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Hong Kong

Hung Lau and the Politics of Memory in Post-Handover Hong Kong



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Hong Kong, China

Contested Histories Initiative

Abstract

Hung Lau (紅樓) in Tuen Mun is a historical building in Hong Kong thought to have housed China's 'founding father,' Sun Yat-Sen. This revolutionary statesman served as the first provisional president of the Republic of China (中華民國). Adjacent to the house is a garden commemorating Sun Yat-Sen, which was built in 1983. The house has been at the centre of the national identity and history debate in China. On October 20, 2020, hundreds were barred from attending the annual flag-raising ceremony on the grounds of Hung Lau. This day marks the Double Tenth Day (雙十節), which commemorates the uprising against the Qing dynasty and the birth of the Republic of China in 1912.

For years, the government has refused to recognise the Hung Lau as a monument on the grounds of its lack of certain historical relevance to the Xinhai Revolution (辛亥革命). However, in 2017, it was temporarily granted protected status for a year due to the imminent risk of demolition. Hung Lau remains unprotected today and has not officially gained the status of a historical monument. This case illustrates the internal tension between the government and citizens in Hong Kong over its national history and territorial rule.

Introduction

This paper will begin by presenting a brief history and description of Hung Lau, addressing its connections to Sun Yat-sen's legacies in Hong Kong and the 1911 Xinhai Revolution. The paper aims to untangle the history of contestations related to Hung Lau by presenting existing textual and material evidence behind the different narratives associated with the site. This paper will examine both scholars' historiographical discussions and the complex political discourse behind the different controversies surrounding the site. Finally, the paper will also touch on the legal dimensions of the contestation, outlining the ramifications of the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (古物及古蹟條例) in Hong Kong Law and the impact of the passing of the Hong Kong National Security Law (香港國家安全法) in 2020 on Hung Lau.



Figure 1: 'Hung Lay' Image by Honeybee via Wikicommons CC BY -SA 3.0.

Description of the Site

Hung Lau is located on the grounds of the former Castle Peak Farm (青山農場) in Tuen Mun, New Territories. The house is divided into two units, with a two-storey verandah at the front and a kitchen and storeroom at the rear, indicating the house's original function as a living quarter. The house is simple, with plain metal windows, a balustrade of pierced screen blocks, and a faded pink plaster finish (Figure 1). From these external features, we could roughly date the house to the 1920s or 1930s.¹ Discrepancies in old documents make it unclear if the current structure is the original from the early 20th century. The oldest recognisable records we have of the site are aerial photographs dating back to 1949.²

According to the most prevalent version of the story, the Castle Peak Farm and the Hung Lau were initially owned by Li Ki-tong (李紀堂), a loyal follower of Sun Yat-sen and a member of Xin Zhong Hui (興中會) or the Revive China Society, the anti-Qing revolutionary society founded by Sun.³ Between 1901 and 1911, the site served multiple purposes: a storehouse for weapons, a location for manufacturing and testing firearms for planned uprisings, a meeting place for revolutionaries, and a refuge for disbanded insurgents fleeing Manchu retribution.⁴ As a result, this site is considered by many to be part of the legacy of the Xinhai Revolution that ended China's last imperial dynasty.

Background

A Brief History

The First Opium War (1839-1842) was a defining moment in the history of British imperialism and also marked the beginning of the late Qing dynasty (1644-1911). China's defeat in the war marked the aggressive expansion of British imperial power in China. The British Empire, seeking to rectify trade imbalances caused by China's restrictive trade policies, turned to the opium trade, illegally exporting large quantities from India to China. Under the leadership of Emperor Daoguang, the Qing government attempted to halt this trade due to its devastating effects on Chinese society. Britain responded with military force and defeated the Qing court with its superior naval fleets.

¹ Legislative Council Brief, *Declaration of Hung Lau near Shek Kok Tsui Village, Castle Peak, Tuen Mun, New Territories as Proposed Monument under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance*, File Ref.: DEVB/CHO/1B/CR/14/39.

² Ibid.

³ 劉智鵬 [Lau, Chi-pang], *香港地區史研究之四：屯門* [Regional History Studies of Hong Kong IV: Tuen Mun] (Hong Kong: 三聯書店(香港)有限公司 [Sanlian Bookstore (Hong Kong) Ltd.], 2012), 82.

⁴ Ibid, 82-85.

As a consequence of the war, the British Empire imposed the unequal Treaty of Nanking (南京條約) on 29 August 1841. This treaty compelled China to open up key ports to foreign trade, cede Hong Kong to Britain, and pay reparations. This treaty exemplified the exploitation of weaker nations by Western imperial powers and the erosion of Qing sovereignty, eventually leading to the decline and fall of the dynasty. Following the First and Second Opium Wars, China's humiliating defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894 – 1895) and the Eight-Nation Alliance's invasion of Beijing (1900 – 1901) forced China to pay reparations and grant special privileges to foreigners. These defeats shattered the longstanding self-conception of China as the Celestial Empire at the centre of the world and brought forth the calls for urgent modernisation/westernisation. The year 1842 marked the beginning of the 'Century of Humiliation' (百年國恥) for China; by the 1890s, disillusioned intellectuals and revolutionaries embraced a new nationalism focused on transforming China into a strong and unified nation-state capable of resisting imperialist powers.

