Hong Kong’s Mosaic History: An Assemblage of Foreign Culture

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Ancient root

- Sung/Yuan Dynasty (960-1279 AD) relics, including ancient coins and a well, unearthed in Tokwawan during construction of MTR Shatin-Central line in 2014.
Dr Ho Kwun Wan (historian) explaining possible connection of the relics unearthed in Tokwawan with the government’s salt control authority in Sung Dynasty.
Lee Cheng Uk
Han Dynasty Tomb
25-220 AD

Discovered in 1955 during construction of a public housing estate
Hong Kong

Yue Da Ji 粵大記

Published in Ming Dynasty recorded “Hong Kong” as the now Ap Lei Chau island opposite Aberdeen.

This could be where the British first landed and asked the locals about the name of the place. “Hong Kong” is Tangka’s dialect of 香港. If the British had asked a Cantonese, it would be Heung Kong instead! But there were rarely any Cantonese really!
Despite our Chinese root, Hong Kong’s lifestyle and culture are incredibly diverged. Evidence of foreign influence are visible from all walks of life.
Western Restaurant

“Cha Chan Ting”

Nan Lung 南龍冰室, Hong Kong

Simpson’s in the Strand, London (1828)
Russians have a long history of interaction with China.

Russian restaurants were common in China, from Harbin to Shanghai, and later to Hong Kong. Perceived local western meals (restaurants) in the early days had Russian influence.
Russian Influence

After the 1917 October revolution in Russian, the Tsarist autocracy was overthrown, leading to the rise of Soviet Union. A lot of “white Russians” fleeced the country and came to China. In Harbin, 1/4 of the population was Russians in 1922, about 120,000. They then came to Beijing, Shanghai, Qingdao, Tianjin, and Hong Kong.

In 1938, Hong Kong had 67 Russian restaurants and were widely regarded as western restaurants.

They slowly evolved, with local influence, to become today’s “cha chan ting” 茶餐廳
A British tradition that influences Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia ...

Ceylon tea (black tea) trade
Availability of evaporated milk
Afternoon tea: a British lifestyle

Image source: Wen Hui Pao
British egg tart as early as in 1399

CANTON

Lisbon, Portugal

Hong Kong Cantonese Restaurant
England

STORE

Hong Kong
CHRISTMAS AND EASTER

Most celebrated festivals in Hong Kong and in any Asian countries
Our language

Ball  打波
Fare  買飛
Grip  皮喼
Lift  車
Change 唱錢
Bus  巴士
Taxi  的士
File  快佬

Frightened 發 “t” 騰
Scared 蛇 “啞”
Panic 頻 "能"
Carefree 茄呢啡
Fashion 花臣
Carnival 嘉年華
Fluke 符碌，源自桌球用語
Notes 碌史
Case K史

Image source: Hong Kong Economic Journal 信報
Quick history of foreign interaction

Before 1842:

✦ Tang Dynasty (618-907): Ships from India, Arabia and Persia came to Hong Kong as a brief stop for getting silk and porcelain from China.

✦ European trade ships came as early as the 16th Century, dominantly the Portuguese. They settled in Macau, however. Later, Dutch and French followed.

✦ In late Qing Dynasty, British trade ships came but were all contained in Guangzhou (called Canton). The Qing government allowed only 13 trade companies (13 “hongs”) to operate in Canton.

Image source: Sydney living museum, MIT Visualising cultures
• Great foreign demand for silk, tea, arts and crafts

• Trade imbalance created conflicts

• Opium imports eventually restored trade balance and further caused China’s huge outflow of silver for paying opium

• Chinese government banned opium and destroyed 20000 chests of opium.
Opium Wars leading to Nanjing Treating 1842

Hong Kong ceded permanently to Britain

https://global.britannica.com/topic/Opium-Wars
British influence began. Governance, religion, culture, technology.

- 1849: St John’s Cathedral was built.
- 1855: The Government House was built.
- 1864: HSBC was established in London.
- 1888: Peak Tram began to operate.

Image source: China Mike
Catholic and Christian missionaries have played important roles in shaping education and public services.

Top schools and elite schools are run by churches.
Catholic missionaries in Hong Kong

Missions Etrangeres de Paris came to HK in 1847,

and built a sanatorium at Pokfulam Road in 1875
Sisters of St Paul de Chartres came to HK in 1848

- Schools
- Hospitals
Maryknoll Sisters came from US in 1925

Girls’ Schools
These missionaries brought about their values in education to Hong Kong, which have had long-term impact to people being educated.

“A student should never be punished because of a feeling of aversion or annoyance that a teacher may have for that student.”

–John Baptist de La Salle
• Society of Jesus / Jesuits (in China since 1699 Qing Dynasty) — Wah Yan College (from 1930s)

• Canossian Sisters (1860) — Sacred Heart Canossian College (1860), St Mary Canossian College (1900)

• Salesians of Don Bosco (1941) — St Louis School, Salesian English School
Think about your own education in Hong Kong.

Can you reflect on how it impacted the values you hold now?

Are these values traditional Chinese values?
1903: Construction of a single-track system began, from Kennedy Town to Causeway Bay. The route was later extended to Shau Kei Wan.

1904: Bodies of the first fleet of 26 tramcars were built in the United Kingdom. They were then shipped in pieces Hung Hom to be assembled. The tramcars were all single-deck.
British Dennis & Daimler Benz and Volvo after 1997

Image source: wikipedia
Horse Racing: One of Hong Kong’s most loved activities!

When did it start?
Happy Valley Racecourse was built in 1844. House racing was the ONLY legalised gambling in HK.

*The Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club* (英皇御准香港賽馬會)

McDonald’s opened the first restaurant in HK in 1975 at Paterson Street Causeway Bay.

HK’s economy picked up in 1970s. People worked long hours. Fast food culture began to popularise.

Image source: South China Morning Post
American

Commercial Radio founded 1958, promoted pop music

British
More recently, Japan and Korea
Japanese Influence

In 1895 Merchant Umeya Shōkichi (梅屋莊吉) met Sun Yet-sen in HK and helped his revolution financially.

Throughout 1930s to 1950s, anti-Japanese sentiments were strong within China.

In HK, the change began in late 1960s when Japanese TVs became popular. Impact on our values was huge! (Free wireless TV began in 1967 in Hong Kong.)

How young generation rebels against tradition.
Liberal thoughts about marriage, against family’s disapproval.

Freedom, pro-activeness, unconventional considered revolutionary and certainly impactful to our society in the late 1960s and 1970s.
Instant noodles are even in the menu and served in restaurants!
MOST INFLUENTIAL APPLIANCE

First by Japan’s Mitsubishi Electric (三菱) 1945
First available in Hong Kong, imported by Shun Hing Group owned by the late Mong Man Wai, was Matsushita 松下 (National) Rice Cooker

Every household in Hong Kong, and every Chinese household in the world has a rice cooker!
Hong Kong Taxis in 1960s are mostly Mercedes.

Hong Kong Taxis now are mostly Toyota Crown / Comfort.

Japanese cars are extremely popular for all purposes.

Image source: gwulo.com
Korean impact to young generations

(1) Popular Culture (TV series, music, films)

(2) Consumer Culture (electronic products, fashion products)

(3) Beauty Culture (skin-care products, medical cosmetology trend)

(4) Food Culture (restaurant, snack food)
Questions to close

What are the driving forces behind popularisation of a new culture? Why do you like to follow / adopt a particular lifestyle?

What role does soft power of a country play and how does a country benefit from strengthening its cultural soft power?

Why is it useful for you to appreciate the cultural origins of things around us?

There is no model answer. Multiple factors come into play.