

Jurisdiction Dispute in the British Colonial History of Hong Kong: Anarchy of Kowloon Walled City and Its Architectural Transformation

Abstract

When studying Kowloon Walled City, existing scholarship evaluates its political, architectural, and social aspects separately. This paper aims to synthesize these three aspects and provide a comprehensive understanding to Kowloon Walled City, by examining the impact of British colonial history on the transformation of architecture and living conditions within Kowloon Walled City. It begins with an investigation into the causes that led to the anarchic status of Kowloon Walled City in the 1960s, followed by an evaluation of the architectural transformation with reference to the Building Ordinance 1950 edition. Through a synthesis of historical review and analysis of visual records, this paper validates that the anarchy status attributed to the British colonial history had the major impact on the deterioration of underprivileged living conditions in Kowloon Walled City.

Keywords

Kowloon Walled City, Hong Kong, architecture, British colony, jurisdiction, anarchy

1. Introduction

Kowloon Walled City was once the most crowded residential complex in the world. The exceptionally high population density and its image as a lawless enclave caught attention from scholars in the discipline of both architecture and popular culture¹. Established in 1847 and demolished in 1994 shortly before the handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China in 1997, its lifespan almost overlapped with the British colonial history of Hong Kong (1841-1997). Till now, Kowloon Walled City still retains its reputation as an ungoverned slum in the narrative, famously referred to by locals as the “place not governed by any of the three parties (三不管)”.² The three parties included the British government, the colonial government of Hong Kong, and the Chinese government.

The interaction between the three governmental parties during the British colonial period brought diverse opinions from the public. On the one hand, the British colonization of Hong Kong had long been regarded as “unequal treaties” forced upon the crumbling Qing government³ by many historians (Greenberg 1983; Tang 1994). Many scholars argued that it

¹ For instance, the concept of cyberpunk from William Gibson’s multiple award winning novel *Neuromancer* (1984) has been associated with the image of Kowloon Walled City in late 19th century.

² The Chinese translation was used by the Hong Kong Tourism Board on the official webpage of Kowloon Walled City Park, and appeared in most Chinese webpages discussing Kowloon Walled City. <https://www.discoverhongkong.com/tc/interactive-map/kowloon-walled-city-park.html>

³ China, ruled by the Qing government (1644-1911), lost to the Great Britain in the First Opium War during 1839 to 1842.

weakened the sense of national identity of Hong Kong people, as reflected in Hong Kong government's failure attempts to promote Putonghua in secondary schools (Chan 2002; Leung 2009). On the other hand, historian Jürgen Osterhammel (2005, 15) noted that not "every domination by foreigners has been perceived by its subjects as illegitimate foreign domination." In the case of Hong Kong, it could be observed that the colonial expansion in Hong Kong was facilitated by sustained collaboration with the Chinese locals throughout the early colonial history. For many of the prominent Chinese businessmen, British domination had transformed Hong Kong into a vibrant commercial centre, contributing to the prosperity of economy (Carroll 2005). According to the Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies⁴ (Jones 1949), British officials claimed that they had "turned it into one of the most important and thriving ports and markets of the world" (39) from a "barren rock". The impact brought by the colonialization was considered positive by many of the British officials (Tang 1994).

Yet, in 1957, due to Britain's imperial decline and the challenges of defending Hong Kong, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Harold Macmillan expressed that the British government was "considering abandoning Hong Kong" (Mark 2005, 51). Similarly, Hong Kong historian Chan Lau Kit-ching (1990) depicted a subdued attitude from the Chinese government in the 1950s, with only sporadic and half-hearted statements regarding Hong Kong's jurisdiction. Both the Chinese and British government showed a decline in willingness to overtake the jurisdiction of Hong Kong, and a microcosm of such ambiguity of power distribution was also reflected in the anarchy of Kowloon Walled City. From the early 1960s onward, a series of unregulated construction took place in Kowloon Walled City replacing squatter huts with extensively compact high-rise buildings. These buildings housed a chaotic community plagued by crime, unhygienic conditions, and poor living standards.

The British colonial history brought benefits and drawbacks to Hong Kong. This paper takes Kowloon Walled City as the main case, which presents a distinguishing urban landscape on the overall impacts – advantaged and disadvantaged. For this paper, the research question is "How did the anarchy status, stemming from British colonial history of Hong Kong, shaped the transformation of the architectural form of Kowloon Walled City?" It holds a hypothesis presuming that the lack of governance within Kowloon Walled City could be attributed to the British colonial history, which had a detrimental effect on the transformation of Kowloon Walled City, extended beyond its architecture to harming the quality of life of the residents. This resulted in a transformation characterized by underprivileged living conditions, unregulated construction practices, and a breeding ground for criminal activity. Kowloon

⁴ The memorandum with former reference number CP (49) 120 is now held by The National Archives with current reference number being CAB 129/35/10.

Walled City was officially depicted by the Hong Kong Tourism Board (2024) as “a lawless enclave for fugitives and criminal gangs through the 20th century”.

This paper attempts to synthesize the visual records by observing the architectural form via various archival documents, media reports, documentaries, films and analysing the interview with the former residents in the city. Findings on the unregulated architectural features would be evaluated using the Building Ordinance 1950 edition. The paper shall first cover the historical context of the British colonial history of Hong Kong. It follows by how the British colonial history transformed the architecture of Kowloon Walled City, and how the architectural transformation affected the people’s way of living within Kowloon Walled City. It concludes by analysing the role of the anarchy status on the overall transformation of Kowloon Walled City.