By the end of the Second Opium War in 1860, Hong Kong had already developed from a temporary colonial outpost into a major entrepôt. Due to its strategic location, the city played a crucial role in organising revolutionary movements against the imperial court. As a British colony, the Qing imperial court could not openly suppress revolutionary activities in the region. Revolutionaries used Hong Kong as a base to organise societies, gather compatriots, spread propaganda, and raise funds.⁵ Consequently, sparsely populated areas such as the New Territories, Sheung Wan, and Tai Ping Shan on Hong Kong Island became ideal bases for revolutionary activities and provided personnel and financial supplies.⁶

The Legacy of Sun Yat-Sen in Hong Kong

Dr. Sun Yat-sen (孫中山) was a Chinese revolutionary and statesman (Figure 2). He served as the first provisional president of the Republic of China (1912-1949) and the founding leader of the Kuomintang (KMT). Sun played a crucial role in the overthrow of the Qing dynasty during the 1911 Xinhai Revolution.⁷ He also has a long personal history with Hong Kong. In his 1923

⁵ 蕭國健 [Siu, Kwok-kin Anthony], *簡明香港近代史(增訂版)* [A Short History of Modern Hong Kong (Revised Edition)] (Hong Kong: 三聯書店(香港)有限公司 [Sanlian Bookstore (Hong Kong) Ltd.], 2021), 39.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Xinhai Revolution of 1911 was a nationalist uprising that led to the fall of China's last imperial dynasty, and led to the establishment of the Republic of China. Triggered by widespread dissatisfaction with the Qing court, western imperialism, and failed attempts at reform with the Self-Strengthening Movement (洋務運動), the revolution was sparked by an uprising in Wuchang on October 10, 1911. It quickly spread across the country as provinces declared independence from Qing control. By early 1912, the abdication of the last Qing emperor, marked the end of over two thousand years of imperial rule.

address to the University of Hong Kong (HKU), he acknowledged Hong Kong and the university as his intellectual birthplace (Figure 3).⁸



Figure 2: 'Portrait of Sun Yat-sen' by Shanghai Bo'er Photo Studio via Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

Figure 3: 'Sun Yat-sen at the University of Hong Kong, 1923' by Unknown author via Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

Sun started his secondary education at the Diocesan Home and Orphanage and the Government Central School. In 1887, he enrolled in the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese (a forerunner of the University of Hong Kong), graduating in 1892. It was in Hong Kong that he witnessed the patriotic reactions of the Chinese during the Sino-French War of 1884.

Ten years later, the Revive China Society (興中會) was founded by Sun Yat-sen in Hawaii on 24 November 1894, becoming the first major revolutionary group in modern Chinese history.⁹ Established during the First Sino-Japanese War, the society aimed to achieve self-determination for the Chinese people against the Manchu ruling class.¹⁰ Over time, it reorganised and eventually evolved into the Kuomintang (KMT), or the Chinese Nationalist Party, which now considers its founding date to be that of the Revive China Society.

In 1895, the society established its British Hong Kong headquarters on Staunton Street, disguised as a commercial business. In 1996, the Hong Kong government established the 'Sun Yat-sen

⁸ 孫中山 [Sun Yat-sen], “即從前人人問我，你在何處及如何得到革命思想，吾今直言答之：革命思想，從香港得來。” [“In the past, people asked me where and how I acquired my revolutionary ideas. Today, I answer frankly: I acquired my revolutionary ideas from Hong Kong.”], 摘錄自羅香林著《國父在香港之歷史遺跡》 [Excerpt from Lo Hsiang-lin, *Historical Sites of Sun Yat-sen in Hong Kong*], Sun's Address at HKU, 1923, 孫中山於港大公開演說 (Sun Yat-sen's Public Speech at HKU), The University of Hong Kong official website.

⁹ 蕭國健[Siu, Kwok-kin Anthony], [A Short History of Modern Hong Kong (Revised Edition)] 簡明香港近代史, 39-40.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Historial Trail' (孫中山史蹟徑) on the anniversary of Dr. Sun's 130th birthday. This trail was designed to promote knowledge of modern Chinese history and celebrate his legacy; each location is marked with a special oval-shaped red plaque, labelled in both Chinese and English. In the present day, the trail is comprised of fifteen sites, all of which are limited to the Central and Western Districts.¹¹ The sites included schools Dr. Sun attended, the places he lived, the venues he attended, and the sites where revolutionary activities were held. Interestingly, Hung Lau, the supposed military base for the Revive China Society, was not included in the historic trail. It's unclear whether Hung Lau, as the missing puzzle, was excluded due to its distance from the Central and Western Districts or its strong political association with the pro-Republic of China camp in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The Sun Yat-sen Commemorative Garden

In proximity to the main structure of Hung Lau is the Sun Yat-sen Commemorative Garden (中山公園), situated on the same plot of land as Hung Lau (Figure 4). Constructed in 1983, the garden features an obelisk and a bronze statue of Dr. Sun Yat-sen.

According to the 'Inscription on the Donation Monument for the Construction of Castle Peak Red House Sun Yat-sen Commemorative Garden' (青山紅樓中山紀念公園建設工程捐款碑記), the monument as we know it today was established around the pre-existing bronze statue of Sun by the Hong Kong Sun Yat-sen Memorial Society (香港孫中山紀念會).¹²

As early as 1966, the Society held commemoration services for Dr. Sun Yat-sen's birthday. According to archival sources, in the same year, they also proposed to the then-colonial government the establishment of a commemoration garden in Tuen Mun.¹³ In 1967, the Society erected two statues of Sun Yat-sen in front of Hung Lau. Despite the Society's continuous efforts to establish the park, the British Hong Kong government did not approve the request.



Figure 4: 'The Sun Yat-sen Commemoration Garden' by Honeybee via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

¹¹ Hong Kong Tourism Board, "Stroll through History on the Sun Yat Sen Historical Trail," Hong Kong Tourism Board.

¹² 郭錦洲 et al., 休憩空間與歷史記憶: 全球中山公園研究 [Recreational Spaces and Historical Memory: A Global Study of Sun Yat-sen Parks]. 香港 [Hong Kong]: 香港浸會大學歷史系 [Department of History, Hong Kong Baptist University], 2017. 359.

¹³ Ibid.

