by the local Sea Cadet organisation), gallery chats (manned by corporate volunteers from shipping companies), photo corner (manned by student helpers from the Business-School Partnership Programme), and a Star Ferry booth (manned by the Maritime Union). Visitors were able to learn more about the maritime sector through participating in relevant activities.

that it is increasingly underrepresented and underappreciated by HK people. So, the company thinks that it is necessary for the sector to pool in resources to HKMM to promote maritime culture.[69]

Nevertheless, this close relationship with corporates has come under frequent criticism. With galleries that are named after them, display panels that detailed company achievements, and their model container ships all over the exhibition, HKMM was criticised by the local media as "boasting family's glorious history", rendering the institution a "Family's Private Museum" (Next Media 2016). Museum staff also criticised that HKMM special exhibitions were often driven by partnership and sponsorship, without first setting out the storyline and considering exhibits.[70] These were essentially, as an academic termed it, "canned exhibitions", which were developed and "spoon-fed" by museological institutions externally.[71] According to another museum staff,

> *"being over-dependent on externally-initiated exhibitions restricted the curatorial originality of the museum. … Museums should have their own exhibitions, instead of relying on 'jobs given by other people', otherwise they would become galleries that merely exhibit."*[72]

On the positive side, such an approach could help organisations and individuals to materialise their desire to put on exhibitions. It is easier for non-government museums to negotiate with a wide range of organisations, sometimes even corporates, to collaborate for exhibitions. For example, as my research collaborator pointed out, HSBC first considered hosting the *Made in HK* special exhibition at HKMH but the plan fell through as the government "would rather not collaborate and receive funding from the

[69] P.B. Subbiah 2018. pers. comm.
[70] Hui 2018. pers. comm.
[71] Wong, S. 2018. pers. comm.
[72] Cheng, Interview, HK, Aug 2018.

commercial sector".[73] In such sense, HKMM is a platform for other organisations to stage their concerned topic in exhibitions.

In short, HKMM voluntarily takes up government historical narrative and cultural agenda at times, promotes and represents the interest of maritime sector, yet still tries to cater to public demands on local exhibitions. Precisely because of this intermediary nature, HKMM could afford to take more risks in its curation and make decisions swiftly.[74] As the founding Chairman opined, HKMM benefitted from "not having a lot of red tapes to go over" and "a closely-knit helpful people and we make decisions".[75] A former HKMM curator who had worked at government museums also pointed out that "it is impossible for [government museums] to have that many changes to the permanent exhibition as we could."[76] With a totally private origin, HKMM has evolved into a successful case of 'public-private partnership', or 'joint community project' that remains a non-government but independently-run museum. It acts as a 'pier', connecting knowledge and relationship between the government, maritime sector, and the society.

4.5. Humanistic Agendas, Social Responsibility and Museum-mindedness

> *"The public is actually excluded from [government] museums, … [they] are not very friendly. It's not about personality, it's just the system, risk-taking, risk-aversion… which is opposite to what a museum should be. … That's one of the reasons why … independent museum … [exist], there are groups outside of the government who've got something to say."*[77]

One of the general criticisms of government museums in HK is that they are exclusive, or not 'human-centred'. Perhaps due to their bureaucratic limitations,

[73] Sze, Interview, HK, 2018.
[74] Refer to Section 4.3 in this chapter for discussion on HKMM's ability to take risks in curating special exhibitions.
[75] Hardy, Interview, HK, Aug 2018.
[76] Tong, Interview, HK, Aug 2018.
[77] Wesley, Interview, HK, Aug 2018.

government museums are less capable of being flexible and accommodating genuine public participation (cf. Stokes-Rees 2006). Can independent museums in HK provide an alternative? I argue that HKMM exemplifies how independent museums in HK, free from official restrictions, could be more 'human-centred'. To begin with, HKMM has a successful guided tour system.[78] As a volunteer claimed, "I don't have any interaction with [the artefacts]. … if it was through the voice of a real person, I feel like I am closer to the artefacts."[79] Another claimed that "when knowledge in museum is transmitted in a guided tour by a local Hongkonger, it is easier for us to digest. … the way each museum guide interprets and presents the exhibition material to visitors is different, which makes the visiting experience more humanistic (人性化)."[80] Both of these volunteers show that museum tours are popular among both visitors and volunteers, as tours involve two-way communications and human interactions. A third research collaborator added that the guided tour experience is "very different from just reading exhibition texts … [as] interpersonal interactions and communications in guided tours … provide a 'human element' that museums don't have."[81] Similar to what Handler and Gable (1997) found in the physical mediated constructions of history in Colonial Williamsburg, I argue that museum guides in HKMM not only act as medium to help visitors understand the contents, but also help to make them feel involved and more relevant to the exhibitions. Docents also guide and trigger visitors to think about bigger questions and find out more themselves, thereby informing their identity construction. The popularity of guided tours and the repeated calls for museums to be more 'human-centred' show that HK visitors

[78] HK government museums also provide regular guided tours for visitors.
[79] Tung, Interview, HK, Oct 2018.
[80] Aidee, Interview, HK, Sep 2018.
[81] Tsang, Interview, HK, Oct 2018.

prefer to learn about their heritage through people, aided by the display space and its artefacts, rather than through caption labels and texts.

As an independent museum, HKMM can afford to be more experimental in their curatorial, education and outreach strategies to connect people, objects, and stories. The HKMM senior management, which is mostly international, plays a huge part in devising innovative approaches to museum management and exhibitions.[82] For example, HKMM brought the International Congress of Maritime Museums to HK for the first time in 2015. In such ways, HKMM again acts as a 'pier' that brings communities together from all over the world. Under their management, the museum also takes on a different route from HK government museums, that is, to say the least, more aware of the social responsibility contemporary museums have: "embrace volunteerism, support risk-taking and innovation, and stay abreast of community issues and emerging concerns" (HKMM Plan 2015: 13). During my fieldwork, I found a diagram displayed in the office by the Director urging his staff to embrace different values and to become a "Museum of the Future" (Fig. 4.30). [83] An important part of this is to be 'inclusive and accessible': to encourage participation from all strata of the society in all levels of museum work. This, according to many critics, is lacking in government museums.[84] For example, HKMM has established long-term partnerships with social enterprises in operating its café, refugee organisations in organising musical evenings, and environmental groups in establishing an urban farming project (HKMM Log, Oct 2018: 17; Report 2017-2018: 15).

[82] Between 2013-15, all of the museum's management level staff were non-locals. The Museum Director was Australian, Museum Chairman, Exhibition Consultant, Conservator, Head of Education Team were British; Head of Development was German, Head of Media was American. By 2018, when I conduct fieldwork research at HKMM, only the museum's Director, Conservator and Guest Project Consultant were still non-local. The current museum Director, who started in 2021, is Dutch.

[83] This graph was originally developed by the National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy. Key ideas include moving from being keepers to sharers, focusing on relevance and meaningfulness, inviting visitors to actively participate, becoming a platform for ideas, a civic place and forum for conversation, collaboration, and connection.

[84] Refer to Chapter 2 for detailed discussion on government museums in HK.

Furthermore, the museum provides outreach services for disabled and underprivileged children as well as curates special exhibitions (Table 3) on environmental issues and ocean conservation. In addition to exploring innovative ways in exhibition presentation such as developing the augmented-reality roving exhibition *Yuto Aquarium* (HKMM Log, Apr 2018: 6), the museum's education events are especially innovative, well-attended and socially inclusive. For example, HKMM was the first museum in HK to introduce object handling session in 2017-18.[85] The education team also brought HKMM collections to schools for pupils to handle (Fig. 4.32), which aimed at teaching pupils "the purpose and role museums play" (HKMM Log, Nov 2014: 8).

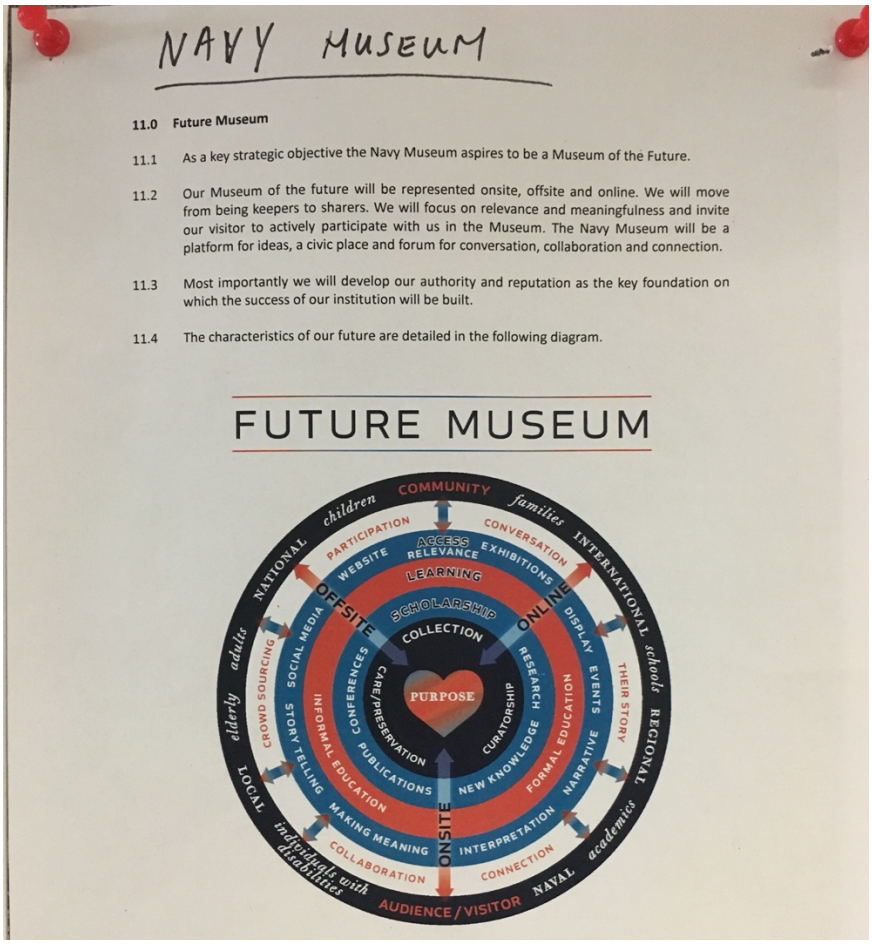
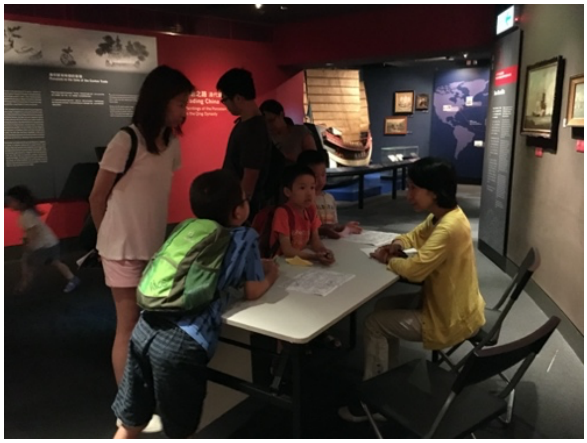


Fig. 4.30. (Top) Future Museum poster displayed by the Director at the office (Photo by Author, 2018).

Fig. 4.31. (Bottom Left) Museum education event "Night at the Museum" in 2018 (Photo by Author, 2018).

Fig. 4.32. (Bottom Right) HKMM's school outreach activity, object handling (HKMM Report 2018: 14).

[85] Excluding the special guided tour for blind visitors that involve object handling, which might have been offered by other museums in HK. Although the HKMM has also arranged a number of these tours.





More importantly, HKMM actively engages in projects that contribute to a more mature museum culture in the HK society. For example, since 2016 HKMM has been participating in the *Muse Fest*, which is associated to the International Museum Festival. In addition, HKMM also seeks to become a "cultural hub" by organising events such as musical evenings and collection handling night to "stimulate learning and promote collecting" (Fig. 4.31, HKMM Log, Jun 2017: 7; Winter 2017: 5; Report 2016-17: 6; Log, Jul 2019: 15). Furthermore, HKMM helps to increase public interest by involving the public in the different areas of museum work. Young people in HK are increasingly interested in local history due to the ongoing identity dilemma triggered by HK's handover in 1997.[86] Museums provide a way for people to discover their own heritage. HKMM provides invaluable internship opportunities to secondary pupils and University students so that they could have a first-hand and all-rounded experience of museum work. HKMM set up its volunteer scheme as soon as it was reopened in 2013. HKMM was in fact the first museum I volunteered in, having been rejected by government museums that I had written to. Since becoming part of the first batch of volunteers HKMM recruited in 2013 and an intern in 2015, I was able to gain sufficient insight in museum work through hands-on experience in developing special exhibitions and education programmes, and

[86] Refer to the introduction chapter (chapter 1) for further discussion.

leading guided tours. My HKMM experience has inspired me to compare government and non-government museums in HK, and consider the wider question of why museums are important in postcolonial HK. Without the experience at HKMM, I would not have gone on to curate a School History Museum, and I probably would not be researching about museums on a doctoral level.

HKMM also joined the HK government Education Bureau's Business-School Partnership Programme in 2015, which offered secondary school pupils to lead special guided tours, to be young curators, and to conduct family programmes (HKMM Log, Autumn 2016: 6; HKMM Report 2018-19: 15). During my fieldwork research, a pupil participated in the programme told me that they chose HKMM as they loved museums and would like to try working in one, having failed to secure work experience opportunity in government museums. Indeed, government museum volunteer and internship programmes often have very limited places available, or only offer roles that are barely related to actual museum work. A research collaborator who had volunteered in both government museums and HKMM revealed to me that the government Museum Volunteer Scheme was "mostly for retired people" and involved only "basic tasks … like giving out flyers and ushering".[87] Apart from the younger generation, HKMM also engages with other strata of the community to encourage heritage and historical consciousness. For example, in 2019 HKMM conducted a records survey and offered some expert advice to the HK Shipowners Association on long-term archives management to preserve their records, which they recognise as the maritime heritage of HK (HKMM Log, Oct 2019: 22). In 2021, HKMM became the first museum in HK to organise a course on museology. All of these prove how HKMM are more proactive than government museums in helping to

[87] Tsang, Interview, HK, Oct 2018.

instil museum-mindedness, historical consciousness and heritage awareness in HK society.

In short, I argue that HKMM can be considered more 'human-centred' with its guided tours and innovative engagement events than many other HK museums. They actively take up their social responsibility and feature genuine public involvement in museum work. In the process, HKMM has empowered the socially disadvantaged, connected with enthusiasts to make them feel involved and respected, and introduced a diverse group of audience, especially the younger generation, to the museum. This inclusive independent museum model poses a rather stark contrast to the exclusive government museum system. In fact, it helps to create pressure on government museums to improve their public engagement programmes.

4.4 – Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the case of HKMM and its importance as a non-government museum. HKMM is seen as a 'pier', due to where it is physically located: it is a springboard, where people, communities, and objects come and go, and where visitors embark on a trip to discover or rediscover knowledge. HKMM is half on land and in the sea, located in HK's central business district. It is part of the fabric of the subject matter and encapsulates the history of HK: built on maritime trading culture, but firmly cemented on its land-based proximity to mainland China. Because of its hybrid, amphibious nature, it connects HK's past and present, abstract ideas to the concrete, and a locality to the world. Through collections, displays and curatorial intentions, HKMM emphasises the historical and material specificity of HK's maritime relations. It is a

transient cultural hub that bridges between culture, ideas, and civilisation rather than a static, territorially bounded secular temple of nationalism (cf. Duncan 1995).

The transitory nature of a pier also stands for HKMM's status as an intermediary between government and non-government actors, and between Chinese and HK historical narratives. HKMM also shows that private or independent museums can complement government museums in HK, working on what the latter cannot do, such as discussing sensitive topics, filling up the gaps in specialised subject area, and embracing social responsibilities. They are in no way inferior to government museums. In fact, with only limited resources, every evidence points towards their higher efficiency and popular support, as they are closer to the community.

HKMM's development is a perfect example of how the museums in the former British colony are symbiotically related to postcolonialism and decolonisation. On the one hand, the permanent exhibitions were curated by 'westerners', who placed HK as an integral part of the South China Coast and viewed the development holistically. Although such interpretation of HK could not be branded 'colonial' as it does not involve seeing the HK and Chinese story as the primitive and inferior 'other', it does continue the colonial conception of the city as a middleman between East and 'west' and focus on its role in international trade. Under this dominant theme, HK's indigenous maritime culture and sector (e.g. fishing sector and the associated Boat People culture) has received much less attention. On the other hand, special exhibitions are almost always curated by local Hongkongers. From 2013-2016, local curators have presented a somewhat different emphasis – one that is keen on emphasising local HK elements while embracing historical and cultural unity with China. Yet, since 2017, HKMM has been actively engaging in discovering the history of HK before the arrival of the British, demonstrating its extricate

links to cultural and commercial exchanges between East and 'west'. Until recently, HKMM has heavily involved in exhibitions that promotes the Maritime Silk Road narrative devised in mainland China, which ultimately boosts the national project of Belt and Road Initiative (Frankopan 2016), but only to a lesser extent the development of the port city from a local point of view. The choice of special exhibition topics also reveals the museum's increasing leaning towards favouring a Chinese rather than HK perspective on maritime heritage, such as the recurrence of BRI and 'Maritime Silk Road' themes that promote mainland Chinese cultural agendas. I argue that this is not only a result of increasing polarisation of HK society towards a localist versus pro-Chinese standoff following local political events, but also a result of neoliberal market economy pull factors as the independent museum needed external funding for exhibitions, which are conveniently provided by BRI and Greater Bay Area-funded organisations.

In such ways, HKMM represents a case of museum cultural hybrid which features a mixture of Chinese and 'western' perspectives with fluid, liberal and everchanging modes of representing and interpreting HK maritime history and culture. Free of the state constraints experienced by government museums, the development of independent museums is shaped mainly by the interests of stakeholders and donors, but more importantly the visions and beliefs of individuals who are its curators and directors. While this hybrid or 'intermediary museum' model sounds ideal for cultural institutions in HK, staff of HKMM that I have interviewed are nevertheless not entirely content with the museum, citing constraints like the need to satisfy stakeholders' wishes and the constant lack of funding. I wonder if they have ever thought about breaking free of the institution and becoming museum owners themselves. In the next chapter, I will consider the freedoms that independent and personal museums afford and examine one individual in HK who set up this kind of amateur 'community' museum.

5
Amateur 'Community Museums':
St Mathias Journey



Fig. 5.1. A glimpse of one corner of Mathias Lee's 'Mini Museum' located in a factory building and packed with thousands of objects (Photo by Author, 2018).

Coming out of the lift in an old factory building in 2018, I met local collector and 'museum-maker' Mathias Lee for the first time. He invited me into his business unit where he had set up a 'mini museum'. I was immediately stunned by the number and nature of the objects he had accumulated and packed in the small and mysterious space – clocks, electric fans, televisions, toys, lunchboxes and many more (Fig. 5.1). They all had their own stories to tell. It was a trip down Mathias' 'memory lane' among the kind of mundane objects that he and other HongKongers of his generation had used and encountered in his lifetime. In front of his display, Mathias handed me a small item – turning his 'collection' into 'souvenir' (cf. Stewart 1993: ix-xii); a 60-year-old paper bag manufactured by a local department store. "I hope that this can remind you the wisdom of our ancestors, and help you find motivation and figure out a better way to live in the present," he said (Lee, Interview, HK, June 2018). This paper bag is meaningful to me. Manufactured as

dispensable ephemera, this paper bag is extraordinary as it has witnessed history through having been reused, collected and gifted. Having been passed down through generations, for me it signifies the inheritance of the cultural values of HK people: frugality, resilience and a hardworking ethos. I soon found out that the bag was only the tip of the iceberg of Mathias' collection and display, as I embarked on a journey to discover his 'mini museum'.

In this chapter, I will examine the case of *St Mathias Journey* (hereafter *SMJ*; 聖馬弟亞之旅展覽館), a 'Community Museum' set up by Mathias Lee, a collector and 'museum-maker' based in HK. Mathias was born and raised in the colonial city in the 1970s, when the economy flourished and the society was becoming increasingly prosperous. He is a zealous Roman Catholic, who has studied for a postgraduate degree in theology and vowed to put biblical teachings into practice in his daily life. While he is a religious gift retailer and karate coach by trade, he is also one of the many contemporary collectors in HK who are interested in 'Old Objects' (or 'Nostalgic Objects' - 懷舊物品 / '舊物'). He is married and his daughter was born in 2012 – the same year that he set up the SMJ 'museum' alongside his religious gift shop. In Mathias' exhibition space, all kinds of artefacts that reflect the history, culture and collective memory of HK are densely packed in and range from quotidian and mundane domestic objects, such as old refrigerators and food packaging, to local folk-culture objects including religious statuettes and Chinese wedding costumes. Mathias salvaged most of them from dumps and recycle points, and later acquired some more from local antique shops and overseas flea markets.

When it comes to a 'museum', one would normally imagine an exhibition space that visitors navigate in a 'self-guided' manner, gazing at labelled objects which are

trapped in glass cases and with no curators present in person. They usually behave in a subconsciously 'museum-like' manner (Duncan 1995) - with no inappropriate physical behaviours such as talking, touching or even spitting (Singh 2015) - as if in a ritual space. This is certainly an accurate description of government museums in HK. However, Mathias' 'museum' is the antithesis to this norm. Instead, it is characterised by the sheer number of objects on display that are not encased in glass, the presence of the curator who is eager to interact with visitors, as well as the absence of exhibition text. This is only one example of a growing phenomenon of amateur 'community' museums in HK. Mathias's museum was one of the many non-government 'museums' to emerge in the last two decades and that were amateur and community-based in nature, having been set up by non-professional grassroots actors. Although Mathias is not the only person in the city who has set up an amateur 'community museum' that aims to preserve the collective memory of HK, he is one of the first to set up a 'one-man' museum in HK, with a focus on everyday objects instead of fine art collectibles that would attract traditional collectors. To my knowledge, there are at least 50 amateur museum-like exhibition spaces in HK.[1] In this chapter I ask: how do such community museums contribute to the forging of an alternative HK identity? Does their emergence reflect rising 'museum-mindedness' among the HK public?

[1] Similar institutions include Dick Lam's *'Lotte's Store'* (多日村), dedicated to restaging life in 1970s HK public housing through the museum-maker's eyes; as well as Joel Chung's '*Silver Stationery Shop*' (銀の文房具), which collects and displays stationery and toys used in 20th century HK. Most of these spaces are in factory buildings and deprived areas due to the cheaper rent available. See Appendix 1 for a complete list.

Definitions and Literature Review

In HK, 'community museum' (民間博物館) in Chinese is roughly translated as 'museum in the populace'. It must be noted that as museums have traditionally been organised by the HK government in the colonial period, 'community' in this context refers to the active agency of the public in curating such museums. Being entirely self-initiating and self-sustaining, these museums are more personalised, humanistic and interactive, in contrast to the 'temple-like' and distancing approach (Karp and Levine eds. 1991) adopted by governmental museums and often reflected in their architecture and organisation. So, as I will argue in this chapter, these 'community' museums are characterised by an alternative museology that is accompanied by increased 'museum-mindedness'.[2] This concept was first raised by Kreps (2003), who, through the examination of indigenous museology in Indonesia, argued that there was not one universal museology but a world full of museologies. More importantly, Kreps (2003, 2019) pointed out that museological type behaviour was a long-standing, widespread and diverse cross-cultural phenomenon that had previously been overlooked, undervalued and marginalised under colonialism. In addition, she demonstrated how the value of the objects was construed differently – as memory markers, triggers for community identity, acknowledgement of the ancestors – in unconventional exhibition spaces vis-à-vis that in conventional museums. In this chapter, I will examine the rise of an 'indigenous' museology in HK that, owing to its non-professional nature, has not been 'tainted' by the dominant 'professional' 'western' museology. I will also show how non-professional curating in HK is related to the rise of museum-mindedness.

[2] See also Candlin (2015) for discussions on amateur museums in the United Kingdom.

Amateur 'community' museums have two unifying characteristics, namely their amateur nature and focus on everyday life in the past. Levine (2016) has complained that people adopt an essentialist position in overgeneralising what museums are and attempting to categorise them. She has observed that most of these generalisations of museums are reductive and are tied to normative accounts of museum experience – to what one should experience in a museum; and attraction of museums - why people go. Nevertheless, my decision to 'categorise' these recently established 'Community Museums' in HK is based on their organising nature and self-perceived purposes, to help with my investigation into their relationships with processes of decolonisation and identity construction in postcolonial HK.

Museums can be considered 'amateur' when they are set up and maintained by people without formal museum training or prior experience. Janelli (2012) provided a very useful study on German amateur museums which she referred to as "Wild Museums", a kind of cultural expression using museum strategies or the cultural techniques of collecting and exhibiting. They are operated by amateurs devoted to the museum theme which they have in-depth personal experience of. Candlin (2015) carried out a similar study on 'micromuseums', an emerging type of museum in the United Kingdom. They tend to present focused issues that feature a personal and transparent curatorial approach in which visitors play a relatively important role in shaping the visiting event and production of knowledge with their interests and identities. Similarly, presenting a summative analysis on various case studies in the world, Klimaszewski (2018) noted that these museums tended to embrace visitor-centric, experience-based and grassroots approaches, and proposed to call them 'emergent' museums as they fostered ways of knowing that, in contrast with traditional museum epistemologies, foregrounded knowledge-from-within, knowledge-making, and individual-as-locus-of-knowledge.

Furthermore, Heijnen (2010) has observed that as contemporary museums became more 'bottom up' with grassroots initiatives, mainstream museums also followed suit. They open up further and become a place where a dialogue between heritage and society can be established. In the same vein, Taimre (2013) stressed on the personal nature, when approaching the themes of exhibitions, their visitors and community, common to many of the amateur, "Do-It-Yourself" museums in Estonia, which emerged due to both historical reasons and adaptation as institutions for self-realisation. In Romania, Panoiu (2017) examined "Naïve Museums" as a cultural phenomenon and artistic expression that did not conform to the already-standard museum definitions and expectations. They were private ethnological exhibitions set up by collectors lacking museum training, aimed at preserving and transmitting traditions and ways of life whose survival was threatened. With a strong affective touch, "Naïve Museums" emphasise an alternative local identity that makes strong references to the past and is influenced by their founders' desire for community self-representation. How far do these authors' observations and conclusions from amateur museums in other parts of the world ring true in HK?

The second defining characteristic of this type of museum is its focus on everyday life in the past. MacDonald's (2002) study on Museum of Island Life in Skye, Scotland, is relevant to my investigation on Mathias' personal museum, as they are both examples of the relatively recent phenomenon of what MacDonald has termed, "Museums of Everyday Life" (cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991). They are results of rapid commodity obsolescence, which generates ever more 'old things'. They are the means of denying ephemerality as well as retaining personal and collective values by employing objects as mnemonic devices, capable of 'carrying' the past into the present and the future. Moreover, with recreated historical scenes portrayed as only temporarily vacated, they present themselves as microcosms for visitors to understand the broader way of life of the locality

(MacDonald 2002). While most of these observations apply to these 'Community Museums' in HK, MacDonald's case study did not involve questions of decolonisation and identity construction as they pertain to HK, the relationships of which I am going to investigate using Mathias' case. Furthermore, it must be noted here that Mathias is only one of the many HK collectors, whose obsession with the past is linked to nostalgia.[3] On this front, Levine (2016) has argued that museums afford their audiences opportunities to engage with their nostalgic self. Thus, museums make it possible for us to be less repressed and better at positively engaging with repression through objects that may elicit emotional, wishful, as well as cognitive responses best characterised as nostalgia. Moreover, studying the boom of 'local unofficial' museums in Romania in recent history, Klimaszewski and Nyce (2014) has argued that their creation goes beyond sentimentality and nostalgia, and they are places where history, tradition, and culture of a locality are validated and legitimised, making them some ways to provide comfort and familiarity in the rapidly changing world. All these examples and studies show that this new type of museum is emerging all over the world in the past few decades. However, how far can we see the rise of 'Community Museums' in HK part of this global phenomenon? I will discuss later how the drive of nostalgia could be different in a decolonising city like HK.

Wintle (2010) reminded us that before the professionalisation of museums, the very first modern museums benefitted from generous assistance from 'amateurs', as the boundary between amateur passion and professional practice in collecting, interpreting, and displaying was not clear cut. In this chapter, I aim to find out why amateurs are setting up their own museums today, despite the existence of professionalised and well-funded museums. As a relatively recent phenomenon in HK, academic literature on

[3] The 'craze' for HK artefacts and the relative scarcity of them due to the devastating Japanese occupation during the Second World War have led to a very active vintage trading market where HK artefacts are almost guaranteed to be sold at good prices.

amateur 'Community Museums' in HK is scarce. Studying the case of Wan Chai Living Place, Chai (2012) concluded that with strong links to the values and culture of communities they represent and oftentimes displays featuring authentic interpretations by local residents, community museums were useful in strengthening social network, establishing community identity, and enhancing community development in HK. Researching on the same exhibition space at Wan Chai, Tsang (2003) deconstructed the power relations in the project and found that the exhibition space enabled different social groups to negotiate their own discourses of "community and local culture", which ultimately aimed at opposing official discourses about urban development. Comparing the same museum-like institution with official museums in HK, Lam-Knott (2018) found that visitors expressed an affinity to those created by the 'vernacular' domain as history being carried by this space was seen to be more relatable to their own lives and was presented in a more personable and humanised manner in a homely and egalitarian environment. Is this, then, the only reason why museum-like institutions have been founded by amateurs in HK? Another case of an amateur museum in HK was presented by Chu (2004), who examined a private 'museum' in HK founded by antiquities collector Mr. Chan Fo Kwong in as early as 1990. Chu argued that the space allowed the owner to show-off his economic and social status as well as to strengthen his personal identity as a Chinese (cf. Bourdieu 1979). Nevertheless, from a museological point of view Chu (2004: 27) reckoned that this case could hardly be treated as a museum as 'it is not an institution that collects and safeguard artefacts which it holds in trust for society' but just for the benefit of its owner. Chu (2004) is not the only academic to dismiss the importance of amateur museums in HK. Analysing the experimental 'Community Museum Project' initiated by HK independent curators in 2002, Lu (2015) argued that the term 'Community Museum' is inherently contradictory, as museums usually cater to and

collect 'elite' culture, instead of indigenous and local knowledge existing in the 'community'. While the cases discussed by the above authors provide a good variety of non-government 'amateur' museums in HK, their discussion fails to relate their emergence to the bigger picture of HK's postcolonial development. In this chapter, I am going to reveal what we can learn from amateur 'community' museums in HK both in terms of its curatorial style and of its relationship with identity development.

