

## Hong Kong – A distinguishable NMM city

Hong Kong is a distinguishable city among her counterparts around the globe. First, her socio-economic history was distinguishable. It was a colony of the United Kingdom until its return to the Chinese sovereignty as a Special Administrative Region on 1st July, 1997. Since then, it is part of the Chinese urban system. Her economy took off in the 1970s and since then it has become a significant economic power house, especially after the Pearl River Delta region in southern China opened itself to the world, later transforming into the world manufacturing centre. The quite spatially integrated economy, supported by the financial industry, allows Hong Kong to obtain the fame, labelled by the Times Magazine, of being a part of the transnational city "NY-LON-KONG" – the abbreviation for the three global cities of New York, London and Hong Kong. Besides, Hong Kong has been rated somewhat consistently as the world's freest economy since 1996.

Second, since its inception as a colony, Hongkongers have never achieved their citizen rights. Policies were formulated in London, with some consultation, and sometimes negotiation, with local colonial officials. Situation has not improved since Hong Kong returned to her motherland, as people still strived to elect their Chief Executive (Mayor) and legislative councillors. It is, then, not surprising that policies are not necessarily formulated to meet people's needs.

Third, she has a distinguishable man-land relationship. Her population, which was totalled more than seven million earlier this year, is accommodated within the stretch of land on both sides of the famous

Victoria Harbour, certainly less than half of the total area of about 1,104 km square. As a consequence, Hong Kong is ranked as one of the highest population density areas in the world, and her developable land is always scarce, and rendered politically and administratively so by the collusion between the Government and a small number of land developers. The latter collusion is possible due to the fact that all urban land is owned by the Government (and the Crown in the colonial time), which leases land to lessees for a stipulated period of time in exchange for land related revenues. Land is always a thorny issue of contention since her days as a colony, and more pronounced since the late 1970s.

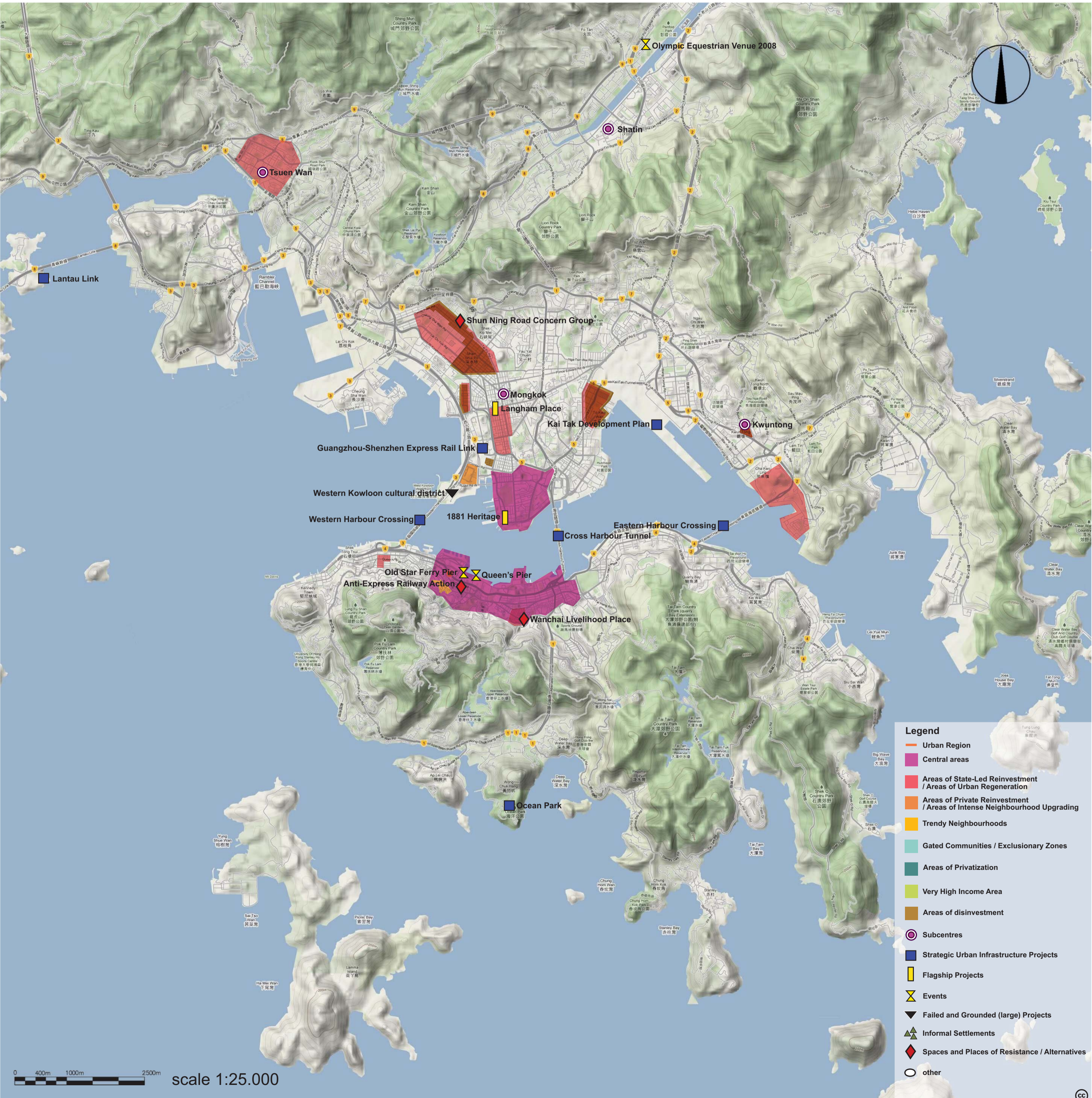
Fourth, some kind of centre-periphery has been formed. While the dominant class concentrates in the Central District and its surroundings, the underprivileged population is continuously displaced to the periphery, partly via the construction and allocation of public housing. In terms of urban landscape, skyscrapers are abundantly found, even blocking the ridgeline and causing the wall effects in the environment, some villages are still conspicuous in the more suburban setting.