Numerous inscriptions dotted around the site to monumentalise Sun's ideas and contribution to the formation of modern China. Most noticeably, the calligraphy engraved beneath the bronze statue reads「天下為公」meaning 'the world belongs to the people,' a phrase taken from the Confucian classic *The Book of Rites* (禮記). This phrase depicts the image of an ideal society. These four characters were adopted to encapsulate the core of Sun Yat-sen's philosophy. Throughout his life, he actively embodied this principle by implementing the Three Principles of the People (三民主義) as nationalism, democracy, and welfarism (民族主義、民權主義、民生主義). This philosophy, embraced by the KMT as its official slogan, is considered the foundation of the ROC's domestic policy. This phrase is also reflected in the opening line of the ROC's national anthem.

Since the construction of the garden, supporters of the KMT and the ROC have held annual ceremonies on October 10 and January 1 in the commemoration garden. Participants would raise the national flag of the Republic of China, pay tribute to the statue of Sun Yat-sen, and sing patriotic songs. Double Tenth Day, celebrated on October 10, commemorates the 1911 Wuchang Uprising and the Xinhai Revolution, which led to the establishment of the Republic of China. This day is also held as the national day of the Republic of China and continues to be celebrated in Taiwan, where the KMT fled after losing the Chinese Civil War (1949-1950). For years, both regimes continued their claim to be the sole legitimate government of "China". KMT sympathisers retained this tradition of holding patriotic commemorations for decades. The Double Tenth Day is one of the most important dates on their annual calendar. In 2017, Hong Kong's pro-Taiwan groups managed to hold a Double Tenth flag-raising ceremony at Sun Yat-sen Park, adjacent to Hung Lau in Tuen Mun, New Territories, for the final time.¹⁴

The Double Tenth Day, which calls into question the political legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party, would be inconceivable in mainland China. However, these celebrations have been tolerated in Hong Kong, a Special Administrative Region (SAR), following the 1997 handover. Hong Kong has maintained its right to assembly, enabling such events to occur. This garden, as well as the main construction of Hung Lau, has become a site of contestation. In 2002, the garden was maliciously vandalised—Sun Yat-sen's bronze statue was defaced with excrement, and three palm trees in the park were sawed down at the base.¹⁵ In 2014, the park endured severe destruction—the base of Sun Yat-sen's bronze statue and the memorial stone tablet were covered

¹⁴ 葉靖斯 [Yip Ching-sze], “雙十節：紀念辛亥革命的青天白日旗會不會在香港絕跡” [“Double Tenth Day: Will the Blue Sky, White Sun Flag Commemorating the Xinhai Revolution Disappear from Hong Kong?”], BBC Chinese News, October 9, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/chinese-news-58838181>.

¹⁵ 星島日報 [Sing Tao Daily],〈珍貴樹木被砍國父像遭潑糞：工團促將紅樓列古迹〉 [“Precious Trees Cut Down, Sun Yat-sen Statue Defiled: Labor Groups Urge Red House to Be Listed as a Heritage Site”], 星島日報 (Sing Tao Daily), January 2, 2002.

in black oil, the plastic signage at the entrance and several stone tablets were destroyed, and multiple Republic of China (ROC) flags were torn down or ripped apart.¹⁶ The following chapters will detail how Hung Lau's transfer of property rights and the implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law have affected local commemorative traditions.

History of the Contestation

Historicising Hung Lau's link to the Xinhai Revolution

To this day, scholars and archaeologists have yet to provide a definitive chain of evidence that would solidify Hung Lau's historical functions or accurately date it. When reviewing the lists of files presented during the Antiquities Advisory Board's 180th meetings in 2017, its members merely acknowledge the site's value as a symbol of collective memory and the belief held by locals regarding the story of Sun Yat-sen and Hung Lau, rather than focusing on its archaeological significance values. This section of the paper will focus on presenting some of the main scholarly arguments surrounding the sites.

On February 26, 1995, a research seminar under the title of *Hung Lau and the Xinhai Revolution* 《香港青山紅樓與辛亥革命》 was held by the Hong Kong Chu Hai College.¹⁷ Around fifty scholars from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan discussed the historical importance of Hung Lau.¹⁸ At this conference, most scholars spoke about the importance of Hung Lau as a monument that marked the beginning of the 1911 revolution. For example, in their paper titled 'An Investigation into Historical Sites of Sun Yat-sen's Activities in Hong Kong' 《孫中山在香港活動史跡調查追記》, Professors Chen Shenglin, former Director of the Modern China Research Centre, and Guo Jingrong of Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou have identified the palm trees standing on the slope to the right of Hung Lau to be planted by Huang Xing, one of Sun Yat-sen's most trusted leaders in the Xinhai Revolution, during a visit to Castel Peak Farm (Figure 4).¹⁹

¹⁶ 明報 [Ming Pao], 《青山紅樓國父碑遭淋黑油》 ["Sun Yat-sen Memorial at Castle Peak Red House Doused with Black Oil"], 明報 (Ming Pao), September 18, 2014.

¹⁷ 珠海書院亞洲研究中心 [Zhuhai College, Asian Studies Research Center], ed. 亞洲研究 [Asian Studies], vol. 13 (April 10, 1995).

¹⁸ Ibid. 74

¹⁹ 郭景榮 [Guo Jingrong] and 陳勝粦 [Chen Shenglin]. "孫中山在香港活動史跡調查追記 — 為『青山紅樓與辛亥革命學術研討會』而作" ["Investigation of Historical Sites Related to Sun Yat-sen's Activities in Hong Kong—Written for the 'Hung Lau and the Xinhai Revolution Academic Symposium'"]. 亞洲研究 [Asian Studies], vol. 13 (April 10, 1995): 120–133.