Indeed, as every museum starts with a collection, this new type of 'Community Museum' is also fundamentally tied with the increasingly diverse fields of contemporary collecting. While the most cited book on the subject of collecting, Pomian's *Collectors and Curiosities* (1990), has provided a detailed history of collecting since antiquity in which the preservation of significant objects and the impacts of their accumulation in psychological terms are emphasised, what we could observe at the amateur 'community museums' in HK is a new type of collecting that involved quotidian objects. This phenomenon sees ephemera being collected and preserved by HK people in the process of establishing their own identity, personal history, as well as collective narratives of and relation to the past (cf. Bloom 1997, Geraghty 2014, Shuker 2010, Moist and Banash eds 2013). In the process, they also express concerns about cultural preservation and imbuing the collected objects with personal memories and meanings. Many authors have argued that, driven by nostalgia, the modern and postmodern collectors aspire to counter the terrifying concept of speeding time by catching its passing in tangible and permanent form (Pearce et al eds., 2000-2002). This may be seen as a renewed salvage paradigm for the almost immediate past in face of the fast-changing present.[4] That explains why many contemporary collectors are primarily interested in redundant, post-utilitarian and

[4] As opposed to the recuperation and retention of pastness through things collected in the past two centuries' anthropological practices that freeze time at the moments of major changes (cf. Stewart 1993, 2017; Clifford, J. 2004).

ephemeral objects that symbolise our everyday life, instead of traditionally prized collectibles like ethnographic and fine art objects. But, why are collectors in HK turned into 'museum-makers'? [5] These 'museum-makers' are not merely either collectors, curators, educators, historians, researchers or conservators; they are all of these and, in addition, they *make* the museum experience. The motivations and mentality of these individual 'museum-makers', who are also more often than not contemporary collectors, are certainly intriguing and worth studying.

By looking at Mathias and his 'museum' in this chapter, I have a threefold aim. Specifically, I want to find out what motivates amateurs to set up their own museum and how museum becomes a way to achieve and express their own identity, and I am also going to analyse how amateurs adapt the concept of museum in terms of perceived goals and functions, modes of representation, curatorial messages and the processes involved in its exhibitions, as well as practical exhibition mechanisms. To achieve these, I will first explore how alternative collecting and exhibiting experiences are translated into the development of identity and heritage consciousness. Based on the comprehensive analysis of the exhibitions curated by Mathias that follows, I will then reveal how the concepts of museums and collecting have been popularised among the populace in HK and analyse its implications on identity development and heritage preservation.

Analysis in this chapter draws on data obtained from ethnographic research in HK in 2018-2019, when I conducted multiple extended semi-structured interviews with Mathias Lee, as well as participant observation sessions in his museum-shop space. I also draw on photos, videos, posts and comments Mathias has shared online. Particularly important are a series of videos he has taken for documenting his exhibition. Together

[5] I will detail what accumulating a massive collection means to Mathias, as well as the psychology of him as a collector in section 5.1. It is about amassing large amounts of things as a kind of bulwark against the onslaught of change. I will also detail what 'Old Objects' mean to Mathias in the sane section.

with his verbal explanations, I have recreated two-dimensional floorplans of his museum spaces that form the basis for discussion in the chapter. It should be emphasised here that, as I aim to investigate the reasons behind the rise of non-government museums in HK, most of my data and observations reflect Mathias' own curatorial intentions instead of the perceptions and perspectives of visitors.

5.1 – Mathias' Journey in Museum-making

Salvaging Stories: On Collecting 'Old Objects'

Styling himself as "Little Hong Kong collector" (大舊先生), Mathias Lee clearly found collecting to be an effective way to cope with stress and problems in his life. He also understood it to be a family tradition as he followed the footsteps of his father, who amassed his own collection to reminisce about the past. Mathias first started collecting toys and stamps when he was young.[6] Indeed, childhood memory is a fundamental aspect of collecting as collectors make the collection meaningful by investing personal memories and experience in them (Geraghty 2014: 181). From a psychological point of view, the continuation of childhood collecting into adulthood could therefore be seen as a means of reigniting a relationship with a 'lost era' and a way to reach back into the security of childhood. Mathias also attributed his hobby to collecting as a result of his personal trait of being sentimental (感性) instead of rational (理性) and someone that treasured memories and relationships with others. As he put it, "if the society is full of rational people, no one would care about history and heritage anymore – they would demolish everything to make way for new stuff as that is the most logical way to do it."[7]

[6] Lee, Interview, HK, June 2018.
[7] Lee, Interview, HK, June 2018.

But more importantly, Mathias took collecting seriously because he felt pity for seeing familiar objects vanishing amid rapid sociocultural changes and urban renewal in the postcolonial era. Land has always been in short supply in HK, and the turn from a secondary to a tertiary sector-based economy in the 1980-90s has only exacerbated the situation. Despite the government's pledge to preserve and put historic buildings into 'good, innovative and adaptive re-use' (HKSARG 2017) in urban redevelopment projects, Mathias saw such effort as at best half-hearted because large-scale urban renewals were often carried out to the detriment of heritage sites. For example, the Queen's Pier, where the British Monarch used to disembark, was demolished in 2007 to make way for reclamation. Other historic buildings that were lucky enough to be 'revitalised' were instead completely overhauled and redeveloped into commercial complexes leaving very limited heritage elements remaining. Mathias first started collecting from rubbish dumps during the demolition of the Wong Chuk Hang housing estate (黃竹坑邨), as many residents threw away their possessions when moving out. While other people might treat them as rubbish, they were treasures to Mathias. At the same time, he also roamed around second-hand shops in older areas such as To Kwa Wan (土瓜灣). In particular, the redevelopment of Lee Tung Street (利東街), where Mathias was brought up, in 2007 proved pivotal in Mathias' commitment to collecting (Figs. 5.2-5.3).

> *"The whole street where I used to play and cycle when I was small has been removed. It feels like this place do not belong to me anymore. … If they threw away a window, I would collect a window. I hope to preserve these, so our next generation has the chance to understand life of their predecessors."* (Economic Times, 31 Dec 2012)




Figs. 5.2-5.3. Lee Tung Street before (left), after (right) 'revitalisation' (Creative Commons).

One would assume from Mathias' statement that he was just obsessed with his own past. But, with plenty of well-funded government and private museums in HK having been set up to preserve historical artefacts, why would a modest individual still decide to take on such an ambitious task of preserving the "treasured but fragile collective memory of everyday life"[8] for not only himself but everyone in the society? Mathias recalled that the trend of collecting 'Old Objects' first emerged in mid-2000s, just as the HK society experienced rapid alterations: being 'revitalised', demolished and changed.[9] This type of collecting is different from conventional collecting in that the collectibles are no longer fine art items or rare ephemerals but 'Old Objects' which could trigger memories. It is also different in that rather than subscribing to the pre-existing value system upheld by the art trading market, the collector regains agency when converting other people's rubbish into something of value. Indeed, discarding objects and scavenging discarded objects can be ways to make symbolic and emotive statements, create and destroy value, establish and threaten preestablished orders (e.g. Douglas 1984, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 391-392, Reno 2009, Thompson 2017). To Mathias and perhaps also to other

[8] Lee, Interview, HK, July 2018.
[9] ''Old Objects'' as a term is translated directly from Cantonese/ Chinese "舊物" (Gau6 Mat6/ Jiuwu). It is more popularly translated as Vintage Objects, but I use the direct translation term to avoid confusion with the more versatile "Vintage Objects" term as Mathias' understanding could be different to what "Vintage Objects" are popularly known as in the 'west'.

collectors, 'Old Objects" did possess a strange therapeutic function (cf. Parkin 1999). They served as a reminder of the "happy and carefree childhood and family moments".[10]

> *"These are objects of our HK, our people. … Once the people are gone, their stories and memories are buried in the soil. No more stories could be told. I am that stubborn person who wants to help preserve their memory, which is, to be honest, also our memory."*[11]

In other words, Mathias aims not only to collect the objects, but also the stories – often personal and intimate – that they have had with their previous owners. As Appadurai and Kopytoff (1986: 68) have argued, objects have multiple biographies and could be endowed with culturally specific meanings. In other words, by looking into individual objects we can retrace how people's life histories have been affected (Hoskins 1998; Phillips 2005: 101). This is exemplified in Mikula (2015)'s examination of an amateur 'vernacular museum' in Finland; she found that the objects collected were meaningful both as 'biographical objects', those that reflected the curator's life and personal identity, and as 'history objects', those that acted as witness to the wider historical development. This, in turn, reminds me of how Tythacott (2011) explored the lives of five Chinese Buddhist statues when they entered museums in Britain. She found that objects may be endowed with multiple meanings under different owners, and especially the complex and uneasy ways in which Chinese objects have been classified in the 'west'. The difference in Mathias' case is that he has acquired these objects from their original owners due to their perceived historical nature and used them to construct and interpret his personal identity in his exhibitions. Although not professionally trained, Mathias understands the importance of these stories and the power of object to affect. When these objects are entered into Mathias' collection, they have acquired a new

[10] Lee, interview, HK, July 2018.
[11] Lee, interview, HK, July 2018.

significance – to act as strands of collective memory of all HK people. Although Mathias has not recorded object biographies formally, he has frequently featured these memorable experiences in his 'museum' guided tours. For example, he recalled vividly how an elderly woman once requested him to help preserve her treasured objects: some heirloom dresses and *Cheongsam* (長衫). She was very anxious as she knew her children did not like these obsolete objects and would just discard them after her eventually passing away. She was relieved and delighted as Mathias collected her treasured objects: her story could be kept for perpetuity.[12] Eventually, friends and fellow collectors started to recognise Mathias as a collector of HK's collective memory. Many elderly people and their family members started offering Mathias 'Old Objects' that they had used overtime and to which were too emotionally attached to be thrown away. There were also times when Mathias was invited to enter domestic spaces to deal with objects left behind by the deceased and people who had emigrated overseas. Mathias also recalled how he was invited to 'salvage' 'Old Objects' from a 'pre-war' Chinese style tenement building (唐樓), as it was due to be demolished despite its historical significance and public opposition (Figs. 5.4-5.6).[13] In the two-week 'grace period', Mathias tried to save as many objects as possible in the building constructed in the residential district of *Shum Shui Po* (深水埗) – including most of the floor tiles, furnishings, wooden screens and cabinets, and even the household ancestral cabinet (神台) – and documented the layout of an apartment with videos and photos for reference as he wanted to reconstruct the apartment in the future in its entirety. Similarly, he salvaged some farming tools and rural household items from *Choi Yuen Chuen* (菜園村) – a village in the New Territories that had been removed to

[12] Lee, Interview, HK, June 2018.
[13] Lee, interview, HK, June 2018.

make way for the High Speed Railway. These 'salvaged objects' were eventually displayed in his 'museum'.[14]







Figs. 5.4-5.6. Mathias scavenging in a rubbish skip; dismantling furnishings in a Chinese-style tenement building; collecting a vintage cash register from a store that was closing down (Photos provided by Mathias Lee).

From Collector to Museum-maker

HK is probably the most difficult place in the world to establish private museums, due to the high property price and operating costs, public's lethargic responses towards cultural appreciation and stringent legal requirements (Chan, K. 2017: 91). Then, what motivated Mathias to overcome these obstacles to set up his 'museum'? Of course, Mathias felt "responsible as a collector of 'Old Objects' – and memories that belongs to everyone in HK – to share these with the public."[15] Still, there were different means to

[14] Refer to footnote 2 for reasons why pre-war artefacts are prized in HK.
[15] Lee, Interview, HK, July 2018.

achieve this, such as by donating them to government museums.[16] The main drive that motivated Mathias to become a museum-maker was in fact his scepticism about how established museums, especially those managed by the government, would treat his collection. Many of Mathias' donors complained about the long-winded administrative and accessioning processes in government museums, not to mention that the donated objects would "most definitely remain in the storage" even if they were accessioned.[17] Although these museums were often spacious, Mathias found their exhibitions lacking focus and 'soul'. He found that the unique spirit and culture of HK people were not clearly illustrated in their exhibitions, as they were not 'down to earth' enough and he felt distanced from them. In other words, government museums failed to elicit and facilitate his sense of belonging to HK. Specifically, Mathias found the special exhibitions irrelevant and boring as little effort were made to adapt them to local needs, language and culture.[18] Furthermore, memorable historical events that influenced many HK people including Mathias, such as the 1967 riots and 1989 pro-democratic demonstrations, were glossed over.[19] This could be a result of political calculations, as the permanent exhibitions in the government museums of history and heritage were planned and curated when the sovereignty of HK was due to be transferred from the United Kingdom to China. As a result, government museums preferred to represent history by closely following the orientation of traditional Chinese nationalism and restrained themselves from dealing with sensitive colonial legacy in HK (Law 2014). In addition, Mathias also criticised

[16] Other private museums in HK have very specialised thematic area, such as the HK Museum of Medical Science, HK Maritime Museum and HK Racing Museum, so it is not viable to for Mathias to donate his collection to these museums other than the government Museums of History and Heritage.
[17] Lee, interview, HK, December 2018.
[18] Lee, Interview, HK, July 2018. Refer to Chapter 2 for a critical analysis of HK Government Museums and their exhibitions.
[19] As a ground-breaking event, the 1989 protests were only represented by one picture and an audio-visual documentary element 'A Million March, 1989' in the HK Museum of History.

government museums for lacking a 'vital human touch' to make a museum 'lively', as the voice of curators were often hidden and they had no interaction with the visitors.

> *"Civil servant curators in government museums treated their work 'merely as a job' and satisfying government needs. Most of them prefer a stable career in the inflexible, bureaucratic framework."*[20]

If Mathias' determination to share his collections with the public as well as his disappointment with governmental effort in museum development in HK were the push factors, the few museum-related experiences he had were then pull factors which convinced Mathias that setting up his own 'museum' was the means to achieving his goal of being a responsible collector. Among his numerous and frequent museum visits, Mathias admitted that his visit to a privately-owned Toy Museum in Hyogo, Japan in the late 2000s was a major turning point. The museum owner-curator led visitors around and played with them his toys – a collection that was compiled over a lifetime. The overall 'comforting nature' of the museum visiting experience struck Mathias, not least because the museum contained many 'popular', or low-end toys which he could find resonance with. As Macdonald (2002: 100) has argued, a museum experience is "not just looking: it is 'being in touch with'". Mathias was particularly impressed by the owner-curator's participation in the visiting experience through direct exchanges with visitors. He considered this meaningful as, in such way, the museum did not only disseminate but also assembled knowledge in the process. So, in contrast with being interpreted as a 'temple' (Cameron 1971), the museum could be a platform for exchanging and furthering human interaction, that is, as a social space. This became Mathias's preferred museum operating mechanism. Considering himself a 'guardian' of his 10,000-piece collection, which was still growing in 2021, Mathias determined to bring out the memories and stories

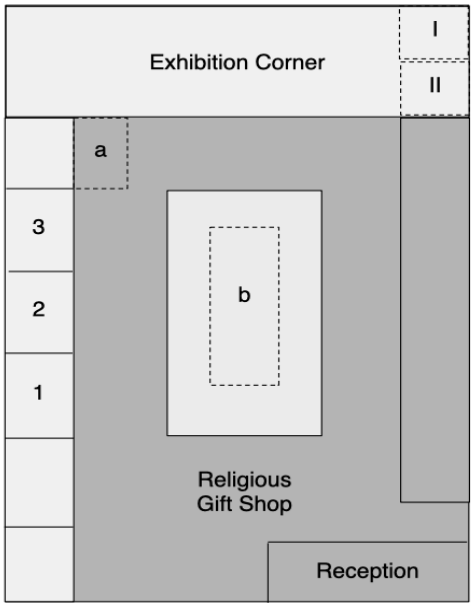
[20] Lee, interview, HK, December 2018.

embedded in these seemingly ephemeral objects and turn them into long-lasting memories.[21] Drawing from his experiences of visiting various other museums as well as conducting hands-on curatorial projects, he reckoned that the best way to achieve this was by setting up his own 'museum'. He is not only a collector, but also a self-educated 'museum-maker'.

5.2 Three Iterations of St. Mathias' Journey Museum

Mathias' museum-making journey began in 2009 at an exhibition corner in the 700 square feet '*Oratori Production'* religious shop, where he displayed, sold and bought 'Old Object'. This first 'iteration' of his museum was in Causeway Bay, HK (Fig. 5.7). Mathias trialled different exhibition techniques like setting up two recreated historical scenes and categorising his exhibits (Figs. 5.8-5.9). The pre-war historical scenes included a pre-war dress cabinet and a barber's chair. The exhibit categories included vintage televisions, clocks, chairs, electric fans, jukeboxes and typewriters. These later formed the backbone of Mathias' exhibitions for his future 'museum'. The process started as an experiment for him to figure out what he would like to do with his collections, which he eventually got deeply attached to. "When my collections got damaged, I was heartbroken. It felt as if my own child lost a limb."[22] This showed how intimate a relationship Mathias had with his collection; they not only stood for his memory, but also the cultural values that he held dear. Collecting and his object collection have become his purposes of life.

[21] Lee, Pers. Comm., 28 May 2021.
[22] Lee, Commercial Radio Interview, 22 Sep 2011.



Exhibitionary Cabinets
1 - Gramophone, Recording Device & Rare Objects
2 - Toys & Telephone
3 - Radio & Electric Fan

Furniture Display
a - Sewing Machine
b - Desk Lights

Recreated Scenes
I - Pre-war Dress Cabinet
II - Barber's Chair

Exhibition Corner
- Television
- Clock
- Old Chairs
- Electric Fans
- Jukeboxes
- Typewriters

Fig. 5.7. Floorplan and exhibition elements of Oratori Production in 2009-2011 (Illustrated by Author, 2019, based on photos provided by Mathias Lee).



Figs. 5.8-5.9. The principal display areas (Provided by Mathias Lee).

Greatly motivated by his exhibition corner's success, Mathias, in March 2012, relocated and expanded it into a 1000 square-feet exhibition space named '*St Mathias' Journey' (SMJ)* (Fig 5.12). Mathias' second 'iteration' of his 'museum' was in Quarry Bay, a residential-business district in HK.[23] Rectangular in shape, the 'museum' space was partitioned by thin walls and had a one-direction pre-set visiting route. This reflected the journey Mathias had gone through – from collecting intimate family memories to collecting stories and memories of HK. To help visitors make sense of the exhibition, Mathias categorised his collection into different display cabinets according to his life experience, which were then chronologically displayed within each cabinet (cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 391). Exhibits were also displayed overhead (Figs. 5.11-5.12). It was clear that Mathias attempted to impose order on his collections through their spatial organisation, as explanation text and object caption labels were largely non-existent. Only items with historical significance to Mathias, either due to their age (e.g. a century old marble) or relationship with him (e.g. his Baptism photograph) were marked. Yet, some visitors found that his display was overwhelming but hard to make sense with.[24] Indeed, *SMJ* relied on Mathias, as a guide, to unlock the cultural knowledge embedded in objects and to bring visitors back into history.

In a narrow corridor full of display cabinets, the exhibition began with Mathias' family collection (Cab. 1 in Fig. 5.10) as he found it important to start with understanding one's root and origin.[25] These 'heirlooms' having been passed down to Mathias were 'prized items' like family photos, certificates, medals and trophies, as well as identification and personal documents. Most notable was the HK St John Ambulance

[23] As Mathias updated his exhibition regularly, the analysis below is based on the exhibition in its final form, using the series of videos he took shortly before another relocation in 2016.
[24] Chung, Interview, HK, December 2018.
[25] The 'museum' entrance also featured the story of Christian 'Saint Mathias the Apostle', the namesake of the 'museum' and the museum-maker himself, as well as an LCD monitor playing Mathias' childhood photos.

collection (Cab. 2 in Fig. 5.10). These uniform accessories, insignias and memorabilia stood for Mathias' memory of his parents' achievements. Coming next were Mathias' personal childhood memories (Cab. 3 in Fig. 5.11; 5.13), including school ties, report books, and plush toys. By exhibiting his own private, intimate objects in a public space, Mathias attempted to trigger visitors' personal and familial memories with his biographical collection. Opposite to these were two cabinets full of vintage toys, including board games and HK-made plastic toys, Japanese cartoon and anime merchandise (Cab. 4-5 in Fig. 5.10; 5.14), as well as 'Space Age' toys, which were popular in 1960-80s HK.[26] Mathias sought to connect these toys with photos and memorabilia of the Kai Tak and Lai Yuen Amusement Parks – some popular HK leisure venues in the past.

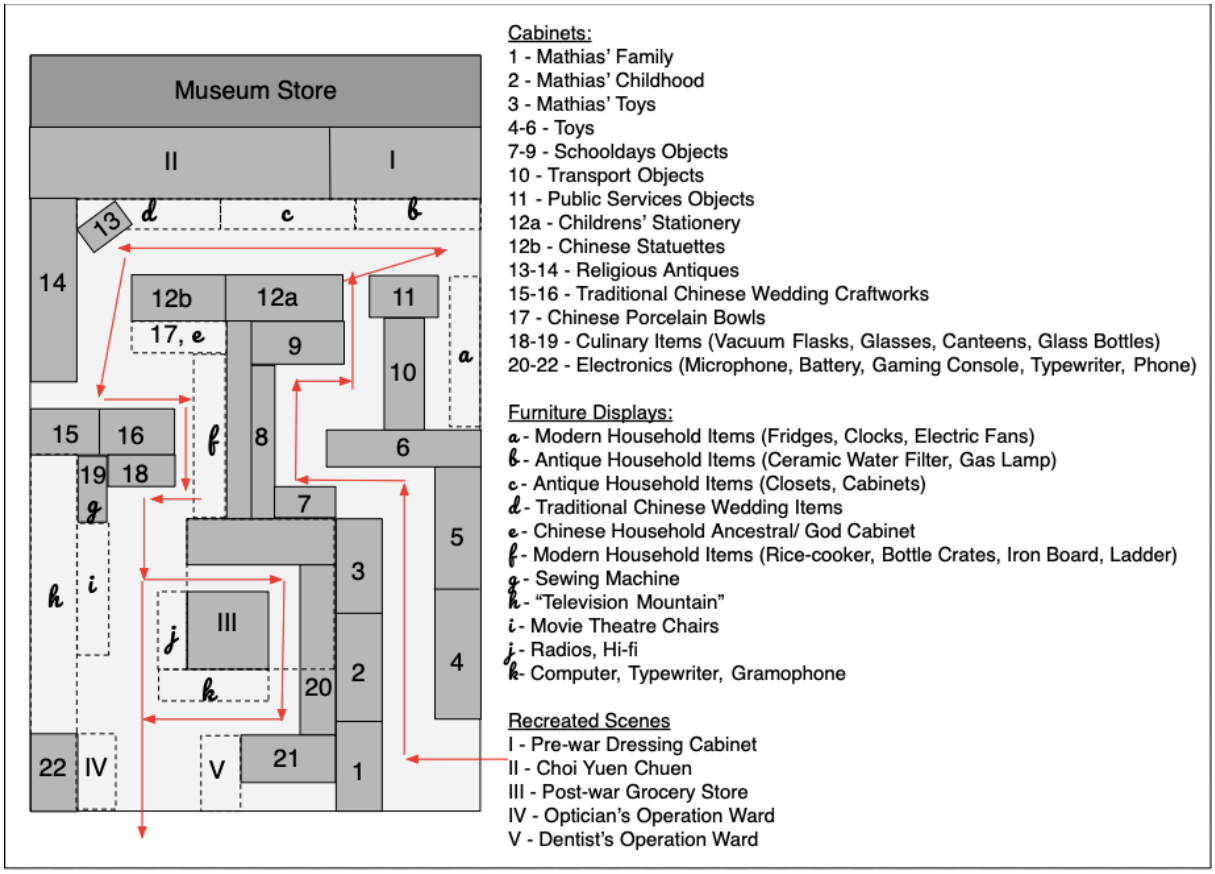


Fig. 5.10. Floorplan and exhibition elements of SMJ in June 2016. Cabinets numbered by Author to aid discussion (Illustrated by Author, 2019, based on videos provided by Mathias Lee).

[26] Cabinet 4 contained cartoon cards, Lego bricks, HK made plastic toys, marbles, yoyos, Japanese cartoon merchandise, and monster figures. Cabinet 5 contained toy guns, Japanese anime figures, wooden toys and larger toy sets. Cabinets 6-7 were full of what Mathias categorised as 'Space Age' toys, such as Star Wars and Marvel merchandise. Larger toys like bicycles and rocking horses were placed overhead.





Figs. 5.11-12. St Mathias Journey – General View (Provided by Mathias Lee).





Figs. 5.13-5.14. Family and Toy Collections in SMJ (Provided by Mathias Lee).

After that, Mathias described the exhibition as "following on from myself to entering one's home".[27] For example, there was a waist-height vintage wooden shelf cabinet (Cab. 8 in Fig. 5.10) full of medicine, mimicking what every household would have had in the past. As an extension of the childhood memories in the last section, pieces of school furniture and teaching equipment were displayed on the floor (Dis. A in Fig. 5.10) and in the adjacent cabinet (Cab. 9 in Fig. 5.10).[28] "Then logically people also need to travel," Mathias reckoned; so, the exhibition turned to transportation and public services.[29] To enter this section, visitors had to pass through the entry gate of 'Star Ferry', the only means of crossing the HK harbour before the 1970s. The two cabinets featured bus and taxi parts, tickets and travel guides (Cab. 10 in Fig. 5.10), as well as colonial government artefacts including uniform, accessories and currency (Cab. 11 in Fig. 5.10). Next, Mathias sought to link these back to the household with larger exhibits (Dis B, C, D in Fig. 5.10) to make contrast between his two 'recreated history scenes'. On the right (Scn. I in Fig. 5.10) was a pre-war dresser of a wealthy woman, complete with vintage perfume, screens and floor tiles. On the left (Scn. II in Fig. 5.10) was a rural household in which century-old agricultural tools made from jute, straw and wood were laid. They came from the Hakka village *Choi Yuen Chuen*, which was forcefully evacuated in 2012 for the construction of the High-Speed Rail to further connect HK to mainland China. Together, these reminded visitors of the passing of time.[30] Coming up next were household ritual objects including Christian religious exhibits (Cab. 12, 13 in Fig. 5.10),

[27] Lee, Interview, HK, September 2018

[28] To be exact, the display included basketball basket, plastic 'watermelon football', kindergarten tables and school chairs, jute and plastic book 'cases', vintage stationary, pencil cases, and 'piggy banks'.

[29] Lee, Interview, HK, September 2018.

[30] Other artefacts in Cab. 10 included relics from old buses, bus models, taxi miles calculator. Other artefacts in Cab. 11 included fireman's helmet, police batons, handcuffs and colonial tea wares. Household exhibits included refrigerators, clocks and fans (Dis. B); large antique clocks, ceramic water filters, gas lamps, wooden closets, and a pair of traditional dragon and phoenix wedding plaques (Dis. C, D). The dresser was also displayed with an electric fan, teapot, mirrors and combs (Scn. I). Agricultural tools on display included jute basket, farmer coir, straw raincoat, wooden plough and livestock traps (Scn. II).

traditional Chinese wedding items (Cab. 14, 15 in Fig. 5.10), and Chinese Ancestral Worshipping objects (Dis. E in Fig. 5.10).[31] Mathias reckoned that his religious exhibits and 'Old Objects' were compliment to each other, as the stories behind them served to "enlighten visitors on the relationship, distance, and love among us human-beings".[32]

Mathias continued on the theme of household objects with a giant 'television mountain' display that dominated the exhibition space. There were more than 40 televisions from different eras stacked together with cinema chairs placed at the front, which became the most popular spot that visitors would pose for photos (Dis. I in Fig. 5.10; 5.15). It reminded me of Daniels' (2019: 21, 175) argument that letting visitors take pictures in the exhibition space helped to create a feeling of "bodily closeness" and as a result "enhance(s) sociality". Mathias' 'television mountain' was created specifically with visitors' needs in mind. In fact, Mathias not only encouraged but also regularly joined visitors in their photos, which demonstrated how much the museum-maker wanted to interact actively with his audience. Furthermore, this mass display style could be seen as Mathias's attempt to challenge the dominant 'singularisation' display style in most museums, which has successfully captured visitors' attention and triggered emotive responses (Fig. 5.16).[33]

> *"The sheer number of exhibits compiled together made it the most striking and astonishing element in the whole exhibition. Also, television is a fairly universal and intergenerational household appliance that brought joy to many families."*[34]

[31] Christian religious exhibits included holy crosses, statuettes, icons, Bibles and mission papers (Cab. 12, 13). Traditional Chinese wedding items (Cab. 14, 15) included headpieces, shoes, ceramics, candle stands, necklaces and wedding dress. Chinese Ancestral Worshipping objects (Dis. E) included a set of Chinese Ancestral Cabinet, porcelain bowls and cutlery. These reminded me of the rural Chinese wedding exhibits in the Tang Clan Gallery (refer to Chapter 3 for detailed discussion).
[32] Lee, interview, HK, September 2018.
[33] The Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp exhibition space in Poland, and to a certain extent Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, both feature similar exhibition style.
[34] Lee, Interview, HK, December 2018.





Figs. 5.15-5.16. 'Television Mountain' and Grocery Store in SMJ (Provided by Mathias Lee).

Although he had never been professionally trained in a museum environment, Mathias has used both 'in situ' and 'in context' techniques (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991:

389) to help visitors make sense of his collections. In some areas, he sorted his exhibits into functional categories, and arranged objects that belonged to the same space or used in related circumstances to be exhibited next to each other. In other areas, Mathias recreated 'in situ' diorama displays, which he called 'historic scenes', for visitors to walk into and experience. This 'reconstruction of a home' style led to more immersive and potentially affective, or even emotive responses in visitors. Furthermore, although the exhibition started chronologically, it gradually developed into what could be seen as 'randomised' display arrangement. Indeed, this was an accurate reflection of Mathias' collecting journey as he told me that he had gone through a phase of 'collecting maniac' when he would seek to collect everything that he could lay his hands on.[35] So was the mixture of the two aforementioned display techniques, which showed how Mathias first encountered his objects – whether it was in obsolete households or closing-down shops – and how he made sense of his collection.

Next to the televisions were two 'cup cabinets' commonly found in 1950-60s HK households (Cab. 16, 17 in Fig. 5.10), which were displayed alongside some common household items (Dis. F in Fig. 5.10) and electronics (Dis. H, J; Cab. 18, 19, 20 in Fig. 5.10).[36] Together, they projected a homely atmosphere to visitors compared with a grocery shopfront recreated opposite (Scn. III in Fig. 5.10). In the 'store', visitors could find various packaged food, confectionary, sundry items, as well as bottled drinks in wooden crates, freezers and warmers. These vintage objects, including a juke box and radio, were all salvaged by Mathias from a grocery store when it closed down. Mathias

[35] Lee, Interview, HK, July 2018.
[36] Artefacts displayed in Cab. 16, 17 included drinking glasses, lunch canteens, milk bottles and vacuum flasks. Common household items displayed in Dis. F included ironing boards, rice cooker, wooden ladders and electric fans. Dis. H, J featured bigger household electronics such as typewriters, computers, gramophones, cameras and irons, while Cab. 18, 19, 20 contained smaller items such as microphones, film cartridges, light bulbs, batteries, radio recorders, cassette players, projectors and gaming consoles.

had particularly strong memory towards the fridge on display. He recalled that at his teenage birthday party, a 1950s American-made vintage refrigerator caught his eyes, although at the time he was not able to appreciate the fridge but one that "smelled of plastic and looked ugly". When he became a collector, he yearned for the fridge that had been "imprinted on his mind". He started digging and finally acquired the very same vintage refrigerator.[37] This showed that Mathias' exhibition was in fact very personal and biographical, yet still relatable to the wider public. As the exhibits could trigger visitors' pleasant memories, the recreated grocery shop was another popular spot for visitors, according to Mathias. Towards the end of the exhibition, Mathias recreated an optician's (Scn. IV in Fig. 5.10) and a dentist's (Scn. V in Fig. 5.10) operational ward with equipment he collected from the retiring professionals. Mathias mentioned that if he had time and space, he would create a display on medical objects next to these scenes for better contextualisation.