2. Literature Review

Existing scholarship analyses aspects such as political factors behind the demolition of Kowloon Walled City, changes in its jurisdiction and planning over history, and the quality of living within Kowloon Walled City. However, the historical and architectural aspects are usually separately discussed. What remains to be elucidated is the linkage between the two, explaining the role of British colonial history in shaping the architectural transformation of Kowloon Walled City.

Scholars had critical thoughts regarding the government’s decision “to clear the area and build Kowloon Walled City Park” (Leisure and Cultural Services Department 2016) after the demolition of Kowloon Walled City. In the Park, only a few old cannons, the structure of the *yamen* (衙門 administrative office in the imperial era) and several stone tablets of the *Longjin Yixue* (龍津義學 Longjin Charity School) were preserved. These exhibited pieces only present the reminiscence to the early stage of Kowloon Walled City before being transformed into the image of lawless enclave in the 1950s. For many scholars, the action was an attempt to erase the experiences of crime, corruption, and unsanitary conditions of the Kowloon Walled City from the official record, while replacing these experiences with “the Jiangnan garden style of the early Qing dynasty” (Leisure and Cultural Services Department 2016). The park is now understood as a functional park and not as a place that offers social value related to its heritage and understanding (Ko 2020). The action was considered selective and tends to exclude the adverse side of the history of the Kowloon Walled City, which is a narrative favored by the Chinese government under the “return to the motherland” background (Abbas 1997, 66; Harter 2000; Chen 2005; Fraser and Li 2017). However, this paper holds the stance that the period of Kowloon Walled City being depicted as “lawless enclave” is prominent in understanding the comprehensive picture of Hong Kong

history. The densely populated Kowloon Walled City was shaped by and thus reflected several important historical events in Hong Kong, from the British colonial history, to the invasion of Imperial Japanese, and even the emergence of refugees from mainland China after the establishment of People's Republic of China in 1949. The value of the record on Kowloon Walled City should not be limited to the adverse image of people committing crime and living an underprivileged life, but the reflection towards the impacts of multiple historical events.

In the field of historical context, Kowloon Walled City also drew scholars' attention on studying its jurisdiction and planning. Cheng (2018) analysed the change in sovereignty and governance through studies in the history field and concluded that Kowloon Walled City reached the status of anarchy under the conflicts between Britain and Chinese. Although Kowloon Walled City had always been recognized as an anarchy, a group of Hong Kong scholars argued that Kowloon Walled City was indeed always under the city planning of the colonial British Hong Kong government and the Chinese government (Lai 2016; Lai and Chua 2017; Lau et al. 2018). For instance, it was mentioned by Lai and Chua that the Nationalist Government had a "Draft Outline Plan for Reinstatement of Administration" regarding the planning of Kowloon Walled City. Yet the Draft Outline Plan came to nothing in the end due to the resumption of the civil war and defeat of the Nationalists by the Communists in 1949. Lai also argued that the colonial government tightly controlled the spatial boundaries of the building as a subtle admission of an officially and diplomatically denied otherness in ownership. This paper acknowledges that the macroscopic level of city planning might existed behind the battle over jurisdiction, yet this paper focuses on the microscopic control over the architectural design. For instance, this paper demonstrates that the architectural features of Kowloon Walled City like the windows and staircases violated the Building Ordinance 1950 Edition via extracting visible traces from archival documents and visual records. This paper shall proof that Kowloon Walled City was still lack of planning and execution in the microscopic level, with the Airport Heights Restriction being the only regulation strictly enforced to limit the building height to 14 stories.

Relatively few examples of research studied the quality of living within Kowloon Walled City. For instance, Zhang (2023) argued, despite the underprivileged conditions, that Kowloon Walled City was founded as a living community with order, rules, and regulations as it was controlled by triads with extremely strict gang rules. Zhang argued that the residents had a satisfactory quality of life based on the mental aspects as "the neighbours were very close and understood each other". This paper acknowledges the mental satisfaction of the residents in Kowloon Walled City. Nonetheless, within the context of an architectural history

thesis, this paper shall still focus on the objective evaluation of the architectural features and spatial quality to comment on their quality of living.

On the other hand, Lau et al. (2018) argued that the disorderly-built structure of Kowloon Walled City was a product of unorganised small builders in Hong Kong construction industry. He provided a detailed basis for comprehending the plan layouts of the flats in Kowloon Walled City and the construction industry of Hong Kong. He also mentioned that the layout of the flats was only a starting point for determining the quality of living in Kowloon Walled City. This paper acknowledges builders as a factor behind the architectural transformation. Nonetheless, it asserts that the overarching influence of British colonial history was the primary reason behind the proliferation of unorganized small builders within the enclave. Furthermore, this paper shall take a step further by not confining to the documents like reports statistics and plans. Investigation on other dimensions like image features and video recordings shall be included to expand the comprehension on Kowloon Walled City.

3. Methodology

This paper shall evaluate the transformation of Kowloon Walled City in multiple levels, beginning with the historical and political context of its formation and the anarchy status, following by the impacts brought by the anarchy status of Kowloon Walled City. The impacts are further divided into the architectural and social aspects. This paper shall adapt a mixed qualitative approach of content analysis and narrative analysis, by observing the architectural form via images and documentary combined with analysing the interview with the former residents in the city.

