

## ABSTRACT

Many former ports have been transformed into consumption spaces for the experience economy or into attractive environments for the creative class. In Europe and North America, port heritage has been a major asset in these processes, adding reusable buildings as well as narratives to these new developments. In Asia, similar processes are taking place, but have attracted less attention. This paper looks at heritage conservation in four Asian port cities: Macao, Hong Kong, Qingdao and Taipei. These cities share a colonial past and cultural background, but nowadays operate in different political-administrative systems and economic contexts, offering interesting opportunities for comparison.

Conservation of port heritage is challenging as port buildings may lack architectural value, or prove hard to reuse for their size, lay out, or location. The limited access to port areas in the past may mean the public has little knowledge of, or connection with, this heritage. The main challenge for conservation is to move beyond a mere facelift of the waterfront and to preserve a coherent port landscape that tells the story of the port and its relation to the development of the city. Such an integral vision is hampered [1] by poor communication and cooperation between different government levels and agencies, [2] by different agendas of stakeholders and conservationists and [3] because public participation, although often mentioned, proves hard to establish in practice.



## The challenges of conserving port heritage: tales from Macao, Qingdao, Hong Kong and Taipei

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## KEYWORDS

Port heritage; Conservation; Adaptive re-use; Stakeholders; Colonial ports; Macao; Hong Kong; Qingdao; Taipei

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## Introduction

As a result of transformations in the economy and geography of ports and shipping, many old harbour districts have become obsolete. New deep-water harbours, that can service the ever-larger ships, have been built, often closer to the sea. Containerisation requires huge areas for temporary storage and makes the old warehouses, the most characteristic buildings of traditional harbours, redundant (Amenda, 2011). Many old harbour districts have lost their functions, leading to degraded buildings and their surroundings. However, these areas have potential: they hold the promise to reconnect adjacent urban areas with the water, after a long period in which harbour activities had formed a major barrier between the two. Moreover, empty warehouses and other buildings can be adapted for reuse, a process that often starts informally.

Waterfront redevelopment started in the 1970s in Western de-industrializing cities and most attention has been given to pioneering examples such as Baltimore, Barcelona, Boston, London Docklands, New York, Rotterdam and San Francisco (Meyer, 1999; Atkinson, 2007; Pries, 2008; Brownill, 2013). However, since the 1980's regenerated waterfronts became a world-wide phenomenon (Hoyle et al., 1988; Atkinson, 2007; Brownill, 2013; Airas et al., 2015) and a growing number of examples can be studied in East Asia. These examples are interesting as Asian cities have followed different socio-economic and political-administrative pathways compared to cities in the West, as processes of industrialisation and de-industrialisation in the Newly Industrialising Economies worked out differently (Leung and Soyezy, 2009). Also, visions of heritage differ. Initially, heritage conservation in Asia was characterized by a predominantly western-oriented Authorized Heritage Discourse, often following international institutions such as UNESCO or ICOMOS and imported by scholars that received (parts of) their training in western institutions (Taylor, 2004; Smith, 2006; Zang, 2019). Recently, however, Asian countries have developed their own charters and principles which adapt heritage conservation to local culture and understandings of past and heritage. On the other hand, heritage practices in the "Western" world and in Asia also show parallel developments such as the transformation of the Beijing Art District 798 into a tourist attraction (Cerutti, 2011), and public participation and local, bottom up initiatives such as the efforts to protect the harbour piers in Hong Kong (Zang et al., 2017) and a modernist casino/hotel in Macao (Xie and Shi, 2018; Zang, 2019). So, waterfronts need to be understood in their local context. They do not all follow the same model: the reigning planning culture in a city influences both stakeholder involvement and notions and practices of heritage conservation (Oevermann et al., 2016). Each site thus presents a unique mix of stakeholders, coalitions, power structures, planning traditions and narratives of public interest that operate within a historically unique setting.

This paper presents a comparison between four colonial port cities in Asia: Macao, Qingdao, Hong Kong and Taipei, investigating which challenges conservation of port heritage is faced with and how these challenges are dealt with. Whereas any port can be depicted as a point of economic and cultural contact where global and local flows interact (Reeves et al., 1989), colonial ports inherently carry with them stronger foreign influences. The port was a vital element of the colonial enterprise (Ross and Tellkamp, 1985), where colonizers created a stronghold, either as safe haven for the navy, as trading post or to exploit local resources. Traces of these influences may be contested today as they remind of former occupation and of the way in which foreign powers moulded the cities to their needs (Yeoh, 1996; Tunbridge, 2002). Waterfront redevelopment

projects and conservation of port heritage in the four cities are therefore part of wider identity formation processes and renegotiations of the colonial past. The comparison of the four cities is interesting as they share a cultural background which influences heritage notions and philosophies, whereas they operate in very different political and socio-economic contexts which influence the renegotiation of the colonial past in the present (Law, 2014). Taipei for example started to embrace Japanese heritage partly as a means to attract Japanese nostalgic tourists, while in Qingdao the Second World War occupation is still felt so strongly that conservation of Japanese remains is complicated. Meanwhile the handing back of Macao and Hong Kong to mainland China strongly influence the representations of their past (Law, 2014; Zang, 2019).

