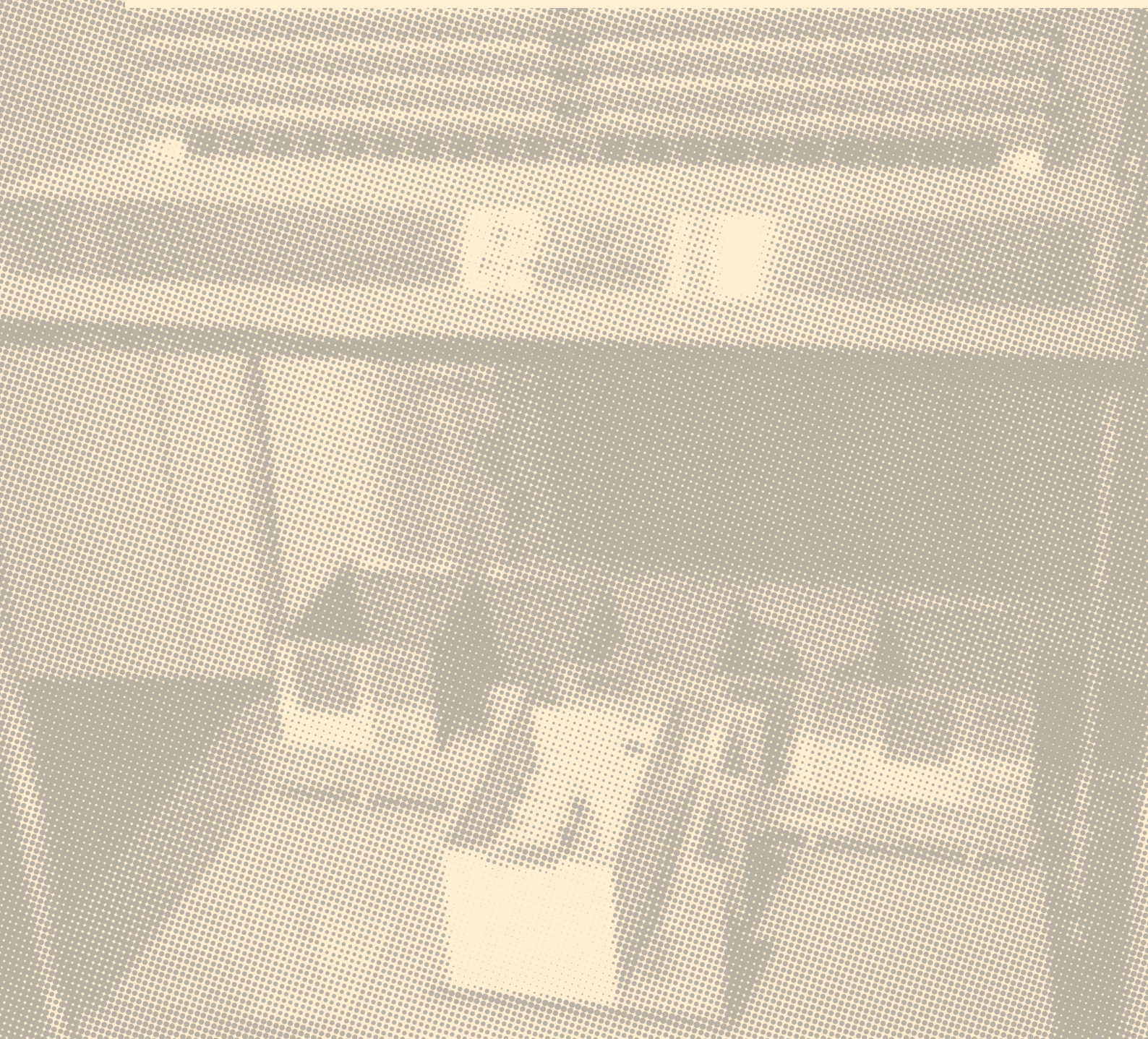
Safeguarding memory as intangible heritage: experiences and stories of life on Hong Kong's social housing estates

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ABSTRACT

Public housing is an important facet of social life in Hong Kong. Nearly half the population benefits from living in a publicly subsidised unit. In recent years, strategies have been put in place to preserve the architectural heritage of public housing in Hong Kong. Similarly, other strategies targeted the safeguarding, the valuation, and promotion of life in the public estates in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s as a manifestation of intangible heritage, and symbol of Hong Kong's identity. Memories of public housing contribute to preserving and promoting a form of intangible heritage that is remembered across Hong Kong's various heritage institutions. Over the last decade, many projects have attempted to engage with the ethos of life in public estates through different ambitious exhibitions and site redevelopment projects. After reviewing the different strategies put in place to engage with the intangible heritage of early life in public housing, this paper reviews the technical challenges and the ethical dimensions associated with the preservation and valuation of this type of intangible heritage.