Figure 4: 'Palm Trees allegedly planted by Huang Xing' by Honeybee via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Figure 5: 'Hung Lau under damage in 2017' by Wpcpey via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

However, not all scholars were optimistic about Hung Lau's future at the time. In his paper titled 'The Red House at Castle Peak and the Xinhai Revolution' (香港青山紅樓與辛亥革命), Zhang Lei, the then President of the Guangdong Academy of Social Sciences, warned of the potential political contestations surrounding Hung Lau. As a mainland scholar, his commentary is perhaps most indicative and foreboding of ideological contradictions facing Hung Lau and how they can bring undesirable impacts on Hung Lau's preservation:

Any commemorative objects or inscriptions that were added later and have no historical relevance to the original site, and therefore should be removed. Some inscriptions on the stone monuments are detrimental to national unity and serve only to incite secessionism. Crude additions, such as engraving Sun Yat-sen's calligraphy on the ruins, are disrespectful and should be thoroughly eliminated. These unsophisticated elements should be cleared away, as there is no reason to preserve them.²⁰

In 2017, The Conservancy Association (長春社), hereafter CAHK, published a journal article titled 'Notes on Preserving Hong Kong's History: A Further Investigation of Castle Peak Farm and Hung Lau' (保育香港歷史筆記:青山農場和紅樓史實再探) on Hung Lau.²¹ The CAHK is an NGO founded in 1968, dedicated to the conservation of both natural and cultural heritage in Hong Kong. This article challenges conventional beliefs about the site recorded in historical documents. The author of this article cited the often-overlooked memoir of Li Yikuang, a former Kuomintang Military General, on his account of a visit to Chen Cuifen, Sun's concubine. This account proposed Hung

²⁰ 張磊 [Zhang Lei]. "香港青山紅樓與辛亥革命" ["Hung Lau in Castle Peak and the Xinhai Revolution"]. *亞洲研究* [Asian Studies], vol. 13 (April 10, 1995): 117–119.

²¹ 長春社 [The Conservancy Association Hong Kong]. "保育香港歷史筆記:青山農場和紅樓史實再探" [Preserving Hong Kong's History Notes: A Further Exploration of the Facts on Castle Peak Farm and the Red House]. *第三期增刊* (Special Issue No. 3), March 2017.

Lau as the house where Chen Cui-fen and Sun Yat-sen lived together between 1891 and 1892.²² This view further challenges the existing chronology of Castle Peak Farm and Hung Lau being built in 1901. Suggesting that even though no evidence proves Li Ki-tang built Hong Lau and its connections to the 1911 revolution were indirect, the building is nonetheless an essential part of Sun Yat-sen's activities in Hong Kong.

In June 2011, the Antiquities Advisory Board (古物諮詢委員會) rejected the proposal of declaring Hung Lau as a monument. Claiming that the historical relevance of Hung Lau to the Xinhai Revolution remains to be determined, as it is unclear whether it was built before 1911. Unless new evidence emerges to confirm a direct connection between Hung Lau and the revolutionary activities, it would not be considered for further declaration.²³ During the Antiquities Advisory Board meeting on 7 December 2017, Ng Chi-wo presented the key findings of the review conducted by the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) as follows:

- (a) the aerial and old photos of Hung Lau taken since 1949, the earliest government records identified so far, showed the appearance, construction style, and materials of Hung Lau, as well as its major changes in the exteriors. These photos, however, could not indicate the construction year of Hung Lau and its relationship with the 1911 Revolution;
- (b) the historical information from various publications by different scholars reviewed mainly described the relationship between the 1911 Revolution and the former Castle Peak Farm owned by Li Ki-tong (李紀堂). Some of the publications did associate Dr Sun Yat-sen with Hung Lau in the context of the 1911 Revolution. There were, however, considerable doubts about the people, buildings, and activities mentioned. For instance, Feng Tzu-yu (馮自由) was mentioned to have met Dr Sun Yat-sen in around 1891-92 in Hung Lau, but this was unlikely as Feng was then only about 10 years old and residing in Japan. Furthermore, it was unlikely that Dr Sun Yat-sen and Chen Cui-fen (陳粹芬) met in a church of China Congregational Church (中華基督教會公理堂, "CCC") in Tuen Mun as mentioned in some of the publications as CCC did not have any church there at the time;
- (c) a survey plan of 1905 for Lot No. 36 in DD 300 suggested that there were once buildings or structures erected on the site, yet it was unlikely that the present-day Hung Lau was one of the buildings or structures shown on the survey plan as their locations were very different;
- (d) the markings on the two maps of 1904 and 1915 could not be confirmed as the present-day Hung Lau;
- (e) an internal government memorandum issued by a maintenance surveyor who estimated the building then located at the site might have been constructed 100 years ago, i.e. in 1868, after

²² Ibid.

²³ Antiquities Advisory Board, "Progress Update of Hung Lau, near Shek Kok Tsui Village, Castle Peak, Tuen Mun, New Territories," Minutes of the 180th Meeting, AAB/5/2017-18, Board Paper AAB/20/2017-18, December 7, 2017.

visiting the site in 1968. Yet his estimation was never quoted again in all the subsequent internal documents thereafter. The internal memorandum could not substantiate the construction year of Hung Lau, not to mention the relationship between Hung Lau and the 1911 Revolution. Furthermore, as Hung Lau was built in reinforced concrete, it was not convincing that it was built in 1868;

(f) the view of the first Executive Secretary of AMO on the age of Hung Lau was only partially quoted as “probably built between 1885 and 1890” without mentioning the statement, “but accurate historical records were difficult to obtain” that followed. The statement showed that the first Executive Secretary was skeptical of the view that Hung Lau was built in 1885-1890.²⁴

Overall, scholars and board members on the Antiquities Advisory Board concluded that no concrete evidence supports Hung Lau’s direct link to the 1911 Revolution.²⁵ They rejected the reliability of oral history due to noted inconsistencies, such as Chen Cui-fen’s account of meeting Dr. Sun Yat-sen in a church in Tuen Mun in 1891, and the style of Hung Lau being atypical for the New Territories at that time.²⁶ As a result, a more rigorous approach should be used to evaluate the credibility of historical evidence to prevent the dissemination of misleading information and to respect the private ownership of historic buildings.