The comparison is based on desk research, literature review, field observations and interviews with 24 local heritage experts and professionals (both performed between 2014 and 2016). After a brief literature review, the paper first sketches to what extent the colonial port landscape is still visible and then focuses on the many challenges and pitfalls of the conservation of port heritage.

## Waterfront development and redevelopment

Even when abandoned and derelict, waterfronts are not blank slates (Avni, 2017). Although initially the emphasis of redevelopment may have been on real estate, it soon became clear that the existing old warehouses and other harbour structures could be seen as assets - in line with the growing interest in industrial heritage from the 1970's onwards. Gradually, heritage gained prominence in the redevelopment processes and became a subject of systematic research (Fragner, 2012). As a consequence, derelict port areas are no longer seen as problem but as opportunity or unrealized potential (Loures, 2015), and formerly run-down, inaccessible areas have been transformed into valuable urban spaces (Giovinazzi and Moretti, 2010).

Redeveloped waterfronts seem to have become the hallmark of successful post-industrial cities that compete in the global arena, but these developments are contested as well. Whereas some commentators hail waterfronts as examples of successful strategies for creating post-industrial cities, many others take a more critical stance on the redevelopment processes (Meyer, 1999; Atkinson, 2007; Brownill, 2013), pointing out for example that these "makeovers" create sanitised landscapes (Oakley, 2005: 319), where shipping, fisheries, and related industries have disappeared to be replaced by leisure, entertainment, shopping, creative industries or expensive residences (Boland et al., 2017: 119). Brownill (2013) further concludes that waterfronts redevelopments borrow standard formulas which made Graham (2002:1009) speak of "*a global cliché as restaurants, craft shops and leisure spaces replace working harbours*". Issues of commodification, identity, and displacement that have been raised in the context of urban rejuvenation, gentrification and adaptive reuses in general are thus noted in waterfront redevelopments as well (Atkinson, 2007; De Cesari and Dimova, 2019).

A recent addition to the arguments for redevelopment is sustainability. Adaptive reuse of derelict industrial and port areas can be a strategy towards more sustainable cities (Loures, 2015; Yung and Chan, 2012). On the one hand, adaptive reuse of existing building stock means less waste and less new resources required in comparison to demolition. It also implies less greenfield development and thus less urban sprawl. On the other hand, as heritage is related to local identity and sense of place, adaptive reuse potentially stimulates social sustainability as well. Economic sustainability through adaptive reuse is more problematic (Bowitz and Ibenholt, 2009; Janssen et al., 2014; Botti et al., 2016): cultural uses such as museums may not generate enough income to pay for maintenance whereas more commercial uses such as shopping malls may require extensive adaption of the building - to the extent that some authors see it as façadism or kitsch.

## Port heritage

Reuse of old buildings provides them with a second life: having lost their original function they now live on as “exhibits of themselves” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995: 370). It is therefore in the present that these elements are valued and imbued with (new) meanings (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1999; Atkinson et al., 2002; Graham, 2002). Port heritage then consist of those remains of the historic harbour landscape and port system that are today valued, preserved and given new purposes (Hein, 2011). Port heritage comprises of a huge variety of interrelated objects and sites that together can narrate the story of the development of a particular port, its (inter)national importance in trade and transportation networks, and its influences on the urban development at large. Port heritage can be situated at the waterfront, but also further inland and consists of elements with various functions and locations: docks, wharves, depots, cranes, port and maritime services (such as lighthouses, customs, hospitals), port related industries, fisheries (harbours, boats, markets, livings, livelihood), defence works (fortifications) to protect the port itself and the fleet, naval shipyards, and finally infrastructure such as railroads connecting the port with inland areas. Port heritage is not about individual objects but about components of what Westerdahl (1992) described as a maritime cultural landscape.

In terms of conservation, port heritage has many aspects in common with other industrial heritage. These include concerns about commodification, Disneyfication, nostalgia, authenticity or selectivity that are often raised in the context of heritagization and adaptive reuse (Atkinson, 2007; Kohn, 2010; Mathews and Picton, 2014). A common problem for most industrial heritage are the architectural characteristics buildings that often do not have the same aesthetic qualities as “traditional” monuments, such as cathedrals or government palaces, and at the same time are difficult adapt to new uses because of their sheer size and volume. Moreover, public awareness of the heritage value of industrial and port areas can be low, as the areas have always been inaccessible for most of the population. On the other hand, for those inhabitants that earned a living here, these sites played an important part in their lives (Oevermann et al., 2016). Port heritage can also have iconic value and may add to inhabitants’ sense of place as they were part of the face of the city when approaching from the water (Cheung and Tang, 2015).

