



Governance of built-heritage in a restrictive political system: The involvement of non-governmental stakeholders



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ABSTRACT

Built-heritage conservation has increasingly become Hong Kong people's urgent concern since the years leading up to the territory's change of sovereignty from Great Britain to China, under political rules in which development takes priority over conservation. Built-heritage is a symbol of cultural identity and thus Hong Kong people's awareness of the importance of preserving them (Henderson, 2008). NGOs' sense of urgency in getting involved in built-heritage conservation also stems from operating within a political system which Scott (2010) describes as having a restrictive policy-making process, lacking in responsiveness to public demands and expectations. NGOs have three basic functions, namely, service provision, advocacy, and monitoring. Two case studies are used to illustrate these functions. The findings indicate that NGOs are most intensely involved in advocacy. NGOs involved in service provision have been selected through tightly-controlled processes. NGOs' monitoring activities were very limited. I argue that NGOs' role in built-heritage conservation is limited due to the restrictive political system. However, NGOs demonstrated insistent and resilient opposition to any top-down approach to decision-making, a sign that leads to the belief that despite of and because of the nature of the political system, NGOs' involvement in built-heritage is not only likely to intensify but also expand with government increasing the openness of the policy process to contain public pressure.

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1. Introduction

For the most part of the colonial era, cultural heritage was not a priority for the government and the Hong Kong people. For Britain, Hong Kong was to be transformed into a commercial port and a port of call for the British navy. For majority of its residents, Hong Kong was a place of refuge from the political and economic turmoil in the Mainland as well as an ideal place to make profit (Yung & Chan, 2011). However, as the reunification of Hong Kong to the Motherland in 1997 approached, local residents' awareness of the importance of conserving their city's heritage sites increased (Henderson, 2008). Hongkongers consider heritage structures as witness to their unique cultural identity (Lu, 2009; Yung & Chan, 2011) which is different from that of the Mainland Chinese (Henderson, 2002). The dismantling of the Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier in Central in 2007 particularly marked an important period in the history of built-heritage conservation in Hong Kong. Conservationists' expressed strong and passionate opposition such

as hunger strikes, sending a letter to the Secretary for Development written with their own blood, and chaining themselves to columns around the pier on the eve of the demolition day (Henderson, 2008). These events and similar others prompted the Chief Executive to acknowledge Hong Kong people's passion for culture and promised to pay greater attention to heritage conservation (Tsang, 2007).

While the government recognized this change in Hong Kong people's attitude, development continued to take priority over heritage conservation due to various factors such as increasing demand for housing and office space, limited amount of developable land, huge constraints to land reclamation, and land premium being one of the major sources of government revenue. As Lung (2012: 132) puts it, "... heritage is not solely a cultural issue. When it comes to implementation, it is an issue of land economics."

A more important factor is the restrictive political system in which the government tends to consider its policy views superior to those of the public (Scott, 2010). Other scholars on Hong Kong politics (Cheung, 2008; Ma, 2007) hold the same view as Scott

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(2010). However, some signs of a more open policy process have been seen (Cheung, 2011), particularly in the area of built-heritage conservation since its purview has been transferred to the Development Bureau in July 2007. At the same time, caution is needed about concluding that the changes are adequate in responding and taking into account stakeholders' views and interests.

This article examines the roles of NGOs in built-heritage conservation in Hong Kong, using two case studies involving heritage sites, namely, Central Police Station (CPS) and Police Married Quarters (PMQ). Data for analysis were collected from documentation and some interviews. The documentation examined include, among others, relevant papers, memoranda, and minutes of meetings or hearings of the Legislative Council, District Councils, Antiquities Advisory Board, Town Planning Board and Metro Planning Committee; NGOs' annual reports; newspaper reports and articles. Fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with relevant NGOs and government officials, each lasting for more than an hour. Snowball sampling was used to identify possible informants for the subsequent interviews. Few studies have examined public involvement in built-heritage conservation (Li, 2014). Of these, only a few relate to Hong Kong (for example, Cheung, 2011; Cheng & Ma, 2009; Yung & Chan, 2011).

The following section provides a review of academic literature on the role of NGOs. This is followed by a brief description of the features of the Hong Kong political system, informed by Scott's (2010) thesis. The two case studies are then introduced, followed by their involvement in terms of their basic roles of service provision, advocacy, and monitoring. The last section analyzes the findings in relation to how NGOs' roles in built-heritage conservation in Hong Kong are influenced by the political system.

