Introduction

Cultural heritage is defined very broadly to include both tangible and intangible values. Tangibles include individual sites, buildings or structures, as well as urban or rural landscapes. Intangibles refer to ‘the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage’ (UNESCO 2016 Article 2: 5). In this study, cultural heritage space refers to urban landscapes that contain intangible values that include rich local culture. According to Jacobs (1961), streets are regarded as the main public places of a city which can make a city look interesting.

Under the current trend of urbanisation, rapid and uncontrolled development is transforming urban areas and their settings, resulting in the fragmentation and deterioration of urban heritage and having a deep impact on community values. Urban renewal is an elementary measure intended to tackle the problem of urban ageing which occurs in all developed cities. It is increasingly recognised that conservation and redevelopment can be complementary (English Heritage 1999; Kearns and Philo 1993; While 2006) and that heritage conservation, as part of the urban renewal of old districts, can have a significant impact on enhancing sense of place and identity and community development (Steel and Slayton 1965). However, with the intense demand for housing and commercial spaces, there has been insufficient consideration of the impact of (re)development on historical settings and the original urban life, leading to the phenomenon of restructuring urban space (Logan 2002 in Wang and Lee 2008).

In Hong Kong, an aggressive urban renewal regime has been implemented in the last two decades. This has involved the demolition of decayed and obsolete buildings in old districts and the subsequent construction of new buildings with the intent to create a better living environment. Although it is claimed that preservation is one of the key principles of the urban renewal strategy, the exchange value of redevelopment has been more apparent than the use value of the sites that have cultural significance. In this chapter, we will study two public areas in Mongkok...
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and Wanchai, in Hong Kong, which have a unique heritage and social and cultural values; namely, Bird Street market and Wedding Card Street. Unfortunately, both these public areas have been demolished to make way for commercial development and high-rise residential development. Inevitably, the social network, social cohesion and the unique local culture and characteristics of the two districts have as a result of redevelopment been destroyed. The relocation and recreation of heritage spaces in planned urban spaces demonstrate a contentious reproduction of space. In these two cases, Lefebvre’s (1991) concept of the ‘representation of space’ offered from planners and professionals (the conceived) and inhabitants and users (the lived) is vividly portrayed. These two cases also illustrate the notion of ‘contradictory space’, in which contemporary global capital is contested with the localised meaning of heritage space.

Theoretical framework

Conservation of cultural heritage space with local significance

It is commonly recognised that cultural heritage connects people to their histories and collective memories (Halbwachs 1980). It relates to the everyday lives, communications and meanings attached to a district (Assmann 1995). Heritage conservation can also help develop cultural identity through the identification of common grounds, including location, history, aesthetics and religious beliefs (Ashworth et al. 2007). The evolving trend of heritage conservation shows that heritage does not only refer to preserving listed buildings or monuments of international or national significance, but also to those buildings associated with familiar and cherished local scenes (Delafons 1997; Lamei 2005) associated with the rich social values of a society as a whole. It is increasingly recognised that historic and local streets reflect traditions, local stories and beliefs and traditional ways of life (Yung and Chan 2015) which represent a sense of cultural identity (Orbasli 2000; Doratli et al. 2004) and attract tourism (Wang and Lee 2008). Many countries worldwide, such as Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, China and the United States, have designated conservation areas or historic districts to preserve historic streetscapes. In addition, many market districts in urban centres are vibrant places which have become important tourist destinations as they portray the everyday lives of people. The case of La Rambla Market in Barcelona and Pike Place Market in Seattle are cases in point.

Relationship between urban renewal and heritage conservation

Urban renewal usually involves large-scale demolition and redevelopment, which destroys sense of place, history and people’s local memories. The conservation of historic buildings is increasingly recognised as contributing to the social well-being and sustainability of an urban city. Although urban renewal has gradually changed from the bulldozer approach to regeneration and revitalisation, towards a social consciousness which takes account of economic, physical and environmental conditions, numerous historic buildings located in old run-down areas are often demolished to make way for new development. As a consequence, social problems have arisen, such as the destruction of existing social networks and social cohesion, forced eviction of vulnerable groups and discontinuation of everyday community lives, loss of sense of identity and loss of collective memories (Hayden 1995). As such, there have been increasing demands from the public for retention of local characteristics and communities, particularly the preservation of sites and structures of historical, cultural and/or architectural interest, and preservation of the social networks of local communities.
Contested cultural heritage space

**Representation of cultural heritage space**

Growth politics is often a common goal in cities and is a key determinant in the social production of urban space (Lefebvre 1991, 1996). Different interest groups, including preservationists, developers and politicians, increasingly working together to market historic sites for combined profits, have been considered to be ‘heritage machines’ (Barthel 1996). Although cultural heritage spaces and sites often bring a wide range of externalities, including cultural identity and sense of place, heritage is often seen as an economic resource with which to promote tourism, economic development and urban regeneration (Graham 2002). Heritage has also been recognised as an important element of symbolic economy (Zukin 1995) by which ‘cultural strategies drive the production of commercialized urban space geared towards entertainment and tourism’ (Reichl 1997: 515).

