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## **Politics and tourism promotion: Hong Kong's national myths**

### **Abstract**

By using “crisis of identity” as background, this study examines how post-colonial Hong Kong relies on myths that are grounded in its complex, centuries-old socio-cultural political heritage to convey through tourism an identity different and separate from that of China. This qualitative inquiry, which relies on both online and printed promotional documents reinforced by primary data collected through in-depth interviews, features a hybrid method of analysis to propose an explanation of the symbolic representation of tourism through four sequential myths. The article concludes that Hong Kong exploits its colonial past to create an identity that enhances its “local Chineseness” with a Western flavor and positions the territory to assume an increasingly hybrid identity to avoid being just another Chinese city.

Keywords: Myths; tourism promotion; symbolic representation; hybrid, identity; cultural heritage

## Introduction

In the period leading up to the Handover of Hong Kong to China on July 1, 1997, *The Pearl of Orient* was the most popular song broadcast throughout Mainland China. The lyrics conveyed the patriotic notion that Hong Kong was about to return to its “biological” mother after “too many years under its British ‘stepmother.’” Sixteen years later, the process of nation building between Hong Kong and China remains a work in progress at various levels (Ip, 2012). Hong Kong’s status as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) and its “one country, two systems” arrangement have supported calls for its autonomy as a city-state, but recurrent rhetoric suggests that Hong Kong is becoming just another Chinese city (Fong, 2010) and highlights what Ip (2012) calls a continuing quest for a “Hong Kong identity.”

At the center of this identity crisis lies the issue of whether Hong Kong is Chinese or international (Fong, 2010). Chun (1996a, p. 65) not only predicted that Hong Kong would “search for its ‘identity’” in the years after the Handover but also ascribed the “...total absence of a shared identity among the Chinese there” to a combination of complex historical factors culminating in a crisis of cultural ambiguity and ambivalence precipitated by Britain’s “sudden decision in 1984” (ibid) to return Hong Kong to China in 1997. Today, while Hong Kong residents are part of the broader political geography of China, they continue to resist attempts to foster closer cultural and social assimilation with the PRC (Fung, 2001 and Wong & Wong, 2014).

Nowhere is this more evident than in the SAR’s English and Chinese tourism promotion activities, where references to China are almost non-existent. Its current slogan, “Hong Kong - Asia’s World City,” specifically dissociates the city from China. The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) continues to rely heavily on Hong Kong’s myths, while paying scant attention to similar Mainland Chinese national myths. Such actions may reflect strategic marketing decisions aimed at positioning Hong Kong uniquely in the global marketplace. However, the external rhetoric and representation that distinguish Hong Kong could be more political and historical in nature and inextricably tied to a broader

post-colonial resistance to social and cultural assimilation. The “return to the motherland” should have been seamless given that Hong Kong displays some proximity to the Chinese nationalist consciousness. However, residents’ identification with Hong Kong has increased since the Handover (Veg, 2013), with figures peaking at 84.3% among youths (ages 18 to 29).

Using Hou’s (2012) examination of the symbolic authority of tourism as a constitutive exteriorization of China as a springboard, this paper focuses on the process at work in Hong Kong. It provides fresh empirical evidence from the operational practice of tourism to support Chun’s (1996a) claims that the identity crisis in Hong Kong’s public arena is due to fractured tactical co-options by interests such as the tourism sector. This approach is justified based on the fact that the performative authority of tourism and collaborative sectors (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998), in their signification of Hong Kong, explicitly acknowledge the city’s historical complexity. In other words, this paper highlights the intersection of the ideological power and political authority of tourism (Hollinshead, 2009) through a critical investigation of how Hong Kong positions and signifies itself. To that end, the study delves into practices of myths as agency and appropriation in the manipulation of the symbolic image of the place (McKay, 1994). In addition to examining the phenomenon of cultural identity crisis as a product of post-coloniality (Gupta, 1992), this study also depicts the intricacies and complexities of the role assumed by local tourism promoters.

## **Myths, identity and tourism**

Lévi-Strauss (1955) relied on historical concepts to define myths as processes of dialectic synthesis of oppositions such that myths are both historical and ahistorical. Myths also vary, as they are affected by environmental changes brought about by increasingly mobile cultures (Lévi-Strauss, 1976). Because their purpose is to address paradoxes of human ambivalence, myths effectively reconcile history with politics. Connor (1994) argues that nations are themselves myths and that the essence of a nation is its intangibility or subjectivity, or as Anderson (1991) suggests, an “imagined political

community.” The “imagined place” relies on myths that are both diachronic (changing through time) and synchronic (transcending time) (Lévi-Strauss, 1978). The place is therefore fluid, alterable and in a constant process of restructuring (see Fees’ (1996) study of the Chipping Campden).