Recently, the Government started the urban renewal process on a more comprehensive basis. Given the above distinguishable features, which is classified as one of the NMM Flagship projects. Under the Urban Renewal Strategy (US), On the other hand, you will be able to find lots of old buildings in certain old districts. With a development history of about one and a half century, Hong Kong possesses many

old structures with old communities while some of them have high historical value. These also became a problem to the government when it started the Urban Renewal process with one of the NMM Flagship project – Urban Renewal Scheme (URS). Under the URS, urban renewal was blamed by local conservatives and residences that old communities are destroyed together with valuable structures while the government will sell the land to the developers and to build landmarks like large modern shopping malls.

Thirdly, in the suburban areas of Hong Kong, we can find some primitive villages. These villages are not yet developed but they are still highly related to the urban area's development. For example, a NMM project - High Speed Railway - was planned to have a terminal in West Kowloon while its alignment passes through the Choi Yuen Village in New Territories. In order to support the developments in urban area, the village must be moved away. In such situation, conflict was caused between urban and suburban areas.

China 9'640'000Km2 \* Inhabitants 1'330 Mio.  
Urban Region 1'104Km2 \* Inhabitants 7'055'000



0 400m 1000m 2500m scale 1:25.000



# Failed Project: West Kowloon Cultural District

# Alternative: Star Ferry Pier and Queens Pier Preservation Campaign

# Flagship Project: Urban Renewal Strategy

# Event: A Symphony of Lights

<b>Purpose</b>	To create a cultural landmark for attracting foreign investors and tourists
<b>Dimensions</b>	About 40 hectares of reclaimed land
<b>Projets costs</b>	A one-off funding of HK\$ 21.6 billion for construction and operation
<b>Investors</b>	The Government

<b>Purpose</b>	To preserve the historical Star Ferry Pier and Queens Pier and demand for more public involvement in urban planning.
<b>Dimensions</b>	The piers occupied an area of about 40 square meters.
<b>Projets costs</b>	Projets costs
<b>Investors</b>	Limited resources
<b>Architects</b>	The people

<b>Purpose</b>	To make land available for capitalistic (re)development
<b>Dimensions</b>	225 redevelopment project areas covering a total area of 67 hectares.
<b>Projets costs</b>	HK\$ 10 billion government operation fund and recurrent costs and revenues
<b>Investors</b>	Urban Renewal Authority (URA), Hong Kong Government, Private Developers
<b>Architects</b>	Hong Kong Government in the first place, and URA