Keywords

Hong Kong, popular intangible cultural heritage (PICH), ethics, public housing, social practices, migration, 'narrativisation', Shek Kip Mei fire.

Introduction

Intangible heritage is an intellectual and professional construct. Safeguarding intangible heritage is an ethical project. There is little doubt that, since its inception more than fifteen years ago, the *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003) has contributed greatly to the intellectual and ethical project of conserving intangible heritage. This *Convention* has been an essential tool for the promotion and awareness of intangible heritage amongst communities and governments around the globe (Aikawa: 2004). Behind

the *Convention* – behind its global call for action – has been, in essence, what can be defined or characterised today as an ethos of responsibility towards intangible heritage (Paquette and Nelson: 2017). In its social and philosophical essence, the *Convention* is a global, professional, and policy instrument embodying values and a certain collective obligation towards the future of certain cultural practices, customs, languages, knowledge, social practices, crafts, and events.

Another layer of ethical preoccupations and a different series of issues and questions came into focus between 2012 and 2015, when a number of experts and stakeholders voiced potential ethical issues and challenges associated with the process of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. While the *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* brought attention to professional and collective obligations to culture and the future of intangible heritage, the ensuing debates that took place a little more than a decade after the formation of the *Convention* raised the importance of community. These debates also raised the importance of recognising representative and inclusive intangible heritage; questioned the place of social practices that could be seen as harmful and whether they should be offered systematic preservation; and raised the issue of the commodification of intangible heritage in line with similar debates about cultural tourism (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett: 1998; McIntosh and Prentice: 1999; Du Cros: 2001; Trinh and Ryan: 2016).

Experts have paid significant attention to the risks of 'folklorisation' and commodification associated with safeguarding intangible heritage. That being said, examining further the implications of the ethical framework and standpoint of intangible heritage also brings to light another set of issues regarding whether intangible heritage is inclusive, representative, and accessible from the perspective of all social classes. For instance, many cultural practices identified and recognised as intangible heritage have been traditionally associated with elites and ruling classes, and their contemporary practice may require a level of knowledge, with a steep learning curve, and a level of independence from economic pressures that only a few can afford. This is not the case for every cultural practice associated with intangible heritage, but a cursory look at the recent designations on the UNESCO *List of Representative Practices* – or, even, their list of heritages at risk – can reveal that what is designated as intangible heritage may be less accessible than it appeared to be at first glance. In making this observation, it is not to suggest that distinctive practices should not be safeguarded because of potential risks of elitism, nor is it to offer a criticism of UNESCO's intangible heritage designation process. Rather, the intent of this paper is to challenge what is believed to be a fundamental and inherent question about intangible heritage safeguarding practices: the role and place of popular intangible heritage. Specifically, this paper argues that popular intangible heritage should also be considered when thinking about intangible heritage and its safeguarding. Class awareness and inclusion should also be kept in mind, not only for designing communication strategies, but also for establishing what intangible heritage is, and preserving that which has a strong resonance with the community.

In order to further address the issue of inclusion and accessibility, this paper discusses the case of intangible heritage in Hong Kong. The Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong (HKSAR) has a distinct history: it is at the crossroads of many civilisations and is a multicultural territory that has welcomed migrants from many parts of the globe. While Hong Kong is associated with global financial markets and economic affluence, social stratification is a key characteristic of the territory, and a significant proportion of the population have come from more humble roots. In this context, public housing has become an essential collective achievement, one with a long history that conveys the cultural experience of life on the early estates and evokes many important memories for Hong Kong citizens.