In addition, the propaganda of heritage conservation has increasingly reshaped and altered the true meaning of heritage assets in society. The notion of heritage conservation has been invariably used for different purposes by people with different interests. For example, cultural heritage is often associated with enhancing upper-class cultural life. At the same time, the commodification of heritage has become ‘a nostalgic twist of an increasingly consumption-oriented society, turning history into a commodity to suit the tastes of the affluent classes (Lu 2002, quoted in Ng 2009). It is evident that the revitalisation of historic buildings is increasingly being used to promote consumption. These economic and cultural uses also help create the images with which places are marketed in economic and cultural terms (Graham 2002). In turn, the association of the upper classes and consumerism often results in the relocation of old traditional businesses due to dramatic increases in rents (Smith 1996; Lees et al. 2008).

**Urban renewal in Hong Kong**

Hong Kong is a very vibrant metropolitan city. The city is constantly under construction and development in order to meet the demands stemming from a population explosion and rapid economic changes. Due to a shortage of flatlands, in this tiny territory, packed with more than 7 million residents, there is an increasing need for housing, traffic, green areas and commercial space. Thus, urban renewal has become one of the most important issues in Hong Kong.

The British Administration in Hong Kong, in 1988, set up the Land Development Corporation (LDC), which was officially responsible for the renewal of urban areas in Hong Kong (Adam and Hastings 2001). However, due to severe public criticism of the slow progress of urban renewal and unfair compensation, the LDC was transformed into the Urban Renewal Authority in 2001 after the handover of Hong Kong to China under the Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance (URAO) (URA 2015). The URA is a statutory body responsible for undertaking, encouraging, promoting and facilitating the regeneration of older urban areas in Hong Kong. Compared to LDC in the past, the URA acts as an implementer that initiates redevelopment projects on its own instead of facilitating other parties’ projects (URA 2011a). Apart from initiating projects by itself, the URA also responds to the joint approach, which means working with the buildings’ owners or landlords to redevelop the owned lots or buildings. Along with the establishment of the URA, the Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) was published, which acts as a guideline for urban renewal measures. The approach the URA has adopted is ‘people first, district-based, public participatory’, and 4Rs (redevelopment, rehabilitation, heritage preservation and revitalisation) are the principles of the URS. Among the 4Rs, redevelopment and rehabilitation are at the core of the URA (URA 2011b).
However, criticisms have been levelled at the urban renewal movement in Hong Kong and communities have questioned whether the movement has achieved the URS’s principles. Criticism has also been raised by the public over issues such as economic-based redevelopment and lack of cultural preservation. Furthermore, much of the revitalisation of historic buildings projects in the old districts has been censured for its bias for achieving economic objectives and overlooking the social impact on the local community. The URA has claimed that its emphasis on ensuring space for everyday businesses has helped to preserve local characteristics and maintain social networks and enhance district vitality (Development Bureau 2011). However, the claims that the regenerated neighbourhoods have had a positive impact on the original inhabitants and encouraged business remain contentious. In fact, many inhabitants have been forcibly evicted and have sold their properties to the URA for unilaterally agreed compensation. Moreover, many traditional trades and businesses have been disappearing from the Hong Kong streetscape. Commercial redevelopment, which claims to subsidise the revitalisation and reuse of historic buildings, often destroys the local characteristics of districts. In addition, in the process of redevelopment, the quantities and qualities of the original open spaces are lost. The demolition and relocation of traditional local open street markets to indoor buildings are cases in point. Given this dilemma, the question becomes: to what extent do urban renewal projects negatively affect the local culture and public spaces of local significance?