Despite the demolition of Kowloon Walled City, this paper attempts to synthesize the visual records by observing the architectural form via various media reports, documentaries, films and combined with analysing the interview with the former residents in the city. Collections include films *Brothers from the Walled City* 城寨出來者, *Long Arm of the Law* 省港旗兵; documentaries/interviews *City of Imagination: Kowloon Walled City 20 Years Later*, *The Common Sense* 鏗鏘集; and photo records *City of Darkness: Life in Kowloon Walled City*.

After extracting visible traces on the architecture and spaces, they will be evaluated under the Building Ordinance 1950 Edition. The findings would be used to analyse the impact of the architectural design of Kowloon Walled City as a high-density residential cluster on shaping people's way of living under the British Colonial era.

4. Historical Development

Before analysing the architectural transformation, this section serves to provide the historical context of Kowloon Walled City within the British colonial era of Hong Kong, from its origin to the population growth within the area. It also explains the interaction between the three governmental parties, from where Chinese insisted to retain jurisdiction in the midst of a British administered territory, to “a place governed by none of the three parties” in 1960s.

4.1 Formation of Kowloon Walled City

The origin of Kowloon Walled city could be traced back to Qing dynasty, when a signal station was established at the northeastern corner of Kowloon peninsula in 1668. Until the British takeover of Hong Kong Island in 1841, the historical significance of the station remained peripheral (Sinn 1987). Only when administrative officers and military officers of Hsin-an (新安) county were transferred there did the signal station transform into a garrison town containing about 150 people in 1843.

Later in 1846, with the aim to further strengthen the coastal defence of the area against the British military, viceroy *Chi-ying* (兩廣總督耆英 the governor general of Guangdong (廣東) and Guangxi (廣西)), raised the proposal of constructing a walled city mounted with cannon. Kowloon Walled City became the official name after the completion of the wall construction in 1847. The establishment of Kowloon Walled City could therefore be attributed to the British colonization of Hong Kong. By 1898, Kowloon Walled City primarily served as accommodation for the military and their dependents.

4.2 Second Convention of Peking

The influence of British colonial history escalated when the Second Convention of Peking was signed in 1898. As Chinese lost in the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895, the Great Britain, in the name of “proper defence and protection of the Colony”, requested for further leasing of land. However, with the intense Chinese insistence on jurisdiction in Kowloon Walled City, the British consented to include a clause that “within the city of Kowloon the Chinese officials shall continue to exercise jurisdiction”, while “within the remainder of the newly-leased territory Great Britain shall have sole jurisdiction” (6). This established the basis for the anarchy of Kowloon Walled City in the 1960s, as Kowloon Walled City became an enclave, an isolated territory of China entirely surrounded by the British colonial Hong Kong.

The jurisdiction in Kowloon Walled City was multi-layered. This Chinese enclave was considered by the British an imperilment to the colonial governance. Soon in 1899, the British sent a force of 300 men to take over and announce British jurisdiction over Kowloon Walled City under “Kowloon City Order in Council” unilaterally. All Chinese officials were

forced to depart under the attack. Although this remained an unofficial one-way revision of the Convention which the Chinese government never acknowledged, no actions were taken by the Chinese to reinstate an actual administration in Kowloon Walled City after the departure of the officials (Sinn 1987).

Despite voicing persistent complaints and protests against the British action, the Qing government refrained from exercising any actual control over Kowloon Walled City. Conversely, the British government, wary of diplomatic complications, took on minimal administrative responsibilities within the enclave. Kowloon Walled City turned into “a near vacuum of administrative function and authority” (Sinn 1987; 38).

4.3 Population Growth

By 1898, the 2.6 hectares of land within Kowloon Walled City housed a population of 544, comprising of approximately 200 dependents of the military (Sinn 1987). The population remained at around 500 until the 1930s.

In 1933, under the outbreak of cholera in Hong Kong, the colonial government announced plans to demolish the houses in Kowloon Walled City for sanitary reasons. Under the resistance from residents, the colonial government’s action was not effective and got postponed to 1940 (Jones 2011). It was followed by the invasion of Hong Kong by Imperial Japan in 1941, in which the Japanese army dismantled the external wall structure of Kowloon Walled City for the expansion of Kai Tak Airport. After the series of demolition, Kowloon Walled City was only left with ruins of the external granite wall, the former Longjin Yixue, an elderly home, a private old house, and a Tin Hau Temple (天后廟) (Girard and Lambot 1993; Jones 2011). The place which no longer had its wall became desolate and highly accessible by homeless people (Lai and Chua 2017).

The war against Japan ended in 1945, followed by the establishment of People’s Republic of China in 1949. The series of wars led to refugees fleeing from China to Hong Kong. The uninhabited enclave of Kowloon Walled City without much administrative control from the governments then became an appropriate destination for refugees to squatter and settle. The population of Kowloon Walled City increased from less than 500 in the 1930s to about 2000 by the late 1940s (Sinn 1987). This marked the beginning of the rapid population growth within Kowloon Walled City.

The population growth in Kowloon Walled City aggravated in the following decades. The overall population of post-war Hong Kong rose from 600,000 in 1945 to almost 4,000,000 by 1969 (Podmore 1971, 26). By the late 1960s, increasing prosperity and a soaring population

fuelled a rash of property development across the territory in the rest of Hong Kong. However, given the unique anarchy status in Kowloon Walled City in 1960s, both the construction costs and the property prices of high-rise housing in Kowloon Walled City were made cheap as compared to the rest of Hong Kong. Both the anarchy status and the reason for the low costs would be explained in the upcoming sections of this paper. As a result, the population within Kowloon Walled City rose to the estimate of 45,000 before its final demolition in 1994 (Jones 2011).