In his study of the role of government advertising in developing national symbols and myths to shape the conversation about citizenship in Canada, Rose (2003) suggests that all nations have extensive genealogies to create community and bind their citizens. How real or imagined the effects of these stories are depends on the symbolic and metaphorical meanings associated with them (Bowman, 1996). In proposing Shangri-la as a phantasmal destination, Gao, Zhang and L’Espoir Decosta (2012) claim that tourists’ meanings attached to the creation of imaginative space are derived from preconceptions and impressions from myths. This study demonstrates the power of the symbolic meaning of myths in positioning Hong Kong as different from China. Myth-making in this instance plays a vital role in national and local identity building (Robb, 1998) through cultural and heritage tourism (Palmer, 1999).

The unique socio-historical and geo-political positions of Hong Kong warrant an investigation of the role and types of myths that have helped construct its identity as a city-state (Cullen, 2006). To Goulding & Domic (2009), national culture is a discourse or a way of constructing meanings about the nation with which people can identify. By exaggerating differences in the three discourses of identity construction in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, Chun (1996a, p. 63) highlights that “...identity is not necessarily synonymous with ethnicity.” Simply put, Hong Kong may not necessarily identify itself as Chinese. To Chun (1996a), as constructed notions of [national] identities are taken for granted, they become hegemonic in practice (Chun, 1996a) and in language (Said, 2002). du Cros (2004) suggests that national identity, expressed in symbols and discourse, is built on the cultural identity of a nation-state such that the scope of the myths they express become national.

National myths therefore build continuity and social cohesion but also shift with the political environment (see Chang, 2005, Hall, 1999 and Light, 2001). Thompson (2004) suggests that the process for many post-Soviet-era states involved both dissociating from Russia and “re- Nationalification,” often with a heavy emphasis on local ethnicity (Saarinen & Kask, 2008). The image of representation, however, may not be based on a logically argued historical narrative but rather on a revised one that turns it into a mere symbol.

### *Representation and tourism*

Light (2001) reminds us that tourism marketing also has a strong political dimension. It is widely accepted that tourism promotion plays a central role in developing, promoting and reinforcing national identities among both domestic and international visitors (Rose, 2003), as the language of tourism has the power to construct and control tourists, culture and the environment (Dann, 1996). Tourism is therefore both inscriptive and performative, as it can be “used to articulate preferred meanings of ‘local’ place” (Hollinshead, 2004, p. 26) through myths and narratives. Thus, the leitmotif of “worldmaking” proposed by Hollinshead (2004) becomes a creative but often “faux” imaginative process of representation and signification of tourism about culture, nature/place and space. Fragmented and differentiated “faux” scripts enable tourists to consume the “spirit” and meaning of the destination and to become impressing colonizers with the power to homogenize and transform the destination. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) ascribes to tourism the ability to project performative effects on socially constructed and theatrically mediated memory of the place, thereby redefining the place to an often under-suspected degree.

McKay’s (1994) examination of the politics of cultural selection in Nova Scotia, Canada, charts the rise of the “tourism state” (p.100) as a “worldmaking” player by manipulating the symbolic image of the province (Hollinshead, 2009). The tourism state, as a whole, contributes significantly to imagining, re-imagining and de-imagining the place, and “essentializes” identity by acting as an interpretive agent. By selecting ideological

narratives (e.g. representation of innocence), tourism becomes the “moteur” for myth-making and directs the outlook on the world (Hollinshead, Ateljevic & Ali, 2009). Such is the performative/inscriptive power of tourism. Similarly, Nyiri (2006) highlights “the agency of the [Chinese] state” in selecting and producing “scenic spots” such as Jing dian that become promotional instruments of patriotic education and national modernization as part of “indoctrainment” (Nyiri, 2006, p. 78). The peculiar historical characteristics of Hong Kong, together with its proximity to China, provide an interesting comparative situation of the performative authority of tourism in the signification of the territory.

### *Heritage and tourism*

Heritage and tourism are increasingly intertwined as heritage attractions and are prominent in tourism development and marketing activities. Visiting cultural heritage sites is a powerful tool, as they are symbols of national myths (Palmer, 1999, 2005 and Nyiri, 2006). Myths are therefore essential in tourism as they can help construct a sense of national identity within [heritage] visitors’ imaginations (Selwyn, 1996). Heritage is quintessentially present-centered, as it is enlisted for present causes (Lowenthal, 1998) and shaped by socio-political and economic concerns of the moment (Peckham, 2003 citing Halbwachs, 1992). Its contents, interpretations and representations are selected to fit the demands of the present and to ultimately pass on to the future (Ashworth, Graham & Tunbridge, 2007), as evidenced by the openings of the History and Heritage museums in Hong Kong after the Handover. Heritage is devoid of intrinsic value but can achieve it to become representation when its components are imbued with meanings (ibid). Any resulting heritage discourse is therefore contentious and in conflict (Hall, 1997) with competing interpretations, which creates “dissonance” (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996). Dissonance occurs because, in becoming the symbolic agency of economic commodity, heritage operates within variegated landscapes of consumption and interpretations by, for example, tourists and residents. As a symbolic agency with political ramifications, heritage effectively excludes those who do not subscribe to the terms of the meanings attached to it. The zero-sum characteristic of heritage effectively creates dissonance (see Graham & Howard, 2008).