**Case 1 – Bird Street (Hong Lok Street demolition and relocation)**

The oldest and most lively area, Bird Street market, used to be located on Hong Lok Street in the centre of Mongkok. Bird Street market was crowded with shops, restaurants and residential areas. This open market street was a favourite meeting place for people who enjoyed watching birds and chatting with each other. Thus, the district was a local landmark and a tourist attraction. Hong Lok Street was formed around the 1960s and was popular due to an old restaurant named *Ki Heung tea-house*. It then became a gathering place for bird-keepers. It attracted bird hawkers who ran their stalls near the tea house. Hong Lok Street was chosen because of its very convenient location to major transport networks. The centre lanes bordered by stalls in Hong Lok Street were so narrow that no more than two people could pass through them at the same time. This car-free street housed more than 100 stalls of all types of businesses related to bird keeping, such as birds, cages, bird food and bird-feeding products. The diversity of products attracted many visitors and bird-keepers, even after the tea house was demolished. According to the Wong (1995) survey, those who frequented Bird Street market were more concerned with its unique characteristics rather than its negative environmental conditions, such as the lack of hygiene, the crowdedness and noisiness.

Bird Street market signified the soul and the long tradition of the bird-keeping culture in Hong Kong. The bird-keeping culture in Hong Kong, and in China in general, is very different from that in Western countries where birds are kept at home. In Hong Kong, a common hobby, especially among elderly males, is to walk the streets with their caged birds. Garisto (1992: 46), describing the history of bird keeping in the Chinese culture, remarks that birds and birdcages have been ‘an essential element of Chinese domestic life’. Like people who keep dogs or cats, bird-keepers stroke and talk to their birds. As a 53-year-old retired civil servant commented, ‘I like their singing. I can get a sense of success if I can keep them healthy and beautiful’. Both bird-keepers and their birds enjoy their gatherings in popular areas, and the former Bird Street market was one of them. When bird-keepers are with their birds, they interact with each other and also interact and talk with the bird-shop owners. The majority of elderly bird-keepers are retirees, so a key motivation for keeping birds is that they can make friends more easily when
they have the birds. Other than personal reasons, bird-keeping behaviours actually reflect the highly dense environment and the housing situation in Hong Kong. Keeping birds rather than dogs or cats is preferable and more practical in a very small living unit, particularly in public housing which imposes stringent restrictions on keeping dogs and cats.

After a ten-year negotiation, Bird Street market in Hong Lok Street was demolished in 1998 and relocated to Yuen Po Street and became Bird Garden, next to the Flower Market in Mongkok (Figure 24.1). The former Bird Street market was replaced by the Langham Place Shopping Mall, an upscale shopping mall opposite Langham Place, and a five-star hotel. Although much cleaner, better organised and nicely decorated in the traditional Chinese garden style and with sufficient open space, the new Bird Garden can house only a few dozen stalls. The atmosphere and the ambience of the place are not as vibrant as before. The setting of Bird Street market was a lane in Hong Lok Street located in one of the busiest areas in the Mongkok district. After relocation, it was turned into a garden with tiled roofs, a pavilion, gates and trees.

Both bird-keepers and shop owners indicate that the former Bird Street market in Hong Lok Street had a stronger sense of belonging than the new garden. Now, bird-keepers tend to stay in the market for shorter periods of time (interviews conducted in 2016). To make matters worse, as it is at a distance from public transportation, the numbers of bird-keepers coming to the new Bird Garden is far less than before.

Case 2 - Wedding Card Street (Lee Tung Street/McGregor Street Redevelopment Project)

Lee Tung Street (Figure 24.2) is located in Wan Chai, which is in the middle part of Hong Kong Island and is one of the foremost developed areas of Hong Kong. Lee Tung Street was built around the 1910s to 1920s in the three-story tradition of Chinese tenement buildings. In the 1950s, the street added six- to seven-story buildings. Lee Tung Street was known for its large number of publishing companies; before the street was redeveloped, 28 out of 52 shops were publishers. In particular, from the 1970s, wedding invitation card manufacturing became the signature of Lee Tung Street, which earned it the nickname of ‘Wedding Card Street’. The
red invitation cards and red pockets created a special scene along the street. Apart from the publishing industry, other businesses were also available in the street such as tailors, shoemakers, property agencies, laundry service providers, groceries and Chinese restaurants.

The Hong Kong government began to consider redevelopment in 1999 and commenced the H15 project – Lee Tung Street/McGregor Street redevelopment project in early 2004. The project was the first government-initiated large-scale redevelopment project. The question of urban development and the unique cultural status of Lee Tung Street became the subject of great debate by the public. The project demolished 35 tenement buildings to make way for a number of residential towers. Within the site area of the project, only three old tenements buildings (186–190 Queen’s Road East), built in the late 1930s, have been preserved and revitalised.