In the first part of this paper, the situation of heritage in Hong Kong is discussed, and the cultural reality of the special administrative region is explored in detail. In the second part, focus is placed on one particular case – experience and memories of public housing – and how it has become an important component of Hong Kong's museum and archival work. This section will discuss the implication of the 'narrativisation' of intangible heritage in relation to public housing experiences. Moreover, this section will discuss the development of a local culture of exhibiting memories of public housing. Memories of public housing constitute a way to preserve and promote forms of intangible heritage that are distributed across Hong Kong's heritage institutions. Building on this, the third section of this paper will discuss some aspects

of the ethics of the intangible heritage 'process'. In particular, it will discuss the complexity of articulating and communicating 'popular' heritage. By popular heritage, this paper means heritage (tangible or intangible) that is associated with people with humble social roots. Popular heritage (or popular intangible heritage) comes with a certain number of challenges.

Of course, it could be said that most items of intangible heritage are popular by nature, because they are, by definition, community-based. However, this article serves as a reminder that the activities that are often easily defined as intangible heritage – traditional and folkloric practices – are not as class-inclusive as they may first appear. Items inscribed in UNESCO's list, such as organ craftsmanship and music (in Germany since 2017), many crafts in fact, and many forms of religious rituals, are at times associated with those segments of the population which have the capacity to be involved in those intangible heritage practices. Some items of intangible cultural heritage may require resources, time, and skills that are not available to everyone. That being said, these are all important items of intangible heritage that need and deserve to be preserved. The argument here is that we have to acknowledge that some forms of cultural practices may be associated with social status or they may require financial and social resources that may not be readily available to most individuals.

This paper is therefore an invitation to discuss the social inclusivity of intangible heritage. We wish to place popular intangible heritage on a certain practical continuum with the concept of popular culture. The notion of popular intangible cultural heritage (PICH) embodies a number of singular characteristics. First, it is a form of intangible heritage that builds on traditions and ways of life that are in the making. This heritage is embodied in practices and oral histories that are being transmitted, they are part of developing traditions that emerge as cultural responses to industrial and post-industrial societies. Popular intangible heritage may not be ancestral, but it is no less traditional. Second, popular intangible cultural heritage is accessible; it does not require resources or a command of specific codes to engage with it. Third, popular intangible heritage is associated with more humble ways of life, and as such, it requires special efforts for heritage professionals to legitimise it. Heritage professionals must help in building communities' confidence in the value of their experiences and their intangible heritage, and they must also develop strategies for the valuation and preservation of popular intangible cultural heritage in existing or new institutions.

Hong Kong: heritage and cultural governance

While Hong Kong is a rich cultural space, and while the territory's arts and creative industries have been given a significant amount of attention since the 2010s – through, for example, ambitious projects such as West Kowloon cultural district (Kong: 2005; Lui: 2008; Tang: 2016; Ho: 2017) or the renewal of the Hong Kong Art Museum in Tsim Sha Tsui – the long history of public support for culture and heritage is more complex and, interestingly, more modest. Heritage protection in Hong Kong has typically focused on the protection of archaeological sites and the preservation of cultural artefacts. As archives from the Public Records Office tend to demonstrate, in the 1950s administrative procedures were developed incrementally to deal with the discovery of cultural goods in the wake of many ambitious infrastructure development projects. In the absence of any real guidelines, district officers and engineers developed a number of strategies to deal with the objects they found. The development of administrative procedures to preserve material heritage was driven by a certain sensibility for culture, as well as by a realisation of the embarrassment associated with the illicit sale of artefacts in the Macao market. This embarrassment was amplified by the fact that the artefacts were – from a legal perspective – reputed to be Crown property (District Commissioner: 1960 and 1962). The administrative procedures developed by district officers and engineers sowed the seeds of Hong Kong's first heritage policy in the 1970s.

Specifically, two factors led to the formulation of an *Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance* and office in 1976. First, many frontline colonial administrators, like district officers, were keen on having a clear instrument to guide their work when they encountered cultural artefacts. Second, a new generation of politicians came to power and used new institutional and political spaces to make progressive and creative decisions and policies for Hong Kong. In an attempt to appease the relationship between the population and the colonial administration, especially after significant social unrest and demonstrations in the late 1950s and 1960s, a new

governing body – the Urban Council – was created and given a number of policy powers in an attempt to be more responsive to the population's needs. The Urban Council gave momentum to the creation of the heritage act and Hong Kong's heritage policy. It should also be noted that the Urban Council was also the political institution behind the development of Hong Kong's publicly-supported museum system. As Hong Kong's museum scene was relatively under-developed in the early 1970s, and with the aspiration of having Hong Kong recognised as a global cultural leader, the group developed a task force in the 1980s that led to the creation of a Space Museum, a Science Museum, and a new Art and History museum (Urban Council: 1982 and 1986). In other words, the Urban Council was a catalyst for the preservation and the promotion/communication of cultural heritage (Paquette: 2019).