4.4 Anarchy of Kowloon Walled City

Kowloon Walled City eventually turned into the status of “not governed by any of the three parties” in 1960s. The British government lost the will to govern, the Chinese government lost the ability to govern, the colonial Hong Kong government was left in an embarrassed situation struggling to govern.

From the British perspective, they had the jurisdiction since the “Kowloon City Order in Council” in 1899 after forcing the departure of Chinese officials in Kowloon Walled City. Yet, the jurisdiction kept facing resistance from the Chinese, as the new “Order” was not a treaty officially signed. For instance, a crowd set fire to the British Consulate in Guangzhou and the Chinese Government in Nanking officially protested to the British government in response to the incident where Chinese refugees were expelled and injured by the British officials in 1948 (Jones 2011). As the population escalated notably since the 1940s alongside the increasing hatred against Britain in the diplomatic conflicts over the years, the British government’s control over Kowloon Walled City became more challenging. This was also reflected in the statement of Harold Macmillan, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, of “considering abandoning Hong Kong” due to Britain's imperial decline and the challenges of defending Hong Kong (Mark 2005, 51). There was a notable decline in the British willingness to govern Kowloon Walled City in the late 1950s.

From the Chinese perspective, Kowloon Walled City as an enclave isolated from Chinese territories was always difficult to govern. After the expulsion of all Chinese officials from Kowloon Walled City under the attack in 1899, the complete absence of administrative authority within the district significantly hampered any attempts to intervene in the governance of Kowloon Walled City. It was followed by a series of turbulence took place in China, from the downfall of Qing dynasty in 1912, the invasion from Imperial Japan in 1941, to the establishment of People’s Republic of China in 1949. The rapid changes in government structure of China over the period kept impairing their ability to reinstate actual administration in Kowloon Walled City.

The colonial Hong Kong government were ultimately subordinate to the British government. They were appointed by the British government for the local administration, and shared same challenges with the British government. For instance, in 1963 the colonial government seized its clearance plan on Kowloon Walled City due to resistance from the local community. As the British government lost the will to govern, the colonial government could only exercise minimal administrative actions. In addition, Greg and Lambot (1993) suggested that the reluctance of service provision by government “was a reluctance to further encourage permanent settlement in the City”. Their hypothesis was supported by the multiple clearance attempts by the colonial government. In the personal recollection of a Kowloon City District Officer worked between 1983 and 1986, Gordon Jones (2011) also claimed to have reservations about the proposal to improve the water supply infrastructure of Kowloon Walled City, as it would “have had the effect of legitimising the existing arrangements in the Walled City”. The lack of intervention from colonial Hong Kong government could be considered a strategy rationalizing their clearance plan.

5. Architectural Transformation in the British Colonial Era

As mentioned in previous chapter, Kowloon Walled City turned into a status of anarchy in the British colonial history. On the one hand, it was not bound by the regulations of colonial Hong Kong government; on the other hand, the Chinese government had difficulties in executing administrative powers on the enclave surrounded by British colonial territories. The anarchy status then led to the series of architectural transformation under constructions that barely complied to the building regulations.

5.1 Compactness and High Density of Buildings

Unconstrained by most of the building codes and regulations, land developers faced only one restriction: with respect to the proximity with Kai Tak Airport, the building height could not exceed 14 stories. Nonetheless, early residential buildings only went up to 4 to 5 stories high. There were still room for developers to extensively construct new structures on top of existing low-rise buildings.

Without the need to meet standard building code applicable to the rest of Hong Kong, the cost of construction could be largely reduced for profit maximisation. Meanwhile, from the perspective of the buyers, the property prices within Kowloon Walled City were considerably lower than those in the rest of Hong Kong, with the added incentive of avoiding property taxes. As a result, landlords in Kowloon Walled City could still generate profit by renting apartments at one-third to one-half the market rate of surrounding neighbourhoods. (Ho 1986; Harter 2000). It created a huge demand for improper property construction that blatantly violates the Building Ordinance in Kowloon Walled City. Some buildings were

reported to be constructed without proper piling and foundation works to speed up the process of construction (Mak 1975, 12:28).

The growth in density of buildings could be observed in the series of aerial images from 1963, 1973 and 1989 (Figure 1-3). According to the study by Kowloon City District Office (1972), an estimate of 563 buildings were reported within the official boundary Kowloon Walled City, with approximately 86 buildings exceeding 10 storeys. By 1989, it could be observed that the number of buildings exceeding 10 storeys might have tripled or quadrupled. It resulted in a compact structure subsequently affecting other architectural features explained below.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

5.2 Inadequate Provision of Window and Limited Sunlight

The inadequate provision of window was one of the consequences of the compact building form of Kowloon Walled City. According to Building Ordinance 1950 edition in Hong Kong, “every storey of every domestic building hereafter erected shall be provided with one window at least opening either directly or across a veranda or balcony into the external air and the total area, clear of any obstruction to the light, of such window or windows shall be at least one tenth of the floor area of every such storey” (486). However, as reflected in the interview in *Common Sense: Walled City*, the residents complained on buildings having no

windows at all (Mak 1975, 11:48). Even for newly constructed tall buildings, windows might be included but most of them could not actually be opened (Figure 4-5). It could be deduced that the land developers sacrificed the residents' exposure to sunlight for maximizing the number of housing units built.



