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 1 July 1997. Since then, it is a 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. This rapid spatially integrated economy, supported 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 of- fatherland, as people still strived to elect their Chief Executive (May- or) 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 collaboration between the Government and a small number of land developers. The latter situation is possible due to the fact that all ur- ban 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 thrifty arena of contestation 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 surround- ings, 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 grand scale. Hong Kong possesses many old structures with old communities while some of them have high histori- cal value. These also became a problem to the government when it started the Urban Renewal process with one of the NMM Flagship projects – Urban Renewal Scheme (URS). Under the URS, urban re- newal was blamed by local conservatives and residence 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 primal- village. 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 Chi 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.
Purpose
To create a cultural landmark for attracting foreign investors and tourists

Dimensions
About 40 hectares of reclaimed land

Projects costs
A one-off funding of HK$ 2.6 billion for construction and operation

Investors
The Government

Description / Reason for this choice / Background / context
This project, which was originally proposed by the then Chief Executive (Mayor) in 1988, called for proposals for development in late-1980s. In 2003, due to strong opposition from different interests, the project was brought to a halt in 2006 and re-initiated a few years later. This project failed to proceed, mostly due to problems related to any financial crisis as attributable to conflicts in interest among land developers.

Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream

The Government's objective was apparent, as listed in the government's web page, "It is an important strategic investment towards the sustainable development of arts and culture in the city of Hong Kong... It will be a major catalyst for attracting and nurturing talents, an impetus to 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 serve it.

Stakeholders and their interests

The land developers' interests were clearly related to the ratio of residential land use in the project. The local cultural focus groups emphasised on the needs of the governments to raise the city's reputation in the area of culture, but this was brought to a halt, the Government gave up the 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.

Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream

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

Stakeholders and their interests

The conservationists wanted to preserve the piers, sites of historical values, and to do with a democratized urban planning. At one time, the whole society talked about collective memory and historical preservation. In contrast, the Government merely wanted to demolish them for the construction of transport infrastructures and offices building. The concern was to get the job done expeditiously. Many urban designers, architects, and urban developers advocated for resisting the plan. They have the ability to pay the costs of the assembled land and of construction.

Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream

The URA proposed a 20-year urban renewal programme, involving 2,000 pro/claimed building and Imams 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 as "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.

Stakeholders and their interests

The Government wishes mainly to render developable the affected owners, tenants and shopkeepers, although the approach is proclaimed to be "people-centric". In response to the resistance from the public, the URS proposes a 4R strategy (Redevelopment, Rehabilitation, Revitalisation and Preservation) to create the dominance of buidlet renewal and holds a consensual public engagement to manipulate opinion.

Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream

The inner-city, which has been problematic as the pockeots of decay, becomes a "new city of development". The physical landscapes of the inner-city might have been upgraded, but the living space, social network, public space, local economy and culture are sacrificed. There are pre-matures attempts to solve the problem of "saving the historic buildings". In reality, the 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.

Stakeholders and their interests

The Government has, in fact, multiplied since the Star Ferry Pier and Queens Pier Preservation Campaign. People have opposed the Government to create urban planning by fostering "real" public participation. Simultaneously, people search for other possibilities by means of different campaigns. Dealing with 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, failed to create a "new city of development".

To obtain a better account of this city's urban development, it is imperative to go beyond the mechanisms strictly related to NIM. 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, failed to create a "new city of development".

Synthesis over all four projects and outlook

These two posters barely scratch the surface of this complex city that said, the chosen projects do show some aspects of it from the NIM perspective. A review of her colonial history illustrates that Hong Kong's urban development was related to the attraction of foreign capital and skilled labour. As time proceeded, some states lost their function of attracting foreign capital, thereby inducing reconstruction by means like urban regeneration. To maintain competitiveness, Hong Kong's future development should be highly related to the injustice involved as well as some technical problems.

In the original plan, after the widespread criticism about the project, the Government changed its strategy by demolishing the Star Ferry Pier and Queens Pier Preservation Campaign. People have opposed the Government to create urban planning by fostering "real" public participation. Simultaneously, people search for other possibilities by means of different campaigns. Dealing with 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, failed to create a "new city of development".

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