That being said, in Hong Kong, as is the case in many places throughout the world, preservation efforts have typically focused on cultural objects and the built heritage. Again, two important elements can serve to explain why heritage was closely associated with tangible cultural assets. First, despite the fact that local politicians and administrators were the main catalysts for developing a protection instrument, most of the expertise behind the project was informed by a western view of heritage. For years, the administration of the *Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance* made decisions that aligned with western values and aimed to preserve colonial heritage. Interestingly, some colonial-built heritage that did not attract wide public support for preservation, such as the Murray House – a symbol of colonial administration and a reminder of the ruthless Japanese invasion of 1941– was nevertheless protected through great public sector efforts and at great cost (Yung and Chan: 2011). Second, land value and land scarcity in Hong Kong constitute a distinct challenge for historic preservation. In these conditions, built heritage is, understandably, under considerable pressure.

The question of intangible heritage has always been, at least implicitly, an important one. Since the 1950s Hong Kong has been described as fertile ground for cultural experiences, and has been marketed as a rich destination for cultural tourism (Henderson: 2001; Li: 2003). However, a more conscientious and sustainable approach to intangible heritage only began to take shape in the decade following the reunification of the territory with the People's Republic of China. Since then, the Leisure and Cultural Service Department has played a key role in the promotion of intangible heritage in Hong Kong (Cheung: 2011). As the People's Republic of China ratified the *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* – and as the government of the HKSAR also recognised the *Convention* – the Leisure and Cultural Service Department established a special unit in 2006. Efforts to promote and preserve intangible heritage in Hong Kong culminated in 2015 as the department consulted the population and experts to create a list of Hong Kong's intangible heritage. This list now contains 480 items of local intangible heritage, including: Cantonese, Hakka dialect, Fuzhou dialect (languages), many lineages and stories of lineages and ancestry, dances, herbal tea, milk tea, and many more cultural items. The Intangible Cultural Heritage Office was also established in collaboration with the Sam Tung Uk Museum, providing space and organisational support for events and activities aimed at promoting intangible heritage.

Beyond the results associated with the *Convention*, there have been other attempts to take intangible heritage seriously in Hong Kong. In the late 1990s cultural itineraries and heritage trails (Cheung: 1999) linking tangible and intangible heritage were developed and promoted throughout the territory, providing a unique opportunity for collaboration between the Antiquities and Monuments Office, district administrations, and the Leisure and Cultural Service Department. More importantly perhaps, the creation of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum in Sha Tin in 2000 was, without a doubt, an early and strong commitment to the conservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage in Hong Kong. The museum has a rich programme that builds on traditional crafts and practices, while also providing a significant space in its activities and exhibits for contemporary and popular culture. The Hong Kong Heritage Museum is equally devoted to the art of calligraphy, Hong Kong Cinema, modern design, and the traditional oral histories of the Northern Territories.

This social philosophy is crucial in challenging some of the biases commonly entertained about intangible heritage. Intangible heritage does not have to be folkloric; it can be contemporary, accessible, popular and evolving. Hong Kong's identity is a notion and construct that is difficult to articulate (Veg: 2007). That being said, many

elements of recent history – many popular practices – have created, in Hong Kong, a unique experience for the world and shaped the identity of its local residents (Cheung: 2003; Lu: 2009; Leung and Soyez: 2009; Chen and Szeto: 2015). For instance, the ferry ride between Kowloon and Hong Kong Island by the Star Ferry Line is an oft-cited example of a simple popular item that has shaped a sense of local identity through a very common collective experience (Henderson: 2008; Chai: 2009; Ku: 2012). Intangible heritage is also about collective, highly accessible, and also, sometimes, deep-seated and tacit experiences of the world. The challenge for intangible heritage preservation and promotion is to identify and recognise experiences and narratives the boundaries of which are not entirely well-delineated.