Although further archaeological excavation could provide material evidence consolidating the relationship between the current Hung Lau building and the 1911 Revolution, no active effort is currently being made to resolve the contradictions in different speculations. However, one has to question how far archaeological evidence can take us to prove the historical importance of the site, as Sr Wong Bay pointed out in the AAB meeting, the building’s past neglect led to the deterioration of its original architectural features, including a roof replacement that negatively impacted Hung’s architectural value Lau, and also prevented accurate dating of the site.²⁷

Conflicting Narratives and Discourse

Despite its historical and political ambiguity, most historians acknowledge the importance of Hung Lau as a vital part of Hong Kong’s collective memory. The belief that Sun Yat-sen and his followers had once planned the 1911 Revolution at this site has, over time, increasingly become an accepted truth for the locals. However, the interpretation of Sun’s legacies strikes at the heart of the Cross-Strait relations and the disputes regarding the political and administrative status of Taiwan. Sun Yat-sen is unique amongst 20th-century Chinese leaders for being revered by both

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Antiquities Advisory Board. “Minutes of the Special Meeting on Tuesday, 28 February 2017.” *Minutes of the Special Meeting, AAB/2017*, February 28, 2017.

the mainland and Taiwan. For the KMT and present-day Taiwan, which claims legitimacy and continuity from the government established in 1912 on the Chinese mainland. Sun is revered as the 'Father of the Nation' (國父). In the mainland, he is known as the 'Forerunner of the Revolution' (伟大的革命先行者). The distinction between 'Father of the Nation' and 'Forerunner of the Revolution' needs to be further unpacked here.

The first title emphasises a narrative centred on Sun as a unifier who sought to modernise China through his 'Three Principles of the People.' More importantly, it ties Sun directly to the legitimacy and continuity of the ROC government, which claims to be the rightful successor of the state he founded. The PRC government uses the latter title to acknowledge Sun Yat-sen's early contributions to the revolutionary movement that overthrew the Qing dynasty. However, it subtly downplays his status as the founding father of a republic distinct from the PRC, which positions him as a precursor to the PRC and the communist revolution.

Paralleling the grander conflicts between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). Hong Kong, a city closely tied to the revolutionary legacy of Sun, compounded by the complexities of the transfer of sovereignty from colonial to communist rule, finds itself in an ambiguous position due to its unique historical and political context. Double Tenth has been celebrated as the Chinese National Day in Hong Kong since 1911. After 1949, when the government of the Republic of China retreated to Taiwan (recently reclaimed from Japanese occupation in 1945), local supporters of the People's Republic of China began celebrating National Day on October 1st. Meanwhile, supporters of the Republic of China, now based in Taiwan, celebrate the Double Tenth Day on October 10th as their national day. After the handover of Hong Kong from colonial Britain to the People's Republic of China in 1997, the Double Tenth Day celebration in Hong Kong has seen further decline in scope. In recent years, it has transformed into a gesture of disobedience that challenges the CCP's political legitimacy.

Hung Lau and the Sun Yat-sen Commemoration Garden are adjacent to the site. It is one of the only remaining locations in Hong Kong where the KMT/Republican flag is regularly flown and serves as a gathering point for ROC supporters. Since the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the old flag has lost its status as a national symbol. However, it could still exist within exceptional contexts. One example officially available in mainland China is the Tengchong Martyrs' Shrine (腾冲忠烈祠), located in the National Cemetery of Tengchong County (国殇墓园), Baoshan City, Yunnan Province.²⁸ It was built in 1945 to honour the fallen soldiers of the Chinese Expeditionary

²⁸ This is the only cemetery in mainland China dedicated to KMT soldiers, and it is also the only place in the country, apart from the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum (中山陵), where the Blue Sky with a White Sun flag, can be raised. 抗日战争纪念网 [Anti-Japanese War Memorial

Force's 20th Army Group who sacrificed their lives in the battle to retake Tengchong against Japanese Aggression. Unlike Hung Lau, this site has gained the status of National Priority Protected Site (全国重点文物保护单位) since 1997 and is recognised by the provincial government as an important historical site for patriotic education.²⁹

The key difference between these two sites lies in how the respective sites fit into the PRC's official historical and political narrative. Hung Lau, with its historical associations with KMT activities, the flag represents a political alternative to the PRC. It challenges its legitimacy, making it a site of contestation against the already precarious context of Hong Kong as a SAR. In contrast, the Martyrs' Shrine can be incorporated into the PRC's narrative of national unity and anti-fascism. The shrine also carries substantial emotional weight in honouring wartime sacrifice, a unifying and less politically divisive theme.

The meanings and associations of the ROC flag lend themselves to extensive discussions. The flag, once a powerful symbol of the Republic of China, has become increasingly contentious in both mainland China and Taiwan. In mainland China, it is unrecognised and politically sensitive, symbolising a competing historical government. Since 1971, following the United Nations' expulsion of the ROC and its replacement by the PRC, its use has been limited in the international arena. In Taiwan, its meaning is also deeply divisive: some see it as a representation of Taiwan's sovereignty and its history, even if they don't fully support the KMT, while others, especially separatist advocates, view the flag as an outdated symbol of the Nationalist party-state ideology and increasingly irrelevant. Internationally, its use has diminished due to diplomatic shifts and restrictions, further complicating its identity.³⁰ While once revered and strictly protected during Taiwan's White Terror era (1949-1991), its significance has waned in recent years, reflecting the island's evolving political and cultural identity.³¹

The flag also has its own history of significance in Hong Kong. During British colonial rule, Hong Kong's pro-KMT community openly celebrated Double Tenth Day by displaying the ROC flag. In the 1950s, tensions over such displays sometimes led to conflicts, such as the 1956 Double Tenth Riots in Sham Shui Po (雙十暴動). However, public flag displays were largely tolerated.³² In 1998,

Network], “国殇墓园, 中国大陆唯一一座国军烈士墓园” [“National Martyrs' Cemetery: The Only Nationalist Soldiers' Cemetery in Mainland China”], *Online Archive*, September 21, 2022.