Visitors

Between 2012-16, Mathias received in *SMJ* at least 3,000 visitors, typically local elderly people, students and teachers, history enthusiasts, and even architects and designers.[38] The comparatively small number of visitors could be attributed to three factors. Firstly, Mathias consciously avoided advertising his 'museum' in a high-profile manner due to legal restrictions on numbers, and health and safety concerns.[39] Secondly, to allow time to attend to his other businesses, he could only afford to open his 'museum'

[37] Lee, Interview, HK, October 2018.
[38] The visitor profile derives from Mathias' own perception of, interactions and discussions with visitors in the 'museum' space. Naturally, the diverse range of visitors preferred different visiting experiences. While some visitors looked for a chat based on the collection and its history, some others came to find inspiration.
[39] For comparison, *SMJ* stood at 700 sq. ft., while the government Museum of History 188,368 sq. ft. As of 2022, HK still lacks a 'museum law' to regulate, legitimise and coordinate private museums. The existing 'Museums Regulation' (Cap. 132-105I) only applies to government museums. It was last revised in 1983.

on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays. Nevertheless, Mathias recalled giving four guided tours every day during peak times, which usually fell during school holidays. Thirdly, the fact that an entry fee was charged (Table 5.1) might also have deterred some from the visit.[40] Even so, Mathias had to rely on his religious gift shop business to support his museum and hobby of collecting.

Table 5.1. Entrance fee for different types of visitors, 2012-2016 (Provided by Mathias Lee).

Adult	**Student**	**Group**	**Concession (Junior & Senior)**
HKD 40 (~£4)	HKD 30 (~£3)	HKD 28 (~£2.8)	HKD 20 (~£2)

Current Museum Space and External Exhibitions

Due to increased running costs, Mathias was forced to close down *SMJ* in 2016. Instead, he set up a much smaller exhibition area called 'Mini Mathias Journey' (MMJ) in his relocated unit. He hoped that no matter how big or small the exhibition was, visitors could still learn from his collections, ideas and messages, as he said, "Ultimately, these are done for the good of HK and its people to preserve witness to the memory that belongs to all of us. I have done what I could, for this city I call home."[41] The current iteration of *MMJ* is hidden behind the religious gift shop and in the rehearsal room (Fig. 5.17-5.19).[42] Collections like old wooden chairs and bureaus are integrated into Mathias' religious gift shop as Mathias hopes to trigger visitors' curiosity to ask and learn about the past through these 'Old Objects'. The idea is effective, as I have witnessed his karate students playing with these vintage toys and furniture and being amazed at the different design from what they have had at home. Mathias has then been able to explain to them

[40] As I have discussed in the case of HK Maritime Museum (Chapter 4), the HK public have great reservations in visiting museums that charge an entrance fee as government museums are free to visit.
[41] Lee, interview, HK, December 2018.
[42] Oversized exhibits are scattered around these cabinets (Figs. 5.18-5.19) and the in the rehearsal room (space a-k in Fig. 5.17). Oversize objects include wall clocks, electric fans, lunch canteens, confectionary tins, electric desk light, and even mini televisions.

something about life in the past, which is an important step in instilling sense of history and cultivating historical awareness among the future generation. I have also witnessed Mathias taking his religious shop customers, personal guests and other interested visitors into the exhibition area, connecting his collecting work with religion and faith. Although Mathias has designed *MMJ* primarily as an exhibition on toys and childhood memories, it has featured different samples of his wider collection. On display are religious antiques (Cab. 5, 6, 7 in Fig. 5.17), toys and model figures (Cab. 1, 2 in Fig. 5.17), electronics (Cab. 3, 4) as well as some other rare objects (Cab. 8, 9 in Fig. 5.17). In addition, since 2009, Mathias has been very active in sharing his collections in a weekly half-hour radio broadcast, "*When I was Young, I Listened to the Radio*" (口水多過浪花), as well as organising external exhibitions to spread his curatorial messages further (Table 5.2). These have significantly increased his exposure as a collector and museum-maker and attracted many visitors to *SMJ* and *MMJ.* Looking into the future, Mathias wants to rebuild his museum by moving to a bigger unit at a location with lower rent.

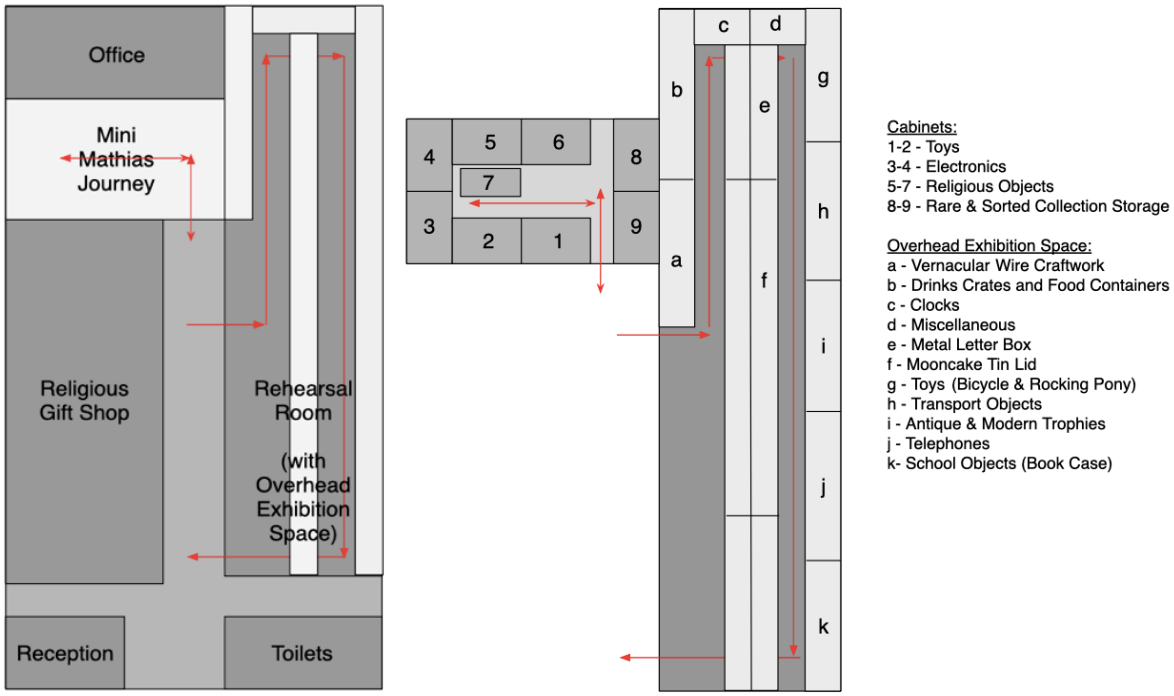


Fig. 5.17. Floorplan of Mini Mathias Journey at the time of my fieldwork research, August 2018 (Illustrated by Author, 2019).





Figs. 5.18-19. 'Mini Mathias Journey', with overhead space utilised (Photos by Author, August 2018).




Fig. 5.20. (Left) Mathias installed exhibits at the 2017 vintage wedding exhibition (Provided by Mathias Lee).
Fig. 5.21. (Right) Mathias introduced exhibits to former schoolmates at the 2018 exhibition (Provided by Mathias Lee).
Table 5.2. A summary of external exhibitions curated by Mathias Lee.

Year	Exhibition	Venue	Theme
2009	A Century of Wedding in HK [「百年·好合」— 香港婚嫁百年]	Wan Chai Livelihood Place	Wedding
2009	Fifty Legendary objects that made HK [50 件締造香港傳奇物品展覽]	Maritime Square (Tsing Yi)	Toys
2010	The Magic Box [百變公仔箱]	Wan Chai Livelihood Place	TV
2010	Celebrating Lantern Festival with Antique Wedding [古董婚嫁展慶元宵]	Sun Arcade (Tsim Sha Tsui)	Wedding
2010	Dad's Toys [爸爸的玩具 – 懷舊玩具展]	EMax (Kowloon Bay)	Toys
2011	Toys for kids, toys for sharing - an exhibition of games in our childhood [童玩 · 同玩 — 兒時玩意展覽]	Wan Chai Livelihood Place	Toys
2012	Vintage Corner [長者中心懷舊閣]	Elderly Homes in HK	Household
2013	Premiere of *Populaire* Exhibition [《打字夢女神》首映展覽]	IFC Mall (Central), Pacific Place (Admiralty)	Type-writer
2015	Fook Loi Estate Exhibition [福來邨]	Discovery Park (Tsuen Wan)	Household
2017	A Century of Antique Creative Wedding [香港百年古董創意婚嫁珍藏展]	APM (Kwun Tong)	Wedding
2018	St Joseph's Primary School 50th Anniversary Exhibition	HK Convention & Exhibition Centre (Wan Chai)	School Life

It is now time to address some bigger questions that Mathia's museum-making practices have raised. What is revealed when 'un-trained' amateurs start to amass collections and open their own 'community-oriented' 'museums' alongside the more

established and well-funded government museums in HK? How does museum-making become a way to construct and express one's own identity or that of a community?

5.3. The Therapeutic Value of Nostalgia

Mathias collects and displays 'Old Objects' in his 'museum'. For Mathias, 'Old Objects' is a generic term for objects that have certain non-monetary qualities acquired through their use and history. "Even if it is a small everyday object that normally gets discarded, it could still reflect HK people's history and experience. It is priceless."[43] In other words, it could be any objects that he has lived with, used or experienced. According to Moist and Banash (2013), collecting is influenced by emotions, driven by desire and memory, enmeshed in the basic processes of cultural meanings, and found in the roots of almost every personal history. Mathias' grassroots background explains why most of his collections are everyday objects once widely circulated and used by the public, like packaging, tins, clothes, windows, doors, bathtubs and even floor tiles. He first realised this – in a very powerful and emotional way – when he went through his deceased father's 'Old Objects' and consulted family friends. He got to know his father as a person and his life again. But these objects would not be the same if they were never used by his father. Therefore, in most of the cases, Mathias would rather collect objects that have had signs of wear and have been used by people. To him, these are objects that can tell stories.

> *"I don't like 'Old Objects' in mint condition that haven't been used. They are different. … Wooden objects that have been used feel physically different from those that are new; the use, or wear would have transformed the texture, colour and shape. I don't like furniture that has been retouched, repainted and refurbished, as the historical feel is no longer there."*[44]

[43] Lee, interview, HK, June 2018.
[44] Lee, interview, HK, December 2018.

On many occasions during my interview with Mathias, he constantly retrieved objects from storage, invited me to 'feel' (touch) them and urged me to pay attention to the signs of wear. Indeed, this multisensory visiting experience is what marks Mathias' museum out from mainstream government museums in HK. In fact, the signs of wear reveal much more than just the age of the product. As Mathias has pointed out, he believes that "humans are capable of 'giving lives' to 'inanimate objects' through interacting with them, leaving traces of memories and use on them. That is why he treats his collection "affectionately": they represent their owners and are like "friends to [him]".[45] Indeed, people can inscribe their personhood – their sense of personal future and identity – in objects (Parkin 1999). That is why, embedded with surplus memory and senses in layers of meanings and history (Seremetakis 1996: 11), objects can furnish the collection and recollection of memory (Kwint 1999: 2, 4). That means many of these physical signs of usage on the objects, apart from revealing history that they have witnessed, reveal their previous users' life stories. They can also trigger visitors' own memories through touch, as Edwards (2006: 40) has argued that touch on photographs mediates presence of ancestor and creates an "optical tactility", where object world and visual copy could merge. This is why Mathias finds 'Old Objects' to be *leng* (靚), which is Cantonese for 'beautiful' and 'elegant'. For him, 'beauty' does not come merely from an object's shape, colour, texture and design, but the memory that they can trigger. Mathias' yearn for human touch on objects also reminds me of Benjamin's (1969: 220) famous theory of 'aura' - the old, singular objects that retain their connection with tradition and ritual.[46] To Mathias, the 'aura' of 'Old Objects' stems from their timelessness. However, he has

[45] Lee, interview, HK, July 2018.
[46] Walter Benjamin first coined the term Aura in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* published in 1935.

made it clear that 1997, which marks HK's official transition from colonial to postcolonial, is the cut-off point for his collection.

> *"I only collect objects that could trigger good memories – so my collection rarely exceeds [year] 1997. This is a watershed that marks the beginning of the era we now live in, rather unsatisfactorily and unhappily. I have richer and more intimate feelings towards objects used in colonial HK."*[47]

Mathias saw 1997 as a watershed for HK's history; for him, that was a moment of rupture and disconnection between the better past and worse present. In fact, the colonial past as subject of nostalgia has been especially present in HK after 1997.[48] In other parts of the world, scholars have argued that nostalgia is triggered by fear of change and the onslaught of modernity and mass consumption (cf. Stewart 2017; Clifford, J. 1988). Similarly, to many in HK, the socio-political and cultural changes after the handover were too rapid, and, to some, undesirable. A generation of people, including Mathias, who experienced both worlds – the colonial and postcolonial – could make comparisons easily. This resulted in the active remembering – almost a cult – of the colonial past, which could be romanticised and compared with the 'failed present' and 'doomed future'. At the same time, Mathias reckoned that the postcolonial transition created an identity crisis among HK people, including himself.

> *"As people started to question their identity as Hongkonger, Chinese or British, conveniently they looked back, only to rediscover happy memories in the past. I identify myself as a Hongkonger, with a British colonial root that we feel nostalgic about, as it seems that the city was more prosperous, the society less negative and pessimistic – everything was better in the past."*[49]

Stewart (1993) argued that people used objects as 'miniatures' to fulfil nostalgia's longing of the past in the present. This was true to a certain extent in Mathias' case as he wanted to collect what he lamented as the disappearing past. It was a personal attempt

[47] Lee, Interview, HK, August 2018.
[48] This 'colonialist' nostalgia could also be found in other postcolonial societies (e.g. Rosaldo 1989). See detailed discussion of nostalgia and museum-making in section 5.3.
[49] Lee, interview, HK, June 2018.

to save the public memory. In fact, Mathias was not the only collector who sought to use 'Old Objects' to trigger memory of the past. Colonial material culture in HK, such as government souvenirs and stationery with the "British Crown", became highly sought-after collections in postcolonial HK. The demand is so high that interest groups such as 'Badges Story' and 'Watershed HK' were formed and started to sell replicas such as colonial government tea sets and the kind of badges worn by colonial officials (Fig. 5.22-5.24).[50] Through objects, Mathias and other collectors could reminisce the days when there were no "uncivilised mainland Chinese people roaming in HK" and when HK was not "mainlandised" because of Chinese influence.[51] They were not 'colonialists' that advocate for foreign domination of HK, but passionate citizens who loved the city which they called home, and critics of the current regime which they found incompetent.

Yet, there was more in Mathias' journey to museum-making than just nostalgia. He was thoroughly disappointed at government museums and their efforts in preserving the past. Speaking from experience, Mathias reckoned that government museums in HK would not accept donations of these everyday objects. In fact, a lot of these donors eventually turned to him as they found governmental procedures too complicated and timewasting.[52] For example, as HK collector Joel Chung revealed to me, the government failed to keep their promise in preserving some local antique printing equipment so he had to step in and collect them instead.[53] And even when these objects somehow found

[50] 'Badges Story', which started as a badges and medals collecting Facebook Page, had been remanufacturing colonial government tea sets in 2016. Their business was clearly thriving as, perhaps influenced by other amateur 'community museums' in HK, Badges Story opened an art and history themed "The Museum Victoria City" in HK in 2021, focusing on colonial artefacts which they portrayed as works of art. 'Watershed HK' was initiated by a group of university history students aimed at commemorating the sacrifice of Commonwealth, British and HK soldiers defending HK in the Second World War. Although Mathias also collects colonial material culture, but his scope is much wider.

[51] Lee, Interview, HK, July & October 2018.

[52] Lee, interview, HK, December 2018.

[53] Chung, interview, Hong Kong, December 2018. A senior government curator defended their decision, explaining that "museum storage space is finite their conservation cost money. Most of the times government museums refuse donations – like an old sewing machine a family discovered when they are

their way into government museums, they were poorly documented, rarely exhibited and sometimes even lost (Wu 2016b). In other words, the fact that government museums failed to collect the 'right' things and represent the history of HK 'correctly' provoked Mathias and other HK collectors to become museum-makers. In this sense, amateur museums could be seen as a reaction and opposition to the conventional and government museums when they were perceived to have 'failed the audience'. They enabled individuals and communities to regain agency.







Fig. 5.22. (Top Left) The Museum, Badges Story (Photo by Author, 2021).

Fig. 5.23. (Top Right) Replica colonial HK government tea sets made and sold by Badges Story (Badges Story 2021).

Fig. 5.24. (Bottom) Authentic colonial HK government tea sets collected and exhibited by Mathias (Provided by Mathias Lee).

moving house – as they already have a similar object in their collections." (Chau, Interview, Shatin, June 2018)

5.4. A Different Kind of 'Museum'

The concept of museum and its associated practices are in most cases a sociocultural construction. Amateur museums or 'Wild' museums, as Janelli (2012: 19) has argued, are especially potent cases that show the popularity of museum as a cultural form of expression. Unbound by 'professional regulations' and official ideological restrictions, amateur museum-makers tend to incorporate local socio-cultural values and characteristics into their institutions. So, these institutions enable us to better understand how the concept of 'museum' could be adapted and evolved outside of the professional circle. In professional terms, Mathias' *SMJ* in fact satisfies the International Council of Museum definition: a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society, open to the public, and which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits heritage of humanity and its environment (ICOM 2019).[54] *SMJ* is museum-like but operated in a non-conventional manner; he amasses his own collections and attempts to conserve them by keeping them in a stable environment; he conducts research on his collections by interviewing donors and looking for information online, and, of course, communicates and displays his collection meaningfully in the numerous exhibitions I have analysed in the preceding sections. Furthermore, Mathias has repeatedly and explicitly referred to *SMJ* as an institution being set up 'for HK people and society', 'to educate the next generation' and to 'provide an escape from reality for people to reminiscence about the happier past'.

[54] This definition is due to be updated. In addition to the problematic terms involved in this definition, it is also useful to recall that there is currently no official definition of 'museum' in HK as no binding legislation are enacted to regulate 'museums' in the city apart from those managed by the government. I learnt from my fieldwork that HK public's perception of what a 'museum' should be is primarily shaped by the more established, well-advertised and attended government museums. The influence of government museum in HK has been discussed at length in Chapter 2.

More importantly, Mathias and his visitors have perceived the exhibition gallery as a museum, not as a community cultural centre or personal biographical collection. This shows exactly what the popular and localised understanding of 'museum' is. In my interviews, amateur 'community museums' were often referred to by a plethora of different names.[55] Even Mathias himself sometimes used different terms like 'nostalgic exhibition gallery' (Facebook, 5 February 2016) or 'private museum' (Facebook, 22 June 2016) to refer to his institution. In essence, this shows how the localised expression of museums goes right down to the linguistics level. On naming his institution '*St Mathias Journey*' with the extension 'Exhibition House' in Chinese, he explained that it was in part due to legal constraints and the absence of museum regulations in HK, but also for the reason alluded to in these words:

> *"Although I do think that my institution is in nature a museum, I tried to avoid using the word 'museum' as I think what I am doing is different from mainstream 'museums'. … [Collections] are placed behind glass in an inflexible (死板) and boring manner."*[56]

In other words, *SMJ* is a museum-like institution, but not a museum in a conventional sense. Mathias is at the same time rejecting common museum display strategy for its depersonalising and ineffective nature whilst projecting his concept of what a 'museum' should be onto the visitors. Mathias and his visitors consider SMJ a somewhat different 'museum', perhaps a variant of the conventional 'museum' they have taken for granted. This variant is based on the stories behind the displayed objects, the interpersonal interactions between the curator and the visitors and, to a smaller extent, the multisensory experience of visitors. To begin with, in this kind of exhibition space,

[55] Taking Mathias' venture as example, apart from 'museum' (Nin Lam, Facebook, 17 January 2013; Kacey Wong, Facebook, 17 May 2017), some other visitors and social media followers also viewed it as an exhibition gallery (Chung, interview, HK, December 2018), warehouse (Darling Luvu, Facebook, 16 March 2015), and grocery store (Lau Wing Hong, Facebook, 6 March 2016).
[56] Lee, Interview, HK, September 2018.

instead of fetishising the materiality of the exhibits, the symbolic significance of the object – the 'story and spirit they stood for', as Mathias has frequently referred to – is of primary interest. As more often than not these stories and morals are hidden, embedded in past experience and memories, it is near impossible for them to be put down on a piece of paper. That explains why only a few caption labels have been used to illustrate artefacts he has considered to be more important. Orality is used instead. This is also because Mathias enjoys 'interacting with people'. "Whether visitors ask questions or even talk about their experience, they are enriching my museum," he said.[57] He prefers a museum with a 'human touch' and interaction to a museum that is comprehensively labelled but 'without a single human voice'. This, in his opinion, is the difference between merely 'displaying' objects, and 'exhibiting' objects. In other words, Mathias' museological model works with affect and is primarily experienced, where knowledge is communicated through the human interlocuter. So, even though SMJ is visually full of objects, they are secondary to the human voice and interaction. They are not decontextualised and viewed as individual artefacts but compiled together as a collection of objects to reflect how the previous generations lived their lives. No wonder why Mathias went to the extreme in an interview by proclaiming, "Not to be boastful, but my museum without me as a guide would be unsuccessful."[58] The museum-maker is then part of the exhibition; the reason is that, as Mathias himself observed:

> *"Objects themselves are not the most important element; but the living memories and relationships they were once connected to. They are all in my heart, so it would not be pity even if my storage facility has been burnt down [and all my collections lost]!" (Take Me Home [a Newspaper in HK], 4 December 2009)*

[57] Lee, interview, HK, December 2018.
[58] Lee, Interview, HK, December 2018.

That is only figure of speech, of course, as the objects are essential in "proving the point" when Mathias introduces the history behind them. In his museum, Mathias wants visitors to be able to touch, smell and feel the exhibits – under his 'supervision'. For example, he recreated historical scenes with vintage music, and explained to his visitors how 'Old Objects' had distinct smell and texture – the "historical feel"[59] (cf. Seremetakis 1994, Edward 2006, Pink 2013, Peers 2015). What Mathias has done with SMJ is an unconscious attempt to challenge the contemporary museum display approach which, as a legacy of colonialism that suppresses the 'inferior senses' of smell, taste, and touch associated with the body, remains visual-oriented and sensorially flattening (Classen and Howes 2006). Introducing the sensory content back into the exhibition – like, in Mathias' case, reconstructed exhibition scenes that could be 'walked into' – allow visitors to participate in history and be aware of the 'bigger story'. Mathias also hopes that visitors, through their visiting experience, would learn how to appreciate these objects properly, thus contributing to the development of a 'museum culture' in HK.[60] Sometimes Mathias would also demonstrate how to use the objects, or even ask his audience to interact with his collections. For example, he recalled that an elderly woman demonstrated easily how to put up a canvas folding bed he collected, a task which he found difficult. This also shows how Mathias' museum has presented an alternative museological model, one that places emphasis on two-way interpersonal communication. For example, he spoke of how much he enjoyed the exchanges with visitors in his museum, as he felt that he could learn a lot from them and the conversation enriched the museum experience.[61] Such visiting

[59] Lee, interview, HK, December 2018.
[60] That being said, he understood the importance of conservation, and would place smaller and more fragile pieces inside display cabinets, as well as maintaining a stable environment by installing dehumidifiers in his 'museum'. From his observation, Mathias reckoned that a 'museum culture' still needs to be developed in HK and Greater China – as some visitors still "would not respect rules in museums, touching and damaging exhibits as they like".
[61] Lee, interview, HK, July 2018.

experience features democratic, collaborative and fluid construction of knowledge with visitors fully involved.

I have emphasised at the beginning of this chapter the importance of the 'community' orientation in these amateur 'community museums' in HK – they are set up by the grassroots and for the grassroots. Indeed, objects have the power to subvert hegemonic representations of museum, historical narrative and political power (Dudley et al 2012). So, in essence, SMJ is a 'self-represented' exhibition speaking from the curator's personal experience. The museum-maker is present in the whole process – sourcing artefacts relatable to himself, choosing what to display and how to display, and disseminating knowledge by himself interacting with his audience. Through this and especially because of that this museological model is built on affect and is primarily experienced, the museum-maker could express his identity and influence his audience, as I will argue in the next paragraph. This is fundamentally different from the government museums in HK, which follow the 'western' museological standards and ideals, and see HK people 'being represented' by a single authoritative source – the government curators in the ruling regime, who might have been influenced by nationalist cultural policies. The contrast between the anonymous 'voice' of the 'western' style museum versus the *actual*, *human* voice of Mathias in his museum is stark.

> *"Government museums in HK are 'cold' and 'in-humanistic', as objects are just left behind glass cases and visitors left to their own devices. The curators are absent and there is no human interaction. … The museum experience is not just about viewing the objects, but also exchanges and interactions."*[62]

In this sense, Mathias envisaged his museum to be not only an exhibition gallery but also a social space. Another example that highlights the importance of objects in Mathias' museum is that despite being very active on social media, which is an alternative

[62] Lee, interview, HK, August 2018.

medium to reach audience beyond the physical exhibition space (cf. Geismar 2018), Mathias has told me that "after all it is not as good as showing the physical objects themselves".[63] In a museum that works with affect and is primarily experienced, Mathias naturally expects his visitors to touch his exhibits under his supervision (cf. Geismar 2018). "Being able to touch and engage with history", according to Mathias, offers a "three-dimensional experience for visitors" that would "help them to understand our heritage and values more vividly and dynamically".[64] That also explains why he has deliberately avoided walls, partitions and glass screens between objects and his visitors, which would make them feel "distanced and separated".

So, I argue that *SMJ* is a 'museum' in its own right, despite not having such word in its name, reflecting some fundamental characteristics of amateur 'community museums' in HK. Although sharing similar goals with conventional museums that adhere to the 'professional' parameters stemming from 'western' museological traditions, Mathias and other amateur museum-makers in HK prefer a different approach based on human interaction and affect, where objects are displayed primarily for commemorating and for disseminating cultural knowledge through human interlocuters. This shows how the concept of museum is localised – and highly personalised in this case – in HK. It certainly features both Chinese and 'western'-influenced characteristics in Mathias' display style and mode of representation. The former relies more on interpersonal interaction using objects as medium of knowledge transmission while the latter, in general, comparatively tends to rely more on object collections in the meaning-making process. Now, the remaining question is – why does museum-making, as a form of expression, become so popular in postcolonial HK?

[63] Lee, Interview, HK, June 2018.
[64] Lee, interview, HK, October 2018.

5.5. Museum-making as a Way of Expressing & Constructing Identity

Museums, as products of their own particular historical and cultural contexts and philosophical underpinnings, can be used as ideological instrument either to consciously indoctrinate or to enlighten and liberate (Kreps 2003). As I have elaborated before, Mathias and other amateur museum-makers in HK are frustrated at the government museum effort in their 'indoctrination' – both in terms of its curatorial style and interpretation of HK history and its people. I argue that they see museum-making as a way of interpreting their own heritage and thus expressing identity.

Mathias told me that when planning his museum, he only had one idea in mind – to present his multifaceted and (auto)biographical collection as a journey, starting with his family memories and zooming out to collective memories of HK people. Its curation was an endless project, for Mathias often changed the displays and exhibits as he felt like it. He claimed, "I do not like displaying objects in a conventional and clear-cut style; I prefer 'freestyle' (隨意) – being free and rebellious. This is my character."[65] For example, when a vacuum flask was placed next to a clock, he did not feel that they were 'related enough', so he moved them apart. Sometimes he might add more objects to an area when he felt that it would enrich the visiting experience.[66] In such way, Mathias is constructing and expressing his own identity through making his own museum. Making his own museum in turn strengthened his belief and philosophy, with the curating experience enriching his personality.

> *"When I have to put up an exhibition, I would start by thinking what it means to me and my visitors, and how it could enrich their lives. I do not want my visitors to take my objects at face value. Toys are not merely toys – they embody stories, and certain values like friendship they once fostered."*[67]

[65] Lee, interview, HK, December 2018.
[66] Lee, interview, HK, June 2018.
[67] Lee, interview, HK, December 2018.

To do this, Mathias relied on the power of objects. Mauss first proposed in his famous Melanesian ethnography (2002[1925]: 31) in the 1920s that objects could be embedded with 'soul and a part of the owner', essentially storing one's personhood and identity. So, when one gave their treasure to another person, they were at the same time giving part of themselves away. In our case, Mathias was able to convince the many donors to entrusting him with their objects – or part of their souls and stories. That was why Mathias saw his collection not merely as inanimate objects, but mnemonic devices that could trigger sentiments which could in turn inform identity construction. By displaying these artefacts in SMJ, Mathias acknowledged that they were part of the 'happier' past – a clear distinction from the 'troubled' present, and thus something worth to be commemorated. The key message Mathias brought out with his collections and exhibitions was "Simplicity is Happiness" (簡單就是快樂). He did this subconsciously with 'the museum effect', that is, by transforming everyday objects into 'special' exhibits through the museum experience (Kitshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 410). He considered such message a philosophical and meaningful one that set his exhibitions and 'museum' apart from others. He explained the idea in a micro movie he directed,

> *"The old HK was full of vitality and also the simplicity and human touch that I long for. … For people in the past, life was hard, but satisfaction and happiness were easy to attain. … In times of difficulties, I hope that you will remember that "simplicity is happiness"."*[68]

This statement shows that *SMJ* is a personal critical reflection that, in Mathias' view, rings true to many others in HK. As Appadurai and Kopytoff (1986) have pointed out, objects, like people, have biographies and they also have culturally specific meanings; they can stand symbolically for people and create personhood. Thus, objects in SMJ also have biographies. They embody experiences of their former owners yet could also invoke

[68] *Lee, YouTube, July 2016.*

Mathias' memories. By displaying them Mathias seeks to tease out the objects' ability to stand for the 'happier past of HK'. By visiting SMJ, visitors are both looking at Mathias' life and also their own as they could easily find objects that they or their ancestors have used before and bigger stories that they are part of. This is how, in an Amateur 'Community Museum', Mathias' collections and exhibitions are very much community-focused – aiming to bring out the collective memories and shared values he perceived to be important yet vanishing in the present. Though his philosophy stems mainly from his own experience and worldview, Mathias found it relatable to his exhibitions as he "found a lot of happy memories from old photos and old stuff which could free [him]self from the tension of life temporarily and bring [him] back to the past with the childhood unrestrained, the warm family and the enjoyable campus." *(Lee, YouTube, July 2016)* So, objects have been chosen not merely because they are historic or with monetary value. He hopes that by revisiting objects that one has used in the past, and learning the stories behind the objects in his collection, visitors could reflect on the meaning of life and happiness. That may explain why in his exhibitions, childhood and wedding objects are always featured.