Though Hong Kong's population is mainly ethnic Chinese, it is by no means a homogeneous one. The consequences of navigating and exploring the possible different arrangements brought about by colonialism, nationalism and capitalism (Abbas, 1997) are what Lau (1997) termed an "identity crisis" and highlight the complexity of heritage dissonance.

### *Tourism: the postcolonial and postmodern*

This paper acknowledges the significance of the interplay between the postcolonial and the implications of Hong Kong's return to the motherland. As a result, the political identity of Hong Kong is far from unambiguous in its identity and status such that "[it is] a type of Chinese colony or province..." with "... a uniquely Chinese-British history" (du Cros, 2004, p.154). This paper contends that Hong Kong cannot be disenfranchised of the postcolonial because it was part of the stereotypes, myths, and fantasies about the "Orient" in the Western imagination (Said, 1978). Such a colonial discourse and its inherent contradictions of unequal relationships (Bhabha, 1994) and perceptions and identities of "duplicity of their position" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1998, p. 43) are useful in understanding the present signifying myths the SAR chooses to represent it. Identity concerns constitute a major aspect of postcolonial views on tourism, as they emphasize the construction of knowledge and power (d'Hautesserre, 2004), just as language is also laced with power (Said, 2002).

Following Hall and Tucker (2004), this study aligns with the Foucauldian postmodern grounding that underscores the relationship between tourism source markets (including China) and Hong Kong as a postcolonial tourism destination, and as a Chinese but international city destination. The approach recognizes a fundamental power relationship that is reflected in (i) the city's myth as a former colony but imbued with "Westernness" and (ii) the city's myth as an international city but also as a SAR of China with a Chinese cultural identity. Though complex, these "post" arrangements are appropriate, highlighting the need to understand the deconstruction of the Western representation of

the non-Western world (Said, 1993, p. xix-xxi) and the contemporary renegotiation of postcolonial local and national identities (Graham & Howard, 2008), as well as heritage at local levels (Atkinson, 2008), and the stories they convey. These local levels are therefore subject to plural and dissonant voices intersecting and colliding in the reconstitution of space (ibid).

### *Hong Kong: A national Chinese but not PRC City*

The socio-political and colonial history of Hong Kong (see Chan, 2000 and Hsiung, 2000) has led to the development of a strong Hong Kong identity in the so-called “heung-gong yan” (Hong Kong people), distinct from that of mainland China (Mathews, 1997, 2001). After 1997, Hong Kong faced a two-way road between locality (local Chineseness) and nationalism (re-Sinicization/mainland Chinese), whence the question of their identity (Ien Ang, 1998). Deprived of decolonization, and “recolonized” towards an eventual absorption, the population of Hong Kong witnessed a juxtaposition of dual identities that are ambiguously complex and culturally hybrid (Chan, 2013).

According to Mathews, Ma and Lui (2008), Hong Kong citizens have a negative view of many PRC symbols. Fung (2001, p.594) asserts that “resistance [to adopting mainland Chinese national identity] is a re-definition of the identity boundary in labels like the ‘Hong Kong people’ and ‘Chinese people.’” The sense of unity that defines national identity and separates it from its constitutive “other(s)” is, according to Walker (2001), the result of the creation of “images of identification” (such as boundary-making), a pre-eminent characteristic and function of nationalism. In that postmodernist sense, a nation is “constituted largely by the claims themselves, by the way of talking and thinking and acting...” Calhoun (1997, p.5). While the nation-state of China emphasizes the “One Country” dimension in its relations with Hong Kong, politicians, journalists and the citizenry focus on the “Two Systems” element that stresses Hong Kong’s “national” separateness and distinctiveness. Its expression persists in features such as myths, memories, values, traditions and symbols (Smith, 2009, p.29). Therefore, given the

multicultural nature of Hong Kong, it can logically be characterized as a “syncretic nation.”

Several events and incidents over the years have bolstered the separateness from China and reinforce this characterization (see Cheng, 2012). It is therefore necessary to link the politics of culture to the practice of a substantive democracy (Giroux, 1988) by arguing that any politics of representation and struggle should be situated within a discourse of substantive citizenship. The citizen is a “multiple subject” (Giroux, 1992, p.4) that can juggle responsibly with discourses and actions in a variety of settings (ibid). Consequently, any understanding of how national myths and ideals are used and projected in tourism to define Hong Kong requires a redefinition of the relationship between culture and politics (see Unger, 1996).

## **Study Methods**

This study employs a multi-stage inductive qualitative approach (Maxwell, 2005). It probes the complex relationships between the contested nature of the politics of tourism promotion and the expression of identities through myths within the equally complex political entity of Hong Kong. Secondary data were first collected in the form of brochures, promotional materials and web-based images distributed through the Hong Kong Tourism Board’s official English and Chinese language websites between November 2011 and February 2012. To grasp the performative power of tourism and cultural representativity, it was necessary to study the promulgation of the different myths in materials targeted at the Chinese and English language markets. The Hong Kong Tourism Board is a government subvented organization that supports and promotes Hong Kong’s tourism in its entirety (HKTB 2011a). The brochures and websites reflected Hong Kong’s tangible and intangible cultural heritage by including 70 tourism attractions and activities, including mainstream products, heritage buildings, museums, temples, intangible heritage, festivals, walks and other activities (see figure 1).