Ports were focal points in the maritime landscape, characterised by the strong relations between the constituting parts. For such integrated systems, area conservation which attempts to preserve the distinctive historic character and fabric in its local context, is vital (Zhang, 2008; Tiesdell et al., 2013). But ports have also always been dynamic and heritage management should take this dynamic character into account. Although area conservation has become “normal” practice in heritage policy - in China for example area conservation is proposed as a strategy to ease the tension between heritage conservation and urban renewal, real estate development and modernization (Shan, 2006) - many waterfront redevelopments eventually result in protecting and reusing individual objects. These often-beautified objects thereby lose their connection with their working landscapes of the past and the people belonging to that.

Sustainable heritage conservation requires efforts by multiple stakeholders. The financial burden of maintaining heritage often results in attempts by local governments to include other (private) investors. Landorf (2011a, b) theorizes how heritage-led redevelopments can contribute to social sustainability. While the historical urban environment can promote social cohesion, social sustainability requires public participation in heritage conservation. Such participation should extend beyond solely informing inhabitants or tokenism (Oevermann et al., 2016; Zang and Van Gorp, 2018). Calls for stakeholder involvement are not new, but Ashley et al. (2015) claim that to actually include local stakeholders is still challenging. There are not only issues of how to involve stakeholders and designing innovative ways to include them (Oevermann et al., 2016), but also about managing diverging views on heritage and on redevelopment. Stakeholders all bring their own agendas and interests to the table (Chang and Huang, 2011; Wang, 2013; Ashley et al., 2015).

## Four colonial port cities

Although the four port cities all functioned as European trading posts at some point in time, their particular colonial history differs (Reeves et al., 1989; Zang et al., 2017) (Table 1). Hong Kong was under British rule for about 150 years until 1997, Macao was a Portuguese colony from the sixteenth to the late twentieth century, Qingdao was ruled as a “model colony” by the German navy from 1897 to 1914. Taipei was under Dutch and Spanish rules for approximately two decades in the 17th century. Meanwhile, three of these ports also share a history of Japanese occupation in the first half of the 20th century. Hong Kong was Japanese territory during WWII (1941-1945), Qingdao was ruled by Japanese for two periods (1914-1922, 1938-1945), while Taipei was under Japanese rule between 1895 and 1945. The transition after colonial rule of each of these cities varies remarkably as does their relations with or integration in China. These processes strongly influence the way the colonial past is renegotiated in national identity (Law, 2014; Zang, 2019).

Table 1. Colonial Histories of Hong Kong, Macao, Qingdao and Taipei.

(Source: Zang, X., 2019. *Heritage Conservation in Chinese Colonial Port Cities*. PhD Dissertation, Utrecht University)

| TOWN                    | Hong Kong   | Macao  | Qingdao   | Taipei   |
|-------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Colonial History</b> | British<br>1841-1941<br><br>Japanese<br>1941-1945<br><br>British<br>1945-1997 | Portuguese<br>1557-1999  | German<br>1897-1914<br><br>Japanese<br>1914-1922<br><br>Japanese<br>1938-1945 | Spanish<br>(North of Taiwan)<br>1626-1642<br><br>Dutch<br>(South of Taiwan)<br>1624-1661<br><br>Dutch<br>(Whole of Taiwan)<br>1624-1662<br><br>Japanese<br>1895-1945 |
| <b>Present System</b>   | A Special Administrative Region under the People’s Republic of China          | A Special Administrative Region under the People’s Republic of China | The People’s Republic of China  | Taiwan   |

Portuguese settlers developed the first harbour of Macao between A-Ma Temple and R.do Tarrafeiro (Figure 1). During the 19th century, parts of these ports were used for “clandestine” trade. Macao lost its importance as an international hub to Hong Kong that had better natural conditions which allowed large vessels to call port here. The British started the development of Hong Kong Port on the northern coast of Victoria Harbour. Subsequent port developments followed on the opposite shore line, to the west of Kowloon. Since the second half of 20th century, the south shores of Kowloon Bay, Victoria Harbour and Tung Wan has been developed and reclamations took place for further expansion of the Hong Kong Port which currently is the 8th largest port in the world (Figure 2). Two piers, along the Qingdao Wan, were constructed by the Qing Government. Since 1900s, ports of Xiaogang and Dagang were built by both German and Japanese governments. Today, to increase port capacity, construction and expansion take place in Xiaogang, Dagang Hungdao and Dongjiakou port (Figure 3). Taipei was developed as a trading port along the Tamsui River in the 18th century. Increasing sand deposits in the river meant that the original port activities were moved from Mengjia to the north – Dadaocheng in 1850s (Figure 4). Dadaocheng eventually lost its position in transportation networks when railways and Keelung port were developed.