<b>Purpose</b>	Promote tourism with the beautiful scenery of Victoria Harbour
<b>Dimensions</b>	Featured by 44 buildings on the both side of Victoria Harbour
<b>Projets costs</b>	Around HK\$ 44 million
<b>Investors</b>	Hong Kong Government, Private Companies
<b>Architects</b>	The Tourism Commission



## Description / Reason for this choice / Background / context

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This project, which was originally proposed by the then Chief Executive (Mayor) in 1998, called for proposals for development in 2003. Yet, due to strong opposition from different interests, the project was brought to a halt in 2006 and re-invigorated a few years later. This project failed (so far) not so much due to problems related to any financial crisis as attributable to conflicts in interest among land developers.

In 2003, the Hong Kong government initiated the Central Reclamation Programme Phase III. Since the programme planned to reclaim the harbour for the construction of new roads and other facilities, the Star Ferry Pier and the Queens Pier must be demolished. The planning process was opened to little public engagement. In late 2006, when demolition started, the piers were transformed into the centre of contestation between the Government and conservationists.

The Metroplan adopted by the Hong Kong government in late-1980s represented a "back to the harbour" development strategy, and the Land Development Corporations (LDC) was responsible for implementing the urban renewal projects. The current Urban Renewal Strategy was announced in 2001 to provide guidelines for the Urban Renewal Authority (URA), a replacement of the LDC.

The Tourism Commission has promoted the programme since 2004. With the participation of 44 buildings on both sides of the Victoria Harbour, it was awarded the world's "Largest Permanent Light and Sound Show" by Guinness World Records. This show, performed every night, involves buildings' exterior decorative light and laser display. The Government claims that being one of the most famous tourist spots in town, it is extremely important to the city's tourism.

## Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream

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The Government's objective was apparent, as listed in the government's webpage. "It is an important strategic investment towards the sustainable development of arts and culture for the future of Hong Kong... It will become a cultural hub for attracting and nurturing talents, an impetus to improve quality of life, as well as a cultural gateway to the Pearl River Delta." Besides, the project was expected to attract to the city foreign, skilled workers in design and management and local, lower-skilled workers to service it.



As the government claimed that the main roads in the northern part of Hong Kong Island were saturated with heavy traffic, the reclamation programme was a must to build infrastructures to accelerate capital flows. Besides, that a promenade would be constructed for the tourists to oversee the Victoria Harbour would attract tourists and, then, capital.

The URA proposed a 20-year urban renewal programme, involving 2,000 proclaimed aging buildings and targeting 67 hectares of the inner-city. By improving the physical environment of the inner-city, this mega redevelopment project aims high to reconstruct a new urban order labelled the "Asian World City". One the one hand, it facilitates capital accumulation, and the land (re)development regime in particular. On the other, it triggers off resistance due to the injustice involved as well as some technical problems.

This programme is undoubtedly a kind of city-marketing. The night scene of Victoria Harbour is world renowned. The claim by the Government is that by programming it, such a scene can enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong's tourism as well as its role as an international city. More practically, it can bring a lot of business opportunities and create abundant job opportunities.

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The land developers' interests were clearly related to the ratio of residential land use in the project, the source of profit. The local cultural focus groups emphasised on the needs of the project to promote local culture to local citizens, on the one hand, and, on the other, to sell culture as a commodity to foreigners. The Government valued this as an opportunity to raise the city's reputation in the area of culture, but this must be achieved by developing commercial development.

## Deals

The conservationists had relied on hunger strikes, mass rally and arts performances to promote collective memory and historical preservation. There were pre-matures attempts to formulate alternative urban visions, including democratisation of urban planning. At one time, the Government made a concession that the piers could be relocated to other parts of the harbour. Some of the conservationists later discovered that this option was technically feasible. As soon as some newspapers reported that there would be a People's Liberation Army naval base near those pier sites, the society was in fury that the harbour was not for the people. Detecting that the conservation campaign had gathered steam and become increasingly out of control, the Government changed its strategy by demolishing the Star Ferry Clock Tower overnight and, later, took away by force those conservationists stationing there.

## Deals

The project is operated under the disguise of public-private participation. The Government facilitates the URA by furnishing it with loans and waiver of land premia. Once land was assembled, the URA either builds itself or cooperates with the developer, both with the identical objective of maximising the profit. It also creates conflicts among the affected owners, tenants residents and shopkeepers, although the approach is proclaimed to be 'people-centred'. In response to the resistance from the public, the URS purposes a 4R strategy (Redevelopment, Rehabilitation, Revitalization and Preservation) to confuse the dominance of bulldozer redevelopment, and holds cosmetic public engagement to manipulate opinion.