This secondary information was supplemented by primary data from semi-structured in-depth interviews during February and March 2012 with four informants in managerial positions at the Hong Kong Tourism Board (see table 1). The qualitative nature of this study, which relies on the premise that any given instance is particular and unique, allows for a purposive selection of informants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Furthermore, the postmodern cultural vibe underlying this study makes it appropriate to place greater emphasis on the intensive analysis of quality empirical materials from a small number of respondents (ibid). The concomitant emphasis is on the display of knowledge and findings (Flick, 2006) by giving voice to the singular or instance when it intersects with a general system (Fiske, 1994). The in-depth interviews allowed the researchers to “gain insight into opinions, experiences, motives, and ideas that are not readily obtained through mere observation” (Gao et al., p. 203). The interviewees were deemed appropriate and knowledgeable given their seniority and professional experiences dating back to the late pre-Handover period with the then Hong Kong Tourist Association (later reconstituted as The Hong Kong Tourism Board).

(Insert Table 1)

The study featured a hybrid analysis of data consisting of a semiotic analysis applied to the brochures and promotional materials, a qualitative content analysis reinforced by a system of coding borrowed from Grounded Theory as proposed by Charmaz (2006), and an integrated constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This hybrid methodological approach was deemed necessary to stretch the content analysis beyond its purpose of identifying surface meaning (Holsti, 1969) to reveal symbolic meanings of the materials and to match the subject of hybridity of place and culture under examination. A consistent system of memo writing was employed throughout the research process to assist with the analysis of data.

Semiological analysis enables a deeper understanding of data by providing a means to discover what lies beneath (Finn, Elliott-White & Walton, 2000) signs (Berger, 2012) such that its general principles are applicable to cultural systems of signification. Hence, the method serves to identify and examine intrinsic structuring order within the

signification system (visual and material data) of tourism promotion (see Echtner, 1999 and Palmer, 1999), emphasizing denotation (literal meanings of text, etc.), connotation (cultural meanings attached to text, etc.) (see Berger, 2012), and key signifiers (see de Saussure, 2011). Both text and pictures become data for analysis (Barthes, 1977 and Echtner, 1999).

An initial denotational analysis of the range of tourism products offered was conducted to categorize them according to myth selection and signification, which was later verified by the analysis of interview data. Classification is based on the core tangible attributes of each place and activity, such as walks. Such a descriptive analysis enabled the researchers to evaluate the range of products employed by the HKTB. A subsequent connotational analysis of the materials was undertaken to determine how these products were presented. A comparative analysis among the different thematic ideas was then carried out at the level of both their denotations and connotations to determine whether any effort was made to bridge the differences among the themes.

This study relies on triangulation of the various interpretations of different types of data (Gibson, 2010) and each of the researchers' reflexive positions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Internal checks were conducted through ongoing comparisons of theoretical arguments by the researchers and a "constant back and forth movement between questions posed" (Kushner & Morrow, 2003, p.38) within the postmodern and postcolonial theories. Clearly, qualitative content and semiotic analyses are dependent on the researchers' judgment. The first author, a Chinese national, struggled to focus on a methodological reflexivity but was conscious of the "incipient... relativism" (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p. 179) of her opinions. This concern was addressed by recognizing the differing theoretical sensitivities of all three researchers, particularly during the analysis/coding processes (Glaser, 1978). A form of audit trail (Creswell & Miller, 2000) was also used as a validation tool, which assisted in tracking all research decisions made and activities performed. Corroboration of factual information was accomplished among the information provided by the four respondents and between their responses and the HKTB's official publications. Similarly, the analytical themes that emerged were

confirmed through consensus after comparative analyses. The four themes that identify and place myths along a time continuum are: perpetual archaic Chinese, bustling Hong Kong local, creative Chinese plus and Contemporary PRC (see figure 1).

(Insert figure 1)

## **From perpetual 'archaic Chinese' to 'Contemporary PRC'**

### *Perpetual Archaic Chinese myth*

Most of the attractions studied (63 out of 68) (see figure 1) reflect national myths that are associated with Hong Kong's unique identity. Those that represent Hong Kong's local cultural identity appear most frequently, followed by heritage attractions that represent its pre-colonial Chinese culture. This pre-colonial heritage forms the basis of the "archaic Chinese" national myths that pre-date the British acquisition of Hong Kong island in 1842 under the treaty of Nanking (Nanjing) (Cullen, 2006). The "Archaic pre-colonial Hong Kong" thus traces its origins to the coastal indigenous Chinese populations. Many of the festivals and built heritage celebrated in the SAR reflect traditions formed during this period. They signify an identity of "Hong Kong people" of which the local commoners became reluctantly proud after 1997 but which China sees in more prosaic terms as a geographic descriptor and as a label of the local populace (Fung, 2001). The significance of these shared symbols and ethnic myths is powerful, as they conceptualize a notion of homeland (Smith, 1986).