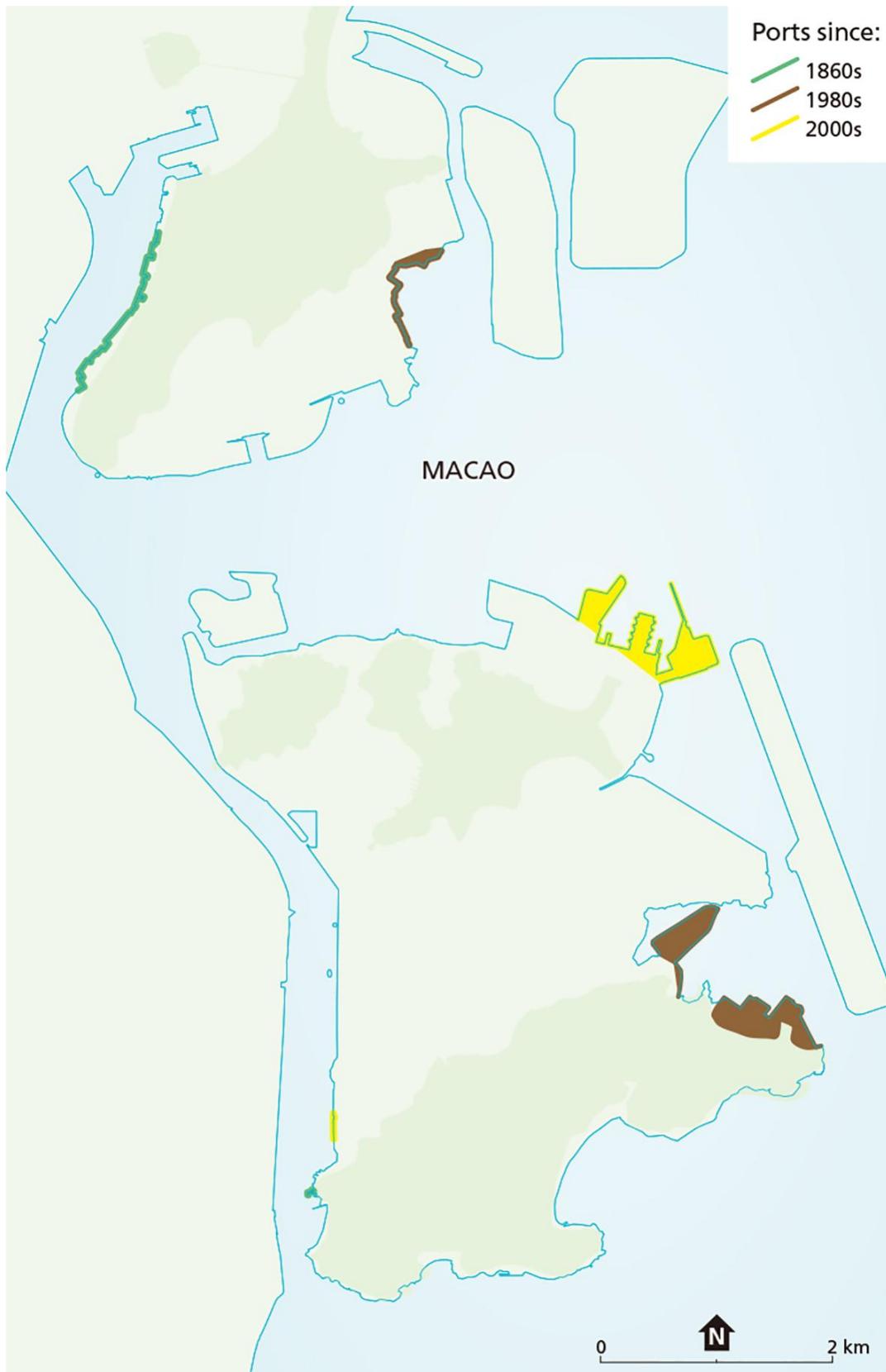


Figure 1. The Development of the ports in Macao.  
(Map created by Ton Markus, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University)