Figure 4



Figure 5

5.3 Inadequate Provision of Staircases and Elevators

The rapid unregulated construction also led to inadequate provision of staircases and elevators. According to Girard and Lambot (1993), there were only 2 elevators within Kowloon Walled City. Access to upper floors of the 10 to 14-storey buildings was almost always by stairs. Some of the newly constructed buildings did not include a staircase and shared the staircase with existing buildings instead (Mak 1975). However, according to the Building Ordinance 1950 edition, "every building hereafter erected, which exceeds one storey in height shall be provided with a staircase" (477). This could be attributed to the cost-saving intention of the developers for the rapid construction. With the absence of staircases, more area could be saved for new building construction to maximize the revenue.

As a result, it was reported that residents relied on the interconnected walkways and staircases between buildings to travel across most parts of the building complex possible without coming down to street level (Figure 6) (Girard and Lambot 1993; Ho 1991a; Jones 2011; Lau et al. 2018, 162). This could be observed in film *Long Arm of the Law* 省港旗兵 (Mak 1984, 1:33:56) that was filmed inside Kowloon Walled City before its demolition.

Multiple building entrances were connected to the same staircase in the scene where the criminal was chased by the police within Kowloon Walled City.

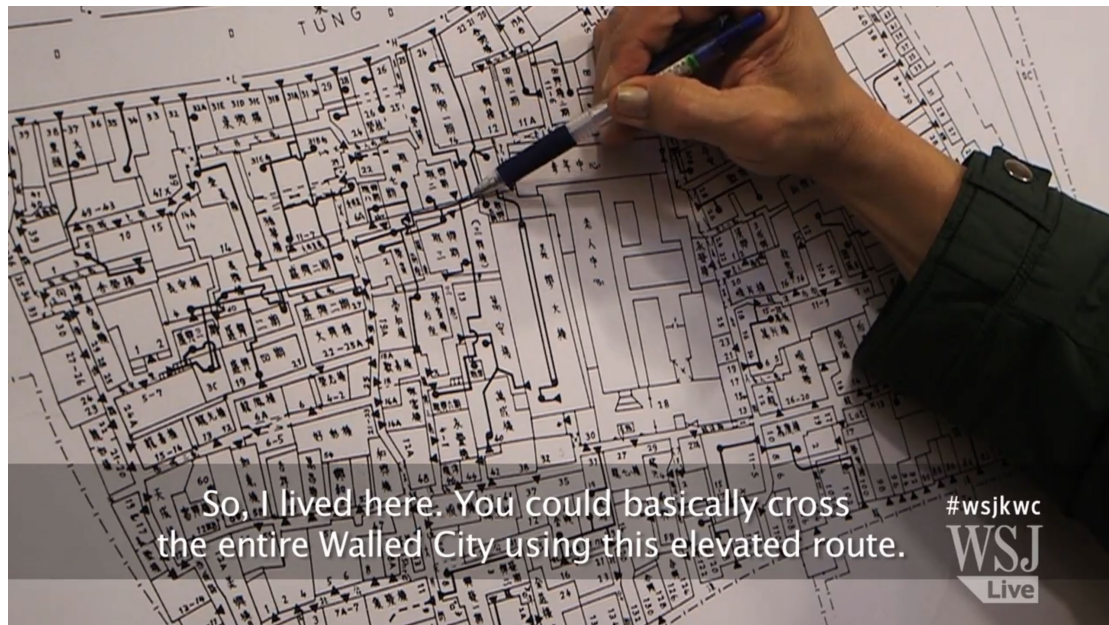
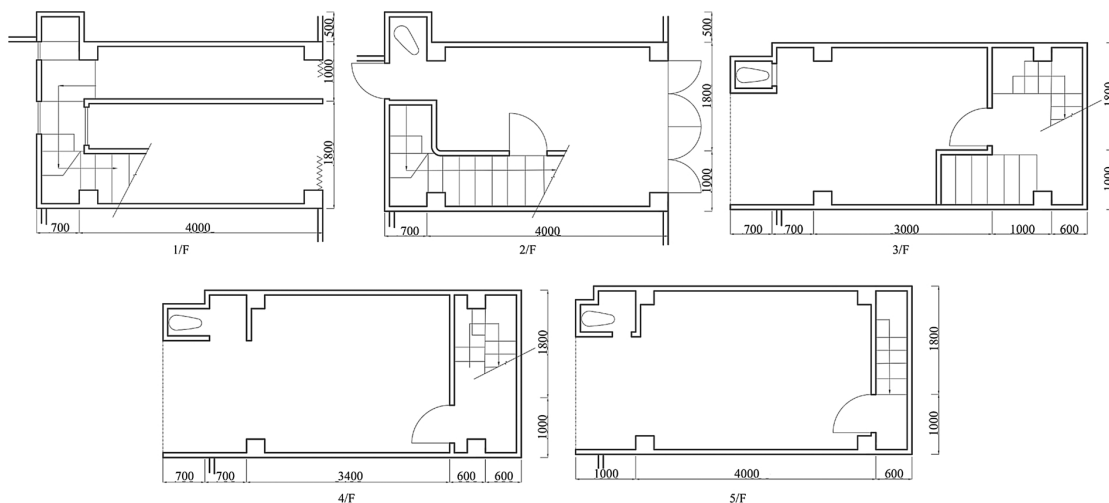


Figure 6

In addition, the staircase design in Kowloon Walled City was found to be violating the building regulations. For instance, some of the staircases had a width of 600 millimeters (Figure 7), below the minimum requirement of 914 millimeters according to the Building Ordinance in 1950⁵. On top of that, instead of a proper landing, the door of the unit on 2/F in the figure was connected to the treads in the middle of a stair flight. The inadequacy of space for staircase was another proof of developers trying to maximize profit, by reserving more space for new building construction.