The archaic Chinese myths become "mythomoteurs" that serve to tell stories (Smith, 1986) about the city's origins: "*Hong Kong is a Chinese city...The place was populated with large numbers of residents, producing high quality products and living well*" (The Hong Kong Heritage Museum; in Chinese only) (HKTB, 2011a); its special character: "[Hong Kong] *is a port open to foreigners* (R1);" and destiny of the nation: "*Hong Kong now is the same Hong Kong as before* (R2)." The values embodied within these "mythomoteurs" are non-falsifiable, not because they are irrational and devoid of

objective arguments but because the claims they represent are normative (Snyder & Ballentine, 1996). When the Museum of History focuses on the “Hong Kong story,” it implicates the nationalist “mythomoteurs” by devoting significant space to pre-colonial and post-Handover Hong Kong.

The official recognition and association of historic Hong Kong to the fishing and farming communities it comprises placed the “nation” on the periphery of Imperial China until 1841. This “archaic Chinese” national myth is projected and perpetuated today in remnants of both built and intangible heritage, including numerous temples and historic buildings, as well as some ancient festivals (see figure 1) celebrating synchronic customs (the Chinese New Year celebration and the Hong Kong mid-autumn festival) (HKTB, 2011a). The primitive nature of these “archaic Chinese” myths and their constant grounding in ancient Imperial China also legitimize an “un-tampered” and authentic identity (vis-à-vis contemporary Mainland China). For example, the official description of the Kat Hing Wai Walled village emphasizes the “Chineseness” of the place and relies on a nostalgic invocation of innocent simplicity to highlight an imagined myth of continuity of Chinese culture:

*“[Kat Hing Wai] was built about 500 years ago during the Ming dynasty and is still inhabited by the descendants of the Tang clan...”* (HKTB, 2011a).

Differences in the official narratives of these “Archaic Chinese” myths in English and Chinese are negligible. The emphatic connections to history in the “Archaic Chinese” myths encapsulate their synchronicity (Lévy-Strauss, 1978). There is a subtle dual political undertone, as part of China’s national building strategy leading up to and immediately after the Handover was to claim that Hong Kong has been Chinese for 4,000 years or more, while the British era was just an unfortunate blip during a period of continuous settlement (du Cros 2004). However, the other political undertone of these “archaic Chinese” myths aimed at local residents highlights how Hong Kong is not associated with the emergence of modern China: *“We have our own unique culture (R3); Hong Kong is not a Chinese city (R1).”* The forms, narratives and symbols chosen to project these myths through heritage tourism, and the audience they target, thus shape the

stories they represent to ultimately have a profound impact on the cultural significance of their texts (White, 2001). In other words, one way in which the national culture of Hong Kong makes sense of the past, represented through these “Archaic Chinese” myths, is through differentiated “...encodation of events in terms of pregenerative plot structures...” (Ibid, p. 1716). Memory is therefore mediated through these fragmented and differentiated scripts: *“There is big difference between ethnic Chinese, traditional Chineseness and Chineseness promoted by the Chinese state”* (R1). In that sense, the dichotomies inherent in historical texts become paradoxical, interfering elements to any hope of full assimilation of the SAR within the PRC. They are therefore not neutral.

### ***Bustling Hong Kong myth***

An extension of the “archaic Chinese” myth is the “bustling Hong Kong,” which also traces its origin to indigenous Chinese populations. It reflects the SAR’s contemporary urban and colonial Chinese cultural influences that have shaped the collective memory of the city. Again, there are evident cultural and heritage attractions in the form of local temples, intangible heritage, outdoor markets, various Cantonese, Hakka and Tanka historic sites developed during the colonial period, and festivals that celebrate Hong Kong’s unique identity of local “Chineseness” that continued to develop under British rule (see figure 1). For instance, the popular Sik Sik Yuen Wong Tai Sin Temple. The temple is portrayed as *“very unique in Hong Kong”* (R2), and *“is where worshippers pray for good fortune through offerings, divine guidance and fortune telling”* (HKTB, 2011a). The temple, which is part of the everyday life for local residents, especially before major decisions, is portrayed to tourists as the place to communicate with the god Wong Tai Sin if *“they want their wishes to come true”* (R2). This is part of a fatalistic Chinese conceptual worldview that the future is beyond human control. Thus, by projecting the “folk-populist” product (Chun, 1996b, p.144) of superstitious belief in supernatural influences (Malinowski, 1948) for consumption, Hong Kong’s tourism authorities manipulate the national image through public (Chun, 1996a) and cultural discourses: *“[p]eople go to this temple when they have big decisions to make...they want their wishes*

*to come true...The underlying Feng Shui is a significant culture*” (R2). The “soft” projection of this local myth is powerful, given that it is an essential part of everyday life in Hong Kong but not necessarily in Communist China, where superstitious beliefs were suppressed for several decades (Smith, 1991).