Memories of time and place: public housing as a collective experience

Intangible heritage may relate to collective stories and shared experiences. In this section, the heritage practices surrounding the curation and 'narrativisation' of public housing experiences and histories are discussed. Public or social housing projects are, in most cases, governmental social policies that aim to provide homes for a particular section of the population, at no cost or at costs that are way below market prices. Public housing may not, at first glance, appear to be appropriate material for heritage preservation. However, there is a compelling case to make that some public housing is an essential part of Hong Kong's heritage. In fact, in recent years there have been tremendous efforts to preserve the first estates created by the government - though many voices have expressed concern that these belated efforts to acknowledge the heritage value of these buildings may have come too late (Chu: 2007). While these concerns are mainly focused on built heritage, there are also, arguably, concerns with regards to the intangible heritage encompassing this built heritage. The collective experience of public housing projects constitutes a contemporary, popular, and collective memory.

To better understand the significance of public housing experiences as intangible heritage, it is important to acknowledge two elements: the size of this programme and its impact on society and the social fabric, and the importance of this social characteristic to the story of Hong Kong and local identity.

First, it is rarely acknowledged, but Hong Kong has the most important public housing programme in the world. In 2016, the Hong Kong Housing Authority was the direct provider of publicly subsidised housing to 46% of Hong Kong's population. In its first thirty years of existence,

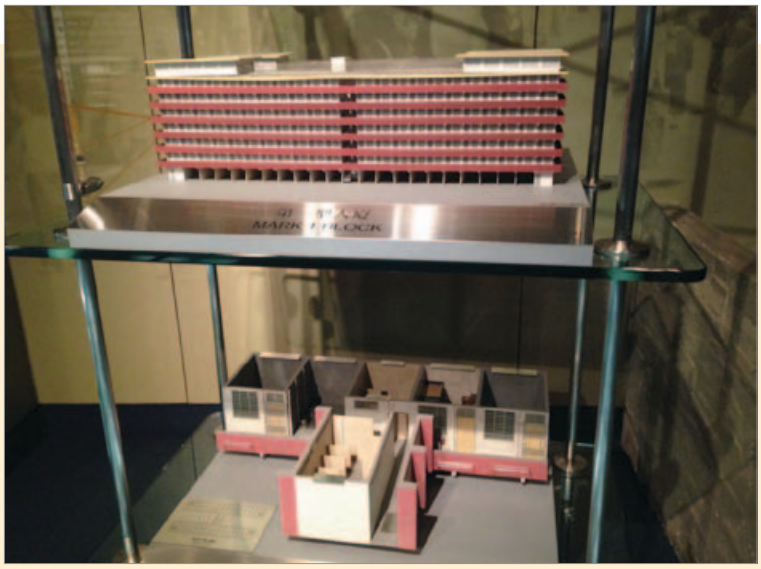


Plate 1
Model of a Mark I building and apartment unit. Hong Kong Housing Authority Exhibition Centre.
Photo: authors, February 2018.



Plate 2
Interior of a unit in the 1950s. Hong Kong Museum of History.
Photo: authors, November 2017.

the public programme created 534,000 housing units for the population (Castells: 1986); today, the programme continues to produce new public housing but can barely meet rising demand. In 2013, a special audit revealed that 228,000 families were eligible and on a waiting list to receive public housing (Audit Commission: 2013, v). The origins of the programme are associated with the Shek Kip Mei fire that occurred on December 24th, 1953 and overnight left 53,000 individuals homeless on Christmas Day. Some authors suggest that this moment acted as a 'mythical catalyst' for the programme (Smart: 1989 and 2006), while others suggest that the roots of the Hong Kong government's efforts in public housing have to do with land clearance and the relocation of populations to areas where land value was lower or had less strategic value for development (Lam: 2015; Lau and Murie: 2017).

Beyond this debate, and beyond the intentions behind this policy, one must recognise that public housing is a distinctive characteristic of life in Hong Kong. The importance public housing plays in Hong Kong society is probably only matched by the importance it plays within Singapore's social fabric. While there are many important public housing programmes across the globe (e.g. in Brazil, on mainland China), public housing programmes in Hong Kong and Singapore target not only the poorest citizens, but they also include projects for individuals who could be considered middle-class. The target of these policies is more comprehensive than those seen in Europe or in the Americas. Not only does the policy affect a large proportion of the population, it has also shaped the landscape and the visual culture of Hong Kong. The different generations of public housing projects and their architecture (Marks I, II, III, Cruciform, H-Block, Double H Block, Trident, Harmony, etc.) (see Plate 1) are all recognisable parts of Hong Kong's landscape, and of the social and cultural fabric in terms of architectural heritage and visual culture.