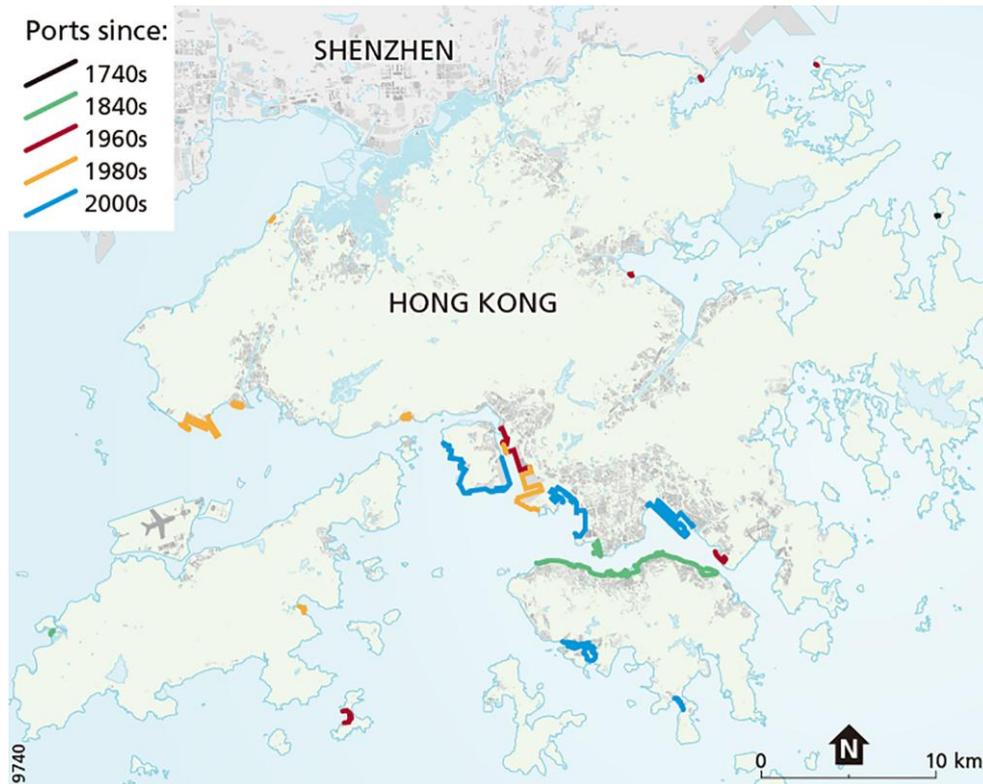


Figure 2. The Development of the Ports in Hong Kong.  
(Map created by Ton Markus, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University)