The Cheung Chau festival is also a local celebration of thanksgiving to “*god Pak Tai to drive off the evil spirits [plague] besieging the island*” by “*...parading statues of deities through the narrow lanes*” (HKTB, 2011a), and its bun festival attracts crowds of local Hong Kong and international tourists alike: “*When a lot of local people join these festivals, like the bun festival... it shows to tourists their popularity among the local community. It also provides them a Hong Kong atmosphere when local people are around*” (R3). The local Hong Kong crowd becomes a subliminal co-opting agent of tourism promotion to foreign tourists. “*... [T]he mainland tourists like to feel the difference of Hong Kong*” (R3). Such promotion reinforces the differences in the national identity between Hong Kong and Mainland China among both domestic and international visitors (Rose, 2003). In this sense, the myth of ethnic and local Chineseness in Hong Kong’s identity is instrumentalist, as it has only been employed to define the nation.

A major signifier of the bustling “local Hong Kong” myth is the image of its famous night markets (see figure 2). The post-war transformation of Hong Kong into a free market port also altered the rhythms of everyday life. As factories ran around-the-clock to ship the “Made in Hong Kong” tag to rich industrialized countries, a night-time economy, epitomized by the neon signs in the streetscapes, flourished around local street markets. The economic advancement brought about by manufacturing industries improved the standard of living and was crucial to the consolidation of a “Hong Kong consciousness” away from the transient mentality. A better way of life was made possible through a permanent settlement where locals could anchor a more articulated sense of identity (Turner, 1995). China as the motherland was simultaneously receding in the local consciousness. Today, the neon signs towering over the bustling street markets have

become evocative of the city as bustling with crowds and are ritualized by tourism professionals “*for an experience of local Chinese lifestyles*” (HKTB, 2011b, p. 36)

(Insert figure 2)

Hong Kong is historically represented an outpost where traditions were maintained while they were actively being dismantled in China, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Today, the promotion of traditions derived from “local Chinese” myths emphasizes the remembrance of a form of cultural consciousness that was completely divorced (back then) from the creation of a national identity (Chun, 1996a).

### *Progressive Chinese plus*

The “Chinese plus” myth, reflected in Hong Kong’s “East meets West” campaign (originating in the 1970s), conveys the unique character of a city with a foot in both Eastern and Western cultures but fully immersed in neither. The myth is borrowed from Mathews’ (1997, 2001) identification of Hong Kong as ethnically Chinese but somehow different from and superior to China. It includes attractions such as distinctive colonial urban landscapes (HKTA, 1999), fortifications, dining establishments, and Western festivals and activities, such as self-guided walks (see figure 1). This myth shows how colonialism has led to a better Hong Kong. In that sense, the Victoria Harbour, which “...*is the core identity of HK*” (R2), serves as an iconic symbol of Hong Kong’s international status and is featured prominently in promotion campaigns. The Victoria Harbour connotes the colonial status of Hong Kong as a major trading post that evolved into a forward-looking and vibrant economy with an international reputation. It celebrates the existence of a unique lifestyle-- “[*T*]he harbor is the sign of Hong Kong’s history, which all Hong Kong people know” (R2)--which encapsulates the idea that Hong Kong’s traditional Western connections have improved on its Chineseness, distinguishing it from other Chinese cities (Ma, 1998). Today though the memory of the colonial period is fading, its legacy lingers and is recognized as a significant myth in creating a strong and unique brand image of Hong Kong as the only Western city in the East (Okano & Wong, 2004). As “Asia’s world city,” Hong Kong is international but with the unique

hybrid cultural features of being “...*a natural, vital and multicultural gateway not only to and from China, but also to the rest of Asia and beyond*” (Brand HK, 2012).

The suites of walks in in Hong Kong also exemplify the Chinese plus myth. “Avenue of Stars” (see figure 3) celebrates the contributions of the media-oriented popular culture through the emergence of artistic genres like Kung Fu movies and its star Bruce Lee in the cultural consciousness of Hong Kong, turning Hong Kong into the center of an “alternative” Chineseness: a hybrid culture of East and West. By also symbolizing the axiomatic capitalist and consumerist identity of the city, the rise of a media-driven pop culture broke cultural barriers that had accumulated since colonization and facilitated the emergence in the popular imagination of Hong Kong’s cultural independence (Anderson, 1991). Today, the juxtaposition of the walk in Kowloon with Victoria Harbor in the background, achieves the double feat of (i) celebrating the phenomenon of East meets West through Cantonese pop culture and the city’s British colonial past, and (ii) reinforcing through tourism the metaphorical representation and narrative of this Chinese plus myth in one of the world’s most iconic ports.

(Insert figure 3)

Ironically, Chinese language materials provide stronger support than the English versions to Hong Kong’s “Chinese Plus” identity, consistent with Bhabha’s (1990, p.293) “doubleness” role of writing in the construction of “the nation” for the people which it simultaneously objectifies. For example, the Chinese material describes the Peak on Hong Kong Island as “... *designed by the famous architect Terry Farrell*” (HKTB, 2011a), serving as a reminder to Chinese visitors of Hong Kong’s international links.