²⁹ 腾冲市人民政府网 [Tengchong City People's Government]. 国殇墓园 [“National Cemetery of Tengchong County.”] Government Website, May 26, 2022.

³⁰ 威克 [Ke Wei], “台湾来鸿:元旦升旗和国家的认同” [“Taiwan Letters: New Year's Flag Raising and National Identity”], *BBC*, May 1, 2018.

³¹ Ibid.

³² 葉靖斯 [Yip Ching-sze], “雙十節:紀念辛亥革命的青天白日旗會不會在香港絕跡” [“Double Tenth Day: Will the Blue Sky, White Sun Flag Commemorating the Xinhai Revolution Disappear from Hong Kong?”], *BBC Chinese News*, October 9, 2021

Ye Guohua, an advisor to Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa, attended a Double Tenth banquet, marking the first time the new Hong Kong government official participated in such an event. He later disclosed an informal agreement with Taiwan's representative office in Hong Kong: official Double Tenth events would refrain from displaying the ROC flag or using the term "National Day," while private organisations could determine how to adorn their venues and conduct their activities celebrations.³³

As a result, contestations facing Hung Lau are not only archaeological. More importantly, it is one of many political intricacies. The site is linked to the 1911 Revolution, symbolising Sun Yat-sen's Tridemism while inferring a historical connection with the KMT and underlying anti-communist sentiments. This duality raises questions about its significance and relevance in Hong Kong today. According to CAHK:

「但現時紅樓四周，特別是「中山公園」內掛滿「青天白日滿地紅」旗，紀念碑上也有反共字句，而在雙十節時也會有特別的儀式。成為官地後，政府會否容許這些繼續存在？」³⁴

Currently, the area around the Red House, especially within the Sun Yat-sen Commemoration Garden is adorned with the "Blue Sky, White Sun, and a Wholly Red Earth" flag (commonly called the flag of Taiwan). The monument also bears anti-communist slogans, with special celebrations during Double Tenth Day. If it becomes government property, will the authorities allow these elements to remain?

CAHK's concerns were well-founded. Amid the escalating tensions in the Taiwan Strait and the implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law in 2020, the significance of Double Tenth Day has become increasingly delicate. On September 29, the pro-Beijing newspaper Ta Kung Pao published :

「台湾是中国领土的一部分，而所谓庆祝‘双十’其实是‘庆祝中华民国国庆’，具有把台湾从中国分裂出去的意图。香港市民应认清庆祝‘双十’的本质，不要参与违法活动。」³⁵

"Taiwan is a part of China, therefore the so-called celebration of 'Double Tenth' is a 'celebration of the Republic of China's National Day' in disguise, this event has the intention of separating Taiwan from China. Hong Kong citizens should be able to see the true nature of celebrating 'Double Tenth' and avoid participating in illegal activities."

Chinese nationalism in mainland China became absorbed into the Marxist rhetoric and party-state ideologies. The shifting political discourses surrounding the legitimacy of the ROC is the elephant

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ 長春社 [The Conservancy Association], “保育香港歷史筆記：青山農場和紅樓史實再探” [Preserving Hong Kong's History Notes: A Further Exploration of the Facts on Castle Peak Farm and the Red House].

³⁵ Ibid.

in the room facing Hung Lau's conservation. In addition, due to the site's association with KMT and the ROC, Hung Lau and the Sun Yat-sen Commemoration Garden became the target of multiple incidents of vandalism: in 2002, the statue of Dr Sun Yat-sen was damaged, and the three Arenga trees were cut down. In 2014, the statue was vandalised again, with the signboard and steles broken and flags torn. In December 2020, five commemorative plates were spray-painted, and Republic of China flag poles were removed. The current condition of the site is unclear.

Since the handover in 1997, the government of the HKSAR has struggled with repeated challenges to its governance and political legitimacy. The public discontent surrounding Hung Lau is one of many cases symptomatic of such discontent, as its complicated historical legacies and political associations spoke of an alternative to the current administrative body. Historically, the British colonial regime gained political legitimacy through socioeconomic improvements. The branding of Hong Kong's success with the slogan 'Prosperity and Stability,' persisted into the 1980s and beyond the 1997 handover to China. The HKSAR government later adopted this phrase. However, grassroots protesters have increasingly demanded 'Democracy and Freedom,' especially since the June Fourth incident (六四事件) and escalating after the Umbrella Movement (雨傘運動), and the Anti-extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement (反逃犯條例修訂運動), amidst the backdrop of relative socioeconomic decline.³⁶

Decision-Making Processes

Legal Complications

In 1981, the Antiquities Advisory Board (hereafter AAB) accorded Grade 1 status to the building. Grade 1 status under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance is defined as 'buildings of outstanding merit, which every effort should be made to preserve if possible.'³⁷ In 1985 and 1995, the AAB discussed the case of Hung Lau and expressed doubts about the main building

³⁶ June Fourth Incident (六四事件) refers to the 1989 student-led protests in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, which ended in a violent military crackdown. For decades, Hong Kong was the only place in China where public vigils mourned the victims, but in recent years, the HKSAR government has increasingly deemed such acts as "seditious."