Second, efforts to preserve the built heritage of these social and cultural spaces was also matched by similar efforts to record the experiences, social practices, and values associated with daily life in the early estates of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Public housing constitutes an item of such public importance that nearly every heritage institution, either permanently or occasionally, has engaged with this cultural phenomenon in the territory. There is a culture of exhibiting public housing as intangible heritage through various exhibitions and institutions. In the Hong Kong Museum of History, the territory's most important museum of history and anthropology, public housing is given a prominent place in the *Hong Kong Story*, one of the museum's permanent exhibitions (see Plate 2). The museum not only acknowledges the historical importance of the programme for Hong Kong's society, it also attempts to recreate the ambience – that is to say the aesthetic and emotions (Golding: 2013; Kidd: 2015) associated with the experience of the modest lives lived on these estates. The museum also tries to convey the bonds and values associated with this new life for



Plate 3
View from the outside of a first-generation unit, 1950s. Hong Kong Housing Authority Exhibition Centre.
Photo: authors, February 2018



Plate 4
A glimpse of the interior of a 1960s unit, Hong Kong Housing Authority Exhibition Centre.
Photo: authors, February 2018.

the residents who inhabited these homes. Similarly, in 2002 the Hong Kong Housing Authority established a museum of its own. The Authority developed an exhibit that portrays the evolution of the architecture of public housing in Hong Kong (Plate 3), and also shows a typical interior (Plate 4) in one of these units – with a somewhat romanticised view of the lifestyle of tenants in public housing, and of the Housing Authority's influence on the daily lives of their residents. The interiors show common objects and social practices. The visitor is invited to imagine and remember social habits in these spaces that now belong to another time. Radios, tea, cupboards, and clothes on hangers, all are reminders of domestic life. Many other institutions pay homage to life on the early estates. Similar exhibits and items are also displayed at the Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre and the Hong Kong Heritage Museum.

In sum, exhibiting public housing is clearly a theme and component with which Hong Kong heritage professionals and institutions are accustomed to dealing. While some of these elements point to the value of built heritage, the exhibits also employ effective methods to demonstrate the intangible dimensions of a way of life lived by an important section of the population.

Most certainly, one of the key moments in showing the lifestyle in public housing in exhibitions can be found in the series of public events that were part of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Public Housing Programme in 2004. As part of the commemoration, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, in collaboration with the Hong Kong Heritage Museum and the Hong Kong Housing Authority, developed the exhibition, *Memories of Home*. This was on show between June 2nd and October 11th 2004 to commemorate not only the Shek Kip Mei fire and tragedy, but to reevaluate Hong Kong's history of public housing. The popularity of this exhibit and its social relevance justified maintaining some of the material through an online archive hosted by the Hong Kong Housing Authority, most of which can still be accessed online. From a narrative perspective, this exhibit showed the importance of one of the essential social facts about the public housing programme: it highlighted how much this programme was part of Hong Kong's migration history. While the Shek Kip Mei fire is seen as the catalyst, and while it is often described as the turning point that gave rise to a resettlement project that ultimately became a wide and comprehensive social policy, the long history of the programme is also intimately tied in with the reality of migration. The unregulated tenements that offered homes to many migrants from mainland China and from Southeast Asia are typically called 'squats'; the public housing programme became a way of offering better living conditions for generations of migrants and Hong Kong residents who had been living in these tenements. The public housing exhibition held at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum was also a reminder of the encounters between individuals seeking a better life in the territory. This exhibit reunited contextual and historical elements relating to current events and policy, and meshed

them with lived experience; the exhibit complemented the history of social policy with the life experience and personal memories of individuals who lived through this important era in Hong Kong's history. Approximately ten years later, the Antiquities and Monuments Office organised another important temporary exhibition, entitled *Growing up in Public Housing*, which was hosted at the Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre in Kowloon Park between September 2013 and March 2014. This exhibit showed a number of photographs, objects, and historical panels, and more importantly, it incorporated many personal narratives that helped describe the experience of life on the public estates.