Numerous references to Hong Kong’s colonial past in Chinese language materials likewise do not appear in English materials. To explain this discrepancy, respondents evoked the necessity to address the different needs of different market segments: “*We will make some minor adjustments... depends on the customer needs* (R1); the different cultural sensibilities of different source markets: “*if the publications are targeting*

*Chinese tourists, we usually have our cover page with a visual of young people, a family or a young couple*” (R2); and mere linguistic differences: *“Of course there are differences between the English version and the simplified Chinese version in terms of the exact wording. However, the key messages are the same”* (R3). However, projecting different contents accentuates Hong Kong’s separateness and difference in the local consciousness and in the minds of the Chinese and international tourists.

History is also chronicled differently. While the English brochure of the Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defense (Hong Kong Walks) states that *“...the Museum of Coastal Defence features a Reception Area, Redoubt and Historical Trail that paint a vivid picture of Britain’s readiness to defend Hong Kong against any aggressors,”* the Chinese brochure mentions that *“the renovation of the museum aimed to match the exhibition and to deliver a vivid experience for the customers and at the same time allow them to understand the cost of war”* (HKTB, 2011b). The nature of the message thus ascribes a political meaning to both difference and omission. The term “aggressors” in English likely relates to China [and Japan] in the Western collective memory. In that context, language is consciously used as a worldmaking agent that reinforces the differentiated making of the place, people, knowledge and history. This dual approach is also reflective of the unequal power relationship, signified not only by language (Chinese vs. English) but also by the myths it purports to create and narrate. Myths are deliberately and unconsciously, politically and historically charged such that the resulting political signification and correctness trumps the ideal of historical truth. Rhetoric and its objectives are therefore not neutral (White, 1973).

## **Contemporary PRC**

The post-Handover political situation of Hong Kong warrants special attention to the status of the SAR as it faces the political and economic might of its next door genitor. At the same time, it consolidates its popular image with continued involvement in the global community. Its colonial parentheses in the territory’s thousands of years of Chinese

culture and history produced socio-political and cultural legacies Hong Kong cannot ignore. du Cros (2004) believes that Hong Kong's national myths have emerged in the post-Handover period to position Hong Kong as a progressive, free, predominantly Chinese, yet somehow multicultural part of China. This context consequently reveals a fourth myth, the PRC national myth. Temporally and characteristically postcolonial, this myth embodies the return of Hong Kong to China. It is symbolized by the Golden Bauhinia Square (5), the site at which Hong Kong was returned to China (see figure 1), which for mainland Chinese tourists is an iconic attraction that is symbolic of being "the remains of Western domination of the SAR, now back in Chinese hands" (Arlt, 2008, p.140). Based on Holt's (2004) explanation of the role of myths in cultural branding, Bauhinia Square symbolizes a broader contradiction with the national Chinese ideology such that the myth is deemed to be created. The contemporary PRC myth thus has implications for both China and Hong Kong. To the Hong Kong Tourism Board, the symbolism of the place lies in the cultural contradiction it represents as Hong Kong moves from the periphery of the British colonial empire to its emerging symbolic identity of a populist world, defined as an autonomous place where people's actions are perceived to be guided by intrinsic authentic [Chinese] values (Holt, 2004), on the periphery of a broader, altered Chinese PRC myth.

This dichotomy is not unexpected, as postcolonial Hong Kong continues to embody compelling (pre-PRC) myths that provide sustenance to these contradictions. The colonial legacy transforms tourism into an area of contested meanings in the postcolonial as Hong Kong continues to project itself as distinct from the image of China to instead celebrate its "otherness." The various manifestations of the colonial legacy thus empower Hong Kong to maintain its stronghold on the directive role it plays in the imaginative creation of tourism and heritage sites that in turn enable the [Hong Kong] nation to pursue the possible enunciations of articulated meanings and national significance. Its adopted title as "Asia's World City" is a conscious positioning of Hong Kong as an international destination, part of Asia [and not of China] that recognizes the motif of fused cultures (HKTb, 2011a).

The global nature of tourism accentuates this tension, as the various “scapes” of late capitalism magnify the complexities of relationships underlying the culture industries and national identities (Appadurai, 1990). The appeal of the colonial legacy is tangible and continues to have an impact, opening up a re-imagined postcolonial “transmodernity” (Venn, 2006a). It also provides the tourist industry with marketable elements and myths that appeal to tourists (Mok & Dewald, 1999). As a dynamic agent in the selection and production of rhetoric in place construction, tourism becomes a critical communicator of Hong Kong as postcolonial. It does so by re-conceptualizing power and place and by facilitating the co-articulation of collaborative compossibility in the production of the place through the agency of other cultural identities anchored in arts and education (Venn, 2006b) based on dynamic evolutive hybrid myths.