⁵ According to the Building Ordinance 1950 edition, no flight, landing, lobby or passage from one flight to another shall be of less width than 3 feet, which is equivalent to 914 millimetres.

Figure 7

5.4 Absence of Legal Water Supply

Another consequence of the unregulated construction was the absence of a legal water supply infrastructure. According to the response from the Water Supplies Department, the installation of the water supply network was difficult because the construction of these new buildings did not include an underground drainage system (Mak 1975). Gordon Jones (2011), the District Officer for the Kowloon City District between 1983 and 1986, mentioned that Hong Kong government tried to avoid “legitimizing the existing arrangements in the Kowloon Walled City” (272) as they had been considering the clearance plan. The government’s refusal to provide legal water supplies meant the water supply was only limited to 2 standpipes in early years, increased to 8 by 1987, within which, only 1 of these was located inside the boundary of Kowloon Walled City (Crawford 2017).

The residents had two options. They were either compelled to manually transport buckets of water from public standpipes situated outside the city, or they could opt to pay private entities for makeshift access to drinking water from these public standpipes. The makeshift access was made with pipelines linking the standpipes to individual households, that were positioned overhead in the alleys, frequently exhibiting signs of leakage, corrosion, and improvised repairs (Figure 8).



Figure 8

5.5 Makeshift Caged Balconies

The caged balconies found on the façade in the perimeter of Kowloon Walled City could be identified in many photographs (Figure 9). These were makeshift balconies that the residents installed either by themselves or with the help from the unlicensed private entities within Kowloon Walled City. The phenomenon could be attributed to the compacted footprints of the buildings under rapid construction by the developers. The seemingly unreliable external structure provided valuable extra living area for the residents, given the population density within Kowloon Walled City was so high.

However, according to the Building Ordinance 1950 edition, no encroachment shall be made on, over or into any street by any verandah or balcony. These makeshift caged balconies were undeniably illegal if they were built outside Kowloon Walled City. Yet, within Kowloon Walled City the phenomenon was commonly found but also tolerated under the status of anarchy.



Figure 9

6 Impact of Kowloon Walled City's Architectural Form on Residents' Way of Living

The transformation of Kowloon Walled City, driven by the anarchic conditions arising from its unique position within British colonial Hong Kong, extended beyond its architecture to significantly impact the lives of its residents. These impacts primarily manifested in the form of an unhygienic environment, the proliferation of illegal businesses, and a shift in the composition of the workforce within Kowloon Walled City.

6.1 Thriving Unlicensed Industries Under Low Rent and Exemption from Regulations

Kowloon Walled City's lack of regulatory oversight fostered a thriving yet illicit business environment. For instance, plenty of dentists who fled from mainland in the 1950s had licenses valid in mainland China. However, on the one hand, the licenses obtained in China

was not approved by Hong Kong government. On the other hand, as refugees it was difficult for them to obtain a legal license in Hong Kong. Having the skill sets but not the authorisation, Kowloon Walled City was their only destination for setting up the dental clinics. According to newspaper report (Hui and Lau 1991, 7), a “Dentist Street” within Kowloon Walled City housed over 80 unlicensed dentists offering half-market-price services.

With a lower rent and the exemption to obtain a legal premise, many other businesses were enticed to set up their firms within Kowloon Walled City. Manufacturing industries thrived within Kowloon Walled City, encompassing production of textile, plastic, and metal hardware (Mak 1975; Crawford 2017). Food manufacturing industries also thrived within Kowloon Walled City, renowned for noodles, dumplings and fish balls production that were served in restaurants all over Hong Kong (Portisch 1988; Girard and Lambot 1993; Harter 2000, 98). Most of the industries within Kowloon Walled City benefited from the exceptionally low production costs, which made their products competitive as compared to those outside Kowloon Walled City.

6.2 Atypical Workforce Structure Comprising Mainly of Children and Elderly

While the business owners focused on a low-budget production, they could only offer employees with low salary. Younger generations, aware of the higher wages available outside Kowloon Walled City, were more likely to seek employment elsewhere (Wong and Ng 1992; Harter 2000, Mak 1975). Consequently, the workforce within Kowloon Walled City comprised mainly of children and elderly, who might have faced limitations in finding work opportunities outside Kowloon Walled City.

In Girard and Lambot’s (1993) publication, one interviewee Lee Yu Chun depicted that her family candy business had employed up to 20 temporary sweet wrappers, “many of whom were children who would drop by after school” (143). Other documentaries also featured plastic manufacturing factories and various food processing factories where the workers brought their children or elderlies to work (Figure 10-11) (Portisch 1988, 9:08; Ho 1991b; Ho 1991c; Ho 1991d). The absence of regulations made the atypical workforce structure only viable within Kowloon Walled City.



Figure 10



Figure 11

6.3 Non-governmental Organizations to Regulate the Community

Without much intervention from government authorities, Kowloon Walled City was regulated by mainly 2 non-governmental organizations, namely the *Kaifong* association (街坊 Neighbourhood welfare association) and the Triads.

The *Kaifong* association was established during the protest against the clearance plan in 1963. To foster a sense of community within Kowloon Walled City, the *Kaifong* association undertook initiatives including funding lighting and signage for alleys, sponsoring social events, and producing publications for residents (Harter 2000). However, the main role of the *Kaifong* association remained political, aimed at unifying the residents to fight for their rights and more compensation from the government due to the clearance (Girard and Lambot 1993).