> *"Wedding and childhood are usually the happiest moments one could have in our lifetime, and I would like to remind visitors of their happy moments in the past. On the other hand, I always feature toys as they are more universally appreciated and popular among visitors."*[69]

Although objects do tell stories and can elicit memories of onlookers – especially wedding and childhood objects that are usually personal and intimate – it is difficult to convey a coherent message and influential philosophy merely by objects but without human as interlocuter. Mathias strongly believes in the role of museum guides, that is, he himself in his 'museum', in facilitating such knowledge exchange. In becoming that human

[69] Lee, interview, HK, December 2018.

interlocuter who connects his visitors with his object collections, Mathias can simultaneously explore his life philosophy and identity as well as influence his visitors. This practice is built on Mathias' belief that the "Simplicity is Happiness" philosophy is especially important for HK people, as he has explained,

> *"Through my collection, I hoped that visitors could get immersed into our HK ancestor's lives – reminding older generations how we have lived happily before and teaching younger generations what it means to be a Hongkonger. The latter is even more important, as younger generations might not have experienced life in the past, under British colonial rule."*[70]

Therefore, it is not only a simple personal philosophy Mathias is advocating through his 'museum', but a politically charged one that "the colonial past is better than the postcolonial present". It is important to note that he has never explicitly claimed that, politically, the colonial *regime* is better than the HKSAR government. Rather, he has referred to the social conditions, economic prosperity and public satisfaction of the olden days. Specifically, Mathias wanted to help remind visitors of local, HK-specific history and culture, based on which an exclusively local HK identity could be constructed. Although he did find 'Old Objects' important in 'reigniting [his] sense of belonging to the local community he once lived in", he found his collections more appealing as an anchor point "in an age when the mainland Chinese influenced authorities [were] trying to erase a past that belong[ed] to us, and [instead] promote homogeneity between Hongkongers and Chinese by neglecting differences."[71] Indeed, as Lam-Knott (2018: 16) observed, two kinds of historical narratives were circulated in HK – a nationalistic common 'Chinese past' shared with the rest of the PRC propagated mainly by the government and its vassals juxtaposed against a local 'HK past' that was popular among the vernacular spheres. As a firm supporter of the latter narrative, Mathias often pointed out the importance of

[70] Lee, interview, HK, July 2018.
[71] Lee, interview, HK, June 2018.

preserving the unique 'positive spirit' and ''core values' – which were embodied in his Old HK collection – that served to distinguish HK people from mainland and overseas Chinese.

> *"From my experience of engagement, mainland Chinese visitors tend to judge my exhibits with their monetary value. But to local HK visitors, these exhibits remind them of the 'Lion Rock spirit' and HK culture. … I want to remind my visitors about our HK heritage and roots. These are, in my opinion, what other museums [in HK] fail to do."*[72]

In this respect, deploying actual historical everyday objects used in Old HK is Mathias' strategy to visualise a common heritage that could elicit memories and initiate dialogues between the older visitors who have experienced the past, and the younger visitors who have not. Mathias aims at affecting his visitors not only through the materiality but also the historicity of the objects. To achieve the latter, he displayed objects in the same category but from different ages together to portray how the core values stayed on although the local lifestyle evolved. Nevertheless, each and every single object, in his eyes, embodies some qualities that together form *the* common HK heritage.

> *"With the plastic HK-made lunchboxes, I want to remind visitors about the Factory Buildings in Kwun Tong industrial area, the crowded scene and food stalls at the pier nearby, and the fact that HK used to be leading the world market on manufacturing. This piece of clothing I have collected from 'ordinary people' shows the authentic and realistic lifestyle of the past. The smell is still here. It also shows that people in the past take care of every detail, including these paper packaging – they were made to last, not to pass."*[73]

With 'Old Objects' acting as evidence of history and gateway to the past, Mathias believes that visitors could establish or consolidate their HK identity after visiting his museum. He reckons that this could lead HK people 'out of the blue' – or the postcolonial identity crisis – and reinstate their faith in HK society. In other words, Mathias perceives and uses his objects as signs to the polished and romanticised HK past he longed for (Seremetakis 1997). He is the 'Hobbyist', or *Bricoleur* who manages the 'Wild Museum'

[72] Lee, interview, HK, June 2018.
[73] Lee, interview, HK, September 2018.

(Janelli 2012: 26-36). This is the second aspect of Mathias' personal identity that he has communicated and, at the same time, strengthened through the museum-making process. One of his strategies to achieve this is to reconstruct historic scenes, as he reckons that by allowing his visitors to 'walk into history', they could experience it and reflect on the lives of their predecessors (Figs. 5.25-5.27). He hopes that visitors could realise how and why life was happier and better in the past – in line with his "Simplicity is Happiness" philosophy; and apply what they have learnt from the past in the present and future.



Fig. 5.25. (Top Left) Recreated Grocery Store in HK Museum of History, which visitors are barred from entering (Photo by Author, 2018).

Figs. 5.26-27. (Top Right, Bottom) Visitors were able to 'walk into history' in SMJ (Provided by Mathias Lee).

These 'historic scenes' were in fact snippets of Mathias' memory of the past. For example, the dentist's clinic in his 'museum', complete with all vintage medical equipment, was based on his relative's clinic in the 1970s. The only thing he did not manage to

recreate was the people who once used these exhibits in the past. By recreating historical scenes with matching exhibits and vintage music, Mathias tried to create a three-dimensional, sense-based environment for visitors to get immersed in history. He was re-contextualising his collections, in the hope that visitors could *feel* history. Purchasing an old apartment – where 'Old Objects' originally came from and belonged to – and turning it into a 'museum' has always remained in his dream.

SMJ had a unique display style, as Mathias preferred cramming objects into every space he can find. By placing everyday objects in an exhibition, avoiding conventional museum visiting regulations (such as no touching), and omitting boundary markers (glass partitions and ropes), Mathias encouraged visitors to encounter objects in a more intimate manner. Daniels (2019: 4-5) has argued that in this more immersive mode of display, visitors were offered "dynamic mix of layers of representative and embodied knowledge that they were free to choose from or engage as they pleased". In other words, visitors were no longer subjected to a one-way communication form as found in conventional museum exhibitions. Furthermore, Mathias described himself as a person who liked and was good at making use of all spaces. Although it seemed visually intense and 'compressed', Mathias explained that this display style would stun visitors with the sheer number of historical artefacts made available in front of them. This could be seen as another challenge to the conventional museum practice, in which a few objects would first be singularised and then exhibited to 'represent' others (cf. Daniels 2019). In addition to the compilation of objects, Mathias explained,

> *"By creating a display with some 'gems' hidden in the darker corners in piles of 'Old Objects', I am trying to recreate my journey to collecting these objects. It is just like how I used to go to flea markets and junk shops to look for my treasures. The best objects are always hidden in the corners, under the pile, and at the bottom of the*

bin bag. I want my visitors to keep searching, so they could also gain a sense of discovery and agency."[74]

He reckons that this is the museum experience that makes the visit interesting. Kratz has once argued that ''rhetorics of value'' are not just generated by objects in museums; visual elements (such as lighting and colour) and linguistic elements (such as text panels and labels) define contours of meaning and provide resources for visitors to "reflect on, reproduce, reshape their … identity" (2011: 38-39). In Mathias' museum, the lights were dimmed and there were a few spotlights. As Mathias explained above, it was in fact the absence of lights – with "best objects placed in dark corners" – that created value. This idea of discovery of objects in dark corners is reminiscent of Steiner's discussion of art dealer's shops and the issue of authenticity in the tourist trade in 'west' Africa (1994, 1996). Steiner showed how the space of the shop was controlled through light (and its absence) and the dense positioning of objects to create a feeling of adventure for the consumer that added value to the artworks on sale. Apart from recreating the junk shops and flea market experience, Mathias also emphasised the fluidity of his exhibition. Essentially, if he found space, he would try squeezing in another object that, in his opinion, would match with the surrounding displays. As the exhibition lacks text, Mathias could interpret his display freely and involve active visitor participation in the meaning-making process during his guided tours. All of these, in Mathias' mind, "make objects interesting to look at" and enrich what otherwise would be "just another boring museum full of display cabinets".[75] In retrospect, it is almost impossible for me to capture the sheer scale of the accumulation of things in Mathias's museum and the overwhelming feeling it can

[74] Lee, interview, HK, December 2018.
[75] Lee, interview, HK, December 2018.

induce in visitors. This is precisely how objects are different from texts: they are better experienced first-handed than described second- or even third-handed.

So, I argue that Mathias saw 'museum-making' a way to express and construct his identity and belief, through which he actively sought to influence his visitors. He saw the opportunity in using objects to reach and affect his audience, as he was himself affected by objects when he was feeling lost. By selecting what to display, interacting with the audience in a personal manner, appealing to intimate personal experiences like childhood and wedding, and conveying philosophical messages in guided tours and visitor interactions, Mathias encouraged visitors to think for themselves what HK heritage and history meant to them. There was not a single word in the museum that conveyed the curatorial message, but these were all done through the stories behind objects and conversations. Thus, the exhibition is democratic in nature – multivocal, open to different interpretations, non-didactic, that is, both the museum maker and visitors participate in the processes of representation. At the same time, such democratic museum visiting experience would help further museum-mindedness in HK, for visitors are not only at the receiving ends but are encouraged to participate in the heritage preservation and interpretation processes. This also encourages potential collectors and enthusiasts to set up their own 'museum' as museum-making is no longer seen as the unreachable ideal.

5.6. Summary

In this chapter, I examined amateur 'community' museums in HK which are self-initiated and often 'one-person' museums founded by non-professional grassroots members of the community. In exploring the case of *SMJ*, a museum founded by HK heritage enthusiast Mathias Lee, I argued that nostalgia for a better (colonial) past and

the perceived incompetence of government museums motivated Mathias to set up his own museum. Through collecting, exhibiting and eventually setting up a museum-like institution of 'Old Objects', Mathias seeks to create a kind of therapeutic buffer zone designed to alleviate social division, grievances, and the identity crisis of postcolonial HK. In other words, Mathias accumulates material culture to satisfy his nostalgia, a kind of protection against everything that is changing around him. By creating a museum, he also seeks to share his collections, his memories and his sentiments with others. But more importantly, he believes that his effort of preserving and exhibiting the past is vital in compensating for the incompetency of HK government museums: the lack of human touch and social relevance. The absence of ideological restriction also prompts museum-makers to project a different kind of identity and historical narrative through self-representation in their exhibitions and guided tours. In Mathias's case, his museum is a self-representation and opposition to the historical narratives in government museums.

Through this process, the museum becomes a way for museum-makers to achieve and express their own identities. However, although museum-makers tend to speak with their own voice in person, it is always in an attempt to affect and influence visitors. By setting up a physical repository of the past and exhibiting material culture, Mathias seeks to define and distinguish the better past (of 'Them') from the worse present (of 'Us'). Unlike other private museums, the makers of museums like SMJ have the 'community' in mind when setting up their institutions. They are firmly positioned within the community and aim to serve their community through providing and provoking memories of the everyday past. Instead of focusing on historical and aesthetic values as in mainstream museums, the 'Old Objects' in Mathias' 'museum' are appreciated as 'common mementos' of the past, representing countless ordinary stories of their humble owners that are relevant to the visitors. Mathias perceives his collection as a materialised witness of

history with cultural knowledge embodied in it that could be used to teach and remind future generations of what life was like in the past. For him, even if a certain type of object was one day eliminated from the world, its value, imprinted the mind, could still be passed on to the next generations to become almost eternal. By putting these once familiar objects on display and personally introducing them in his guided tours, Mathias seeks to trigger positive memories among his older visitors. For the younger generation, these objects serve as essential material testimonies for imagining a romanticised past – a past they have never experienced. Visitors are then encouraged to rethink the meaning of a HK identity and culture. This museum-like institution then acts as a repository of collective memory.

Zooming out, the emergence of amateur 'community' museums signifies a rising 'museum-mindedness' among the HK public (Kreps 2003), as museum has been chosen as a popular means to achieve self-realisation, and in the process adapted to local context and culture. The unique curatorial style of *SMJ* can be seen as a variant, localised museology. The museum-maker's interest in categorising and grouping artefacts, instead of viewing them as decontextualised, feeds into his desire to recreate an authentic and 'life-like' past that visitors can 'walk into'. Mathias seeks to affect his visitors with his own longing for a happier past - his childhood. To achieve this, he prefers to pack a huge quantity of 'Old Objects' in his small display space. Such sheer number of objects often amaze visitors. To add to this experience, he has subconsciously created a multi-sensory experience by encouraging visitors to touch the exhibit, highlighting the 'vintage smell' as well as playing period music. Although visitors are frequently able to find something they have used in the exhibition, the absence of captions means that visitors unfamiliar with the exhibits must engage with Mathias to learn about the objects' past. This strategy helps Mathias to achieve his aim of reinstalling the 'human' element in a museum

environment. Indeed, in a small amateur museum, the museum-maker himself is solely responsible for collecting, curating and engaging with visitors, thus building extensive knowledge and a sense of mission towards his collections. More importantly, this exemplifies Mathias' belief – that objects alone could not tell the whole story but a human interlocuter is essential in unlocking the cultural knowledge deeply and sometimes physically embedded in the objects. In other words, Mathias prefers to transmit cultural knowledge through word of mouth but based on the objects exhibited in the built environment.

Mathias' 'museum' is a microcosm of his life and memories, which is part of and as such intertwines intimately with the city's collective memory. It features his biographical and relational collection: not only of Mathias, but also of HK people (Appadurai and Kopytoff 1986, Hoskins 1998, Gosden and Marshall 1999). Through Mathias' objects on display across his small exhibition spaces, the core values and spirit of HK are made concrete, and a Hongkonger identity based on nostalgia of the glorious past is constructed. In addition to showing the owner's journey of collecting and exhibiting, Mathias' 'museum' also provides a journey for HK people to retrace and learn from their ancestors' historical footsteps, and to reflect on what it means to be a Hongkonger. This journey remains open-ended, just as history can be reinterpreted and identity regenerated across time and space. In short, *St Mathias Journey* is a 'community' museum created by an enthusiastic amateur museum-maker that activates both private and public memories, in a similar manner to what takes place in school history museums, which I will investigate in the next chapter.

6

School History Museums

Queen's College History Museum



Fig. 6.1. Queen's College History Museum (Photo by Author, 2018).

On a sunny winter morning in 2020, I visited my Alma Mater, Queen's College (QC).[1] Students could be heard cheering each other at a basketball match in the background. I sat in front of the Queen's College History Museum (QCHM, Fig. 6.1) with John, my former classmate and fellow 'curator' whom I had known for fourteen years. In 2013, a year after we graduated, with our enthusiasm in history, John and I, both university students at the time, were invited by the then Assistant Principal to assist with setting up a school archive.[2] Soon, the project scope expanded. In 2017, we were appointed honorary curators of the school history museum with a remit to acquire, conserve, research and exhibit artefacts related to QC.[3] As we were chatting and gazing at our collections, the school bell rang; it was recess time. Students whizzed past to the

[1] Queen's College is a boy's secondary school set up and managed by the government in Hong Kong.
[2] There has traditionally been a strong social bonding between 'Tung hok', i.e. classmates (同學), in Ancient China that could be maintained after graduation. Classmates support each other not only at school but also in their future careers.
[3] Both positions are voluntary and do not involve any financial renumeration or set employment hours.

tuck shop; some curious students stopped to look at the museum. "Excuse me, are you Old Boys?", asked one of them. "Yes, and we are in charge of the museum," we replied. "But why do we have a school museum?" asked the student.[4] That was a question I subsequently asked John, the school management team, and even myself. That is the question I am going to answer in this chapter.

Museums have been construed as places of pedagogy and for enlightening the general public since the nineteenth century (e.g. Molyneaux and Stone eds. 1994, Hill 2005).[5] While museum educators are passionate about bringing students into museums and making them accessible for education (e.g. Hooper-Greenhill 2007), it is in fact becoming more and more popular for schools in Hong Kong (HK) to establish school history museums (校史館) within their own premises. These history-themed museum-like spaces in HK schools celebrate and enshrine their schools' history, traditions, and achievements by collecting and interpreting school records and artefacts. In the process, the schooling experience is museumised. With at least 26 school history museums already set up and several new ones being planned, it is apparent that school history museums have become part of the most recent trend in the development of museums in postcolonial HK since the mid-2000s.[6] But why would schools, being education institutions themselves, choose to divert their resources to set up museums? Why have they only been set up in the past ten years but not earlier? Who are these school history museums for?

I will explore these questions with the case of Queen's College History Museum (QCHM), a school history museum established in 2013 inside the then 151-year-old

[4] Leung, Interview, HK, December 2020.
[5] For further discussions on university museums, see for example Young (2000), O'Hanlon (2014), Ruiz-Castell et al eds. (2015), Lam (2016), Davidson and Esslinger eds. (2020).
[6] Refer to Appendix 4.1 for a complete list of known school museums in HK.

government secondary school, which is the oldest in HK established during the British colonial era. Set up on the school's own initiative, it is not part of the government museum structure and thus receives no government funding, assistance, concessions, or influence. Its staff consist of teachers who administers the museum, as well as alumni volunteers and advisors who curate exhibitions and conduct research. Before delving further into the case study, I will first review three genres of literature relevant to my discussion on school history museums. Then I will trace the development of QCHM, analyse its exhibition and reflect on my own experience of volunteering as honorary curator there since its inception in December 2013. This includes observations during opening events, as well as data obtained from interviews with different stakeholders during my fieldwork research in 2018-20. In other words, this chapter differs from others in that it is an ethnography of my own curating experience in a museum at my own school. My status as an alumnus of the school and curator of the museum has helped me in arranging these sessions and conducting in-depth analyses. As I was already an anthropology student when volunteering at the museum, as I will describe in the chapter, my knowledge of key anthropological theories has influenced my approach. So, as an embedded anthropologist, I would adopt a reflexive perspective towards analysing this exhibition space. For example, I have spoken to different actors in the exhibition, such as school management, other curators, students, alumni, and public visitors to ensure that I could reflect on this experience critically. I have paid attention to the meaning-making potential of my own actions and interpretation of different data. Through this case, I attempt to find out why schools need museums, and in what ways school history museums resemble ancestral halls. I will also find out how the emergence of school history museums in postcolonial HK reflects development in identity and heritage consciousness amongst the public.

In this chapter, school history museums are defined as museums or exhibition spaces set up by schools themselves inside their campus that focus on the school's history. To establish a sound foundation for my analyses, I turn to the following three bodies of literature which are particularly relevant to school history museums.

In-school Museums and their Pedagogical Effects

School teachers have realised the pedagogical value of museums in school settings as early as the nineteenth century. In his analysis of the *fin-de-siècle* German school museums, Fuchs (2009) argued that their emergence was ultimately linked to the World Fairs and Education Fairs and the broader social movement towards universal education at the time. While one might attempt to see these early school museums as a product of heightened historical consciousness in the nineteenth century as discussed by Crane (2000), Fuchs (2009) pointed out that these first-generation school museums were not about school history but had the specific function of displaying teaching and learning materials as well as natural history and local history objects. This trend soon spread through the European continent and over the Atlantic. These European school museums were symbiotically influenced by developments in the imperial peripheries as well as new pedagogical theory of object teaching in the late nineteenth century (Vidal 2017).[7] This idea is similar to 'object lessons', which according to Geismar (2018), are arguments about the world made through things and ideas brought into being by things acting as sites of meaning animated by their materiality. Bearing that, being material witness of history, objects are the 'double of the human body', which carry within them sensorial marks of human use imbued with layers of commensal meanings and histories (Seremetakis 1996), the idea could easily be extended to school history museums.

[7] The 'intuitive method' was popular at the turn of the twentieth century. By encouraging pupils to touch and observe objects in school museums, educators believed that knowledge close at hand could be used to reach distant, abstract conclusions. For examples, see Meyers (1901), Chaney (1915), Troelstrup (1929).

Through data from my ethnographic fieldwork, I am going to investigate in this chapter the pedagogical effects of an in-school museum: to what extent is 'object lesson' in a museum context useful for students in knowledge transmission?

Teachers continued to use in-school museums to help instil heritage awareness among young pupils in the twentieth century. For example, Larrauri (1975) found that the country-wide school museum programme in Mexico successfully transformed schoolchildren from having passive, receptive attitude into actively participating ones, as well as encouraged the public to cooperate in the conservation of cultural heritage and appreciate museums as effective cultural instrument.[8] More recently, teachers extended the use of in-school museums to subjects other than history and heritage in bid to, as Liao (2005) suggested, compensate for the perceived shortcomings of solely textbook-based education. Eakle and Dalesio's (2008) work elaborated on this point. Their studies found that pupils acquired unique understanding of literacy skills through curating opportunities, which were made available by 'classroom museum' in an American primary school. Furthermore, Ryder and Annis (2016) concluded that their pupil-curated cross-curricular school museum at a British primary school helped to develop a culture of enquiry and sense of curiosity amongst pupils, energise them as learners, and give them value and self-worth.[9] The effectiveness of the school museum is also recognised by museum professionals. Drawing from her experience both as a museum educator and middle school curriculum coordinator in Wisconsin, D'Acquisto (2006, 2013) argued that school museums were catalysts for student learning as they combined academic and creative learning, connected students with the community, thereby made learning more relevant. To summarise these scholarly arguments, learning through

[8] See Vorster (1985) and Maiga (1995) for further examples of in-school museums in South Africa and Mali.
[9] See Parisi-Moreno & Lolonch-Molina (2020) for benefits of school museums in early childhood education.

artefacts, thinking through things, and interacting with objects in an immersive way in a museum context can be very useful for students. If in-school museums are that useful for learning, why have school history museums only emerged in HK since the millennium? To what extent (compared to the aforementioned in-school museums) are *school history* museums in HK useful? I am going to answer these questions using the case of the QC History Museum.

School History and Museums

In comparison to school museums, *school history* museums are much less studied and indeed much less well-known even in their local societies for, as I will describe in the next sections, they are more inward-looking, and have a specialised audience and narrow focus. There are two forms of school history museums, one that focuses on general history of the locality or community and the other on the school's historical development. The first category is more common in the 'west'. For example, through the case of a community-school history museum at a British middle school, Kerrigan (2014) reflected on how it aided the teaching and learning of history, enhanced social education of pupils, as well as promoted its role within the wider community.[10] On the opposite side of the European continent, Geraskina (2013), a history teacher at Moscow State School No.211, revived an old museum that once stood inside the school campus in order to take advantage of 'museum pedagogy' on the understanding that it would expand pupils' awareness of history and ethnography. She found that the resulting school history museum was not only an archive but also an effective mechanism that exposed pedagogical influence on pupils in the spirit of historical traditions and love for their city.

[10] According to Kerrigan (2014), the community-school history museum's collection contained personal, business, official, newspapers, ephemera and the oral record collections that reflect the ties between the school and the community's history.

Although both school history museums did not focus exclusively on school history, they both showed that school history museums could connect the school to a wider environment, a process that would enrich a pupil's learning experience. As I will discuss later, this applies to QC History Museum too, as the school finds its history inextricably tied to the development of HK. Another example that falls to the first category relevant to my research in HK is the Museum of Schools in Macerata, Italy, as it collects a significant amount and a variety of original teaching materials – such as school objects, teaching aids and furniture from the past two centuries – to stimulate a critical approach to the collective imagery that historical-educational heritage can evoke and represent. Brunelli's study (2015) demonstrated how historical school objects could evoke great visual and emotional impact. The museum could be a place to see and touch the history of education, and a space to acquire and practise historical methods and competences through experiencing history and heritage.

Furthermore, in-school history museums that focus on the school's own history are prevalent in Greater China. As Shen and Shi (2013) has noted, it is a common practice for colleges and universities in China to build history museums to celebrate their anniversaries, as these institutions are perceived to play an important role in highlighting the achievements and displaying characteristics of the schools. For example, Shen (2012) examined several cases of school history museum in China and argued that they could serve as a carrier of college memories, space for visitors to learn about the school's development and achievements, as well as tool to spread the spirit of the 'campus culture'. Similarly, Tong et al (2020) used Beihang University Archives and School History Museum as an example to show that not only did the institution enhance the pride and self-confidence of teachers and students, but also that the footsteps of the predecessors set a moral example for pupils to follow. In other words, these museums are seen as "vivid

business cards" that can communicate the schools' profile, cultural background and history (Hu 2012). This is synonymous with public museums in China, which are seen as institutions that propagate "patriotism, socialism, and the revolutionary traditions among the broad masses of people" (Li, P. 2002). In short, museums and their collections have been actively used as instrument of the Chinese state for developing soft power and conducting cultural diplomacy (cf. Kong, D. 2015; Zhang and Courty 2020, 2021). School history museums in China, similar to other public museums in the country, are often exploited as tools to conduct 'ideological and political education', such as to instil Chinese nationalism and state-approved historical narrative amongst students (Liu 2018). This is a testimony of how museums are inevitably political and could be used, especially in China, in a Foucauldian sense, as tools to spread ideology (e.g. Bennett 1995, 2005, 2017). What aspects of history are school history museums capable of portraying? In this chapter, I am going to investigate whether these observations are also applicable to school history museums in postcolonial HK.

Museum and Historical Consciousness

The concept of historical consciousness that I have outlined in the introduction chapter is especially relevant to this chapter as I want to investigate how far the emergence of school history museums is related to historical consciousness. The emergence of nostalgia, memory and heritage involves a consciousness of possessing a past and history.[11] The concept of historical consciousness came into prominence in the late twentieth century, with academic discussion focusing on its relationship with

[11] Refer to introduction chapter of this thesis for a detailed discussion on the relationship between nostalgia, memory, heritage and museum.

identity construction, history education, and political thinking.[12] Most importantly, the concept emphasises the intention to remember, the consciousness that one possesses a history.

The birth of the modern museum has been long associated with national identity which involves historical consciousness. Benedict Anderson (2006) argued that national museums played an indispensable role in inculcating collective views on the past among its citizens, thus facilitating nationals to 'imagine' their national communities.[13] As a result, visitors acquire a particular notion of historical consciousness through museums' heavily influenced national narrative, which in turn instil a sense of belonging to the nation. However, MacDonald (2013) noted that the recent emergence of the memory phenomenon was characterised by the expansion of public preoccupation with the past, expressed in the commodification, musealisation and fetishisation of the cosmopolitan memory forms. This shift from nation-state to cosmopolitan framework is particularly important in my research, as it signifies the emergence of popular historical consciousness, which in turn leads to blossoming of museums and other heritage institutions.

Susan Crane's research reinforces our understanding on the connection between collecting, memory, museum, and historical consciousness.[14] In her research of German museums around the time of East-'west' reunification, Crane (1997) first reflected on the museum's important role as mediators of historical consciousness as well as their

[12] For example, authors in Dessein's edited volume (2014) demonstrated the role historical consciousness plays in China's contemporary national and international identity as well as Chinese political thinking. See also Nora (1998) on the related concept 'sites of memory'. Refer to chapter 3 for further discussion.
[13] See also related concepts of Foucault (1981)'s theoretical framework of governmentality, and Bennett (1995)'s work on state uses of museums. Refer to chapter 1 for detailed discussion.
[14] Historical consciousness has multiple definitions. Seixas (2006: 15-17) defined it as the ability to understand the pastness and presence of the past, its multiple causes and perspectives, and to use the past to construct historical accounts. Clark and Grever (2018) emphasised that historical consciousness involves not only verbally expressed and cognitive handling of the past, but also embodied expressions: namely how people experience, use, and perform the past. See Chapter 1 for further discussion.

potential to resolve 'distortion' between personal experience and expectation and institutional representation of the past. Then, Crane (2000) examined the complicated relationship between collecting and the emergence of popular historical consciousness in early nineteenth century Germany. Her studies concluded that being historically conscious or being aware of history meant to recognise a sense of the past that was distanced and separated from the present both spatially and temporally, which could exist only through imagination and intuition. In the period she examined, the development of historical consciousness was inextricably related to the new emphasis on appreciating, preserving and collecting material culture like historical ruins, artifacts, and recovered documents. More recently, scholars have been exploring further the relationship between historical consciousness and museum. Authors in Gosselin and Livingstone's edited volume (2016) have demonstrated that postmodern museums focus on community building and the adoption of social justice perspectives, which have created a heightened state of self-consciousness during the processes of making and presenting histories. Through activating various forms of remembrance and motivating teaching and learning history, museums foster various forms of interaction with "the past", when at the same time actors bring their own knowledge into play when they perform "meaning-making" in the museum, generating complex understandings of the past. As Steven Conn has demonstrated (2010), many contemporary museums shift away from taking the centrality of objects and collections for granted. Instead, they expand to take on more complex cultural, intellectual, and political roles in the contemporary society. Similarly, in her discussion of historical consciousness practices that has encouraged learners to consider the moral dilemmas associated with Canadian national history, Stephanie Anderson (2017) has emphasised that historical consciousness is linked to museums and memorial spaces by ways in which these sites of pedagogy

communicate a relationship between the past, present, and future through narrative. Furthermore, drawing data from photo-elicitation and parent reports after a museum visit amongst young children aged 3-7 years, Dunn and Wyver (2019) have concluded that museum experience assists the development of foundational concepts of historical consciousness which include temporal awareness, sense of historical identity, and 'othering' the past. In the following sections, I am going to explore the relationship between school history museums and historical consciousness.

6.1. Queen's College History Museum: School Archives, Gallery or Museum?

Queen's College (QC) is the oldest Government secondary school in HK, founded in 1862 by the British Colonial Government as an Anglo-Chinese Secondary School. With its long history, it has a committed alumni body with members who live in HK and worldwide, which supports the development of the school and its graduates. This results in what pupils and alumni of QC refer to as 'brotherhood': a sense of belonging, identity, and fraternity that one gains from being part of the school.[15]

QC's school-related records and artefacts are now kept at the QC History Museum (QCHM), which was first set up in the campus in 2013. School history was taken for granted until the campus and records were destroyed in the Second World War. Fortunately, as a government institution, the school's historical development has well been documented, and many artefacts are kept intact. According to my research collaborators who work at HK government institutions, it is very difficult to 'write off' objects and dispose them under the government administrative procedures.[16] However, that means a lot of old files and objects have been piled up in attics and storage facilities

[15] The concept of 'brotherhood' originated in the 1890s at QC. Since 1996 it has been included as a core value of the school. It is comparable to the sense of cohesion brought by an ancestral hall to a clan.
[16] Kwok, Interview, December 2020.

in various government institutions throughout the years, which would turn out to be interesting finds for historians, archivists, and curators. After expending strenuous efforts in recovering documents and history, the school published two school history chronicles in 1962 and 1987 respectively. In 1992 and 1997, the school also published an album of historical photos as well as a register which contained information of the alumni. At the same time, the school started displaying school artefacts such as school certificates, uniform items, and some historic photos on some notice boards at the reception room (Fig. 6.2-6.3). These artefacts later formed the backbone of the QC museum collection. The main objectives were to inform visitors, not students, about the school's long history through physical objects, and to preserve some of the old artefacts.[17] In the new millennium QC integrated school history into its formal curriculum for the first time, under the short-lived subject Integrated Humanities between 2005-08. I studied the subject in 2006-07, which included worksheets prepared by teachers on school history, and talks by alumni of the school. It was very inspirational to learn about the school's long history and its many successful graduates. I was left with a strong impression that I should do my best to uphold the tradition bestowed upon us – a sense of responsibility and service to the school and to the society at large that still has impact on me today.