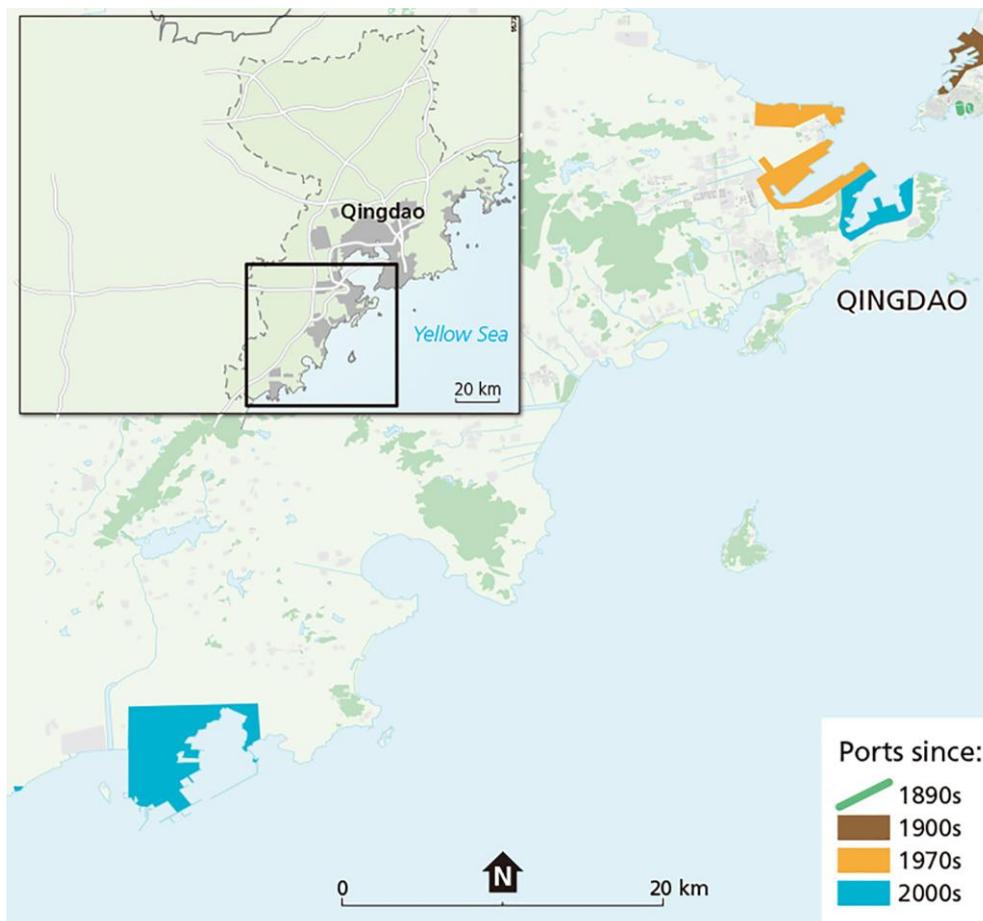


Figure 3. The Development of the Ports in Qingdao.  
(Map created by Ton Markus, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University)

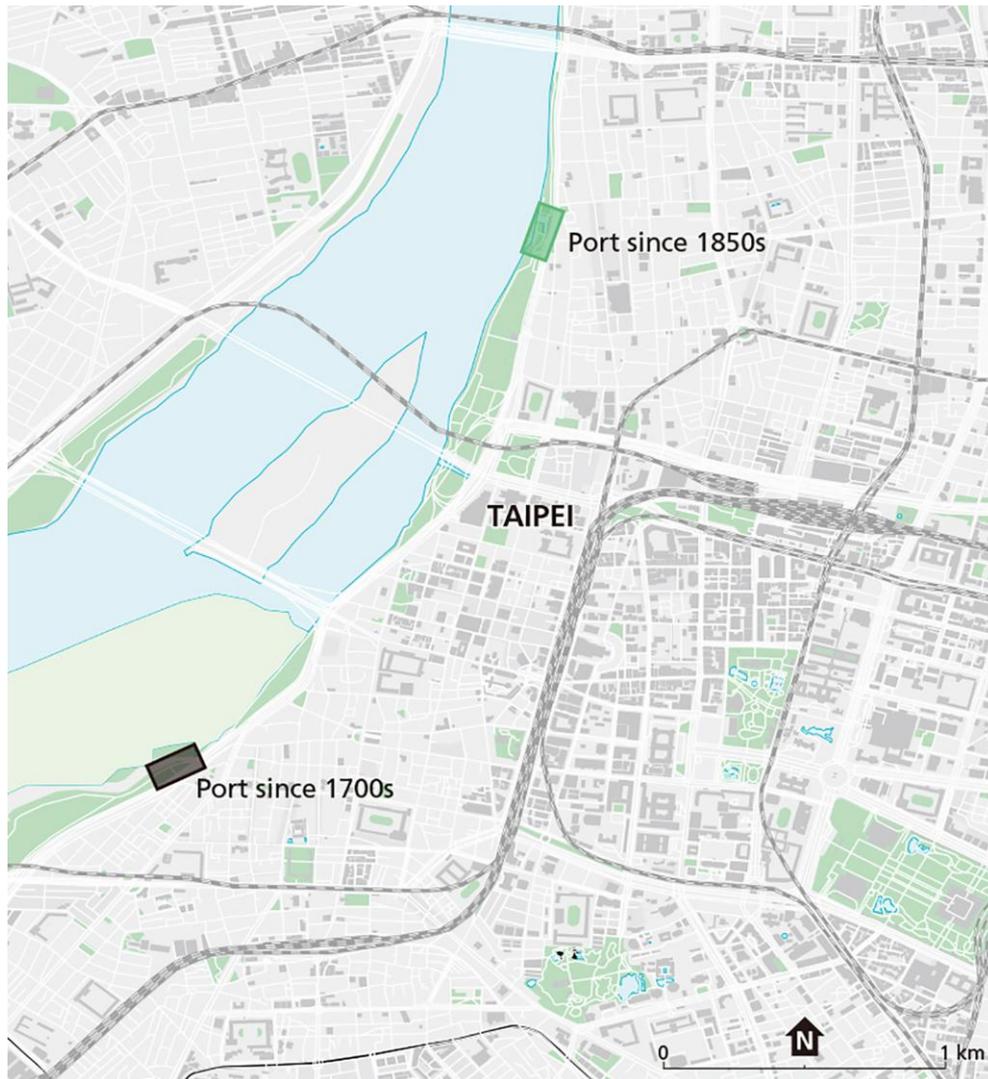


Figure 4. The Development of Ports in Taipei.  
(Map created by Ton Markus, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University)