2013 was also the year of another important project aimed at protecting tangible and intangible heritage in Hong Kong. After years of discussion and planning, Mei Ho House, a public estate built in 1954 that had been declared a grade II heritage site, was renovated as part of a public-private partnership project led by the Youth Hostel Association. The building was repurposed as a youth hostel to provide affordable accommodation for travellers, while a portion of the site was made into a museum. Intangible heritage was a key element in designing this museum, not only to preserve the architectural value of the estate, but to recognise [t]*he everyday life and pursuits of the people involved around this unique spatial morphology, which in turn bred a close bond among the households* (Youth Hostel Association: 2019a). The museum's mission is to:

- [preserve] aspects of Hong Kong life and to exhibit the way of life, living environments, culture and ethos of 1950s-70s Hong Kong through the collection and preservation of artefacts, research, education and the exhibition of household objects of early public housing residents.
- [arouse] public awareness of the importance of conserving tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and to interpret the historical, architectural, cultural and social significance of the historic building, Mei Ho House, through exhibitions, guided tours, and various cultural activities (Youth Hostel Association: 2019b).

Mei Ho House has been developed by the Youth Hostel Association as an intellectual hub for activities related to public housing heritage. From an ethical perspective, the Youth Hostel Association is not only committed to the safeguarding of this heritage, but is also committed to integrating the underprivileged groups in the neighbourhood, providing both employment opportunities and opportunities to create and perpetuate local social bonds through this heritage project.

In recent years, other public institutions were compelled to respond to this renewed enthusiasm for public housing history. The Public Records Office created an important campaign to value the governmental public health campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s. Some of the materials from these campaigns are accessible at the archives and on the archives' website; overall, this constitutes one of the Public Records Office's major recent projects for communicating Hong Kong's heritage. In 2009, the Department of Civic Affairs organised an exhibition to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Information Services Department, and presented a retrospective of its communication campaigns. While these communication campaigns may not at first sight appear to be focused on public housing, they are impossible to dissociate from it. Many of the campaigns circulated in the estates and some of them were directly targeted at the behaviour of the residents. The nostalgia around *Miss Ping On,* around *Lap Sap Chung* (litterbug) or *Mr Zebra* has had an undeniable effect; these campaigns convey the collective atmosphere and ideas about values, public health and good public behaviour which were prevalent in the new public housing spaces. An alternative interpretation of these materials can make the viewer critically aware of the government's perception of public housing tenants who were often seen as squatters. Thus, these campaigns bring a critical perspective to the harsher aspects of life on the public housing estates.

Discussion: the ethics of 'popular' intangible heritage

In this paper, public housing has been discussed as a form of intangible heritage. More specifically, it has been established that public housing was a significant societal characteristic of Hong Kong, and has left important traces on the territory's social fabric. Public housing has left its mark both on the landscape and visual culture of Hong Kong. That being said, intensive property development and changes in housing needs, have created pressures leading to many of the early public housing estates being phased out, and the complete disappearance of others

– leaving only the older generation with knowledge and memories of those formative years for Hong Kong. As we have seen, over the last ten years many initiatives have been put in place – mostly through the expertise of professionals and at the institutional level – to create greater awareness. Likewise, important commemorations of social policy have also helped in bringing in resources to sustain heritage preservation and communication activities.

The purpose of this paper was not to advocate for the inclusion of memories of public housing in the official list of intangible heritage, nor was it to promote the organisational values, institutional culture, or administration of housing policy by the Hong Kong Housing Authority. As the existence of a waiting list to access public housing in Hong Kong would suggest, the situation is far from perfect. Rather, the purpose of this paper has been to recognise the importance of memories of public housing as intangible heritage, and to highlight their significance for Hong Kong society and the articulation of its local identity. Because of the vast size of this programme in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, it influenced the daily life and practices of a large proportion of the population.

This section of the article builds from this experience to discuss the complexity of promoting and safeguarding what this paper calls 'popular' intangible heritage. By popular, this article means the category of heritage items and values that are associated with the working class population and culture. The notion of popular, it is argued, is inclusive of a variety of class categories and stratifications, and helps in acknowledging class mobility. Moreover, this notion of 'popular' recognises that while some individuals may not want to celebrate their modest roots, they may still share feelings towards that part of their life-experience, and consequently, feel that this is material worthy of preservation.