The Triads existed before the establishment of *Kaifong* association and dominated the regulation of Kowloon Walled City. On the one hand, the Triads contributed to the construction of the infrastructures of Kowloon Walled City. According to Lau et al. (2018), a significant portion of the builders or owners of building companies responsible for the construction of the new buildings within Kowloon Walled City were Triad members. The Triads were also responsible for the illicit water supply through the overhead pipes (Girard and Lambot 1993). On the other hand, the Triads also actively engaged in criminal activities like drug selling and prostitution, which shall be further elaborated later.

6.4 Inadequacy of Makeshift Solutions

With the assistance from the 2 non-governmental organizations, the residents often came up with makeshift installations to meet their needs, that were made with low quality serving temporary purposes. Examples included the caged balconies and precariously positioned water pipes mentioned in previous chapters. Although these makeshift solutions kept the

community functioning, they came with several drawbacks, including instability in service supply and potential hazards.

For instance, the pipes were made with poor workmanship that were often reported to be corroded and leaking (Mak 1975). The water supplies coming from makeshift piping also remained unstable, fluctuating between 1 to 8 hours per day. In addition, according to an interview record with Chu Yiu Shan who worked as a property developer in Kowloon Walled City, the owners of the makeshift water supply “would sometimes lock the main tap and disappear for a few days”, before confronting the residents to pay for extra \$300 per unit to “fix it” (Girard and Lambot 1993, 40). The management of water supply in the Kowloon Walled City was a gang-controlled water supply system that exploited the rights of the residents without proper supervision from the government (Harter 2000, 112).

Without stable and sufficient water supply, residents still resorted to daily routines of fetching water in buckets and navigating the labyrinthine stairwells (Mak 1975). Similarly, the lack of a stable electrical grid necessitated the precarious sharing of electricity through dangling power cords stretched between adjacent windows (Figure 12) (Mak 1975). Both the act of passing electric

On top of that, with the ingenious yet precarious makeshift solutions, safety concerns lurked around every corner. Unregulated caged balconies could be structurally unstable and could potentially collapse. Overloaded and unorganised electrical cables that exposed to the air caused electric shocks (Ho 1991e). These makeshift adaptations, though resourceful, came at a cost, creating a constant tension between basic needs met and new dangers fostered.



Figure 12

6.5 Pollutions and Unhygienic Living Conditions

The unhygienic conditions in Kowloon Walled City were another consequence of the lack of development and assistance from government under the anarchy status. Without proper installation of drainage system, the makeshift water pipes connecting to the 2 public standpipes were commonly found to be leaking, corroded, and ingeniously patched, leaving puddles of water on the floor. In addition, there were only nullahs and open channels in Kowloon Walled City. Alongside the lack of proper drainage system, residents resorted to pouring sewage and rubbish everywhere (Figure 13) (Mak 1975; Portisch 1988). Rats and cockroaches could be easily found in the valleys.

On top of that, there were only 2 public toilets to serve the 45,000 residents within Kowloon Walled City. Due to a lack of maintenance and follow up from government, one of the toilets remained as a dry toilet that required manual transfer of the excreta for disposal. Parents thus allowed kids to excrete in the valleys when the access to public toilet was limited (Figure 14). Corpse of drug addicts were reported to be found lying on the floor in the public toilets, aggravating the unhygienic conditions (Mak 1975; Jou 2014, 6:08).



Figure 13



Figure 14

In addition, food manufacturing industries and restaurants exempted from premises never had any hygiene inspector visit (Girard and Lambot 1993). Mice, rats and cockroaches could be easily found in the food production factories, indicating a poorly controlled hygiene level (Figure 15-16) (Portisch 1988, 4:00). The unregulated disposal of sewage and food waste further aggravated the unsanitary environment. The emergence of manufacturing industries also contributed to noise and air pollution within Kowloon Walled City (Mak 1975). The overall pollution level was high given the Kowloon Walled City was so compact and people lived closely together.

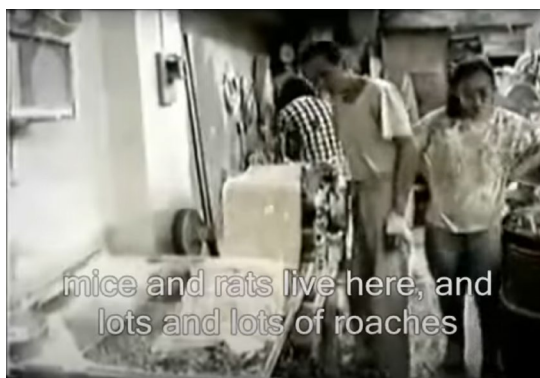


Figure 15



Figure 16

6.6 Dominance of Triads and Criminal Activities

With the residents' dependence on Triads organizations, the power of the Triads remained dominant within Kowloon Walled City. This provided support to their involvement in other criminal activities like drug selling and prostitution (Jou 2014).