The H15 Concern Group was comprised of former business operators and residents formed to pursue the interests of the affected people and to convey to the government the importance of the community in urban renewal. During the planning stage of the H15 project, the Concern Group proposed keeping the old low-story buildings. It was believed that this would preserve local characteristics while boosting the economy. The Concern Group also initiated a number of

Figure 24.2 The avenue in the former Lee Tung Street. Source: Photo taken by Esther H.K. Yung.
hunger strikes in an attempt to persuade the URA to preserve the street and accept the alterna-
tive Dumbbell Proposal, which would conserve the local character of the neighbourhood while
allowing original habitants and businesses to return after redevelopment (Wissink 2015), but
it was rejected by the Town Planning Board. Despite strong protests against the demolition of
Wedding Card Street organised in 2007, the 35 post-wars tenement buildings were demolished
in the same year.

After the redevelopment project, due to increased rents, none of the 28 publishers remained
in Lee Tung Street. Only shops which aimed to promote their brand names could afford the
sky-high rents. Without the old residents and shop owners, the community was lost and, hence,
Lee Tung Street no longer has a cultural identify. At present, there is only one publisher on
the street located at the basement level; the local culture of Lee Tung Street is now completely
different.

Redeveloped Lee Tung Street has become a 200-metre walkway named Lee Tung Avenue
with a group of low-story buildings providing 70 shops in different floor areas that suit the
majority of businesses. Instead of only ground floor shops being available, basement and upper-
ground shops have been added. Therefore, the total number of shops has increased. The rental
income of the avenue is estimated at HK$25 million per month. The businesses on the Avenue
are now diverse, including Chinese and Western cuisine, fine dining and cosmetic and clothing
retailers. High-end multinational companies are also located on the Avenue, which has attracted
tourism and facilitated the overall economy of the Wan Chai district.

Lee Tung Avenue was designed based on the concept of integrating Eastern and Western
cultures and combining both traditional and modern styles. For instance, buildings have been
built in the European style, and the very few elements which recall the old Wan Chai are the
window grilles, the mid-20th-century-style wall tiles and the street lamps in the style of 19th-
century gas lamps. The name of Lee Tung Street has disappeared from the city’s map, as the area
now is traffic-free and not regarded as a street in the government land registry (Ng 2013). It has
been renamed ‘The Avenue’ in English. The ‘inside’ of the street is totally different, and it is no
longer a unique cultural spot in Wan Chai. The past characteristics of ‘Wedding Card Street’ have
been demolished, together with the old tenement buildings. In reconstructing Lee Tung Street
as an open shopping mall, no unique characteristics were created, nor the local history reflected.

In an interview with a member of the Concern Group, Ms. Wong, the representative
commented:

It is undeniable that the overall business environment is improved, shops with branding are
set-up here. However, the lack of local business is a major problem. I don’t see the reason
for which a resident of Wan Chai would come here and purchase for the daily consumables.
The business here is indeed improved comparing to the past but Lee Tung Street has no
difference to a shopping mall now. The cultural value and community network has [been]
lost (interview 2016).

According to Ms. Wong, other than the publishing industries, Chinese tailors and watch repairs
also contributed to the spirit of Lee Tung Street. The H15 Concern Group representative
claimed that the developers had no interest in maintaining the local wedding card production
businesses (interview 2016). No rental discounts were given to past business owners on the
street, nor was there any mention of any shop-for-shop scheme. Although some of the past
business owners were eager to continue their businesses, they were forced to close because of
high rents. Without the preservation of these unique businesses, Lee Tung Avenue has become
another common shopping mall in Hong Kong where the value of the street is now similar to
its counterparts after redevelopment. As a result of redevelopment, the attraction of Lee Tung Avenue for local residents has been reduced because of the lack of cultural identity and valuable traditional businesses. A resident mentioned that it was a pity for Wan Chai, if not Hong Kong, that a street with such a unique character was lost as a result of urban renewal.