One of the first difficulties with the concept of popular intangible heritage relates to what Kaufman (2013) described as an often too-rigid understanding and definition of what constitutes intangible heritage. According to Kaufman, the notion of intangible heritage is elastic; there is a lot of fluidity in what this definition includes. Some communities may have a great interest in opera, while for others, a modest practice or space may evoke more heritage values and memories (pp.22-23). This point is not only important for theoretical purposes but should also be understood at the professional level. When consulting a community about the value of intangible heritage, in an effort to be representative, is this not creating a situation where the participants – as good school pupils – try to find examples of intangible heritage rather than building on their experience and on what defines them and their lived-experience? By raising this question, it is important to point out that what constitutes popular heritage is often seen as illegitimate and difficult to articulate; it may be associated with a certain shame about humble backgrounds, and can also be seen as irrelevant and unworthy of being memorialised. It is unsurprising that the *First Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory of Hong Kong* includes – predominantly – festivals and very highly skilled craft activities, but has very few items that could have a broad appeal or belong to a more popular background. Milk tea, vegetable tea, and other culinary practices are easier mediators of popular customs. The items listed comply with a rigorous definition of intangible heritage. Again, the point is not to advocate for an addition to the 480-item list, but to raise awareness about the difficulty of engaging with popular heritage.

As professionals, there needs to be awareness that the community should not be required to identify with what has been institutionally defined as 'heritage'; otherwise, professionals are simply providing a platform for a quiz-like communication of what fits the definition. Rather, participants should be able to identify what they choose to identify with. Communication is key, and it is even more crucial when dealing with individuals from diverse backgrounds who may not think that their past and their experiences could be worthy of heritage designation. This is even more challenging when the heritage in question is at the crossroads of an embodied experience and a narrative account and recollection of one's experience of the world (Ruggles and Silverman: 2009).

Therefore, the first challenge of popular intangible heritage, and of any popular heritage for that matter, has to do with the difficulty of recognising it as heritage. On the one hand, the notion of intangible heritage is itself full of critical potential; it can help create a space for recognising types of heritage across class barriers. However, on the other hand this notion also comes with some challenges when there is an overly technical

attitude and over-reliance on conventional language. From an ethical perspective, professionals must make efforts to be inclusive, representative and to actively help in identifying popular heritage. While the predominant narratives – reinforced by the language of the *Convention* – suggest that the community should have an important voice in identifying and designating heritage, this should not prevent heritage professionals from acting as mediators and highlighting the importance of some items that are representative, but may not be recognised as such by the community. Recognising what is tacit and rendering it explicit is essential in intangible heritage, and this is where professionals can help in creating a space for discussing types of heritage that are sometimes unrecognised or questionable.

Popular heritage has the disadvantage of not being framed as heritage to begin with; it is not generally seen as timeless and valuable. That does not mean that it cannot attract attention and wide support from the community. In fact, once an item is recognised as heritage, it can generate a sense of pride and create the community bonds that are often expected of intangible heritage. Exhibits on life in public housing, once recognised as legitimate material, have generated a sense of pride and a great reception from audience members who were able to recognise themselves in it. What we can learn from the case of public housing exhibits in Hong Kong is that 'daring to communicate' is essential with popular heritage. This is beneficial for the entire heritage sector which can sometimes then engage with a new audience or with users who are not usually drawn to heritage institutions for fear of their own (perceived) ignorance.

Finally, the governance of popular heritage may prove to be extremely complex. Popular heritage is associated with common social practices, attitudes and the use of mass cultural items and spaces. Popular heritage is often associated with foods and mass consumption items that are also often traversed by corporate interests. For that matter, popular intangible heritage faces issues that are often very close to those encountered by heritage institutions focusing on science and technology. Seeking greater autonomy from corporate interest may prove to be intellectually and culturally beneficial in the long-term. Corporate sponsors may hold significant archive material, they may also provide much-needed financial support for intangible heritage, but they may prove to be more reluctant to engage with divergent, creative, subversive or negative references to their brands and images. Heritage professionals must be in a position to help in weighing the costs and benefits of associating with corporate partners. In Hong Kong, the Housing Authority has been an important sponsor of many of these activities. While there has certainly been enough room for critical reflection on public housing in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s – especially with regards to comfort – there may be other interested voices that could offer other kinds of creative opportunities for debating and valuing the social housing experience in the territory.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to acknowledge the Social Sciences and Humanities' Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for their support for this research.

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