[17] These boards were dissimilar to museums. Students were not allowed in the room, artefacts were not displayed meaningfully, there was no plan to change the displays. (W.S. Leung, Interview, HK, June 2018).



Figs. 6.2. School history display boards in the reception room in 1989 (The Yellow Dragon 1989).



Figs. 6.3. School history display boards in the reception room in 1989 (The Yellow Dragon 1989).

Organising school history exhibition was a turning point that led to the establishment of a permanent school history museum. To celebrate the school's anniversaries, the QC Old Boys' Association (QCOBA) co-curated two school history public exhibitions with the government Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD),

and at the same time initiated an Oral History Project. The school management noted that there was considerable and increasing interest among alumni and the public in QC's school history and its artefacts after the two history exhibitions.[18] Visits to other school history galleries further encouraged the school to set up a similar archive at QC to better preserve school artefacts after the exhibition was over.

Ultimately, the urge of preserving and displaying school artefacts made the school and alumni body recognise that their artefacts had historical value: that they represented the development of education in HK and had immediate relevance to the general public. This 'historical turn' was in part influenced by the socio-political atmosphere in HK as the city celebrated its 10th anniversary of the handover in 2007[19], and the accelerated decolonisation. For example, an alumnus who at the time urged the school to set up a history museum told me that he was influenced by the increasing public sentiment towards heritage preservation after the demolition of the Queen's Pier in 2007. He was "very upset to see QC, as the oldest secondary school in HK, was lacking any archive system or rooms"; so, he "proposed the idea to [the school to] save our heritage".[20] That was why in as early as 2008, QC already planned to start a school exhibition gallery that would display school history and the achievements of its proposed donor Dr Henry Fok Ying Tung, an alumnus who was a prominent Chinese businessmen and philanthropist. The gallery was planned to be a second meeting room for the school (Luminus 2007: 4).[21] However, this plan was soon abandoned with insufficient funds and space on the campus.

The school management finally set up QC History Gallery in December 2013. The small space was converted from a vacant classroom within the campus for preserving the

[18] Leung, Interview, HK, June 2018; L.Y. Li, Interview, Shatin, June 2018.
[19] Luk, Interview, HK, July 2018.
[20] C.L. Yu, Pers. Comm., 5 May 2020.
[21] Refer to section 6.3.3 in this chapter for more information and discussion on this first school history museum 'meeting room' proposal.

increasingly fragile artefacts related to the school, such as publications, photographs, signature albums, and trophies. The name 'History Gallery' was chosen by the school to reflect its main function as an archive or repository. Although to the Principal the aim was "to conserve the school artefacts in a suitable environment, and exhibiting to visitors is only the secondary aim", he did emphasise the usefulness of displaying artefacts:

> *"Instead of storing school artefacts in the Principal's Office – why do we need that? No one could see that. I think it is better if more people could see these artefacts. ... At the beginning we envisaged it to be a gallery displaying school history opened to visitors during annual open days and speech day, VIP guests in their occasional school visits, and newly admitted pupils."*[22]

In particular, the school management hoped that by learning about the school history, newly admitted pupils could establish a sense of ownership and realise that they were not studying at an ordinary secondary school.[23] "It is like you must take it upon yourself, that you have a responsibility of not disappointing the school."[24] Indeed, objects displayed in a museum space have proven to be useful in uniting a populace with a collective identity, embodying the 'idea' of a community (Kaplan ed. 1994; Taylor 1995). According to Duncan (1995), even the museum space and the visiting experience could help to produce self-regulating and proud citizens who would identify with their nation and heritage. In other words, the exhibition is intended to help building amongst students a QC identity and sense of belonging to the school: visiting the history gallery and learning from its collections can turn a student into a 'Queenian' (a 'QC boy'). Nevertheless, though the initial display was an improvement from the reception-room 'school history board', the gallery did not have much on display. The display was made by the school's student art club. There were only two cabinets that displayed a 1950s school album and artefacts such as school certificates and uniform items retrieved from the previous 'school history

[22] L.Y. Li, Interview, Shatin, June 2018.
[23] W.S. Leung, Interview, Dec 2020.
[24] K.H. Chow, Interview, HK, July 2018.

board'. They were accompanied by some old display panels retrieved from the 2007 exhibition with no story or grouping to speak of.

Self-reflexive Review: The Development of QC History Museum

Shortly after its establishment, a schoolmate and I, then recent graduates of QC, were invited to help manage the archives. Since then I have been actively involved in all kinds of museum work, including planning, acquiring artefacts, conducting research, drafting exhibition text, developing education programme, and carrying out simple conservation work. Our very first tasks in 2013-14 were to classify the artefacts, set up an archival system for existing records, and rearrange the artefacts in the two display cabinets and some of the display boards from the previous two history exhibitions, making a crude 'proto exhibition' on school history that was clearly divided into pre-war and post-war sections in the archive room (Figs. 6.4-6.7).



Fig. 6.4. Panorama of QC History Gallery between 2013-14 (Photo by Author, 2014).

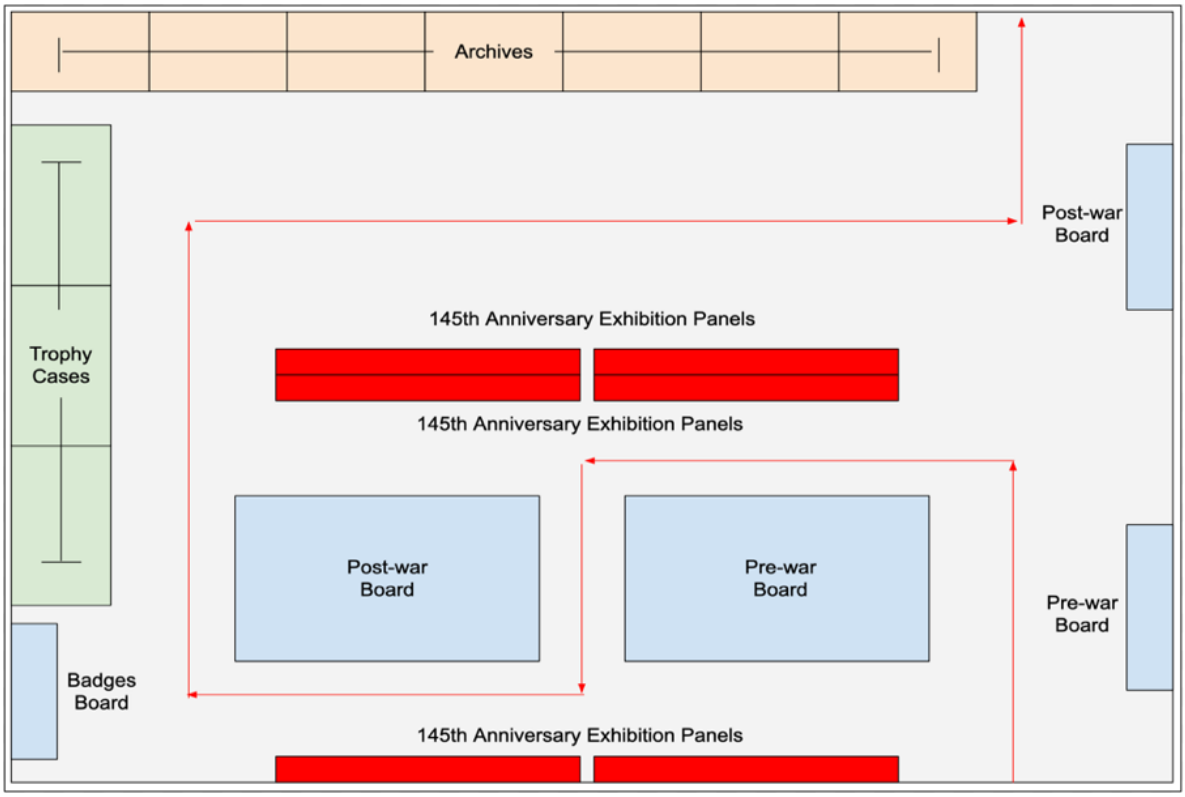


Fig. 6.5. Floor plan of the QC History Gallery (Illustrated by Author, 2021).



Figs. 6.6-6.7. Exhibition cabinet (left) and trophy display (right) of QC History Gallery between 2013-2014 (Photos by Author, 2014).

In the following year, we decided to expand our collections as we found out that there were more school related artefacts scattered around the school. Some of these older artefacts were already in poor condition, so we considered it our urgent task to salvage them from further decay. In retrospect, the thought process is akin to what MacDonald (2002: 103) referred to as the salvage of newly 'old' things: the curators considered it a great pity if the historical significance of these school artefacts were overlooked and

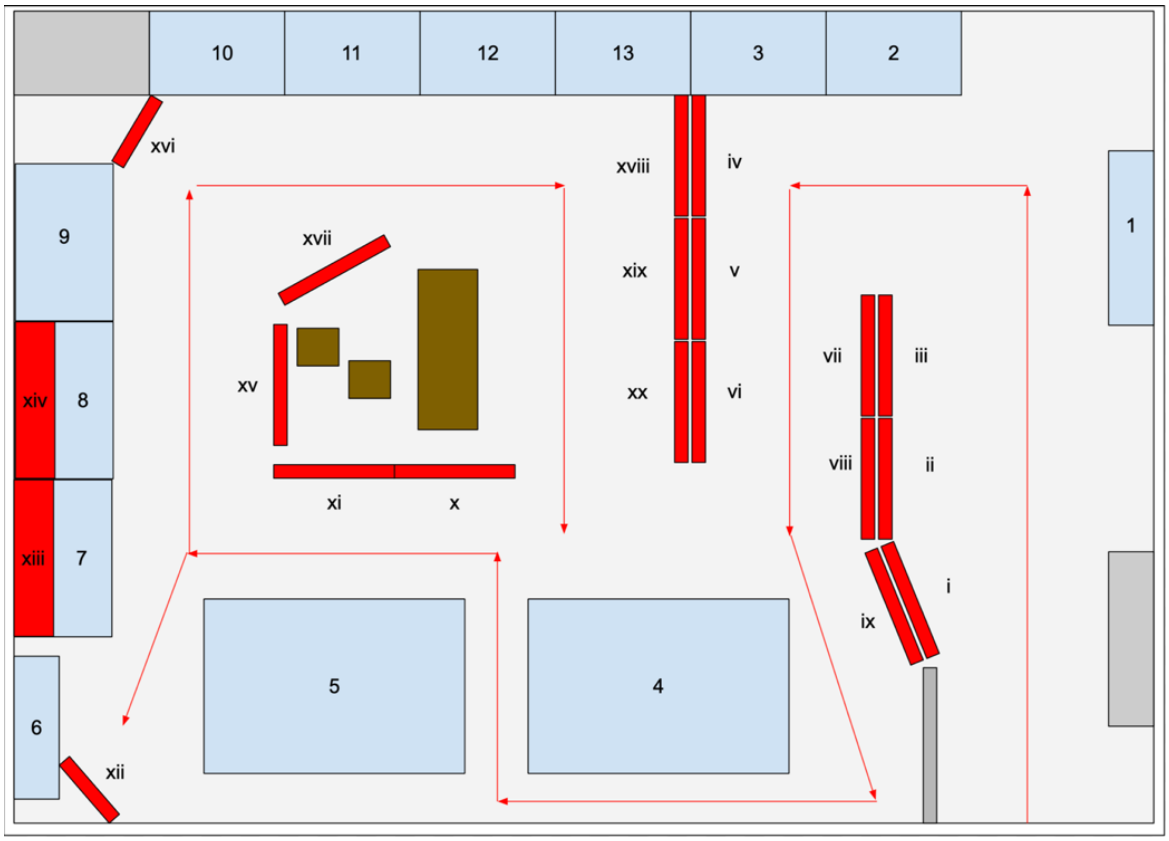
simply discarded.[25] The fear of disappearing memories was not baseless. Therefore, we obtained permission from the principal to conduct a thorough search at the campus to hunt for these relics. As a result, the museum's collection almost doubled in size with abandoned furniture, prizes, and trophies, and even school badges attached with files. These new materials enabled us to curate a chronological exhibition "From Gough Street to Causeway Road: Changes and Continuities of Queen's College" (Fig. 6.10). As an alumnus curator recollected, the motivation to turn the archives into a museum was the determination

> *"to preserve the school artefacts for perpetuity, and to present QC's history as an attractive story to visitors through these artefacts, … Keeping artefacts exclusive to the learned few is far worse than engaging with the public. … This makes us a unique institution even in terms of local school history museum standard, as we position ourselves more as a museum than a school archive."*[26]

The exhibition started with an introduction to the education system in HK prior to the establishment of QC in 1862 (i-ii in Fig. 6.8). The early days of QC as the Government Central School of HK was then documented with some replica objects (iii, 1 in Fig. 6.8). This was followed by an account on the school's development at the turn of twentieth century (iv-vi, 2-3 in Fig. 6.8) and the next few decades leading up to the Second World War accompanied by artefacts such as exam reports (vii-xii, 4-6 in Fig. 6.8). The destruction of the pre-war school campus and the construction of the current campus buildings were then narrated with an abundance of materials like photos, printing blocks and invitation cards (xiii, xiv, xv, 7-9 in Fig. 6.8). The contemporary development of the school from its centenary in 1962 to the present day formed the last portion of the exhibition with school artefacts like badges, ties, and student objects (xvi- xx, 10-13 in Fig. 6.8-6.9). The history gallery also displayed two vintage school furniture in the middle

[25] Refer to section 6.3.3 in this chapter for detailed analysis on collecting school artefacts. Cf. Dudley ed (2012a) on the salvage paradigm in late nineteenth century anthropology.
[26] J. Kwok, Interview, Dec 2020.

of the room which were often used as a 'photo booth' during alumni visits. The chronological method was adopted as it was deemed the easiest for visitors to follow through and learn about the changes and continuities in the historical development of the school. The main message curators sought to convey through the exhibition to the target audience – students and alumni of the school – was that despite the ever-changing environment and emergence of new challenges, the core values and the spirit of QC stayed the same. The exhibition was intentionally ambiguous about what "core values and spirit of QC" specifically entailed, as the curators wanted to encourage visitors to think for themselves what being a QC student or alumnus meant to them. It was hoped that this reflexive exercise would confer more agency to the visitors and avoid rendering the exhibition too didactic.



Figs. 6.8. Floor plan of QC History Gallery in 2015-16 (Plan illustrated by Author, 2021).



Figs. 6.9-6.10. Exhibition cabinet (left) and panorama (below) of QC History Gallery in 2015-16 (Photos by Author, 2015).



This exhibition demonstrated the potential of a well set-up school history museum for QC but the overall opinion of school management, public and alumni visitors was that the existing room was too small for the purpose. Thus, the school management decided to expand and renovate the history gallery in late 2015. Initially, the expansion project of QC History Gallery was met with fierce student opposition as the plan was to extend the gallery into the student council office, with the council office being relocated. This sparked debates throughout the school and with the alumni groups on the very purpose of an expanded history gallery being questioned. On the one hand, at the time students had limited engagement with the history gallery; some regarded it as a room "that was

locked, and the lights inside never get turned on",[27] or "a prohibited area where valuables heritages were kept".[28] As a result, they were dissatisfied that the school decided to sacrifice the space used by current pupils, which symbolised their welfare and rights, to display artefacts – something from the past – of alumni who already left school.[29] On the other hand, the school management and alumni groups emphasised the importance of preserving school artefacts and having a specialised environment to present it to alumni and public visitors.[30] The dispute also triggered curators to rethink about the meaning of the school history museum. The alumni curators realised that future exhibitions should focus on student life while communicating to students that they were part of its history and had the responsibility to uphold its prestige (Yu, J. 2016). Finally, the school management decided to relocate the museum to another space on the campus.

To design a suitable museum space and exhibition that would appeal to all kinds of audiences, an ad-hoc curation team was formed, including the school management and original alumni curators in addition to some alumni architects and designers. I was also part of the curation team. The renovation was funded by a group of alumni and the government Architectural Services Department since QC was a government school. As an alumnus patron explained, he contributed because he was "grateful to QC, which nurtured [him] into who [he is] today. … [He thought] being a Queenian [gave him] confidence as [he shared] the tradition and [was] indeed educated with a lot of successful persons in history."[31] The design, renovation and relocation process took almost a year. The new permanent exhibition, opened with the new tailor-made exhibition space in January 2017, was modelled after the first one and aimed to showcase the development

[27] Kwong, Pers. Comm., 17 December 2020.
[28] Poon, Pers. Comm., 17 December 2020.
[29] Lam, O., Pers. Comm., 3 June 2016.
[30] Li 2016, Pers. Comms., 3 June 2016.
[31] C.L. Cheung, Interview, July 2018.

of the school. The renovated space was renamed QC History *Museum* to reflect its expanded collection scale, as well as to mark the museum's commitment in developing other working areas of the museum.[32] This included telling stories through objects. According to a curator of QC History Museum,

> *"School history museums need stories and artefacts. Without a story, artefacts are just scattered around in a space like random objects and lack educational value. Whereas visiting exhibition spaces that tell stories without artefacts is no different from reading a book."*[33]

In other words, this curator thinks that objects and stories are indispensable for museums to function as an educational space (cf. Conn 2010), they are what distinguish museums from other similar institutions. Indeed, museums are deemed perfect sites for the production and dissemination of 'object lesson'; they forge experience and facilitate understandings of abstract concepts (Geismar 2018). The students' resistance to expand QC History Museum also proves that visitor participation and engagement with objects are important elements in the museum. This is how QC History Museum, started as a small archive converted from a classroom, has developed into a museum that has active collecting, exhibition, research, and education programmes in a tailor-made space.

Reflecting on my involvement in the school history museum's early development, I was grateful that the school offered us a lot of freedom in curating the exhibition and acquiring artefacts from around the campus. There was no instruction on what kind of narrative it should take. As a student of history for my first degree at university, when I initially got involved in the project my initial interest was to find out more about school history, and this involved visiting different archives and libraries in the world to compile historical information. In the meantime, I also visited various museums to study their

[32] The Museum is currently working on areas defined by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) with their collections and students. Refer to chapter 1 for a detailed discussion on ICOM's definition of museums, which is problematic and due to be updated.
[33] J. Kwok, Interview, Dec 2020.

exhibition styles, modes of representation, and technical arrangements. My active involvement in the school history museum and sense of the problematics of creating museums for HK eventually encouraged me to pursue a postgraduate course in museum anthropology and to conduct this doctoral research on museums in postcolonial HK.

6.2. Exhibiting Queen's College School History



Figs. 6.11. QC History Museum (Photo by Author, 2018).

The current permanent exhibition of QC History Museum was set up in 2017, when it moved into its current premises (Fig. 6.11-12). With close to 5,000 artefacts, the museum only routinely displayed less than 10% of them in the exhibition, which was curated using both chronological and typological display methods.[34] Whilst pursuing postgraduate studies in museum anthropology at Oxford, I curated this exhibition with

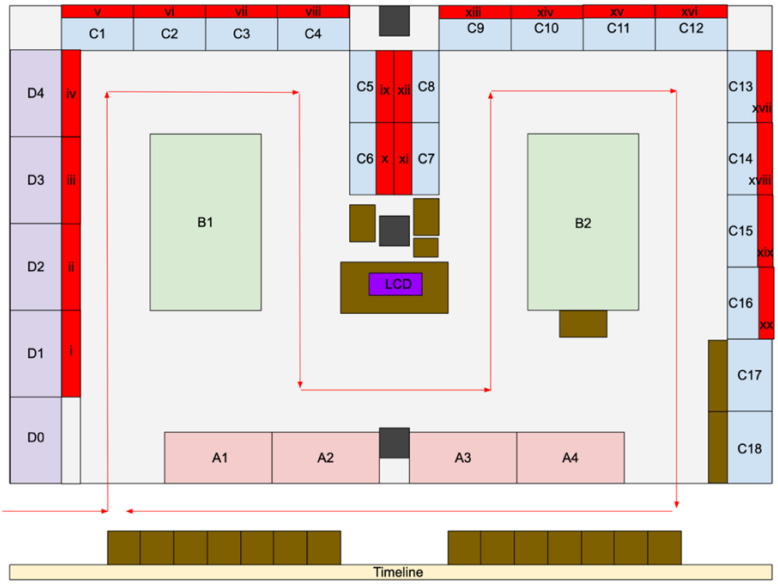
[34] QC museum's current collections include school files and documents, albums and photos, newspaper cuttings and scrap books, textbooks and publications, certificates and transcripts, awards and trophies, souvenirs and memorabilia, school uniform items, maps, signature albums and extra-curricular items. Most of these were originally stored in the Principal's Office or abandoned in some dark corners of the campus. But many others were donated by alumni and collectors or acquired from auction houses and vintage shops.

my fellow secondary-school classmates. Organising the main exhibition chronologically makes communication with visitors effective in a simple and straightforward manner, allowing visitors from different walks of life to observe and fully appreciate, through artefacts in sixteen display cabinets, the changes and continuities of school policies, curricula, student experiences and activities, and their relation to the broader socio-political development in HK and the World. Each of these cabinets represents a decade. They resemble 'windows' which visitors could take a peek at school life in the past. This is a visual metaphor of the Chinese term *Tong Cheung* [同窗] which literally means 'same window', or conceptually, schoolmates who study under the same window. The two typological cabinets, on the other hand, aim at showing visitors the 'evolution' of school-related items formerly used by students and staff from different eras, reflecting the response to changing demands across history. The exhibition is broken up into two parts and separated by a pillar, which represents the break caused by the Second World War, when school was suspended and the campus destroyed during Japanese occupation of HK. As a curator explained,

> *"I think of our school's history as a simple linear timeline, and the museum's role is to connect the past with the present, so visitors could … understand how the school was like when it was first established, and how it was developed to QC as we know of today. … This 'time tunnel' model can illustrate changes in different eras in a dynamic way."*[35]

[35] J. Kwok, Interview, Dec 2020.





Figs. 6.12. QC History Museum (Photo by Author, 2018).
Fig. 6.13. Current floor plan of QC History Museum (since 2017) (Illustrated by Author, 2021).

Within this chronological design the space is a largely symmetrical and the exhibition gallery is clearly divided into two sections, which are separated by the Second World War as a historical watershed. The exhibition starts with display panels stuck on the doors of archival cabinets (i-iv, D1-D4 in Fig. 6.13), which introduce the establishment and early history of QC. In particular, the exhibition points out the school's emphasis on bilingual education, the special status of the school in the colonial government, and the career prospects of its early graduates – not only as wealthy businessmen but also influential political figures in HK and China. Following that are panels and artefacts that reflect the development of the school in the early twentieth centuries (v-vii, C1-C4 in Fig. 6.13). They illustrate the school's spirit embodied by its pupils, which the exhibition argues has stayed the same throughout its 160 years of existence. For example, a commemorative ceramic piece gifted by an alumnus to an expatriate staff stands for the respect for teachers; an old photo of school prefects from Chinese, Indian and European backgrounds illustrates that the colonial school was liberal-minded and had no racial prejudice; the school magazine and photos of sports teams show how the school has

encouraged pupils to explore their interests freely; while the examination papers and prize books show how pupils have acted on the school's motto, '*labor omnia vincit*'.[36] A number of staff photos are also exhibited, which show how the school's teaching staff have changed from mainly European to mainly local Chinese in the 1920s and 1930s (vii-x, C5-C6 in Fig. 6.13). Other key artefacts in this section of the exhibition include photographs of pupils in their Chinese scholar's gowns and Manchurian style queues playing tug-of-war, and South Asian pupils playing cricket games. These represent the diversity of the student body in the first eighty years of the school. Most of the artefacts from the pre-war displays were donated by alumni or former staff, which were acquired from auction houses since the pre-war campus was destroyed during the Second World War. These include the displays in the large typological cabinet, such as dozens of neatly arranged school badges and school exercise books (B1 in Fig. 6.13). A similar typological cabinet (B2 in Fig. 6.13) with school ties and souvenirs is in the 'post-war' area.

The school's suspension and destruction during the war are represented by a break in the continued wall of exhibition cabinets. In the empty space is placed several pieces of old school wooden furniture once used in the campus, including two library catalogue cabinets, an office desk, a filing cabinet, and a coat hanger (brown boxes in Fig. x). Apart from being able to touch and experience these old but sturdy furniture, visitors could also explore the pre-war campus destroyed in the War with three-dimensional reconstructed architectural models on a touch-screen computer (LCD in Fig. 6.13). The computer is also loaded with oral history video clips and some fun facts on school history.

Turning left from the computer is the post-war exhibition area. The exhibition continues to narrate the reconstruction of the school campus following Japanese

[36] *Labor omnia vincit*, or "work conquers all", had been QC's motto since the 1920s.

surrender in 1945, and its reconsolidation in the 1950s (xi-xiv, C7-C10 in Fig. 6.13). Artefacts displayed in this area are more varied than the pre-war section as most have been preserved and found within the current school campus, which have been in use since 1950. Examples include a ribbon cut during the opening ceremony of the current campus, several printing blocks of the school magazine, and student music competition certificates. The exhibition then records the school's development during the late 1950s-90s (xv-xviii, C11-C14 in Fig. 6.13) – a period most popular with alumni visitors as it was when they studied at QC. The period saw the roots of modern QC, such as the diversification of extra-curricular activities, localisation of teaching staff, and emphasis on scientific subjects. These new trends are represented by artefacts like a Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme logbook, a photo of the school's first Chinese principal appointed in the 1960s, and a 1970s student's biology homework book with a brain diagram (Fig. 6.18). Exhibition panels and artefacts in these cabinets also reflect the socio-political development of HK society. For example, on display are two pamphlets published in 1967 by the QC 'Struggle Committee' that show how the school has been affected by the Cultural Revolution-inspired riot in HK; while several commemorative memorabilia produced by the school and a newspaper narrating QC's decision to remove the British crown on its emblem show how the school has adapted to transfer of HK sovereignty in 1997.

The last two cabinets record the contemporary development of the school in the 1990-2000s with artefacts drawn from 'everyday school objects' such as Student Council election materials, graduation ceremony pamphlets, and school anniversary items (C15-16, xix-xx in Fig. 6.13). A few more items of wooden furniture such as magazine rack, shelving trolley and lectern are used to host extra collections like school magazines and replica artefacts that visitors are allowed to touch and consult. In addition, the curators

want to replicate that kind of 'treasure hunting' experience they themselves have had when digging up school artefacts from different corners of the campus. Thus, a section of the exhibition is allocated as 'exploration cabinets', where visitors could explore artefacts hidden in drawers. The installation returns some sort of agency to the visitors as they could form different conclusions depending on what they have found in these cabinets, the order they have found it, and how they interpret them. It avoids the exhibition from being solely didactic and univocal. From my observation in an opening event, the 'discovery cabinets' were highly effective in arousing visitors' curiosity to discover more about school history with artefacts and photos in assorted themes.

Outside the main exhibition space is a corridor that displays a timeline of events, an old school badge with the British crown that used to be hung outside the main door prior to the 1997 handover, and two rows of wooden chairs that have been in use since the 1950s. They are collectively seen by students as a "physical embodiment of the school and the spirit of alumni" (Branche for QC 2016a). Special exhibitions are updated annually in four cabinets (A1-A4 in Fig. 6.13) nearest to the panorama windows, which students and visitors could view from the outside even when the museum is not open. [37]

A central theme that runs through all the research and exhibition projects is that QC's development is intertwined with that of HK and modern China. It emphasises QC's role, as a school where east meets 'west', in the changing global trends. It tells the story of how QC pupils internalise and use the hybrid Chinese and 'western' culture they have been exposed to in their lives. In other words, the curation team hopes that visitors could learn from the 'in-between' history of QC, the social elites it has produced, and the changes she has brought to the education sector in HK and China. This coincides with the

[37] Special exhibitions are curated to make the museum experience more varied and refreshing for return visitors. Themes are picked with anniversary and special events in mind or to display new acquisitions.

HK government's historical narrative portraying the postcolonial city as a bridge between Chinese and 'western' culture and value system.[38] Furthermore, the curators emphasise the link between the school's history and HK's general history to make it relevant not only to students and alumni but also to the public. As a result, I have observed that public visitors are able to find displays that they are familiar with or related to, such as schoolbooks they have used or places that they have lived in. For example, during an opening event, several public visitors approached to tell me their own relationship to the school, such as how their distant relatives or ancestors had once attended the school, while some others recounted that they had been to QC to take public examinations or attend Christmas Ball.[39]

6.3. Museumising the Schooling Experience

School history museums in HK museumise the schooling experience; that is, to make student experience and education exclusive subjects of museum exhibitions. They celebrate their own schools' history and seek to promote pride in it.[40] Is there a causal relationship between the rise of school history museums in HK and processes of decolonisation and identity construction in the postcolonial city?

From my fieldwork experience, schools in HK believe that the longevity of their history helps further their reputation.[41] Most of my research collaborators – both

[38] Refer to Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion on the HK government's historical narrative.
[39] S.H. Chiu, Interview, HK, June 2018. In an opening event I observed in 2018, half of the visitors who completed an exit survey stated that before they visited, they expected not only to just learn more about the school, but also its relationship with HK. 71.2% of the public surveyed understood the relevance between HK and QC after their visit.
[40] History of education is usually presented as part of the narrative on the city's sociocultural development. For example, the government Museum of History in HK had a short section on education in HK, which sought to illustrate the element of east-'west' cultural mix and the evolution of education provision.
[41] Identity begins with what makes 'us' distinctive as a community and what makes us proud of it, which could only be distilled from history of the community, i.e. the school in our case. So, even for schools in HK

teaching staff and alumni – agreed that schools need museums if they consider themselves historic. For example, a QC alumnus felt strongly that setting up a school history museum at QC is necessary because "we have a very long history, being the first government school set up in HK"[42], while another stated that "whether schools need history gallery depends on whether they have enough history to show".[43] Nevertheless, it does not mean that new schools do not need or have no desire to set up a museum, as schools are also motivated by other aims such as building up a sense of belonging. A more important question is: why do schools choose museums to advertise and embrace their history? I argue that the phenomenon is triggered by several fundamental causes, which are all push and pull factors resulted from recent socio-political development in HK.

Firstly, heritage awareness and an interest in a HK identity have been on the rise since the 1980s due to the imminent transfer of sovereignty. This has led to a series of high-profile social movements and demonstrations in the 2000s when people feel that their existing way of life is threatened by socio-cultural and geo-political changes, which in turn have triggered rising demands for heritage preservation and further interest in local history.[44] Under this climate, the more historic organisations in HK, including schools, have started to commission historical project in their anniversary years. As more and more schools start to retrace their heritage, it becomes an 'established tradition' in the school community. Thus, some school history museums are set up due to, as a former

with relatively short history, there is enough impetus to start school history museums. Most recently, a government school in HK with only 35 years of history has asked for my assistance in setting up a school history corridor to celebrate their anniversary.

[42] J. Kwok, Interview, HK, June 2018.

[43] Luk, Interview, HK, July 2018.