## Historic area conservation in ports of Macao, Hong Kong, Qingdao, Taipei

Fieldwork, desk research and interviews with local professionals have indicated that in all four cities there is awareness of the value of heritage. The effect this has on the conservation of port remains varies, however. Integrated conservation of the historic landscape is most pronounced in Macao and Qingdao, as Macao was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2005 (Figure 5), while Qingdao was listed as one of the Chinese Historical and Cultural Cities (国家历史文化名城) in 1994. Their listed status implies that the urban fabric is still readable as an integral landscape in these two cities. While the regeneration project of Dihua Street in Taipei illustrates the awareness of the importance of area conservation since the late 1980s (Figure 6). However, our interviewees stated that large-scale historic area conservation in Taipei had stagnated and was considered a soft suggestion with little legal force. Hong Kong perhaps faced more pressure for urban redevelopment under free market policies in land ownership (Wang and Lee, 2008). In Hong Kong the integral context has been lost as only a few scattered and isolated historic buildings were preserved. One of our interviewees from Hong Kong stated the importance of heritage trails for reconnecting individual heritage into an integrated narrative.



Figure 5. The integrated historic urban landscape is still readable in the old town of Macao.



Figure 6. In the Dihua Street, the Yongle Textile Market in the middle of a transformation process.

A particular threat to the integrated conservation of port heritage were subsequent land reclamations. For many decades, land reclamation was an important method for urban extensions (Figure 7). In the process, former port buildings were demolished and if they remained, they were disconnected from the water (Cheung and Tang, 2015). For Hong Kong and Qingdao, port cities that still have a global importance, economic arguments take precedence as stakeholders successfully argue the need for the port to grow to remain competitive in global shipping. Old port areas as a result are not seen as heritage, as is illustrated by the following comment from one of

the interviewees from Qingdao: “*Our port is well developing and it is therefore not necessary to be listed now*”. For the other two ports that fell out of the premier league in global trade, Macao and Taipei, functional transformation and adaptive reuse are seen as ways to revitalize abandoned areas and improve urban vitality (Zhang, 2008; Zang et al., 2017). However, this is no guarantee for integrated conservation: the Dadaocheng port in Taipei has been transformed into a waterfront park with relatively few built remains of the historic port (Figure 8).



Figure 7. Current landscape of Victoria Harbour located on reclaimed land.



Figure 8. The Dadaocheng Wharf has been transformed into a waterfront park.

Area conservation in port areas is furthermore challenged by conflicting interests. Even when governments are concerned with heritage conservation, officials may dismiss the value of port heritage. Port heritage has been paid less attention one interviewee from Qingdao states “(they) are of less historic, aesthetic and scientific values”. An interviewee from Macao felt that the government “preferred to conserve grand buildings and beautiful landscape”. Moreover, dissonance may also stifle the cooperation in area conservation. Although most people tend to see governments as one body, in practice different sectoral departments may have conflicting ideas, interests and responsibilities in heritage conservation and planning. Such issues are evident in Taipei. One professional explained that in Taipei, the listing of buildings is done by the cultural relics department, whereas the planning department is in charge of conserving historic areas. Another interviewee claimed that difficulties for conserving port heritage result from the river management department considering listed heritage as a burden on the future development.

The interviews with experts concur with Chang and Huang’s (2011) observations that stakeholders bring their own interests and agendas to the table. Although governmental institutions acknowledge the importance of heritage and have introduced heritage rules and policies to serve heritage conservation, the government is a relatively powerless stakeholder in comparison to other stakeholders, such as private property owners and developers. The Ho Tung Garden, a proposed historic monument in Hong Kong was demolished in 2013 because the owner’s expected value exceeded the budget government was willing to provide (by 40000 million Hong Kong dollars). Interviewees know of several instances where developers, to pursue maximum profits, lobby with councillors against large-scale conservation projects.

One important group of stakeholders not yet mentioned is the public. Landorf (2011a, b) explained the importance of public participation for sustainable heritage conservation. Our research has resulted in mixed impressions when it comes to public involvement in heritage issues. A survey in Qingdao demonstrated that inhabitants value heritage but also felt that heritage was a government responsibility (Zang, 2019). Meanwhile, over the last decade, parts of the population have become more vocal when it comes to heritage conservation – they protested against demolition of the Queen’s Pier and the Star Ferry Pier in Hong Kong, a Western-style villa in Qingdao and the Hotel Estoril in Macao. In Taipei, a similar protest movement, the Bopiliao movement, even evolved into a general heritage conservation movement – demonstrating that its “members” (Wang, 2013). Meanwhile, while experts also state the importance of public participation, they also talk about educating the public before they are able to truly participate (Zang and Van Gorp, 2018). This reflects the struggle of such professionals to find a way to include the public in heritage issues. Providing the public with the right knowledge to participate means disregarding the value of local knowledge.