## Deals

The Government not only encourages the private sector to participate, but also installs the lighting system on public buildings. Although this event is opposed by the public and environmental organisations, the Government continues this event every night. In response to the environmental critique, the Government claims that it always encourages those participating private buildings to use a system with high energy efficiency and lower electricity consumption. In other words, a balance between economic development and environmental protection has already been achieved. More importantly, it even argues that tourism development should not be penalised at the expense of environmental protection.

## Deals

In the original plan, after the widespread criticism about the notorious Cyberport secret deal, the Government only invited one land developer to build the commercial and residential areas. While some legislative councillors queried another secret collusion, other developers criticised it for excluding them from the project. Then, the Government changed the plan by sub-dividing the commercial and residential areas into two halves, with the successful bidder's ability to develop one part first and sell the remaining to another developer. The final proposal was, after no expression of interest by anyone, to allow for the inputs of multiple developers.

## Impacts

This campaign is very significant. On the bright side, the campaign successfully raised the society's consciousness of preservation. The public has started discussing about preserving the city's collective memory and treasuring its history. On the dark side, the Government seized this opportunity and turned the debate around by claiming to work on projects of "preserving the high value buildings". In reality, the original residents would be displaced from the site, while the buildings (e.g. become a scenic spot for tourists) would change their uses to increase profits.

## Impacts

The inner-city, which has been problematised as the pockets of decay, becomes a 'new frontier' of development. The physical landscapes of the inner-city might have been upgraded, but the living space, social network, public space, local economy and street culture are sacrificed at the expense of skyscrapers, shopping malls, commercial buildings, private space and high rent-housing. Tenants are the biggest loser in this game, since being neither flat owners nor actual land lessees, they are usually displaced from their already over-crowded living places to an even poorer and more expensive ones. Their right to the city is simply not acknowledged. The developers benefit most, thereby perpetuating the already socially injustice society.

## Impacts

Government records show that the programme did attract 4 million tourists to the show, a point with which the Tourism Commission inclined to concur. The Government even refuses to evaluate this programme. But there are indications that the positive impacts on the GDP are smaller than expected. What is certain, however, is that the show has brought serious light pollution to the area. It also wastes electricity, with the remedial actions causing unnecessary air pollution in the electricity generation process. Finally, the show might create the confusion among tourists that Hong Kong is a modern metropolis without substance, including its culture and local history.



## Synthesis over all four projects and outlook

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These two posters barely scratch the surface of this complicated city. That said, the chosen projects do show some aspects of it from the NMM perspective. A review of her colonial history illustrates that Hong Kong's development was related to the attraction of foreign capital and skilled labour. As time proceeded, some spaces lost their function of attracting foreign capital, thereby inducing reconstruction by means like urban regeneration. To maintain competitiveness, Hong Kong has never stopped promoting the image of a world city (like Urban Renewal Strategy, Symphony of Lights, West Kowloon Cultural District).

are two of the illuminating examples. Effort to resist the Government has, in fact, multiplied since the Star Ferry Pier and Queens Pier Preservation Campaign. People have urged the Government to democratise urban planning by fostering "real" public participation. Simultaneously, people search for other possibilities by means of different campaigns like living with nature in the rural areas.

of her sovereignty to China in 1997. This conversion has brought about another direction of urban development; regional integration. The Government carried out the strategy of regional integration, which entails establishing a closer relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China by promoting several planning projects, like Express Rail Link, Development of Lok Ma Chau Loop, etc. Hong Kong's future development should be highly related to this strategy.

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It, however, brought a series of urban problems. Urban injustice and social inequity have exploded, denying the rights to the city for many. The Urban Renewal Strategy and the construction of the West Kowloon Cultural District

To obtain a better account of this city's urban development, it is imperative to go beyond the mechanisms strictly related to NMM. The colonial power, which conspicuously shapes the urban environment, is a case in point. In fact, the colonial government has promoted a rich array of programmes to construct space, including public housing and new town development, which have, nevertheless, the effect of enlarging the urban environment extensively. The colonial rule has lingered on since the conversion