[44] Significant social movements include the Anti-National Education Demonstration in 2012 attended by over 100K HK citizens (Bradsher 2012), the Umbrella Movement against HK Chief Executive Electoral Reform in 2014 attended by over 100K HK citizens (Roantree and Jucca 2014), and the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement in 2019 attended by over 2 million HK citizens (SCMP Reporters 2019).

QC staff has observed, "herd mentality and 'conformity' mentality",[45] which becomes part of the "same equation" that schools should follow when celebrating anniversaries.[46]

When schools edit their own history to celebrate anniversaries, they would usually be able to uncover some interesting stories and sentimentally valuable school artefacts. This could lead to, as in the case of QC, increasing demands from alumni on preserving school history, either because of the aforementioned 'herd mentality' or an urge to salvage disappearing heritage and vanishing memories. Inspired by other government and private museums in HK, they see that cultural knowledge could best be preserved, inherited and displayed in museum settings. As a former QC Principal who greatly supported QC History Museum explained,

> *"I see that there was a need to start a school history museum when our older alumni start to pass away, and we need their oral history, artefacts, and knowledge about the past to pass on our heritage. Otherwise, their student experience seen in both a micro [ed: internal] and also a macro scale [ed: the HK society], unique to their era, would be lost."*[47]

Individual and collective memory are inseparable from social consciousness. The fear of disappearing memories is closely tied to a feeling of loss of identity (de-Simine 2013). The former Principal's statement shows that the fear of disappearing memories is partly accounted for the perceived need to museumise schooling experience as well as the emergence of school history museum. So secondly, I argue that the alumni's demand in setting up a school history museum at QC also stems from their hope to retrace and shape their own identity through school history. As a QC alumnus told me,

> *"I am interested in my school's history because I feel that I am part of the institution, having attended school here every day for six years. ... It was part of my adolescence, and naturally I have a strong sense of belonging."*[48]

[45] S.W. Li, Interview, HK, June 2018.
[46] W.S. Leung, Interview, HK, June 2018.
[47] S.W. Li, Interview, HK, June 2018.
[48] Kwok, Interview, December 2020.

This quote rings true to many of us for we spent most of our formative years at school. Apart from academic knowledge, we acquire life skills, accumulate socialising experiences, and make lifelong friends in our school years. We not only learn from teachers in classes, but also from the whole campus experience and through participating in extra-curricular activities including paying visits to museums and libraries. School history museum is a repository of memory for those alumni who want to retain their connection. According to an alumnus who has donated some personal items he has kept since his school days, the school history museum "is a place of memory with valuable collections and recollections … where lifelong history and collective memories can be kept, sustained and transmitted."[49] Visiting the school history museum thus become, as a research collaborator described, a "'homecoming' experience, the sense of returning to their schooling days".[50] From my observation of several alumni visiting events, the first few things the alumni visitors would ask when they arrived at the museum were where their "era" was in the exhibition and if they could read the school magazines from their days.[51] Immediately, these middle-aged men became their younger self, using slang from the former days and calling each other and their teachers by their nicknames. Their conversation showed that getting to see artefacts they once used as a schoolboy elicited memories that were not officially recorded, such as the taste of street food outside the school entrance, the laughter that filled the school playground during recess, and the smell of sweat and rain after a football match. The very experience of just being together in the school history museum– situated within the campus – brought back memories of

[49] Y.T. Ma, Pers. Comm., 14 March 2021.
[50] Luk, Interview, HK, July 2018.
[51] Indeed, consulting school magazines during a visit to the school museum after their reunion events is akin to clansmen inspecting the clan genealogy at their ancestral hall after ancestral worshipping and clan ritual events. Both can be seen as 'acts of reminiscence' that renew readers' ties and belonging to the group they identify with and affiliate to. Refer to Chapter 3 for detailed discussion on Chinese ancestral rituals.

attending class together. Indeed, objects alone could not have achieved such an impact. As a research collaborator explained, "when artefacts are viewed on their own, their values and meanings are lost. … School artefacts should not be detached from the school; otherwise, the sentimental value would be lost, and the story fragmented".[52] It is the holistic school environment that the objects belong to, and where they should be displayed to contextualise their meaning and significance. For example, an alumnus has told me that "whenever [he] come[s] back to [his] Alma Mater, the school environment gives [him] a special, familiar and cordial feeling that calms [his] mind. It is like going back home." [53] A current student has also stated the importance of the school environment where these artefacts are displayed. "It would not be the same if these artefacts were removed from the campus … The whole sensation is different. You can hear people playing basketballs outside while looking at this 1920s photo of alumni playing sports, or how pupils throughout the last fifty years have attended assembly at the same place."[54]

6.4. Collecting School Memories through Objects

Then, we shall investigate how schooling experience could be museumised. The process starts with collecting 'school artefacts', which include both 'everyday objects' used in the school settings in the past as well as commemorative school items that were designed to be collected. By being turned into collectibles and displayed as museum artefacts, these objects have gained new meaning and worth: as mnemonic devices. These devices can 'carry' the past and bringing the past into the present (MacDonald 2002: 96). As a former teaching staff noted from alumni visits, "these artefacts do not need to be big, but even so small as minimal changes to the design of school ties and badges that

[52] K.H. Chow, Interview, July 2018.
[53] S. Ip, Interview, Dec 2020.
[54] Fung, Interview, HK, October 2018.

outsiders would not realise is enough. If you are an alumnus, an insider so to speak, it would evoke a lot of memories for you."[55] (Figs. 6.14-16) This point is affirmed by an alumnus' experience when attending an oral history interview project conducted by the QC Student Ambassador Team, as he attributed the enthusiasm of interviewees to talk about their school experience to the fact that they were interviewed by current pupils who were wearing school uniform.[56] In this case, the school uniform was the 'trigger' that elicited memories.



Fig. 6.14. (Top Left) A family visit to the School History Museum. Many of the photos on display are from the same family who attended QC when they were young (Photo by Author, 2018).

Figs. 6.15-16. (Top Right and Below) Alumni checking out school ties they used to wear, and their own contributions published on the school magazine during reunion visiting events (Photo by Author, 2018).

[55] K.H. Chow, Interview, July 2018.
[56] P. Lai, Pers. Comm., 21 July 2018.



In retrospect, it was a painstaking process to collect school artefacts as teaching staff did not have a sense, or historical consciousness, to keep these 'everyday objects'. Several teaching staff explained to me that they "did not know school objects that are now displayed in the museum, like school badges, ties and exercise books, could be seen as artefacts".[57] For example, multiple pieces of larger school furniture that had been in use for more than forty years, including the row of wooden chairs displayed outside the school history museum, were 'written off' and about to be disposed of when the curators found them in the rubbish dump area in the campus. Similarly, descendants of alumni and former staff were largely unaware of the importance of school-related artefacts their dear ones had collected. For example, an alumnus told me how he was too late to salvage a former QC teaching staff's school collection; after the latter passed away his son threw

[57] W.S. Leung, Interview, HK, June 2018.

away the artefacts.[58] Nevertheless, the QC History Museum was still fortunate to be able to acquire quite a few school artefacts from alumni, some of them had already left school for forty years. What motivated them to keep these school objects as collectibles for that long, and why would they eventually agree to donate them? I argue that it is fundamentally related to alumni's recognition of the school history museum as a place where they could store and retrieve school memories that they deemed precious. It is part of their being and pride. For example, an alumnus testified,

> *"I kept the objects that I used when studying at QC as a memento, as I was reluctant to part with them … There is a layer of emotional attachment. … Donating it to the school history museum can maximise its value as a memento of our collective memory. When I bring my schoolmates to the museum, I would always point out my donations, as that gives me a sense of pride."*[59]

This sums up how school objects are important carriers of memory that could evoke feelings of nostalgia and longing (cf. Anderson 2006). I also found out that objects and their materiality could arouse observers' interest in finding out more about the history that the objects witnessed. For example, an alumnus curator of the QCHM told me that as a past student, he could "immediately imagine how it was like to live in the past with artefacts that survive. … What attracted [him] was the idea of an extension of [his] own experience to those in the past that [he] could get in touch with."[60] Those include the pre-handover school badge with a British crown, music album made to commemorate the school's 135th anniversary, the limited-edition school anniversary ties manufactured five to ten years before he was admitted to school, and the few remaining metal badges of a short-lived "School Litter Prefect" team. These objects triggered him to compare his own schooling experience to those of his predecessors: he bought a souvenir version of the pre-handover school badge from the OBA, played in the 145th anniversary music

[58] C.L, Yu, Pers. Comm., 9 Jan 2021.
[59] *S. Ip, Interview, Dec 2020.*
[60] J. Kwok, Interview, Dec 2020.

album, proudly wore the 145th anniversary tie himself, and was appointed a prefect when he was at school. Moreover, he explained that

> *"It is difficult to form a tangible impression if I could not touch the artefacts. For example, it was an unforgettable memory when at Form 6 [ed: year 12] I was finally allowed to touch the old school badges in the reception room … It felt strange when I touched the school artefacts, as I was fascinated by how these had been used by my predecessors a hundred years ago at school."*[61]

In other words, being able to touch and 'sense' the artefacts was what attracted my research collaborator the most. Senses connect individual consciousness and the wider material and social worlds (Ingold 2000). It reduces the distance between 'our' present and 'their' past – an important part of historical consciousness. Indeed, objects function as social agents in a double dynamic that extends human action and mediates its meanings (Edwards 2006: 13). Through objects, history and its associated experiences are made tangible.

In a wider sense, the link between object, memory and identity has been a key to the emergence of school history museums in HK. The need for identity in a time of confusing decolonisation and globalisation encourages the individual to look back to their past and search for answers (cf. MacDonald 2013). From my experience, school artefacts often elicit fond memories amongst alumni visitors, forging a collective identity and sense of belonging to the school across generations. This is because objects are active agents – they are both 'events' and 'effects' (Hicks 2010: 29-30) that shape and reshape, store and trigger memory and sensual experiences among people. Thus, embedded with surplus memory and senses in layers of meanings and history (Seremetakis 1996: 11), objects as tangible records furnish the collection and recollection of memory (Kwint 1999: 2, 4). In this way, in time of identity confusion in postcolonial HK, school objects and the

[61] J. Kwok, Interview, Dec 2020.

museum spaces can act as a secure and stable point for people to return to - a time when everything was simpler, and everyone was happier as a 'carefree' student. For example, I observed that alumni visitors, despite not being docents themselves, would venture to introduce to other guests how they lived as a student in the past. Through introducing school history to 'outsiders', pupils and alumni can further strengthen their own identity.

6.5. Objects and Humans as Exhibition Facilitators

Next, we need to consider the processes of exhibiting school history. Reflecting on my experience of curating QC History Museum, I have found that two issues demand extra attention. The first issue is about whether objects or human interlocuters are more suitable as exhibition facilitator, due to the relatively intimate and personal nature of schooling experience. The curators understand that the key to a successful exhibition is to let objects tell their stories. From an anthropological perspective, objects embody the personhood of their owners (e.g. Mauss 2002[1925], Parkin 1999, Kidron 2009). Whenever the curators acquire an artefact from a donor, they would mark down the objects' stories with their owners not only for research purposes but also to enrich the exhibition. Suitable artefacts that encapsulate the development of particular eras are then chosen to represent their generation, to show changes or continuities, and to tell an interesting story. In other words, the curators have adopted the object biography approach and made use of objects' capacity in accumulating different meanings in changing contexts (cf. Appadurai and Kopytoff 1986, Gosden and Marshall 1999, Hoskins 1998, Phillips 2005). With these artefacts, the curators hope that visitors could see and understand the history that they represent, the journey that they have been through and the meaning that they have acquired in their lifetime. Objects are also chosen so that visitors could acquire a deeper impression. For example, a curator explained that

> *"Out of all the invitation cards, we chose to display the one that shows how in 1947 we had to organise our prize-giving at another school's hall as our campus was destroyed in the war. This brings out how schools were hit hard in the post-war economic crisis, and the urgency for a new campus."*[62]

Nevertheless, it is not easy for visitors to imagine school life in a dynamic way, and there is no extra space within the school history museum to display the more intimate, humanistic, personal, and down-to-earth stories. In fact, these stories are better retold by the human interlocuter. So, guided tours were introduced from the very beginning when the QC History Gallery was first formed but had no exhibition text. Since then, it has been one of the main ways for QC History Museum to communicate history to visitors and students, as the curators have found it almost impossible to narrate the rich stories embedded in displayed objects in exhibition texts only. Guided tours have also opened dialogues between the museum, represented by the docent, and the visitors, who have their own experiences and points of view to share. The curators have almost always been there during major opening events to speak to visitors. In their absence, student docents are encouraged to appeal to visitors through guided tours to elicit their own school memory.[63] The curators hope that these stories could "reduce the gap between seemingly distant and irrelevant history and visitors' contemporary experience, especially in an era dominated by 'instant culture' and the hunt for 'juicy content'".[64] At QC History Museum, this two-way communication has been much more successful than the usual didactic mode of exhibition interpretation.

The second issue is about choosing what to display and what not to display, as well as specific wordings of the narrative, which has led to some heated discussions amongst school management and the alumni volunteer curators. For example, the then Principal

[62] J. Kwok, Interview, Dec 2020.
[63] A pre-recorded audio guided tour has been made available in case student or alumni docents could not be arranged. Visitors could also check for updates in the school museum's active social media and website.
[64] J. Kwok, Interview, Dec 2020.

was much concerned about the potential implications if the museum were to display some left-wing pamphlets produced by QC students influenced by the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, which were sympathetic to the Chinse Communist cause, as well as a giant school badge with a British crown on top and British flags previous used in the school, and thus had reservation in displaying them. But the final decision of leaving them on display is welcomed by visitors and pupils. As a pupil explained to me,

> *"Amongst all artefacts, I found the "Red Guard" pamphlet most remarkable. As I was born in mainland China, I was shocked when exposed to so many negative comments about the Cultural Revolution when I first came to HK. I did not believe it at first, as that was not how we were taught in mainland China. … But artefacts like this [pamphlet] help me understand how deeply it shook HK society, not to mention the Chinese nation at the time."*[65]

Again, this shows that objects could be seen as material testimony to the past. There were also different views on what events should be mentioned in the timeline, especially concerning those HK and international events which were politically sensitive, like the 1967 riot and the 2014 Occupying Central movement. The curators inclined to include these events in the timeline for visitors' reference, but the school management feared that their inclusion would attract criticisms and political repercussions. A former staff recalled that he managed to persuade the school management not to omit these more sensitive events on the grounds that "they are still part of history", or otherwise visitors would question the timeline's authenticity and criticise that the school history museum is biased.[66] The fact that these events are omitted in the government Museum of History but could be featured in QC History Museum shows the relative curatorial freedom non-state museums enjoyed in HK. The above examples show that objects and

[65] Xiang, Interview, HK, October 2018.
[66] K.H. Chow, Interview, HK, July 2018.

human interlocuters each have their specific advantage in facilitating knowledge transmission in exhibitions.

6.6. An Ancestral Hall for Pupils, Past and Present?

School history museums not only preserve and communicate schools' historical origin and development, but they also symbolise and transmit the schools' ethos and spirit – concepts that are abstract and immaterial.[67] Specifically, I will explain through the case of QC History Museum how four distinct features of school history museums make them rather like 'ancestral halls' for pupils, past and present. I argue that both ancestral halls and school history museums act as social space and create a community spirit for their audience respectively. They are places devoted to the transmission of a particular set of idea, values and behaviours through museum-like spaces, the objects, and narratives they contain.

School History Museum as an Inward-looking Institution

Firstly, school history museums are inward-looking institutions that, through displaying the organisational history and evolution, primarily serve the interests of their 'members' and seek to promote cohesion and aid identity construction. They are different from mainstream museums which collect and display artefacts or works of art outside of their immediate affiliation and are outward-looking in that they aim at public visitors.[68] Through largely inward-looking exhibition themes and artefacts, students and alumni

[67] As an Assistant Principal explained, since 2018-19 there has been an element of 'values education' in the Liberal Studies curriculum. The first topic is to "understand school history, in addition to our school's five core values, to help students develop a positive value system" (Y.T. Ling, Interview, HK, June 2018). This is achieved by arranging students to visit the school history museum.

[68] For example, the HK Museum of Art collects not only works of art created by the local artists, while HK Museum of History played host to several exhibitions on Pompeii, Assyria and Afghanistan which are not directly related to HK. Refer to Chapter 2 for discussions on HK government museum special exhibitions.

renew their relationship to and identity with the school while introducing their history to 'outsiders'. My interviews with the school management, who have decided to set up the school history museum in the first place, reveal that one important aim of such venture is to boost 'sense of belonging' to the school, which leads to an identity affiliated to the school – 'Queenian' (or QC Boy). For example, one of the teachers explained that the original plan was "to use the school's glorious history to appeal to alumni and parents to create a sense of pride, which in turn create cohesion. … When pupils identify themselves with successful alumni and see them as positive role models, they would in turn be willing to embrace their identity as part of the school."[69] Similarly, a former QC principal has reckoned that "if students see that a lot of alumni seek to contribute to the Alma Mater after graduation, they are likely to develop similar sense of belonging to the school. … This is how students would inherit the school spirit and heritage."[70] These reveal that the target audiences of the school history museum are students, alumni, and parents. A school history museum functions as a symbol of unity, longevity and prosperity that would help construct a cohesive identity amongst those involved.

School History Museum Visualising Heritage

Secondly, artefacts in school history museums help maintain and visualise relationships and heritage across generations. I observed that during opening events most alumni visitors went to see artefacts from the point when they were studying at QC. This reflected their main interest – to reminisce about their own 'good old days'. But if they did look at artefacts from other periods, they would start comparing their own memories with other people's historical experience. In such ways, artefacts and the space

[69] W.S. Leung, Interview, HK, June 2018.
[70] S.W. Li, Interview, HK, June 2018.

of the school history museum produces a cross-generational effect; so, alumni not only re-connect with people from their own class but also connect with present pupils. They can learn about the school's history and current developments. As a teacher has recollected,

> *"before the museum was set up, alumni visitors like the famous Prof. Joseph Sung could only recollect on the past verbally, leaving students to imagine how it was like. But now, Prof. Sung can physically point to the school badges and ties he has used in the past, while current students can show him in return what badges are now being used and the multiple ties they now could wear. (Fig. 6.17)"*[71]

This testimony shows that school artefacts are nodes that connect different actors. Objects are dubbed the 'double of the human body', capable of releasing emotional engagement and remembrance (Seremetakis 1996: 11, 14). They are three dimensional, able to be felt and touched. I argue that their signs of usage and vintage scent make up the fourth and fifth dimensions to help viewers imagine the past (cf. Howes 2003, Classen and Howes 2006). That is why school artefacts are capable of visualising school heritage and history as well as the once abstract school ethos, such as the school motto '*labor omnia vincit'* and the school ethos 'Brotherhood'. The concept of 'Brotherhood' is similar to the camaraderie commonly found in a kinship group. For instance, a current student has told me that "the Museum is where [he] connect[s] with not only Queenians now, but also those in the past. It is a very special experience to see the evolution of things to be felt with the five senses."[72] Furthermore, school artefacts can also make heritage more relevant to the present, as current students can observe and compare their own experience with those in the past. During fieldwork research, I observed how a current school prefect wandered into the museum on a school day and found his 'connection' to

[71] M. Wong, Interview, Dec 2020. At the time of interview, QC alumnus Prof. Joseph Sung was the Vice Chancellor of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He was frequently invited to give talks and speak to current students at QC.
[72] Chu, Pers. Comm., 17 December 2020.

the past. Upon entry he was immediately fascinated by the blazer badge worn by prefects back in the 1980s (Fig. 6.19) as he found it "very beautiful and well-made". He even asked if the museum could replicate it so that he could have one. He ended up staying in the museum to look at different school badges for almost half an hour, learning about the historical origin of the school prefect team and the responsibilities of prefects in the past. Another student described to me how he was "moved just by looking at the artefacts in the school history museum. … [and realising] how hard-working [his] predecessors were. The well-illustrated brain cross-section (Fig. 6.18) drawn by a 1970s pupil and their subsequent achievements gave [him] immense inspiration and motivation to follow their footsteps." [73] Through interacting with these objects, meaningful, cross-generational connections are forged between different generations of alumni and students. In such way, qualities and virtues are passed down from one generation to the next and consolidated as the school's unique ethos and spirit. As a repository of school artefacts, school history museum therefore has potential to be a cross-generational learning space.



Fig. 6.17. QC alumnus Prof. Joseph Sung visited QC History Museum with current students in November 2020 (Photo by M. Wong, 2020).

[73] So, Interview, HK, October 2018.





Fig. 6.18. (Bottom Left) 1970s Human brain cross-section homework on display at QC History Museum (Photo by Author, 2019).
Fig. 6.19. (Bottom Right) School blazer badge worn by prefects 1960-80s (Photo by Author, 2021).

School History Museum Celebrates Achievements

Thirdly, like ancestral halls, school history museums are also keen on showcasing the achievements of school pupils and alumni. This aims at inspiring the student body, just as the Halls would display achievement plaques of ancestors to inspire descendants to aim high. For example, a current student testified that,

> *"When a teacher showed us a volume of Yellow Dragon from the museum archives, I found out our alumni's public exam results, which made it more relevant for me as I understood that I am not the only one facing pressures from public exams. Another artefact – alumnus Dr Chuk Pui Chun's 1950s exam report - was remarkable; although his exam results were bad, he became a doctor later. This inspired me to never give up on my dream."*[74]

This shows how school history museums provide answers for the present and directions for the future through an enshrined past, emphasising the longevity of the school and its contributions to the society. For example, the exhibitions of QC History Museum stresses on its long history in nurturing leaders in different fields in the society which contributed to the modernisation and development of HK and China. School

[74] So, Interview, HK, October 2018.

history museums are not ungenerous either in celebrating the success of alumni, often with pictures and sometimes even quotes, so that they are remembered like the 'wise old man who preceded us' in an ancestral hall.

A curator of QC History Museum recalled that other school history museums that he had visited seemed more like an achievement showcase room, displaying different certificates and trophies students had won over the years, which were dispersed, had minimal interpretation and contextualisation.[75] While the current settings of QC History Museum might not have focused too much on school and alumni achievements, it had every tendency to do so in the past. As mentioned in section 2, I discovered that the school originally planned to set up a school history gallery in 2008 and focus on the major donor, alumnus Dr Fok Ying Tung Henry's lifelong achievements, while sparing only a small portion of the museum to dedicate to school history. The gallery was also planned to be a second meeting room for the school (Luminus 2007: 4). Even when QC History Museum first started as a 'history gallery' in 2013, it resembled this 'achievement room' model – mostly consisted of trophies and certificates in two big cabinets, old school photo albums and school magazines in other cabinets with no interpretation or contextualisation. Nevertheless, QC History Museum has actively warded off tendencies to glorify achievements of alumni. For example, an alumnus did request the museum to focus more on alumni as "without famous Old Boys no one would be interested."[76] In response, the curators agreed that "while [they] should include some alumni experience and achievements in the school history museum as it is indeed part of school's history, [they] [did] not prefer featuring too much of these and risk[ed] turning the museum into a "hall of fame" for alumni".[77] As a result, the curators actively avoid emphasising on the

[75] J. Kwok, Interview, HK, June 2018.
[76] Luk, Interview, HK, June 2018.
[77] J. Kwok, Interview, Dec 2020.

achievements of QC alumni in society as rather than running a "vanity project … to advertise how much social elites we have produced in a cliché manner … we want to retrace the footstep of our institution from its humble beginning".[78] Yet, the stories of QC alumni are embedded in and represented by QC History Museum's collections. So, visitors, including newly arrived teachers, could still get an impression that the school history museum "emphasises QC's important status in HK society, as well as the achievements of past and current students."[79] In other words, QC History Museum is only an exceptional case to these characteristics as the curators have consciously and intentionally diverted away from this common development in favour of a more balanced and objective narrative.

School History Museum as a Space for Social Cohesion

Fourthly, school history museum acts as a social space: a platform for alumni to meet, discuss and reminisce about the 'good old days' when they were students. The museum, with its exhibitions, becomes an attraction for alumni to visit their Alma Mater.[80] It provides a public space for them to meet up and reminisce about the past (cf. Grinell 2014). Since its establishment, the museum received many visit requests by alumni groups that were organising their anniversary reunions. In the visiting process, as a research collaborator has observed, the alumni could "tell us about their lives after leaving school, and donate school artefacts, which are important in compiling a more comprehensive school history."[81] From my experience, alumni would also donate their

[78] J. Kwok, Interview, Dec 2020.
[79] Y.T. Ling, Interview, HK, June 2018.
[80] There were also times when the school history museum attracted alumni from the same extended family but different generations together. For example, I attended a donation event at the Museum during my fieldwork research in HK, which was attended by the donor himself and nine of his family members. It was a family gathering for the participants both in a biological and rhetorical (school) sense (Fig. 6.14).
[81] K.W. Ho, Interview, HK, July 2018.

treasured personal mementos because they appreciate that their collection would be made available to the public.[82] This completes the knowledge building process as alumni visitors could both learn from and enrich the school history museum resources. A school history museum is like a nucleus, in this sense, that could help attract and 'gel' alumni to schools they affiliate to. Like ancestral halls, they are cohesive spaces and focal points for their 'clansmen' – alumni and students.

In addition, 'membership' of the museum, which extends to every alumnus and student, contributes to a sense of social cohesion within the parent institution: the Alma Mater. From its planning stage, the QC alumni body already plays an active role in supporting its development. Such contributions ranged from financial donation, technical support, and artefact donation to interior design. As a research collaborator puts, these are all "important quartz that make up a tower … a manifestation of alumni's passion, sentiment, and sense of belonging towards the school".[83] All these reflect the wish of alumni to hold on to their identity as part of the school, and to contribute to its development. Since its transformation from a gallery to a museum, QCHM has also actively encouraged student participation. Through participating in museum work as well as getting involved with its object collection, both alumni and students can conduct what Round (2006: 133-138) called "identity work": to construct, maintain and adapt our sense of identity. Whether it is in the process of curation, visiting, or giving guided tours, museum collection and display enable visitors to explore and negotiate their relationships with each other, the society, and the world. In such way, the school history

[82] For instance, a son of a former Principal agreed to donate his family documents to QCHM on the condition that they are to be displayed to the public along with his parents' work, as he reckoned that artefacts and historical documents should go to where they are appreciated most (E. Stokes, Pers. Comm., 20 Aug 2018).
[83] S.H. Chiu, Interview, HK, Jun 2018. Although we can see that many of the alumni I interviewed were proud of their school, it is not possible to disclose how the alumni feel about the colonial and British roots of QC due to current political sensitivity around this subject. See chapters 1 and 7 for discussions on political sensitivity in HK.

museum not only collects artefacts, but also builds up relationships – the school memories and camaraderie – amongst alumni (cf. Gosden and Marshall 1999, Gosden 2001, Gosden et al 2007).

6.7. School History Museums and Historical Consciousness

Using my fieldwork experience, I am able to argue that school history museums can have a positive impact on building students' historical consciousness. To maximise its impact, a Student Ambassador team was formed at QC to encourage student participation in museum affairs through giving guided tours and assisting in its historical research projects.[84] During my fieldwork research, I was involved in training new student ambassadors for the school history museum. It was not an easy task as most of them lacked the initial passion for school history or even history in general. Thus, I judged that the vital task was not to pass on to them historical knowledge but to raise their historical awareness and curiosity. That was why after some short lectures on school history, I brought the new ambassadors into the school history museum, when they eventually became interested. By their own initiatives, the students walked around in small groups to explore the artefacts. Using knowledge I gained from my postgraduate museum anthropology course at Oxford, I then offered these students some training in how to interpret objects and museum displays, such as linking up school history with their own schooling experience. I also encouraged them to do their own research and draft a guided tour script on a section of the exhibition. Through encouraging students to directly participate in museum work, I aimed to make them more 'museum-minded' (cf. Kreps 2003): understanding what museums are for developing interest to visit other museums.

[84] Note Janelli's (2012) research which found that amateur museums in Germany prefer more personal communications like guided tours over caption labels to explain exhibits (Janelli 2012: 23-26). This echoes my observation on Mathias Lee's museum in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Furthermore, after the training, a teacher noted an observable improvement in historical consciousness and interest in heritage among these students,

> *"Students would ask me, as they went along the exhibition, all sorts of questions, like what were those, why were words written like that in the past, and whether they could touch the artefacts and flick through the books. Many of them were amazed at the illustrations on the student notebook and wondered why pupils in the past would spend so much time in writing their own notes, as they did not know that there were no mass-printed study notes prepared by teachers in the past. … Even outside of the school history museum, students started asking all sorts of history-related questions … about the authenticity of a marble bust in the school lobby, the past purposes of a 100-year-old pavilion, and the age of some of the plants in the lawn. It all started with the school history museum."*[85]

All these questions and interactions show that students were actively imagining how pupils studied in the past and acquired a higher historical awareness after their visit. The school history museum can compensate the lack of engaging materials in didactical history class, which account partly for the lack of interest amongst students on history. In traditional classroom learning, students could only absorb prefabricated historical facts and narratives through textbooks and their teacher. Worse, historical facts could be seen as unattractive, distanced, and irrelevant to students. In contrast, exhibitions are "technologies of the imagination" (Daniels 2019: 201-207). Object-based learning has demonstrable advantages over text-based learning (e.g. Liao 2005, Eakle and Dalesio 2008, Vidal 2017). Artefacts in school history museum have immediate relevance to students as they are fully embedded in the schooling experience whilst visiting; it is similar to what Daniels (2019: 22) called 'living ethnography'. For the student ambassadors who have the opportunity to handle the artefacts under supervision, the feeling of this 'closeness' is even stronger. As a student testified, displays in the museum have "increased [his] interest in the history subject."[86] The visiting experience even has

[85] M. Wong, Interview, Dec 2020.
[86] T.H. Li, Pers. Comm., 17 December 2020.

encouraged him to start borrowing books about HK history from the library. This is how the school history museum could activate students' interest in history subject as well as the historical environment.

