Culture and the City: Hong Kong, 1997–2007*

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Abstract

After 1997, sustained public debate emerged in Hong Kong over a suite of cultural issues, yet international analyses of the handover predictably continue to emphasize economic forecasts as if disconnected from cultural politics. This examination problematizes what is culture in Hong Kong, beginning with the idea of the trope of the “cultural desert” as a “placism,” to train analysis on cultural processes in political economic and local contexts. The place-based treatment takes a postcolonial perspective on contemporary cultural political economy through the West Kowloon Cultural District, the role of the municipal state in cultural policy, the rise of studio and contemporary arts in the city, and the heritage conservation movement, to demonstrate how Hong Kong’s cultural turn reflects the tensions of the postcolonial era in the unprecedented time-space of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

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* This paper is based on research carried out under a US-Fulbright CIES grant held in the Department of Geography at Hong Kong Baptist University during 2005–06. The author is especially grateful to Lung Ying-tai and Pak Sheung-cheun for granting interviews. Interpretations of the issues presented in the paper are solely the responsibility of the author.