2. Roles of NGOs: service provision, advocacy, and monitoring

Many definitions of NGO commonly stress NGO's not-for-profit and autonomous nature (Clarke, 1998; Kim, 2000; Salamon, 1994). NGOs are an important type of civil society organization concerned with defending civil society from state encroachment (Bernhard, 1993; Cohen & Arato, 1992; Diamond, 1994). Civil society is a space between the public sphere (state) and private sphere (family), on the one hand, and from the market economy, on the other. While the state and civil society are separate spheres, they constitute one another and therefore their relationship is symbiotic and complementary (Chandhoke, 1995).

A review of the literature indicates three conventional functions of NGOs, namely, service provision, advocacy, and monitoring. These three functions are analytically distinct from each other. The focus in service provision is the creation of benefits for the people without actual changes in policy; the objective in advocacy is policy influence (Jenkins, 1987 in Powell, 1987); the aim of monitoring is to ensure the implementation of a policy or program according to regulation or decision. While in other places education or socialization and mobilization are treated as distinct functions of NGOs (Foley & Edwards, 1998), in this study these are considered as strategies in advocacy, because NGOs use them not as ends in themselves but as means to influence policy.

Service provision involves providing services directly to the public (Foley & Edwards, 1998) or filling in gaps in the service-delivery role of the government which is unable to provide an urgent service adequately to the needy members of a community (Salamon, 2002a, 2002b). The goods and services NGOs can provide are varied in scope. In the context of built-heritage conservation,

NGOs provide goods and services by managing built-heritage conservation projects (Cheng, Li, & Ma, 2014).

Advocacy, according to Jenkins (2006 in De Brelaz & Alves, 2009: 153), "aims to influence the decisions of an institutional elite in favor of a collective interest." Citizens promote change, either in legislation or state policy, in order to address a problem or demand and to seek a solution, which they think is more beneficial to the public than the one proposed by the government (Diamond, 1994). In built-heritage conservation, NGOs attempt to influence government decisions regarding the conservation, after use, and design of conservation projects. NGOs' advocacy work involves different types of activity. NGOs form coalitions or alliances with other groups and individuals in order to put greater pressure on the state. NGOs pool in their resources together, whether personnel, information or funds, to achieve a goal collectively (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni & Bondaroff, 2014).

While *monitoring* is closely related to advocacy, the former is analytically distinct from the latter because the goal of the former is compliance. NGOs monitor government performance (Ghaus-Pasha, 2004) and the implementation of a policy (Hoang, 2013); check abuses of state power and violations of the law (Diamond, 1994); and, undertake activities to expand government accountability (Lane & Morrison, 2006). NGOs' watchdog activities contribute to good governance (Ghaus-Pasha, 2004). NGOs' monitoring activities involve various activities and cover various aspects of government work. In built-heritage conservation, NGOs monitor the implementation of heritage conservation policy in various ways such as how grading criteria are applied in the grading process of heritage sites and whether graded heritage sites receive due protection.

3. Hong Kong's restrictive political system

Hong Kong has a restrictive political system characterized by a policy process where "the government tended to ignore those views that did not correspond with its own" (Scott, 2010: 183). Hong Kong has yet to develop full democracy for the selection of the Chief Executive, and making the city's top policy makers appointed through the Political Appointment System accountable to the Chief Executive does little to ensure responsiveness to stakeholders' interests (Cheung, 2005). The Chief Executive, his appointed political advisors, and high ranking civil servants dominate the policy-making process, leaving little room for public participation in the policy process (Yung & Chan, 2011). Constitutionally the Legislative Council's oversight powers are weak vis-à-vis the executive (Ma, 2007). The functional constituency system in the legislature and the Election Committee institutionalizes corporatism and fosters government-business collusion in decision-making (Cheung, 2008). The numerous advisory and statutory bodies are seen as no more than a co-optation tool for political patronage (Cheung & Wong, 2004), political window dressing (Hood, 1981; Hood & Wright, 1981), and pre-empting potential opposition to government policies (Miners, 2000). These advisory bodies lack independence and do not have a significant role in the policy process (Cheung, 2011). While advisory bodies incorporate societal elements, their advice is not binding (Holliday and Hui in Lam, Lui, Wong, & Holliday, 2007). Public consultations carried out by the government on policy issues are seen as tokenistic and are largely considered as a unidirectional form of engagement (CCSG 2007; Lee & Thynne, 2011).

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