After World War II, colonial authorities prohibited the operation of brothels and opium smoking in the rest of Hong Kong. As Kowloon Walled City remained as an exemption from regulations, the prohibition applied to the rest of Hong Kong drove the criminal activities into

Kowloon Walled City. Outsiders would visit Kowloon Walled City for the opium dens and brothels that could not operate legally elsewhere (Girard and Lambot 1993; Harter 2000). Drug taking was especially pervasive, with an estimate of 5,000 drug addicts that could be commonly found in the alleys or public toilets, establishing the adverse image of Kowloon Walled City as a haven of crimes. A concerted police campaign undertaken in the 1970s seized 500 pounds of heroin and nearly 4,000 pounds of opium in Kowloon Walled City (Crawford 2017). Criminal activities were the themes of most movies filmed within Kowloon Walled City before its demolition for instance, *Brothers from the Walled City* 城寨出來者, *Long Arm of the Law* 省港旗兵 (Nam 1982; Mak 1984). Other activities that were prohibited in the rest of Hong Kong but allowed within Kowloon Walled City include dog meat eating and selling of racing pigeons for gambling purposes (Portisch 1988; Girard and Lambot 1993, 200).

Furthermore, the presence of Triads added extra expenses to the residents within Kowloon Walled City. They demanded protection money by forcing the water supply owners to negotiate with them (Mak, 1975; Girard and Lambot 1993, 40). It was reported in 1980 that a Triad gang boss resorted to intimidation tactics by threatening to “chop up” anyone who dared oppose a rise in fees for the illicit water supply (Girard and Lambot 1993, 70). Even in the early 1970s when the Hong Kong government arranged patrols around the Kowloon Walled City, the police force was reported to be “more likely to compete with Triad bosses for protection money than they were to arrest syndicate leaders” (Harter 2000, 100). The lack of law and government supervision led to chaos and exploitation of the rights of the residents.

7. End of Ambiguity Over Jurisdiction Leading to the Demolition

The demise of the Kowloon Walled City occurred when the battle over jurisdiction was nearing its end. The final clearance plan was initiated in 1986 when the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Donald Tsang, expressed concern about the "potential for creating significant anti-British propaganda after the resumption of Chinese sovereignty" (Jones 2011, 273). As the Handover of Hong Kong back to China approached in the late 1980s, the impending resumption of Chinese sovereignty over the rest of Hong Kong meant that Kowloon Walled City would no longer remain isolated as an enclave.

Simultaneously, the political status of the Hong Kong government shifted from being appointed by the British government to being subordinate to the Chinese government. This transition meant that actions taken by the Hong Kong government would no longer encounter resistance stemming from hatred against the British government. It became increasingly clear that the Hong Kong government would regain control over the Kowloon

Walled City. Consequently, the demolition could be executed decisively, with the primary concerns revolving around compensation and rehousing for the city's inhabitants only.

The resolution of jurisdictional ambiguity paved the way for the successful execution of the final clearance plan. The overlapping timeline between the British colonial era and the lifespan of the Kowloon Walled City was not coincidental. It demonstrated that the status of anarchy brought about by the British colonial history had played a significant role in keeping the Kowloon Walled City alive over the years.

8. Conclusion

The deterioration of Kowloon Walled City could be summarised into 2 parts: the formation of the anarchy status of Kowloon Walled City, and difference between inside and outside of Kowloon Walled City brought by the anarchy status that led to the consequential transformation.

After China lost in the First Opium War, the British colonial history of Hong Kong began in 1841. Kowloon Walled City was first established for the military defence as a garrison town. The Second Convention of Peking granted Kowloon Walled City a unique political status as an enclave, a territory of China entirely surrounded by the British colonial Hong Kong. Over the years, the rapid changes in governmental structure of China, the population growth in Kowloon Walled City, alongside the decline of British influence in the late 20th century aggravated the anarchy status of Kowloon Walled City.

The anarchy status was not solely about Kowloon Walled City itself. When juxtaposed against the rest of Hong Kong, the anarchy status implied that what could not be done in the rest of Hong Kong could be done within Kowloon Walled City. The refugees without legal identities settled in Kowloon Walled City; the unregulated but profitable construction developed in Kowloon Walled City; the industrial production with low costs thrived in Kowloon Walled City; the criminal activities found the hideout in Kowloon Walled City. The British colonial history laid the foundation for the anarchy status of Kowloon Walled City, and the people exploited the anarchy status as an advantage. This lack of oversight created a haven for those struggling to survive in the more regulated areas of Hong Kong. Residents, driven by necessity, exploited this lawlessness to establish a makeshift society within the City's walls. They managed to fulfil basic needs for shelter, water, and income through various, often unregulated means.

However, these resourceful solutions came at a steep price. The lack of regulations led to the construction of unsafe buildings lacking exposure to natural sunlight, and came along with

inadequacy in water and electrical supply, haphazard electrical wiring, and improper waste disposal which created a polluted and unsanitary environment. The unregulated practices within a confined boundary would only be a short-term solution, as the problems like the disposal of waste material would only aggravate over time. Furthermore, the absence of legal authority allowed Triad organizations to flourish, bringing up criminal activities and imposing threats to the residents. This trade-off between basic needs and living conditions ultimately rendered Kowloon Walled City unsustainable.

In addition to how the status of anarchy transformed the Kowloon Walled City, the final clearance of the Kowloon Walled City has been analysed to support how the status of anarchy kept the Kowloon Walled City alive. The formation, the transformation, and demolition of the Kowloon Walled City were all closely related to the British colonial era.

In conclusion, while the decline of Kowloon Walled City is a multifaceted issue, the British colonial era's influence on the jurisdictional ambiguity of Kowloon Walled City stood as a significant contributing factor. The resulting anarchy was the core of the most changes that took place within Kowloon Walled City since the 1950s in particular. It fuelled a period of rapid, unregulated transformation, ultimately creating an unsustainable living environment that necessitated Kowloon Walled City's eventual demolition.

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