As a parent of a current pupil suggested, "the schools' current curriculum on identity construction and Chinese history are not attractive to students, and as a result, students fail to feel related to these historical issues. But if they learnt that … famous historical figures went to the same school as themselves, history would seem closer and more authentic."[87] I argue that this point is valid – a student told me that he found the collections in QC History Museum helpful in consolidating his knowledge in World and Chinese History subjects, particularly on the theme of Second World War and the late period of Qing Dynasty.[88] In this case, school history museum is a medium for students to learn with artefacts and get in contact with primary sources. In fact, I argue that school history museum act as better medium than oral or textual accounts for the transmission of history, because the artefacts are witness to history themselves. As a history teacher stated, through these artefacts, students would understand that history was not so distant to the present and not just 'empty talking'".[89] Seeing the success in museum-based learning, QC has subsequently decided to include school history in the Secondary 1 (Year 7) history curriculum. The curriculum for this (which I was tasked to prepare), will include learning through artefacts, and activities in the school history museum. Sensitive political topics from relatively recent history are covered with respective artefacts in the museum.[90] I was told by one of the teachers that the work we did on the museum, as well

[87] Luk, Interview, HK, July 2018.
[88] N. Lee, Pers. Comm., 17 December 2020.
[89] K.Y. Lam, Interview, Dec 2020.
[90] Such as student involvement in the 1923 General Strike, the 1967 Leftist Riot and the 1989 June Fourth Incident. Refer to chapter 7 (conclusion) for current development of the school history museum following HK's sociopolitical changes because of a large-scale anti-government demonstration in 2019.

as the school's commitment to instilling a sense of historical consciousness amongst students, had triggered this new style of teaching.[91]

6.8 – Summary

To explore the emergence of school history museums as a phenomenon in HK and their *raison d'etre*, I have examined QC History Museum, established in 2013 inside the oldest government secondary school in HK. It is often said that schools are miniatures of societies, reflecting the trends and issues cotemporary to the wider society. In this case, the sense of historical consciousness developed – as a product of nostalgia – amongst alumni looking back at their schooldays reflects a general nostalgic turn in the wider HK society. In other words, school history museums could be seen as a by-product of their wish to preserve remnants of the 'good old days' with which they could explore their own heritage and roots, triggered by an identity dilemma as the city being decolonised in the rapidly changing socio-political environment. Nevertheless, it must be noted that HK is a special case in its decolonising pattern. As we can see in this chapter, QC students and alumni are clearly not uncomfortable with the colonial roots of the school and are proud of it. In many cases, they were beneficiaries of the British colonial government system, becoming educated professionals, businessmen or members of the ruling elite that HK's prosperity has relied on. So, the school history museum can be seen as an extension of their pride in their school, which in turn celebrates their own achievements and those of HK. In such ways, their developments are symbiotically related to postcolonialism and decolonisation.

[91] M. Wong, Pers. Comms., Apr 2022.

The case of QC History Museum clearly exemplifies the extent a school history museum could function: to preserve and hence educate visitors about the school's memory and history. For example, when public visit, they would learn about the school's principles of education; when parents visit, they would understand the origin and distinguishing features of their children's education; when current students visit, they could understand what their predecessors have experienced and how school traditions are developed; when alumni visit, they could feel nostalgic for the past. These are complicated and abstract concepts and matters that could best be explained by 'show and tell' with historical artefacts.

Most of the school history museums were founded with significant backing and demands from the alumni body. Following the handover in 1997, HK people have been in constant search for their own 'roots' – their history, heritage and identity – as they struggle to cope with accelerated socio-political, cultural and identity changes in the postcolonial city. This leads to rising history and heritage consciousness in HK. School years have been our most important formative years and such experience very often defines who we are as adults. So, naturally people look back at this stage of their life and reminisce about the past, especially when their identity is at risk. Demands for school history museums also come from schools, who tend to see school history museums as a tool to showcase the achievements of their alumni, instil a better sense of belonging, establish positive school ethos that leads to better reputation, aid school management, and to deposit all old objects. It is also due to individual school's hope to exhibit their own history in more permanent manner. This is something government museums, which focus on the history of broader HK society, could not entertain.

All this goes some way to explain why school history museums have only emerged in the past ten years but not earlier. The 2010s were characterised by growing distrust

between the HK government and public amid accelerated socio-political changes in HK, which resulted in a number of large-scale demonstrations and deep-level conflicts.[92] These conflicts in the decolonisation process have triggered a particular 'consciousness' in the postcolonial city, wherein HK people are compelled to reconsider who they are as well as what entails 'HK', its history and culture. As the demand rises in tracing one's roots, establishing one's identity and reminiscing about one's past, it follows that school history museums would focus on school heritage in the historical context of HK. This is why schools in HK are more eager to use school-based museums to establish a historical narrative of their institutional history, which is ultimately tied with ideological and moral education, than to use school-based museums as a medium of practical instruction, be it history or other subjects. It is the degree of alumni involvement, and the schools' different emphasis on the *raison d'etre* of their museums that separate Chinese-style school history museums from the history-themed school museums in the 'west'.

In a wider perspective, the emergence of school history museums also shows how postcolonial non-state museums in HK are hybrid institutions embodying both 'western' and Chinese values. More specifically, they embrace the 'western' concept of displaying heritage in a museum-like exhibition space, and also the values associated with Chinese ancestral halls by treating the exhibition space as a cohesive, inward-looking institution that celebrates the achievements of predecessors. They also visualise heritage and relationships, pass on culture and ethos, and, most importantly, 'gather people' and reinforce a communal sense of identity. In addition, the very establishment of school history museums, with the contributions of alumni, is also a manifestation and extension

[92] Refer to footnote 21 for a list of these demonstrations and social movements.

of the Confucian ideals of filial piety – that is, the importance of showing respect for elders and teachers.

7
Conclusions
The In-betweenness of Museums in Postcolonial Hong Kong



Figs. 7.1. Museum maker Mathias Lee (in cap) and the author (Photos by M. Lee, 2018).

In a quiet evening in October 2018, I had just finished interviewing museum maker Mathias Lee at his display space, St Mathias Journey. Playing with an artefact in his collection – an "Hong Kong (HK) International Museum Day 2003" souvenir card holder made by the HK government, he asked, "You have asked me a lot about my museum, so what do you think about museums in HK?" In response, I said, "I think museums are increasingly popular in HK nowadays.". He then asked about the Queen's College History Museum, "Oh right, I have heard that you are also managing a museum at a school, when will you take me on a tour?" "Sure, how about next week?" I replied. "Great, let us keep in touch" Mathias said, before inviting me to take a timed 'selfie'.[1] (See figs 7.1 and 7.2)

[1] Lee, Interview, HK, October 2018.

Through my fieldwork, not only was I able to acquire an in-depth understanding of various museums, but I was also able to make friendships and connections with several heritage enthusiasts. Museum-making is truly a journey and a hobby that we can share with like-minded people, especially in HK: a postcolonial city undergoing massive socio-political changes.

Owing to its unique history, HK presents an ideal case to study the museum as a cultural phenomenon ethnographically. In order to uncover the complex networks of interactions and politics between the governmental and private forces in HK's museum sector, I have critically analysed five types of museum-like institutions in HK namely: ancestral halls, governmental museums, independent museums, amateur 'community' museums, and school history museums. In this concluding chapter, I will connect the various characteristics of localised museologies found in the different non-government museums in HK *vis-à-vis* the longer-standing indigenous mode of representation found in Chinese Ancestral Halls. I will demonstrate how Chinese Ancestral Halls can be considered a 'museum-like' institutions that are still influencing contemporary museums in HK. I will suggest that non-government museums in HK represent different points in a continuous 'museum spectrum' which are, at the same time, influenced by coloniality, museology, and historical factors.

7.1. Museum-mindedness, Historical Consciousness, and Museum Making

In this thesis, I argue that the surge in non-government museums in postcolonial HK can be seen as a manifestation of a rise in historical consciousness (cf. Seixas 2005) and museum-mindedness (cf. Kreps 2003). There are several push-pull factors that could account for the surge in non-government museums. To begin with, HK's governmental museum service is an important push factor that has triggered the prevalence of amateur

museum making in HK. Although they were already 'museum-minded', most of the HK public was not familiar with the 'western' concept of museums as sites for cultural transmission before the expansion of the government museum services in late colonial HK (1950-90s), which effectively introduced 'western' museology to the HK public. As I have demonstrated in the thesis, this process is still on-going, since a considerable part of the HK population remains apathetic to museums. But in the process, not only did HK people start to visit museums, but also to appropriate and reinterpret them. I demonstrated in my case studies how non-government museums emerged from a degree of distrust in and dissatisfaction towards postcolonial HK government museums (see also Chan 1999, Lin et al 2018). If government museum narratives were complete and appealing to everyone, there would be much less incentive for non-government museums to emerge. In reality, throughout the thesis I have demonstrated how the postcolonial HK government has wanted to introduce and assimilate mainland Chinese values and induce patriotic nationalism among the HK public. This makes government museums ideologically loaded. As they have a certain cultural agenda to adhere to, some of the more controversial historical events and memories have been filtered out. The failures of government museums have thus motivated heritage enthusiasts to explore museum-making themselves. For example, the Hong Kong Maritime Museum was founded because members of the shipping sector felt that government museums had neglected HK's maritime heritage and story (Hardy 2005: 53, Davies 2012a). Similarly, amateur museum maker Mathias Lee was dissatisfied with the government museums' historical narratives and modes of representation.[2] New private museums were created as correctives to the limitations of government museums and as spaces that offer freedoms from government

[2] Lee, Interview, HK, Jul 2018.

restrictions. The makers of these museums reappropriated the museum format and converted it from a tool to aid governance into a medium to create their own identity, to remember strands of history that were neglected in government museums, and to interpret heritage from their own perspectives and experience. This is why the surge in non-government museums coincides with when members of the HK public becoming more and more museum-minded in the postcolonial era.

However, this merely partly explains why non-government museums only appeared in the last twenty years or so, while since 'western' museums had been established in HK for more than half a century. The pull factor of this recent trend – a postcolonial phenomenon – is provided by an increasing historical consciousness that has arisen among the public. Prior to the 1960s, most of the population of HK, including both of my grandparents, were migrants from mainland China. In other words, the early colonial HK population was primarily constituted of a mainland Chinese diaspora who actively sought to maintain their ties with their ancestral villages. For example, my paternal grandfather kept in touch with his fellow clansmen and still visited his ancestral village when he retired and until late in life. I was able to visit that village myself during my fieldwork (Figures 3-4). I suggest that people living in HK were initially not motivated to explore this alien cultural concept of the museum, as they could still easily visit and maintain ties with their own ancestral halls in HK or mainland China and connect with the personal and collective memories that such places evinced.[3] However, due to political instabilities, many of the children of these migrants, including refugees from mainland China, decided to settle in HK after the 1950s. Unlike their parents, who as migrants of an earlier era could identify with their ancestral villages in mainland China, many of the HK-

[3] HK's border with mainland China was relatively relaxed before the birth of the People's Republic of China and the beginning of the Cold War. People could come and go often without border checks. See D. Ho (2020) for further discussion.

born generation have no living memory or experience of the villages nor actual familial ties with their predecessors in mainland China. They therefore could not find a sense of 'belonging' (cf. Anderson 2003) anywhere else but in HK; there is no village that could be called 'home' to them and no ancestral hall that they could identify with.




Figs. 7.2-7.3. I, like my peers, was unconnected from a sense of 'home' in our ancestral villages. As part of my doctoral research, I visited my family's ancestral village for the first time in my life. None of my father's generation – he and his siblings – had been 'back'. Nevertheless, I was able to retrace my grandfather's footsteps. The journal of the ancestral hall had published an article about his visit in 1996 and the villagers still remembered him (Photos by Author, 2018).

Politics and Identity Crisis

The late colonial period in HK has been characterised as experiencing an ongoing identity crisis. The concepts of identity and citizenship were first utilised by the colonial government after the disastrous 1967 HK Riots. They were used as a way of promoting a depoliticised HK identity, in order to contain the destabilising effect of the continuing Chinese nationalist-communist conflict (Ku 2004: 327). This pre-existing identity came under threat in the 1980s as HK was due to be transferred to Chinese hands. The earlier discursive form of HK identity became hardened and politicised, drawing widespread support among residents to preserve it (Ng 2016).

With the transfer of HK's sovereignty back to China from Britain in 1997, HK people had to decide who they were: British, Chinese, or Hongkonger. In this respect, HK

is a unique 'postcolonial' society, as it has never gained independence from Britain or the right to self-determination following the departure of the colonial British government. Instead, HK has been 'transferred' to China and ruled under the principle of 'One Country Two Systems'. That policy's effectiveness, both politically and culturally, has been under much criticism ever since (cf. Luk ed. 2018). What the policymakers did not take into account was the drastically different culture in HK from that in mainland China, in areas such as in ethics, popular culture, ideology, lifestyle, value system, and cosmopolitanism. In the meantime, the national needs of the People's Republic of China (PRC) – in terms of national security, economic development and cultural identity – were increasingly emphasised and prioritised over the local needs and character of HK. For example, the recent enactment of the National Security Law in HK in 2021 proved deeply concerning to many and triggered a huge exodus of HK people to Britain and other 'western' countries (see e.g., Chan ed. 2020, Peterson 2020, Toru 2020, Lo 2021). Furthermore, the Beijing government has a growing desire to exercise control over the cultural life of HK, including of its museums (Vigneron 2016b: 90). In the post-handover era, the pro-Beijing HK government is undoubtedly under its influence. All these have led to the intensification of HK's identity crisis, especially when HK government seeks to enforce mainland Chinese cultural values and ethics into the lives of residents in HK, many of which clashed with local values.

However, the ruling principle of 'One Country, Two Systems', which gives HK administrative, political, judicial and economic independence from the PRC, has an 'expiry date' of 2047. In advance of that, HK is undergoing rapid socio-political changes, bringing up multiple periods of political unrest in the past decade. Since the Beijing government regime has been strategically using similar 'autonomous rule' policies to expand state control and smoothen the 'colonising' process in minority regions such as

Tibet (Handers 2010: 2-3; Harris 2012) and Xinjiang, more and more HK people are becoming worried that the HK Special Administrative Region will soon cease to be 'special'. This is what Vaudine England (2012) calls "integration anxiety" – the fear of the potential disappearance of HK's uniqueness. As Zhang et al (2018) argue, in HK the sense of national belonging is not exclusively grounded in pride but is transnationally and transitionally sensitive to its surrounding 'Others'. In this context, the postcolonial HK generation is further compelled to preserve the uniqueness of HK and the identity associated with it: an aggregate of some 'imagined' ideals and values of the political, cultural and civic identities that many Hongkongers perceive themselves to have possessed.

As a result and as documented in this thesis, HK people have actively sought to uncover their own local history, to preserve their own local memory, to support their own local culture and heritage, and to museumise them all. For example, people started to collect different kinds of everyday things they used in the past (chapter 5) and to look back at the schools they attended (chapter 6) to find a sense of belonging. In the process, I have argued, they have become historically and culturally conscious. As HK people have become increasingly familiar with the concept of museums, the prevalence of museum-making has become one of the manifestations of this rise in historical consciousness. In other words, museum in HK is no longer a static concept imported from the 'west'. It has been localised in a postcolonial context as a liberal way to express identity, to remember their own past, and to create meaning. Museums are thereby being utilised to perpetuate the idea of the special status of HK in times of acute uncertainty. In the past, when facing adversities, people could always look back to their history and benefit from their attachment to their ancestral halls. This is why I argue that, under circumstances of

dramatic social and political change in HK, museums are taking on the role of modern 'ancestral halls'.

7.2. Museums as Modern 'Ancestral Halls' in Hong Kong

Since the advent of the New Museology (Vergo ed. 1990) in the 1980s, the meaning and definition of museums has been ever-expanding, as the institutions try to adapt to new demands in our age. In addition to being an exhibitionary space and repository for artefacts, museums are also seen as tools of governance (e.g. Bennett 1995), resistance (e.g. Sandell 2017) and community engagement (Janes 2009). They have also evolved to become spaces for education (e.g. Hooper-Greenhill 2007), performance (e.g. Phillips 2005), decolonisation (e.g. Onciul 2015) and therapy (eg. Peers 2013). More importantly, they are spaces where a narrative of the nation-state could be constructed (e.g. Anderson 2006; Denton 2014) and an identity forged (e.g. Thomas 2016). Through the four museum-like institutions presented in my research, I investigated how the museum is a fluid concept that has been localised in HK and I argued that museums are the modern equivalent of 'ancestral halls' in HK.

Museums have been investigated as a cultural phenomenon in other regions too. For example, Kreps (2003) once recorded how government museum officials in Indonesia have overlooked and discouraged local museology as they claimed that the country's public were not yet 'museum-minded'. This was definitely not the case in HK. Although 'western' museums were only introduced by British colonisers in HK as late as in the 1860s, I argue that the local HK population was already 'museum-minded' through the phenomenon of Chinese ancestral halls. In chapter 3, I have demonstrated through Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Halls how they were important social, political, and ritual space – akin to 'western' museums – in clan-based Chinese village settings. Through the spatial

arrangements, ceremonial rituals as well as ancestral heirlooms and artefacts exhibited, ancestral hall was where power was negotiated and where ancestral history was learnt. It was also where imagined unity and belonging to a bloodline lineage was forged (cf. Anderson 2003). As a clansman has commented, ancestral hall is like a "display gallery for village nostalgia, and habitat for our spirits: it is where mortal bodies are turned into immortal spirits" (Zhou 2016: 48) Therefore, I have argued that Chinese ancestral halls are museum-like institutions in HK that precede the introduction of 'western' museums by British colonisers. I have further demonstrated that to the new generation of Tang clansmen in Ping Shan, ancestral halls mean something different today. While the HK government has used ancestral hall to fit with their own cultural agenda, that is, to bridge the gap between HK and Chinese culture, Tang Clansmen has utilised the new museum model at Tang Clan Gallery to achieve their own interest, that is, to 'avenge' colonial humiliation by establishing their own cultural and historical narrative. Tang clansmen expressed much pride in 'rehabilitating' the former colonial building and "turn[ing] [it] into their own clan's museum, raising their own clan's flag" which "brought an end to the 'hundred-year shame'" (Liu et al eds 2007: 432-437). Since the halls have been turned into monuments, they not only symbolise Tang heritage but also HK heritage. In this sense, ancestral halls are 'modern temples' of postcolonial HK.

More importantly, ancestral halls still impose influence on the development of postcolonial museums in HK today. Through my case studies, I have investigated the characteristics of a local Chinese museology that has been derived from ancestral halls. Such a museological mode positions museums as social spaces for gathering people and interpersonal interactions in the halls activate cultural knowledge embedded in objects. The interactions in these spaces are often multi-vocal, with oral transmission from multiple elders offering different narratives. Essentially, they offer a 'co-curated'

experience between visitors and knowledge keepers. In addition, the visiting experience is usually tactile, 'hands-on' and reflexive through cultural participation. In such ways, visitors benefit from in-situ, contextualised cultural renewal. Thus, collections, and most importantly the cultural meanings they stand for, are conserved through continual usage. Without access to their own ancestral halls, I argue that, HK residents have appropriated museums as a replacement to fill the gap in heritage preservation and cultural transmission. In other words, museums could be considered an equivalent to 'ancestral halls' for the HK public, where they can learn about their heritage, construct identity as Hongkonger, and 'imagine' belonging to HK. Until now, the postcolonial HK government has not denied or discouraged such forms of local museology, although Kreps (2003) found, in Indonesia, government curators remained trapped in their 'professional mindset' which prioritises 'western' museological traditions and practice. Amateur curators in non-government museum-like institutions, on the other hand, have favoured using some elements of local Chinese museology in their display space.

Although, in HK's local museological model, objects are not as important as the 'human' element, it is still indispensable in the process of cultural inheritance and identity formation in HK. As I have demonstrated in my case studies, objects in Chinese society are more than capable of triggering memory and reinforcing identity. In a Chinese ancestral hall, ancestral tablets have always been vital in constructing memory and identity. They are the most important and tangible evidence of the ancestors' existence (Addison 1925: 33). From tangible evidences like the handwriting on the tablet and its materiality to intangible memories of the funeral and tablet placing ceremony, they all remind descendants of their kinship identity and memories or imaginations of the ancestors. Through ritual ceremonies and everyday interactions with the tablets such as praying for blessings and 'offering' them with incense, ancestors are constantly respected

and addressed to. In other words, while the bodily representations of ancestors are gone, their spirits have stayed within the clan embodied in the ancestral tablet, guiding and taking care of the descendants. In contemporary HK, surplus memory and senses continue to be expressed and embedded in objects of rather different sorts, such as everyday items of use from earlier eras. Layers of historical and cultural meaning in these 'mementos' are formed through everyday usage. As I have demonstrated in Mathias Lee's amateur museum as well as in my discussion of the Queens College History Museum, meaning, memory, and sensory stimulation of them can remain in objects for a long time, even after they are disused and detached from their owners. They can invoke emotional response from people, which can in turn reformulate, reinforce, and challenge established identities. For example, the same object, such as a radio made in the mainland China, can be interpreted in the government narrative as reflecting Chineseness and shared cultural heritage with mainland China. But, in amateur museums, they can be interpreted as embodying childhood memories and local characteristics showing how HK culture diverges from mainland China. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that the importance of objects in local HK museology lies in their role as signifiers of culture rather than fetishes of materiality. For example, Mathias Lee collected 'old objects' belonging to other people but similar to what he had used himself in the past in order to invoke his own memory and that of the visitors to his museum. That is why local HK museology does not place much emphasis on preservation and authenticity of the objects.

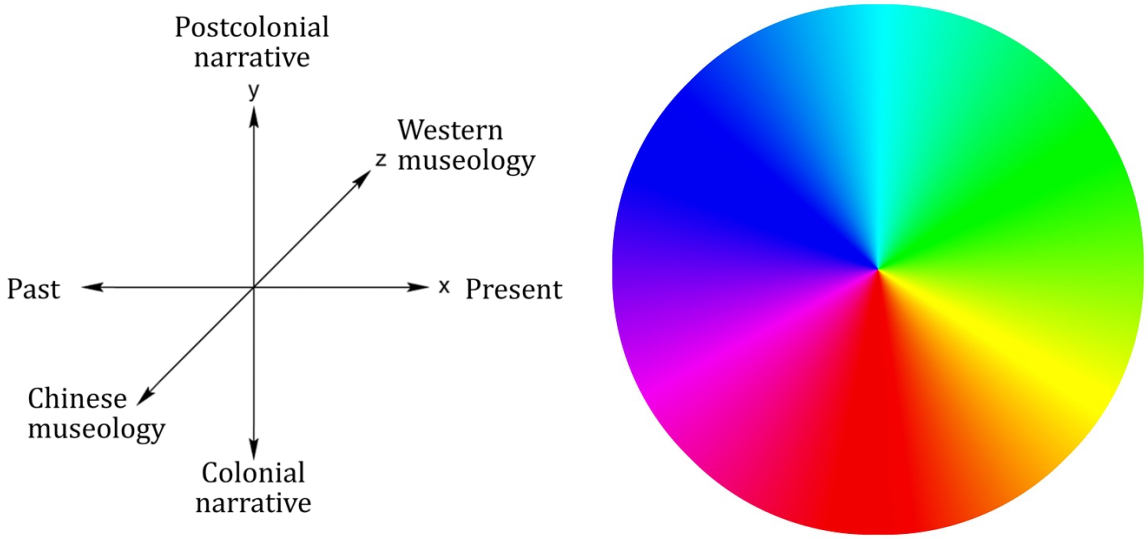
7.3. The Museum Spectrum

Throughout my thesis, I have demonstrated how museum-like institutions in HK are part of an exhibitionary complex that, due to the city's predominantly Chinese cultural background amid British colonialization, features not only 'western' but also local

Chinese characteristics. Strictly speaking, they cannot be defined as museums as such places are of the 'west'. Instead, just as HK is a nexus, a melting pot of different cultures, museum-like institutions born out of that are 'sites of display' that feature a local flavour of display and experience. From the museums that I have studied, it is apparent that the concept of museum has been adapted in postcolonial HK, and affected by both British colonial legacies and postcolonial Chinese influences. For example, the Ping Shan Tang Clan appropriated the concept of museum to reclaim partial control on their ancestral land: the former colonial police station that was seen as a symbol of colonial suppression. Clansmen advocated the plan to turn it into a museum gallery that commemorates Tang Clan's heritage, and co-curated the exhibition content to make sure their voices were heard. On the other hand, clansmen conceded to the government's plan to declare their ancestral hall a monument and turn it into a display space. Since each museum-like institution was set up under different circumstances, I propose a three-dimensional 'museum spectrum' (Figures 7.5-6) model to make sense of this creolisation, or localisation of the concept of museum in postcolonial societies. In HK, three factors simultaneously influence museum-like institutions, namely colonial vs. postcolonial narratives, local (Chinese) vs. 'western' museology, and chronology. It is important to note that this spectrum is a continuum.

The x-axis of the 'museum spectrum' represents when the museum-like institutions are set up and examined. The concept of museum is anything but a static one: it is dynamic and responsive to external influences. Museums' configuration, mission, modes of representation, exhibition narrative (y-axis), and museological characteristics (z-axis) could transform over time according to the contemporary sociopolitical environment and needs of the audience. Similarly, since the 1990s the Tang Ancestral Halls have been transformed from a traditional inward looking Chinese museum-like

institution to a hybrid culture complex. While heritage preservation continues to be dominated by the indigenous Chinese way of cultural transmission in the halls, clansmen allow government officials, who subscribe to 'western' museological tradition, to install museum-style displays.



Figs. 7.5-7.6. Postcolonial museum development in HK could be interpreted with a 'Museum Spectrum' (Illustrated by Author, 2022).

This brings us to the y-axis of the spectrum, which represents colonial and postcolonial influences. In the last 155 years prior to the 1997 handover HK stood as a British colony, as I have demonstrated throughout the thesis, HK's museum-like institutions featured multiple different interpretations of HK heritage. This process is particularly complicated as HK has been undergoing decolonisation since the 1980s. The colonial heritage narrative adopted by British colonists was to justify and aid their governance in HK. It stemmed from their understanding of HK heritage as a foreign power ruling over a predominantly Chinese population. This narrative tended to stress HK's east-meet-'west' nature, downplay or ignore pre-colonial history, and dichotomise Chinese and 'western' cultural influences. On the other hand, the postcolonial narrative reflects HK's cultural 'awakening', which emphasises local memories and nostalgia, celebrates Hongkongers' 'core values' and personal qualities, and rediscovers pre-

colonial heritage.[4] As HK is still undergoing decolonisation or, as some might argue (cf. Luk ed. 2018), transforming "from a British to a Chinese colony", museum-like institutions such as the Hong Kong Maritime Museum (chapter 4) and Queen's College History Museum (chapter 6) have adopted a mixture of the heritage narratives and these narratives can change over time (x-axis). For example, although the Hong Kong Maritime Museum (chapter 4) has initially been set up as a private museum, since receiving government funding in 2010 it voluntarily follows HK government's heritage interpretation narrative, which emphasises essential Chineseness of HK people and their shared Chinese cultural heritage (Zhang 2012: 506).

The z-axis of the 'museum spectrum' represents different museological traditions adopted by these institutions. As the concept of museum is not indigenous to HK or China, there would always be a tension between existing local and imported 'western' museological traditions. As I have argued in chapter 3 through the case of Tang Ancestral Halls, local Chinese museological tradition is derived from the ancestral hall model, in which interpersonal interactions activate cultural knowledge embedded in objects and museum is used as social space for gathering people. These in-situ, contextualised, co-curated and reflexive cultural renewal experience prioritises multi-vocal, oral transmission from multiple elders over passive knowledge transfer via materiality in a display space. Collections are then often conserved through continual usage, offering audience tactile and grounded experience.

While it could be a conscious effort on the part of HK museum makers to follow or reject certain museological traditions (e.g. Onciul 2015), from my fieldwork research it is apparent that most were subconscious decisions. In other words, museum makers chose

[4] The core values include assiduousness, resilience, flexibility, perseverance and solidarity.

elements or strategies they identified with, which could be from either or both traditions. As I have elucidated in the preceding chapters, government (chapter 2) and other mainstream museums in HK, including the Hong Kong Maritime Museum (chapter 4), have featured mainly 'western' museological characteristics. In this museological model, the museum is used primarily as a decontextualised display space for objects collected from multiple sites. This includes encouraging visitors to learn from objects by themselves through pre-interpreted narrative and curated knowledge. The process is usually univocal, with curatorial authority achieved through object and exhibition research. Artefacts, conserved through preservation methods, are usually placed in isolated display cases to offer a primarily ocular-centric visiting experience.

A simple explanation to this pattern is that most professional curators working in these mainstream museums have been trained in the 'western' tradition in museology or relevant subjects (cf. Kreps 2003). Nevertheless, in most cases, museum-like institutions in postcolonial HK reflect a mixture of both traditions: the Hong Kong Maritime Museum also bears some similarity to the ancestral hall model. For example, the Museum's establishment resembled the intention of grateful clansmen who set up an ancestral hall. Successful shipping giants pooled in resources to set up a public-facing repository – a museum – to preserve their stories, impact and legacy. Moreover, the general preference for guided tours and more 'people-oriented' displays amongst HK museum visitors, rather than through caption texts in the 'western' tradition, resonate with the preference of oral cultural transmission in Chinese museological tradition.

Despite the prevalence of 'western' museology in government museums as the concept was first introduced to HK, some stakeholders found it inefficient and incompatible. Some of these individuals proceeded to become museum makers themselves and adopted different strategies to display and interpret their own collections.

Tang Ancestral Halls (chapter 3), St. Mathias Journey (chapter 5), Queen's College History Museum (chapter 6), and most non-government museum-like institutions, having museum makers or curators not formally trained in museology, tend to feature more local Chinese museological characteristics. Tang clansmen find it inappropriate and useless to install display cases and too much exhibition text in their ancestral hall. They prefer their existing mode of cultural transmission while making their display space available to the public. As an amateur 'community' museum, St Mathias Journey shows that the concept of museum have been subconsciously adapted in HK as a new social institution that shares functions of traditional ancestral halls – as a repository of heirlooms, memory and cultural knowledge – in modern HK society. Within such institutions, interactions are mainly verbal and interpersonal, and exhibits are primarily appreciated for their symbolic, historical and cultural values more than their aesthetic value. They act as mnemonic devices to elicit affect and nostalgia amongst visitors, and physical medium to pass on cultural and historical knowledge across generations. Queen's College History Museum (chapter 6) shows how a school history museum functions similar to an ancestral hall: as a symbol of unity, longevity and prosperity that would help construction of a cohesive identity amongst those directly involved. At the same time, through largely inward-looking exhibition themes and artefacts, these cultural 'insiders' renew their relationship and affiliation to the school while introducing their specific cultural knowledge to 'outsiders'. For example, the museum celebrates the concept of 'brotherhood', which is comparable to the sense of cohesion brought by an ancestral hall to a clan. Furthermore, alumni visitors enjoy consulting school magazines, which is akin to clansmen inspecting the clan genealogy at their ancestral hall after ancestral worshipping and clan ritual events. Both can be seen as 'acts of reminiscence' that renew readers' ties and belonging to the group they identify with and affiliate to. At the core of

all of these aspects of a local Chinese museological tradition is the priority on human interactions, memories and relationships, rather than on the materiality. Realising what the audience want, in the past five years government museums have started to change too. For example, HK Museum of History has been criticised of merely shaping a HK story, rather than featuring stories of actual HK people: the agency of local actors and perspectives are overlooked (Wong 2015). As a senior government museum official has noted, "a museum culture is about how to preserve our history, not only macro history, but also micro history".[5] That is why the government Museum of History has vowed to bring about a "brand new museum-going experience" by adopting a "people-oriented" approach in the future (HKMH/ LCSD 2020).