**Discussion**

Bird Street market in Hong Lok Street provided a vibrant space for social integration and fostered a sense of community and identity in the district, as well as being a big attraction for visitors and tourists. It also provided space and opportunities for small and marginal businesses, which highly reflected the local character and local culture. Since the relocation of the bird market to the new Bird Garden, the majority of visitors and customers are those who frequented the old Bird Street market in Hong Lok Street many years ago. Unfortunately, the Bird Garden did not maintain the character and prosperity of the former Bird Street market. The case of the relocated Bird Street market to the Bird Garden is an illustration of a conceived space reproduced by planners and professionals. On the one hand, it relocated the hardware, since most of the stalls were relocated to an environment which was conceived to be better because of improved hygiene and reduced noise. On the other hand, it failed to maintain the software, namely the ‘lived space’, the bird-keepers and shop owners’ experiences of using the space and the meaning of the space. The professionals thought that the Bird Garden would be a more pleasant gathering place for the bird-keepers and a new attraction for new visitors. However, the ambience of the space has been changed. What the visitors want to see is the traditional cultural lives of people holding their bird cages and walking along the streets and talking to each other. It was the prosperity of the street, the trading activities and the social networks which attracted people.

Lee Tung Street was the first and only street famous for its wedding card businesses. Lee Tung Street was involved in numerous marriages and should be one of the unforgettable memories of many couples. The cultural value of Lee Tung Street was invaluable, and it possessed unique meaning in the minds of the Hong Kong people. Unfortunately, its core value was demolished together with the old tenement buildings, and the redesigning of the street is totally different. The influx of foreign restaurants and shops has led to a mixture of Chinese and Western cultures. While the development in this case has helped the economy, the social benefits are questionable, and what was once the hallmark of Lee Tung Street – the wedding card shops – has been lost. Clearly, the redevelopment project failed to preserve local culture and characteristics. None of the characteristics of the past Lee Tung Street were kept. Wedding card businesses, publishers and, most importantly, community networks, have been lost. The bonding of the neighbourhood has been demolished together with the old buildings. It is undeniable that redevelopment is beneficial in terms of economy and environment. However, its negative impact on communities is worth addressing.

In the Lee Tung Street conservation and redevelopment controversy, the strong protests from the community questioned whether consideration of architectural and historical value is sufficient or if it is more important to respect the relationship between buildings, local culture and characteristics, people and social networks. As Jacobs (1961) states, what makes a street special, and therefore the city, is the people. In this case, the locals’ lived space was replaced by the reproduction of space for consumption, dominated by commodification over the continuation of everyday lives, meanings and stories of the habitants (Lefebvre 1991, 2003).

In both cases, the streets contained traditional business activities, as well as being the mainstay for social interactions, stories and memories of the visitors and the businesses and stall owners.
In the reproduction of the Bird Garden, the planners’ and professionals’ intention was to provide a better physical environment for the bird-keepers and bird-traders. However, what they conceived was unexpectedly different from what was actually needed by the users who saw social linkage as more important than the comfort of the environment. The location of the Bird Garden in terms of proximity to other facilities, such as eating places, has been one of the major hurdles discouraging bird-keepers from visiting and staying in the place. The different spatial form of a lane and a garden has also made the ambience of the former Bird Street and Bird Garden very different from each other. Although there is little evidence of commodification, the local meaning and character of the space has been distorted.

In comparison, the reconstruction of Lee Tung Avenue reveals strong evidence of production of space for consumption. It can be shown that the use values of the former wedding card and publishing business street have been transformed to exchange values, as reflected in the high-rent shopping and catering precinct. Similar to the Bird Garden, it has changed the local meaning of the space derived by the users’ experience. The meaning of the space has continued evolving, as other people, rather than the old tenants and business people of Lee Tung Street, are coming to use the space. The European-style shopping avenue is definitely a representation of consumption space using the heritage theme as a marketing strategy, and it can be seen as a contradictory space created under urban renewal.

Conclusions

This chapter illustrates that tangible built environment, the street itself, and intangible cultural roots, traditions and social networks are essential considerations for heritage preservation. It is not just the physical building fabric which is worth preserving, but also the traditional cultures and local characters. The two cases examined, Bird Street market and Wedding Card Street, are controversial examples of urban renewal where planners and professionals planned and designed the spaces to reproduce the conceived quality of the space. However, they both reveal that there is a mismatch between what is conceived and experiences of the everyday lives of the users. Intangible cultural heritage is an essential source of a community’s cultural vitality and an important source of social cohesion. The complexities of community life, particularly in terms of cultural identity and ethnicity, often result in contestation of space regarding the designation and representation of local heritage. Inevitably, urban renewal threatens the legacy of lived space with the replacement of conceived space or, even worse, results in the recreation of ‘contradictory space’, which distorts the meanings and stories of the space. Has aggressive urban renewal been carried out at the expense of heritage space in past decades?

References

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