Umbrella Movement (雨傘運動), was a pro-democracy protest in Hong Kong from September to December 2014, sparked by proposed electoral reforms seen as undemocratic. Tens of thousands occupied key areas, demanding universal suffrage and Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying's resignation. The movement drew global attention but ended without achieving its goals.

Anti-extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement (反逃犯條例修訂運動), was a series of mass protests in Hong Kong opposing a proposed bill allowing extraditions to mainland China. Beginning with a sit-in on 15 March 2019, the movement escalated on 9 June with a demonstration of hundreds of thousands and intensified on 12 June with a protest outside the Legislative Council, delaying the bill's second reading. It became the largest protest movement in Hong Kong's history.

³⁷ Antiquities Advisory Board. "Historic Buildings: Definition of the Gradings," November 23, 2021.

and the CPF site as a whole. The board argues that the current building was built in the 1920s at the earliest and, therefore, is not directly associated with the 1911 Revolution. In December 2009, AAB confirmed to retain Hung Lau's Grade 1 status. This decision considered the assessment results of the independent Historic Building Assessment Panel. The grading also acknowledged the importance of collective memories associated with Hung Lau as shared by many of Hong Kong's citizens.

Another legal complication facing Hung Lau was that the building is currently private property. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Tuen Mun District Council proposed an HK\$86 million restoration plan for Hung Lau, but it was eventually shelved. The antiquities office states that the development proposal is still 'subject to further study with the owner' due to private property and land matters. In November 2016, Hung Lau was sold to its current owner, a mainland businessman. This sale was highly controversial, as the change in ownership could affect the annual nationalist commemorations on site. The site became the centre of public outrage in mid-February 2017 following the removal of vegetation and a temporary structure near Hung Lau. The Buildings Department reminded the owner that prior approval and consent are required for demolition works under the Buildings Ordinance. In light of the imminent threat of demolition, the AAB declared Hung Lau a proposed monument to provide immediate statutory protection. Following this declaration, Hung Lau received temporary protection for 12 months.³⁸ Under the Ordinance, the proposed monument declaration on private land cannot be extended beyond 12 months. As of 2025, no significant advancement has been made; the site retained its somewhat awkward status of a Grade 1 monument.³⁹

In the aforementioned CAHK journal article. The organisation proposed an ideal solution to Hung Lau's conservative status:

「最理想的方案，是把地段分拆，紅樓部分由政府收回，而隔鄰的紅樓休憩處仍有之前農場的果樹遺留(雖然未必是青山農場的)，兩者可以合併成一個環境較理想的紅樓和青山農場遺址的公 共空間。至於「中山公園」，最好安排相關團體購入，讓有重要社會價值的土方可以保留原有特色。至於可否成事，還看各方的政治智慧和對歷史古蹟有多尊重。」⁴⁰

The ideal resolution would be to subdivide the area, with the government acquiring the land containing Hung Lau, while the adjacent leisure area, the remaining fruit trees from the former farm (though not necessarily from Castle Peak Farm), can be combined to create a more suitable public

³⁸ The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Press Releases. "Government Highly Concerned about the Condition of Hung Lau." Government Website, February 21, 2017.

³⁹ ANTIQUITIES ADVISORY BOARD. "List of the 1,444 Historic Buildings with Assessment Results (as at 4 February 2025)." AAB, February 4, 2025.

⁴⁰ 長春社 [The Conservancy Association], "保育香港歷史筆記: 青山農場和紅樓史實再探" [Preserving Hong Kong's History Notes: A Further Exploration of the Facts on Castle Peak Farm and the Red House].

space for Hung Lau and the Castle Peak Farm site. As for the Sun Yat-sen Commemorative Garden, it would be best for relevant organisations to purchase it, allowing this important cultural site to retain its original features. Whether this resolution is viable depends upon the political wisdom of all parties involved and the level of respect for historical monuments.

The contestations surrounding the site were made more complicated by the passing of the Hong Kong National Security Law in 2020. This law criminalised secessionism, subversion, terrorism, and collusion.⁴¹ The passing of this law is interpreted to have profound impacts on the constitutional rights of Hong Kong as SAR, and the principle of 'one country, two systems'.⁴² In the specific context of Hung Lau, the new legislation halted the on-site celebration of Double Tenth Day. On October 23, 2020, Hong Kong's Sing Tao Daily published an interview with Hong Kong SAR Secretary for Security, Chris Tang Ping-keung. In this interview, Tang expressed that celebrations related to Double Tenth Day might be seen as 'serious illegal activities' infringing the Hong Kong National Security Law.⁴³

On October 10, 2020, around 20 citizens gathered at the Sun Yat-sen Commemorative Garden for the annual celebration of Double Tenth Day and found out that they were unable to enter the site. Two individuals asked participants to leave on the grounds of trespassing, while participants of the commemoration argued that they were on public grounds. Conflict arose when a man attempted to breach the security line, resulting in a brief physical confrontation with the guards. Plainclothes officers were present to record the event.⁴⁴ In 2021, reports indicated that police had cordoned off the building to prevent people from paying tribute due to the site's current associations with 'Taiwan Secessionism'.⁴⁵ Moreover, the vague and undefined terms used in the new legislation made the legal threshold for prosecuting subversion and secessionism ambiguous and open to manipulation. As a result, the boundaries for discussing the political legacy of Sun Yat-sen and the ultimate fate of Hung Lau remain halted.