7.4. Research Implications

The research presented in this thesis focuses principally on the museum maker's intentions, motives and perspectives. During the period of my fieldwork, I found it very challenging to conduct visitor studies, either because the museums I worked with felt it inappropriate for me to approach visitors (especially at governmental museums), or because the museum I was studying was in the course of regeneration (e.g. St. Mathias Journey Museum).[6]

In the course of my research I also found it challenging to keep up with the latest developments in the HK museum sector due to the changing socio-political landscape in the city. In 2019, a year after I completed my ethnographic fieldwork, the clash between nationalist (pro-mainland China) and localist (pro-HK) groups intensified in HK, which finally led to a series of large-scale demonstrations in 2019 triggered by the HK

[5] C.W. Ng, Interview, HK, July 2018.
[6] See Stokes-Rees (2003) for similar difficulties when conducting museum visitor research in HK.

government's Extradition Law Amendment Bill.[7] These protests, which in several cases turned violent, fundamentally shook HK people's confidence in the local government and the rule of law.[8] To quench these anti-government demonstrations and tackle the resulting violence, the HK Government enacted the HK National Security Law on 30 June 2020. This caused widespread fear locally in HK amongst those who supported or participated in the democratic movements and 2019-20 demonstrations.[9] Internationally, 'western' powers such as Britain, United States, Canada and Australia condemned the law as further reducing HK's autonomy, and opened routes to emigration for those escaping the 'purge' (The Washington Post 2020, Wang 2021, The Guardian 2022). In this environment, non-government museums in HK (especially those set up and operated by individuals) were likely to be discouraged from remembering certain aspects of the past and expressing their identity through museums since this could be politically contentious. For example, my collaborators have told me that museums have recently started to undergo self-censorship. They have to consider whether their narrative or artefacts displayed, such as those with British flags or British crown, could be seen as sympathising with HK's colonial background and construed to break the National Security Law.[10] One collaborator even urged his colleagues to consider a backup plan for removing controversial artefacts altogether from the museum collections to avoid confiscation or the museum being shut down.[11] This was at a time opposition newspapers, such as the *Apple Daily,* were forced to shut down and the iconic 'June Fourth Incident'

[7] Nevertheless, it is important to note that HK's political scene is far from binary, as exemplified in the aforementioned ongoing identity dilemma and multiple 'in-between' identities.
[8] See Lam (2020), Vittachi (2020), Luqiu (2021) for detailed account of the 2019 protests and their impacts.
[9] As a result, the Office for Safeguarding National Security of the Central People's Government in the HKSAR, was set up in HK. It is staffed entirely by mainland Chinese officials. See Chan ed. (2020), Peterson (2020), Toru (2020), Lo (2021) for the full impact of the Law on HK.
[10] Chan, Pers. Comm., 31 Dec 2021
[11] K, Pers. Comm., 31 Dec 2021

memorial was confiscated from the University of Hong Kong. Other more sensitive topics and artefacts under consideration to be removed from display include those portraying political activities, such as student involvement in the 1967 Leftist Riot (inspired by the Cultural Revolution in mainland China), 1989 June Fourth Demonstrations (sympathising with the June Fourth Incident in Beijing), and the more recent 2014 Umbrella Movement in HK (demonstration against the HK Chief Executive electoral reform). Nevertheless, several new museums were opened as I was writing up my thesis, including the non-government museum HK News-Expo (2018), the new permanent exhibition at government science museum (2020), the quasi-governmental M+ (2021) and HK Palace museum (July 2022). New permanent exhibitions at the government Museum of History and Museum of Coastal Defence are to be set to open in the near future. Further research in HK museum sector must undoubtedly take into account this new socio-political landscape and its effect on museum making.

The concept of museum making has been adopted by different cultures, and its practice, or museology, has been adapted according to local heritage practice. Museums, coloniality, historical and cultural consciousness, and identity development are intricately related in a postcolonial setting. In HK, I have demonstrated that museums are 'modern temples', 'modern ancestral halls' that support cultural transmission across multiple generations. They are social spaces where people from different backgrounds are gathered to visit objects that are collected and displayed. Through these objects, the complex concepts of identity, heritage and belonging are visualised. That is why, in these spaces, visitors can commemorate *their* ancestry, trace their common roots, and learn from the past. In addition, rather than a static, territorially-bound secular temple of nationalism (cf. Duncan 1995), museums are also 'piers'. They are transient cultural hubs that bridge between culture, ideas, and civilisation. They are springboards, where people,

communities, and objects come and go and where visitors embark on a trip to discover or rediscover knowledge. Museums also connect the past to the present, the abstract to the concrete, the local to the global. In HK's case, a range of museums helped to develop a three-dimensional vision of the culture, experience and identity.

The museum culture that emerges in HK will not look like the one in London or Delhi or anywhere else. HK is an 'in-between' place: a city still finding its way in the process of decolonisation. The cultural impact inevitably drives reminiscence about the 'colonial past' as well as to quest for an identity. Its museums are thus 'in-between' museums, concerning 'in-between' lives. Nowadays, setting up museums in HK is no longer exclusive to states, governments, established figures or organisations; it is becoming an increasingly inclusive and grassroots concept which anyone could adopt and adapt to their own needs. Museum making is an open-ended journey, through which individuals can store their memories, tell their stories, negotiate their identity, and commemorate what is otherwise going to be forgotten. Amateur museum makers could also supplement, or even challenge the dominant history narratives in mainstream museums (cf. Candlin 2015). Museum education is not only important *for* schools, museum *in* schools have also proven to be useful in supporting students and alumni in search of their past. More importantly, participating in the museum making process can enhance museum-mindedness and historical consciousness, which leads to a maturing museum culture. Museums are, all in all, fluid cultural constructs that preserve our memory, facilitate knowledge transfer, and enhance communication between people and cultures. As such, we should understand museum-making as a positive cultural phenomenon that can be a force for good in times of change and challenge.

As an ethnography of museums outside of 'the west', I have demonstrated that museums can be influenced by local culture and take on other forms. At a local scale, I

hope that more people will realise the benefits of setting up their own museums. They are not only places where belonging is imagined (cf. Anderson 2003), but also places where museum makers can remember the past and express their identity. I also hope that the HK government will encourage further development of non-government museums in HK by offering a favourable environment through enlightened policies and regulations. On a broader scale, I hope that this thesis contributes to the ongoing anthropological discussion of the diversity of contemporary museological forms and their deviation (or otherwise) from the conventional models of museums that were established in early modern Europe and then disseminated around the world along the trajectories of colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I also hope that my research findings can inform museums in HK their ongoing quest to meet with challenges and embrace the opportunities of our era.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. List of Known Museums in HK

Notes on Museum Classification

The nature of museums in this list are classified into government, independent, amateur and school museums according to the definition I set out in this thesis (see chapter 1 for further discussion). Their themes of focus are further categorised into art (artistic & aesthetics focus), encyclopaedic (no particular theme, but all-encompassing), heritage (ethnic/ cultural focus), history (historical & archaeological focus), science (including Natural History), and departmental (set up by government bodies to aid departmental policies).

No.	Name (Organisation)	Nature	Year	Category
1	Hongkong City Hall Museum	Gov't	1874-1933	Encyclopaedic **DEFUNCT**
2	University Museum & Art Gallery, HKU 香港大學美術博物館	Independent	1953	Art
3	Lei Cheng Uk Han Tomb Museum 李鄭屋漢墓博物館 (HKMH)	Gov't	1957	History
4	City Museum and Art Gallery 香港博物美術館 (DEFUNCT)	Gov't	1962-1975	Art & History **DEFUNCT**
5	Art Museum of CUHK 香港中文大學文物館	Independent	1971	Art
6	TWGH Museum 東華三院文物館	Independent	1971	History
7	Hong Kong Museum of History 香港歷史博物館	Gov't	1975/ 1998	History
8	Hong Kong Museum of Art 香港藝術館	Gov't	1975/ 1991	Art
9	HSBC Archives HK (Gallery) 匯豐銀行歷史檔案部展覽館	Independent	1970s (2000s)	History
10	Hong Kong Space Museum 香港太空館	Gov't	1980	Science
11	Sheung Yiu Folk Museum 上窯民俗文物館 (HKHM)	Gov't	1984	Heritage
12	Museum of Tea Ware (Flagstaff House) 茶具文物館 (HKMA)	Gov't	1984	Art
13	Po Leung Kuk Museum 保良局歷史博物館	Independent	1984	History

14	Hong Kong Railway Museum 香港鐵路博物館 (HKHM)	Gov't	1985	History
15	Sam Tung Uk Museum 三棟屋博物館 (HKHM)	Gov't	1987	Heritage
16	Police Museum 警察博物館	Gov't	1988	History
17	Law Uk Folk Museum 羅屋民俗館 (HKHM)	Gov't	1990	Heritage
18	Coca Cola Hong Kong Museum 可口可樂-香港博物館	Independent	1991	History
19	Hong Kong Science Museum 香港科學館	Gov't	1991	Science
20	Telecom World 電訊堡	Independent	1995-1998	Science **DEFUNCT**
21	Airport Core Programme Exhibition Centre 機場核心計劃展覽中心	Gov't	1996	Departmental
22	Hong Kong Racing Museum 香港賽馬博物館	Independent	1996	History
23	HK Museum of Medical Sciences 香港醫學博物館	Independent	1996	History
24	HK Housing Authority Exhibition Centre 香港房屋委員會展覽中心	Gov't	1996/ 2002	Departmental
25	HK Scout Gallery 童軍文物廊	Independent	1996	History
26	Health Education Exhibition and Resource Centre 衞生教育展覽及資料中心	Gov't	1997	Departmental
27	Po Leung Kuk History Museum 保良局歷史博物館	Independent	1998	History
28	Museum of Ethnology 人類民俗館	Independent	2000	Heritage
29	HK Museum of Coastal Defence 香港海防博物館	Gov't	2000	History
30	Hong Kong Heritage Museum 香港文化博物館	Gov't	2000	Heritage

31	Tai O Cultural Workroom 大澳文化工作室	Amateur	2001-16	Heritage **DEFUNCT**
32	Hong Kong Film Archive 香港電影資料館	Gov't	2001	Heritage
33	HK Correctional Services Museum 香港懲教博物館	Gov't	2002	Departmental
34	Tao Heung Museum of Food Culture 人類飲食博物館/稻鄉飲食文化博物館	Amateur → Independent	2002/ 2005	Heritage
35	HKBU Dr. & Mrs. Hung Hin Shiu Museum of Chinese Medicine 香港浸會大學孔憲紹博士伉儷中醫藥博物館	Independent	2003/ 2007	Science
36	Clementi Secondary School Museum 金文泰中學校史館	School	2003/ 2012	History
37	Marco Polo's Cartocell 香港馬可孛羅地圖館	Amateur	~2004	History
38	Tai O Rural Committee Historic and Cultural Showroom 大澳鄉事委員會歷史文化室	Independent	2004	Heritage
39	HK Correctional Services Museum 香港懲教博物館	Gov't	2004	History
40	Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre 香港文物探知館	Gov't	2005	Heritage
41	HK Maritime Museum 香港海事博物館	Independent	2005	History
42	The Fans Museum 古董電扇博物館	Amateur	2005	History **DEFUNCT**
43	Ying Wa Heritage 英華書院校史館	Independent	2007	History
44	Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum 孫中山紀念館	Gov't	2006	History
45	Hong Kong Immigration Museum 入境處博物館	Gov't	2006	History
46	BNP Paribas Museum of Bethanie 法國巴黎銀行伯大尼博物館	Independent	2006	History
47	Exchange Exhibition Hall 香港交易所展覽館	Independent	2006	History
48	Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden Museum 嘉道理農場暨植物園博物館	Independent	2006	Science

49	Instant Camera Museum 即影即有相機博物館	Amateur	2006(?)	History **DEFUNCT**
50	Classic Auto-cycle Museum 香港運輸工具歷史文化博物館	Amateur	2006	History **VIRTUAL**
51	Lamma Fisherfolk's Village 南丫島漁民文化村	Amateur	2006	Heritage
52	Aviation Discovery Centre 航空探知館	Gov't	2007	Departmental
53	Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery 屏山鄧族文物館	Gov't	2007	Heritage
54	Fireboat Alexander Grantham Exhibition Gallery 葛量洪號滅火輪展覽館 (HKMH)	Gov't	2007	History
55	Peak Tram Historical Gallery 山頂纜車歷史珍藏館	Amateur	2007	History
56	Wanchai Livelihood Place/ Hong Kong House of Stories 灣仔民間生活館/ 香港故事館	Amateur	2007/ 2012	Heritage
57	St Stephen's College Heritage Museum 聖士提反書院文物館	School	2008	History
58	Ma Wan Houses 馬灣藏館	Amateur	2008	Heritage
59	Sai Kung Cultural Museum & YCHWWSSS School Museum 西貢文物館及仁濟醫院王華湘中學校史館	School	2009	Heritage, History
60	HK Museum of Education 香港教育博物館	Indepen dent	2009	History
61	Stephen Hui Geological Museum 香港大學許士芬地質博物館	Indepen dent	2009	Science
62	Urban Renewal Exhibition Centre 市區更新探知館	Gov't	2009	Departmental
63	Pre-historic Story Room 史前故事館	Indepen dent	2011- 2013	Science **DEFUNCT**
64	Swire HK Archives Service Gallery	Indepen dent	2011	History
65	HK Int'l Hobby & Toy Museum 香港國際玩具博物館	Amateur	2011	Heritage **DEFUNCT**
66	Jockey Club Lei Yu Mun Plus 賽馬會鯉魚門創意館	Indepen dent	2011	Art

67	St Mathias Journey Museum (懷舊生活館) 聖瑪弟亞之旅展覽館	Amateur	2011	History
68	Ho Tung Secondary School History Gallery 何東中學校史廊	School	2012	History
69	June 4th Museum 六四紀念館	Independent	2012 (2016)	Political **VIRTUAL**
70	City Gallery 展城館	Gov't	2012	History
71	Cheung Chau Government Secondary School 長洲官立中學校史館	School	2012	History
72	Jao Ysung-I Academy 饒宗頤文化館	Independent	2012	Art
73	Ma Wan Residents Museum 馬灣水陸居民博物館	Independent	2013	Heritage
74	Hong Kong Trams Station 香港電車文化館	Amateur	2013	History
75	Queen's College History Museum 皇者仁風校史館	School	2013	History
76	Diocesan Boys' School Museum 拔萃男書院校史博物館	School	2013	History
77	King Ling College Museum 景嶺校史館	School	2013	History
78	Jockey Club Museum of Climate Change 賽馬會氣候變化博物館	Independent	2013	Science
79	Heritage of Mei Ho House Museum 美荷樓生活館	Independent	2013	History
80	Imperial Museum 皇家博物館	Amateur	2013	Art
81	Magical World 4D 奇幻館	Independent	2014	Art
82	Liang Yi Museum 兩依藏博物館	Amateur	2014	Art
83	F11 Foto Museum F11 攝影博物館	Amateur	2014	Art
84	HK Toy Museum 香港玩具博物館	Amateur	2014	Heritage
85	Concordia Lutheran School Museum 路德會協同中學校史館	School	2014	History
86	New Asia College History Museum 新亞校史館	School	2014	History
87	TWGH Lui Yun Choi Memorial College History Gallery 呂中校史館	School	2015	History

88	SKH Li Fook Hing Secondary School Museum 聖公會李福慶中學校史館	School	2015	History
89	St Paul's Co-educational College Archive Gallery 聖保羅男女中學校史文物廊	School	2015	History
90	King's College School History Museum 英皇書院校史館	School	2015	History
91	Hong Kong Pui Ying Secondary School Museum 香港培英中學校史館	School	2015	History
92	Shatin Pui Ying College School History Room 沙田培英中學校史館	School	2015	History
93	Sun Museum 一新美術館	Independent	2015	Art
94	Hong Kong News-Expo 新聞博覽館	Independent	2015	History **PLANNING**
95	The Records Museum 唱片博物館	Amateur	2015	Heritage
96	Old Textbooks Showroom 舊課本展示館	Amateur	2015-17	History **DEFUNCT**
97	Repulse Bay Visual Art Museum 淺水灣超視覺藝術館	Independent	2015-16	Art **DEFUNCT**
98	Silver Stationery Shop Museum 銀の文房具	Amateur	2016	History
99	HaDavar Biblical Museum 夏達華聖經文物博物館	Independent	2016	History
100	Fire and Ambulance Services Education Center cum Museum 消防及救護教育中心暨博物館	Gov't	2016	Departmental
101	Sha Tin Government Secondary School 沙田官立中學校史館	School	2016	History
102	Loffy's Store 多日村	Amateur	2016	History
103	The Art of Chocolate Museum 朱古力博物館	Independent	2017(?)	Art
104	A'Museum 香港大倉博物館	Amateur	2017	Art
105	Mill 6 六廠 (南豐紗廠)	Independent	2018	Art, Heritage
106	Market Museum 街市博物館	Amateur	2018	Art
107	Ap Chau Story Room 鴨洲故事館	Amateur	2018	History

108	Hong Kong News Expo 新聞博覽館	Independent	2018	History
109	Aberdeen Technical School History Gallery	School	2020	History
110	Pun U Wah Yan Primary School History Gallery	School	2020	History
111	M+ Museum	Gov't	2021	Art
112	The Museum by Badges Story	Amateur	2021	Art, Heritage
113	Hong Kong Palace Museum 香港故宮文化博物館	Gov't	2022	Art, Heritage
114	Tseung Kwan O Government Secondary School History Corridor	School	2023	History
115	Queens Museum (Under Construction)	Amateur	2023	Art, Heritage

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Appendix 2. List of Known Ancestral Halls in HK

Notes on Ancestral Hall Classification

Ancestral Halls listed below are classified according to their nature (family/ clan/ public), opening status (open to visitors or private to descendants), and displays (planned, unorganised, none). Halls that have been declared by the government as monuments in HK are also duly noted.

No.	Name (Organisation)	Nature	Status	Displays
1	Tang Ancestral Hall, Ping Shan 屏山鄧氏宗祠	Clan	Open	Planned (government), declared monument
2	Tang Ancestral Hall, Ha Tsuen 廈村鄧氏宗祠	Clan	Open	Planned (government), declared monument
3	Kwong Fuk Ancestral Hall 廣福義祠	Public	Open	Unorganised, declared monument
4	Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall 愈喬二公祠	Clan	Open	Planned (government), declared monument
5	Tang Kwong U Ancestral Hall, Kam Tin 廣瑜鄧公祠	Clan	Open	Planned (government), declared monument
6	Tang's Ancestral Hall, Ha Kwai Chung 鄧氏家祠	Family	Private	No
7	Tang Chung Ling Ancestral Hall, Lung Yeuk Tau 鄧松嶺祠堂	Clan	Open	Planned (government), declared monument
8	Liu Man Shek Tong Ancestral Hall 廖萬石堂	Clan	Open	Planned (government), declared monument
9	Man Lun Fung Ancestral Hall 麟峯文公祠	Clan	Open	Planned (government), declared monument
10	Leung Ancestral Hall, Yuen Kong Tsuen 梁氏宗祠	Clan	Open	Planned (government), declared monument
11	Cheung Ancestral Hall, Shan Ha Tsuen 張氏宗祠	Clan	Open	Planned (government), declared monument
12	Cheung's Ancestral Hall, Sha Lo Tung 張氏宗祠	Clan	Open	No
13	Cheng's Ancestral Hall 鄭氏家祠	Family	Private	No
14	Law's Ancestral Hal 羅氏公祠	Clan	Private	No
15	Lau's Ancestral Hall	Family	Private	No
16	Chung's Ancestral Hall 鍾氏家祠	Family	Private	No
17	Wan's Ancestral Hall 溫家祖祠	Family	Private	No
18	Chim's Ancestral Hall 詹氏家祠	Family	Private	No
19	Ng's Ancestral Hall 吳氏家祠	Family	Private	No
20	Hau Ku Shek Ancestral Hall, Ho Sheung Heung 居石侯公祠	Clan	Open	Planned (government), declared monument
21	Li's Ancestral Hall 李氏宗祠	Clan	No info	No info

22	Chan Sin Hing Ancestral Hall	Family	No info	No info
23	Chan Nam Tak Ancestral Hall 男德陳公祠	Clan	Open	No
24	Ming Yuen Tong Ancestral Hall	Family	No info	No info
25	Yeung's Ancestral Hall	Family	No info	No info
26	Yip's Ancestral Hall	Family	No info	No info
27	Tsang's Ancestral Hall	Family	No info	No info
28	Yip's Ancestral Hall	Family	No info	No info
29	Law's Ancestral Hall	Family	No info	No info
30	Yeung's Ancestral Hall, Ting Kok	Family	No info	No info
31	Lei's Ancestral Hall, Tai Po 李氏宗祠	Clan	Private	No
32	Fu's Ancestral Hall	Family	No info	No info
33	Chan's Ancestral Hall, Tai Po 陳氏家祠	Family	Private	No
34	Wong's Ancestral Hall, Tai Po 黃氏宗祠	Clan	No info	No info
35	Lee's Ancestral Hall	Family	No info	No info
36	Yan Hau Ancestral Hall 仁孝宗祠	Independent	Private	No
37	Tang Ching Lok Ancestral Hall 清樂鄧公祠	Clan	Private	No
38	Yau Tsan Fei Ancestral Hall 燦斐邱公祠	Family	Private	No
39	Chung's Ancestral Hall, Yau Yue Wan Village 鍾氏家祠	Family	Private	No
40	Chan Hau Tak Ancestral Hall, Kwan Mun Hau Tsuen 侯德陳公祠	Clan	Private	No info
41	Wong's Ancestral Hall, Sha Tin 王氏家祠	Family	Private	No info
42	Tse's Ancestral Hall, Sha Tin 謝氏家祠	Family	Private	No info
43	Pang's Ancestral Hall, Fan Ling 彭氏宗祠	Clan	No info	No info
44	Kiu Fong Ancestral Hall, Ta Ku Ling 橋芳家祠	Family	Private	No info
45	Ho's Ancestral Hall, Kwai Chung 何氏家祠	Family	Private	No info
46	Choi's Ancestral Hall 蔡氏家祠	Family	Private	No info
47	Chan's Ancestral Hall 陳氏家祠	Family	Private	No info
48	San Ancestral Hall 孫氏家祠	Family	Private	No info
49	Chan's Ancestral Hall, Tsung Pak Long 陳氏宗祠	Clan	Private	No info

Reference and Linkages

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3. 40 Tai Ping Shan Street
4. Ping Shan
5. 32 Shui Tau Road, Kam Tin
6. Ha Kwai Chung Village, Kwai Chung
7. Lung Yeuk Tau
8. San Hong Street, Mui Hau Tsuen, Sheung Shui
9. Fan Tin Tsuen, San Tin, Yuen Long
10. Pat Heung Road, Yuen Kong Tsuen, Yuen Long
11. Shan Ha Tsuen, Yuen Long
12. Sha Lo Tung (沙羅洞)
13. 5 Fo Tan Village
14. 8 Hin Tin
15. Mau Po
16. Ham Tin Tsuen
17. 62 Cheung Shue Tan, Tai Po Kau
18. Shuen Wan Chim Uk
19. South Yeuk, Siu Lek Yuen
20. Pai Fung Toad, Ho Sheung Heung, Sheung Shui
21. Tai Po Mei
22. 100 Chug Mei, Lo Uk Village, Tsing Yi
23. Chan Uk Tsuen, Luk Keng
24. San Tin, Yuen Long
25. Yeung Uk Tsuen
26. Ting Kok, Tai Po
27. Ting Kok, Tai Po
28. Po Sam Pai, Ting Kok, Ta Po
29. Po Sam Pai
30. Ting Kok, Tai Po
31. Lei Uk, Shuen Wan (船灣)
32. Sham Tseng Village, Sham Tseng
33. She Shan Village (社山村), Shuen Wan, Tai Po
34. Shuen Wan, Tai Po
35. Sai O
36. 10 Wo Liu Hang Street, Fo Tan
37. Kam Tin, Hong Kong
38. 14 Cheung Shue Tan
39. 15 Yau Yue Wan Village Road
40. Kwan Mun Hau Tsuen
41. Sha Tin
42. Sha Tin Wai Road, Shatin, Hong Kong
43. Pak Pin Tsuen (北便村), Fan Ling Wai (粉嶺圍)
44. Tsung Yuen Ha Tsuen, Ta Ku Ling
45. 168 Kwok Shui Road, Ho Pui Tsuen, Kwai Chung
46. Shap Bat Heung
47. 36 Tin Liu San Tsuen (田寮新村)
48. San Tsuen, Tsuen Wan
49. Bok Man, Tsung Pak Long

Appendix 3. Glossary of Chinese Terms

A Kung - 阿公 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Baiyue/ Yue people – 百越 [Mandarin/ Cantonese Romanisation]

Bowuguan/ Bok Mat Goon (Museum) - 博物館 [Mandarin/ Cantonese Romanisation]

Cheongsam - 長衫 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Choi Yuen Chuen - 菜園村 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Chu Hsi/ Zhu Xi - 朱熹 [Mandarin/ Cantonese Romanisation]

Fanshü (Western Books) – 番書 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Fa Pau Exhibition Hall - 花炮展覽館 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Jiangxi Province - 江西 [Mandarin Romanisation]

Lee Tung Street - 利東街 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Li Hongzhang - 李鴻章 [Mandarin Romanisation]

Lingnan (South China) - 嶺南 [Mandarin Romanisation]

Little Hong Kong collector - 大舊先生

Lotte's Store - 多日村

Mong Yuet Kung - 夢月公 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Nim Wan - 稔灣 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Northern Song Dynasty - 北宋

Nostalgic Objects - 懷舊物品

Old Objects - 舊物

Ping Shan - 屏山 [Cantonese Romanisation]

School History Museum - 校史館

Sentimental - 感性

Shum Shui Po - 深水埗 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Silver Stationery Shop - 銀の文房具

Sinicised - 中國化

St Mathias Journey - 聖馬弟亞之旅展覽館

Tai O – 大澳 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Tang Ancestral Hall - 鄧氏宗祠

Tang Clan Gallery - 屏山鄧族文物館

Tang Kiu-lum - 鄧喬林 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Tang Kiu-ngok - 鄧翹嶽 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Tang Yu-sing - 鄧愈聖 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Tang Yung-keng - 鄧蓉鏡 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Tat Tak Communal Hall - 達德公所 [Cantonese Romanisation]

To Kwa Wan - 土瓜灣 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Tung Hok/ Tong Xue - 同學 [Cantonese/ Mandarin Romanisation]

Village Museum - 鄉村博物館

Wong Chuk Hang Village - 黃竹坑邨 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Yantai Museum - 煙台市博物館 [Mandarin Romanisation]

Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall - 愈喬二公祠 [Cantonese Romanisation]

Zheng He - 鄭和 [Mandarin Romanisation]

Appendix 4. List Of Chinese Translations

1. Along the River during Qingming Festival - 清明上河圖
2. Ancestral Altar - 神台
3. Bless our clan to expand vast and wide like the mountains and rivers running across the country, our descendants will continue with the familial culture of our great ancestor in Gaomi (an ancestral honour), so that generations after generations of descendants could still pay respect and tribute to our ancestors with the fragrant and virtuous leaves and grasses, together with these meats and cereals on the sacrificial stands and pots as a humble repay to our ancestors' virtues - 山河開萬里, 承高密之家風, 此日蘋馨藻潔, 聊將俎豆報宗功 (secondary couplet of Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall)
4. Blessed is Ping Shan where the clan shall prevail with many talented descendants to be born - 屏山毓秀椒衍瓜綿 (altar couplet at Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall)
5. Branch/ Family Ancestral Hall - 家祠
6. Brotherhood - 孝弟
7. Chinese-style Tenement Building - 唐樓
8. Community Museum - 民間博物館
9. Connecting preceding and following generations - 承上啟下
10. Down-to-earth - 貼地
11. Enlightening - 教化
12. Exclaiming ‘wow’ at the sight of every objects - 每件見到都嘩嘩聲
13. Filial piety - 孝
14. Freestyle (Mathias Curatorial style) - 隨意
15. Hong Kong Maritime Museum - 香港海事博物館
16. Inflexible - 死板
17. Lantern-lighting ceremony - 點燈
18. Lineage Ancestral Hall - 宗祠
19. Living classroom - 活課室
20. Maintaining the clan’s unity are achieved through paying respect to ancestors - 敬宗收族

21. May Clansmen maintain Harmony just like the Sound of Huen and Chi - 壎篪翕翕 (plaque on the left wall of the central hall of Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall)
22. May the Clan Prosper with Many Descendants - 宗枝秀茂 (plaque on the right wall of the central hall of Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall)
23. May the Literati Tradition Inherits through Generations - 書香世代 (plaque on the right wall of the central hall of Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall)
24. May the Spirit and Virtues of the Ancestors Prevail - 祖德流芳 (plaque on the right wall of the central hall of Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall)
25. May the Traditions of Reciting Poems and Practicing Rituals Inherit through Generations - 詩禮傳家 (plaque on the left wall of the central hall of Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall)
26. May the Virtues and Reputations of our Ancestors Prevail Indefinitely - 世代流芳 (plaque on the left wall of the central hall of Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall)
27. On this beautiful day of Spring Equinox when day and night times are equal, we fetch the clear water from Sha Kong river (near Ping Shan), using our ritual instruments which are both clear and clean under reflection of spring sunlight - 今朝春色正平分, 挹沙江之春水澄澈, 春光盥得盤匜皆至潔 (long Chinese couplet at the entrance of Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall)
28. Rational - 理性
29. Rituals by sacrificial stands and pots will always be thriving with the meat and cereal offerings - 俎豆生香 (horizontal couplet of Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall)
30. Saw foreign trade a favour granted to the foreigner - 視貿易為嘉惠外人的賞賜
31. Scenery of Rivers and Mountains - 江山情景
32. Scroll of Five Bulls - 五牛圖
33. Simplicity is Happiness - 簡單就是快樂
34. The grace of our ancestral trunks and branches over the centuries was originated and spread from Jishui (a city in Jiangxi province) - 世澤宗枝源傳吉水 (altar couplet at Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall)
35. The People of Ping Shan would look up to Minhou (alias of ancestor Tang Fung-shun who established the Hall), inherit the achievements from Nanyang, evolve into numerous branches to this day, remember ancestral grace by thriving

worshipping ritual traditions - 屏翰仰閩候, 紹南陽之世胄, 今朝派衍支蕃, 不替衣冠隆祀典 (secondary couplet of Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall)

36. [This Clan] Inherited the Earthly Glory from Nanyang, [and] Began our First Imperial Achievement in Eastern Han Dynasty - 南陽承世澤, 東漢啟勳名 (primary couplet of Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall)
37. To achieve the aim of education with distinction - 達期兼善
38. Unconsciously diluting the bad marks during the colonial period - 不著意淡化殖民時期的劣跡
39. Virtues to be equipped in our actions - 德修於身 (literary couplet at the entrance of Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall)
40. We hope that the place here being used as a school would thrive, where Apricot blossoms from nearby Ping Shan hill are so fragrant, that its Apricot being used as offering have perfumed the other meat and cereal offerings to our ancestors - 此日杏林方挺秀, 依屏嶺之杏花芬芳, 杏子供來俎豆盡生香 (long Chinese couplet at the entrance of Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall)
41. We descendants who inherit the ancestral virtues originated in Jishui would continue to worship them with fragrant and clean leaves - 吉水流芳蘋馨藻潔 (altar couplet at Ping Shan Tang Ancestral Hall)
42. We wish our tradition of paying tribute to our ancestors with fragrant sacrificial stands and ritual pots will last forever, so is the beautiful and nourishing landscapes of Ping Shan - 馨香俎豆秀毓屏山 (altar couplet at Yu Kiu Ancestral Hall)
43. *When I was Young, I Listened to the Radio (Radio Programme)* - 口水多過浪花