## Conclusion & discussion

Derelict waterfronts worldwide have come to be seen as planning potential and have been transformed into important areas in the post-industrial city. Waterfronts were turned into places for consumer or tourist experiences, entertainment or exclusive residential areas. This paper investigated which challenges exist for sustainable port heritage conservation in these four post-colonial cities and how these challenges are dealt with.

As heritage is about making meaning and is closely related to narratives of identity, it is often contested (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996; Graham, 2002). Different groups in society may have different or even conflicting ideas about ownership, interpretation and use of heritage. Dissonance is inherent in heritage and can take many forms. It firstly arises over the question whether a particular object should be preserved or can be demolished and secondly, over ‘ownership’. Heritage, Graham (2002: 1005) asserts, “*disinherits or excludes those who do not subscribe to, or are not embraced within, the terms of meaning attending that heritage*”. Thirdly, as heritage

represents a selective reading of the past, questions arise over which and whose past is selected and how this past is interpreted and narrated. Several authors have commented on this in the context of waterfront redevelopments and urban regeneration projects that rely on adaptive reuse of former industrial sites (see for example Atkinson et al., 2002; Avni, 2017). These issues are magnified in the context of post-colonial port cities where the colonial past is renegotiated. In the four case study cities, these renegotiations show substantial, though subtle, varieties and are essential for the position of port heritage.

Conflict also arises over what new purposes heritage is to serve in its second life and who is to benefit from these new uses. This is especially relevant in waterfront redevelopment projects which open up previously derelict or even restricted areas to new users and uses. Although access is granted to the waterfront, not all groups may benefit equally. Revitalized waterfronts are often geared towards the needs of tourists rather than the local population (Sandercock and Dovey, 2002; Chang and Huang, 2011, Cheung and Tang, 2015). In an attempt to remain competitive, cities have copy-pasted the Waterfront renaissance formula of some best practices (Atkinson, 2007; Brownill, 2013), even to the extent that one may wonder whether waterfronts actually preserve their historic distinctiveness (Graham, 2002; Tunbridge, 2002; Airas et al., 2015). The landscape of the redeveloped waterfront is the result of a planning process in which several stakeholders may have presented their plan as the only viable option or in the best interest of the city and its inhabitants.

This paper has shown how the development of port areas and their heritage in Asia is comparable to similar developments elsewhere, but at the same time each case shows unique features and illustrates the importance of the local context. The four ports show some interesting differences. Two of the ports, Qingdao and Hong Kong are still global players, acting as hubs in container transport. These port cities have invested in waterfront development to present themselves as global cities. The two other ports have been moved (Taipei) or fell back in importance (Macao). Here, the old port areas have been renovated and reused. This local context thus helps explain why in some places a relative intact port landscape is conserved and in other places only scattered remains exist. Whereas Macao, Qingdao and Taipei represent a relatively complete landscape inherited from the colonial pasts, in Hong Kong, a heritage trail is necessary to connect the scattered remains.

The economic importance of the port seems essential both in the kind of developments that take place in waterfronts (modernization and land reclamation versus redevelopments into leisure spaces) and in the power balance between different stakeholders and their interests. Waterfront developments always bring conflicts (Lu, 2009; Wang, 2013). Even when several stakeholders all refer to “public interest” or “public benefits” in their plans, the meaning of these terms varies between stakeholders and through time (Sandercock and Dovey, 2002; Boland et al., 2017). The redevelopment of Hong Kong’s waterfronts has for example been framed both in terms of the need to create an international tourist attraction (reasoning that tourism can boost the economy), and the need for public space for residents of nearby neighbourhoods (Cheung and Tang 2015). This leads authors such as Atkinson et al. (2002) and Boland et al. (2017) to the conclusion that in these plans, neoliberal narratives of global competitiveness, entrepreneurialism, place marketing and creative classes have come to dominate.

The results from this paper concur with these findings from previous studies. To understand the state of port heritage conservation, researchers need to study the perspectives of the stakeholders involved. While national policies set the playing field and global influences set developments in motion, it is at the local scale where interests of stakeholders meet or clash. Although in each of the four cities, there has occasionally been support for conserving port heritage from experts, governments and even the public, overall the poorly designed utilitarian harbour structures are valued less than “traditional” heritage buildings. Moreover, neoliberal market condition

emphasizes the importance of economic profits in heritage conservation. In these conditions, powerful developers and private owners may be more inclined to redevelop and the relatively powerless government may want to avoid conflicts with them. The position of local governments is further weakened by their fragmentation when the designation and conservation of port areas requires the cooperation and negotiation of interests between at least two departments. For the future, a major development may be the further development of a civic society with a stronger involvement of citizens. This is in line with the warning against making simplistic dichotomies between stakeholders by Wang (2013) and De Cesari and Dimova (2019).

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