⁴¹ Amnesty International, "Hong Kong's National Security Law: 10 Things You Need to Know," Amnesty International, July 17, 2020.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ 鄧炳強表示：「任何人有意圖想將台灣從中國分裂出去，是嚴重罪行，你首先要問清楚自己，你有否這個意圖，如果你無這個意圖，為何要慶祝這個日子呢？」[Anyone who intends to separate Taiwan from China is committing a serious crime. You must first ask yourself clearly—do you have this intention? If you do not have this intention, then why do you celebrate this day?]. Sing Tao Daily,〈專訪 | 鄧炳強警告：勿趁「雙十」分裂國家〉["Exclusive Interview | Chris Tang's Warning: Do Not Use 'Double Tenth' to Split the Country"], *Sing Tao Daily*, September 22, 2021,

⁴⁴ 葉靖斯 [Yip Ching-sze], "雙十節：紀念辛亥革命的青天白日旗會不會在香港絕跡" ["Double Tenth Day: Will the Blue Sky, White Sun Flag Commemorating the Xinhai Revolution Disappear from Hong Kong?"].

⁴⁵ Koper, Tomasz. "Hong Kong: No Double Tenth Celebrations This Year." *Radio Taiwan International*, October 11, 2021.

Summary and Conclusions

The case of Hung Lau in Tuen Mun encapsulates the intricate interplay of historical narratives, political contestations, and legal complexities that underscore Hong Kong's broader sociopolitical landscape. Originally associated with Dr Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary activities and the Xinhai Revolution, Hung Lau stands as a monumental symbol of Hong Kong's pivotal role in modern Chinese history. However, the site's significance extends beyond its architectural value and historiographical debates. It serves as a reminder of the enduring importance and complexity of history and collective memory.

The Hung Lau case is, first and foremost, a technical and methodological reflection on the historiographical tools available to us. Many historically contested monuments are at a natural disadvantage when faced with positivist-leaning archaeological and legal systems. Often, these monuments are situated in the murky swamps of history, where their indisputable pasts cannot be definitively traced. Instead, we are left with fragmented information from scattered oral sources – accounts that may or may not contradict one another. Reading these accounts is akin to feeling our way along tangled threads, never knowing when they might disappear without a trace.

What is particularly intriguing about the research process is how Hung Lau occupies a complex no-man's land where multiple histories and narratives intersect yet belong entirely to neither. Situated in Hong Kong, it stands at the crossroads of the three regions across the Taiwan Strait. Our efforts to reconcile the past often reject narrative linearity. The ongoing contestations surrounding Hung Lau offer a lens to reflect on the intricate entanglements of mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The Sun Yat-sen Commemoration Garden, located adjacent to the main building of Hung Lau, and its association with the annual celebration of Double Tenth Day speak to the knotty legacies of Chinese nationalism and Hong Kong's colonial past.

Regrettably, legal frameworks such as the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance have only offered temporary protection to Hung Lau in light of demolition risks. The site remains vulnerable to threats of vandalism and destruction. Furthermore, the implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law complicates the political discourse surrounding Hung Lau. Our case here is symptomatic of the broader concerns about infringements on civic rights and freedom of speech. If these issues are disregarded as they are now, it is challenging to envision any change in the foreseeable future.

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In recent years, there have been many contestations over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter- ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

The Contested Histories project is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon, and, although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

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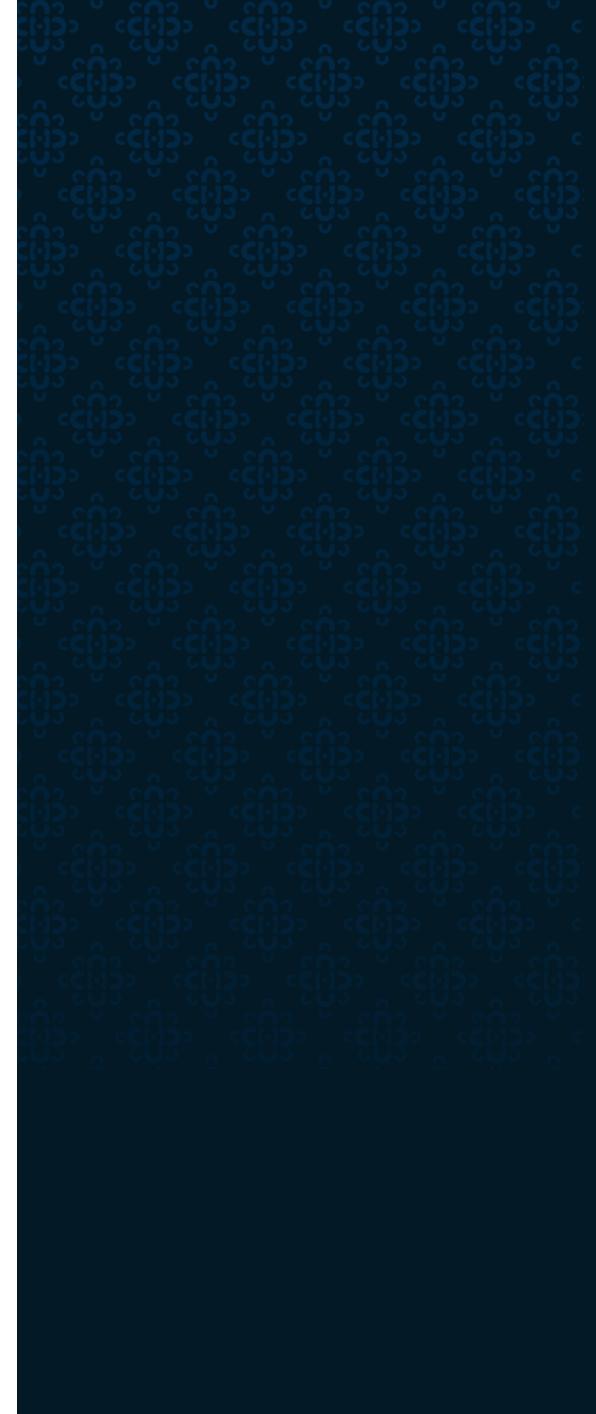
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