

Protecting built heritage in Hong Kong.

GIORGALLIS, A. and MAK, C.H.W.

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Review of Steven Brian Gallagher, *Protecting Built Heritage in Hong Kong*. 111 pp. Springer, 2022.

Thinking about Hong Kong's cultural heritage automatically leads one to some assumptions. A first assumption which might spring in mind is the modern architecture of Hong Kong. With its skyscrapers along the shoreline of Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong is often known as a metropolitan city. A second assumption might be the prominent place of Hong Kong in the art market. From this short story, what goes deliberately unnoticed is Hong Kong's remarkable built heritage.

Protecting Built Heritage in Hong Kong is the first comprehensive examination of the legal and policy framework governing the protection of built heritage in Hong Kong. This book is written by Steven Gallagher, an expert of international cultural heritage law at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Unlike other scholarly works in the field, Gallagher seeks to provide 'a history of the development of protection for built heritage in Hong Kong' as well as examine the "different forms of protection that have been involved, including private, legal and popular protection" (v).

Towards this end, Gallagher divides the book into nine chapters, each one corresponding to one time-period or development of safeguarding Hong Kong's built heritage. These are the following: 1) Built Heritage in Hong Kong; 2) The Development of Protection for Built Heritage in Kong up to 1976; 3) The Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (Cap. 53); 4) Problems with the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance Pre-1997; 5) The Hong Kong SAR and Built Heritage 1997-2006; 6) Heritage and Social Unrest: 2006-7; 7) The Government's

Heritage Concessions; 8) Hong Built Heritage Failures and Successes Post-2007; and 9) Conclusions and The Future for Built Heritage Protection in Hong Kong.

Gallagher, from the first chapter lays down the necessary definitions of the book, commencing from the title of the book itself. He perceives “built heritage” quite broadly as to encompass “the wide variety of heritage which may be created by man’s interaction with the environment and landscape” (2). Gallagher elaborates further on the challenges that urban cities face in relation to the protection of their built heritage. What challenges distinguish Hong Kong’s built heritage, Gallagher contends, are *inter alia* its unique topography, the rapid population growth and the wide perception of viewing Hong Kong as a transitory location. The second chapter details the development of protection up to 1976. In this regard, Gallagher provides various examples to exemplify the protection of built heritage. These span from the colonial era to cover even the Second World War.

The third chapter provides a thorough analysis of the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (Cap. 53) whereas the next chapter discusses the shortcomings of the protective regime prior to 1997. What is of particular interest is the initial position of the colonial government not to offer heritage erected during that era a protective status, such as Kowloon Canton Railway and Marine Police Headquarters Compound, a position which has changed considerably after the dawn of the 1990s (51). The fifth chapter transfers the reader to the post-colonial era, and more specifically to the period beginning from 1997 until 2006. The author critically observes that the said period commenced “well and ended disastrously” for built heritage (53). Positive measures included amongst others the establishment of the Urban Renewal Authority. On the other hand, corruption and the continuing problems for the Victoria Harbour seemed to be the most pressing problems that the administration of the Hong Kong Special Administrative

Region ('government') had to address. The years 2006-2007 represent a turning moment in the post-colonial history of built heritage protection, as the following chapter indicates. The decision of the government to demolish several built heritage sites caused public protest as well as unsuccessful litigation. After 2007, the seventh chapter suggests, Hong Kong's built heritage policy underwent considerable change. The establishment of the New Antiquities Authority, the adoption of a new policy regarding heritage impact assessment as well as the implementation of a scheme for the revitalization of historic buildings were some of the most important initiatives.

The eighth chapter operates as a bridge with the next and final chapter. It takes stock of the bright and dark sides of protecting built heritage in Hong Kong after 2007. In terms of successes, the growing consultation of public opinion concerning heritage-related matters is noticeable (77). By contrast, amongst the darker sides are the disputes about the inscription of certain heritage sites into the World Heritage List and the practical implementation of the heritage impact assessment scheme. Gallagher in the final chapter pushes for the reform of Hong Kong's built heritage law and policy by listing specific recommendations. Gazing to the future, Gallagher, concludes with confidence about the long-term preservation of Hong Kong's built heritage (111).

From the perspective of the reviewers, *Protecting Built Heritage in Hong Kong* fills the lacuna of scholarly research into built heritage legislation and policy in Hong Kong by providing a comprehensive analysis. The book is constructive, enlightening, concise and easily accessible to the average reader. Consisting of 111 pages, the book can be read from cover to cover in a reasonably short amount of time. The book throws a net that is both broad and deep enough to appeal to both academics and a wider audience. The book is welcomed by legal scholars and

students but also heritage professionals working in the field of cultural heritage and policy as well as to those who maintain an interest to learn more about Hong Kong's rich built heritage.

Andreas Giorgallis

University of Glasgow,

Glasgow, Scotland

andreas-giorgallis@outlook.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3494-1541>

Charles Ho Wang Mak

University of Glasgow,

Glasgow, Scotland

charleshwmak@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3587-9938>