The language used, however, has a significant impact on the projection of tourism. There is stronger evidence of China nation building in Chinese language tourism materials. In the Chinese description of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum (opened after the Handover), *“Hong Kong is a Chinese City”* and *“a perception exists that before the British occupation of Hong Kong in 1842, Hong Kong was just a barren piece of stone... this view will be immediately eliminated from your mind. Indeed, long before the British occupation, agriculture and fisheries had been developed for hundreds of years.”* This information was not included in the English version. Likewise, *“The ‘Hong Kong Story’ exhibition is divided into eight galleries, beginning with the 400 million years Devonian and ending with the Handover to the motherland in 1997”* (Hong Kong History Museum, HKTB, 2011a); this text is included only in Chinese and is omitted from the English version. Chinese tourism narratives tend to emphasize Hong Kong’s long-standing connections with China. For instance, the English description of the Golden Bauhinia Square is factual and rather nostalgic, highlighting that *“Prince Charles was present to witness the relinquishing of what had often been described as the richest jewel in the British Crown.”* The Chinese version is more patriotic, noting *“The flag is hoisted at 8a.m. and brought down at 6p.m. every day, attracting many tourists and citizens.”* (ibid).

Tourism initiatives in Hong Kong therefore do not communicate a historically accurate version of culture. It is nonetheless disconcerting to observe how rhetorical devices and narratives are used in the cultural production of cultural representations. The choice to project cultural discourses of tourism by “the stilling of certain voices, the subjugation of alternative knowledge,” (McKay, 1994, p. 247) in either language reveals not only an impoverished historical interpretation in promotional activities, but also a “cultural cooking of images” (McKay, 1994, p. 223) that constitutes an abuse of power consequential to the contestation of Hong Kong’s colonial legacy. The contemporary PRC myth therefore enables Hong Kong tourism authorities to position the territory’s identity through selective symbolism (Hall & Tucker, 2004) so as to bring about natural changes (sublimation) that in practice will eventually totalize through systematic reconstitution (in combination with or without other myths). Therefore, the role of tourism as agent of representation and exteriorization of Hong Kong is signified through its “Hong Kongness” or its local Chineseness.

## **Conclusion**

To explore how “national myths” are employed in positioning Hong Kong as a tourist destination, this study examined the postcolonial as an area of contested meanings, which has an impact on how Hong Kong is presented through its tourism materials. In response to a call by Hollinshead (2009, p. 526) for further “longitudinal descriptivist interpretations” in political analyses in Tourism Studies, the paper extensively discusses and describes how tourism assumes a symbolic authority to constitutively and ideologically exteriorize (Hou, 2012) Hong Kong by signifying its identity through myths. The approach employed is distinctive, as it portrays Hong Kong as a “postcolonial tourism destination” for China and suggests that a neocolonial relationship may be in the making.

The study demonstrated that the unique geo-political and historical situation of Hong Kong has led to the creation of four types of national myths associated with the singular

identity achieved by its representation and differentiation through tourism (Hollishead, 2009) over time: The “archaic Chinese” myth, the “bustling Hong Kong” myth, the “Chinese plus” myth, and the “contemporary PRC myth. Taken together, these myths enable the tourism authorities in Hong Kong to use the uniqueness of Hong Kong as a powerful creator of hybrid “social knowledge” or “held truths” to strengthen the city’s appeal. This extends Hou’s (2012) constitutive exteriorization of [China] through the symbolic authority of tourism and suggests such interpretations and justifications are applicable to hybrid places. Indeed, the local indigenous Chinese culture and its historical legacy highlight national identity as prism through which the politics of space and culture in tourism are refracted. This dual nature of Hong Kong enables its tourism efforts, through languages (Chinese and English), to reflect both internally (on tourism itself) and externally (the exteriorization of its national expression) to provide contested meanings to identity that are clearly embedded in its postcoloniality. Interestingly, this study conveys the idea that in its relations with China, Hong Kong seems to exercise its “power of contestation” through tourism in the postcolonial through a neocolonial engagement to assert its local Chineseness. It shows the dual representation of tourism, which by encompassing the broader issues of identity, heritage and history, signifies a cultural history to the Chinese market different from its cultural genealogy (Appadurai, 1990) as an international icon.

Clearly, the “One Country, Two Systems” model has enabled Hong Kong to firmly embrace its unique local identity as a means of resistance to the metropolitan center (Fung, 2001). China’s decision to adopt a “non-interfering” approach is also unambiguously related to the broader and thornier issue of ultimate re-unification with Taiwan. These facts, however, cannot fully explain the reasons for the widening identity gap between Hong Kong and China. As this study demonstrates, today’s tremolos are history at work. The discourse of tourism is quintessentially politically charged. This study argues (through the Chinese plus myth) that the current trend towards global transnationalism could provide the solution to the identity conundrum on the southern coast of China. As such, tourism as agency exhibits hybrid authority (Venn, 2006b) to bring about changes in public discourses on its significance. With its fundamental

objective of promoting the uniqueness of a place, tourism marketing highlights the dilemma of promoting a unique Hong Kong out of postcolonial hybridity. An alternate explanation lies in the fact that tourism marketing is heavily influenced by politics, with a small and occasionally with a capital “P” (Crick, 2003 and Pike, 2005), which highlights the reality that the tourism industry must be cognizant of public sentiment when positioning a destination in the market. In that perspective, a broadening of critical tourism research to other postcolonial “hybrid” contexts of multicultural and plural societies would be useful to ascertain whether, and if so, how they use tourism to declare their differences (through myths?) in the face of increasing competition in the international arena.

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