

Hong Kong's Popular Entertainment

1. Introduction

“Popular entertainment” can be defined as forms of entertainment that are accepted and enjoyed by most people in a society. Popular entertainment is intimately connected with people’s lives and forms part of their culture; its transformation reflects the changing times.

Adhering to traditional customs and practice, the local Chinese had various traditional forms of entertainment, such as dragon dances, lion dances and outdoor Chinese opera, all of which were performed to celebrate the birthdays of deities. After the cession of Hong Kong to the British government in 1842, new and foreign forms of entertainment such as horseracing, football, movies and so on, reached its shores. In the beginning, such activities were partaken by Europeans and some Chinese, but they gradually became more widespread and eventually became part of the popular entertainment in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong has seen many changes over the past 150 years—population increase, economic development, technological advancement, the transformation of its society and the growth of its commerce. In tandem with these changes is the evolution of Hong Kong’s popular entertainment, in terms of venues, programme content, games equipment, participation methods and so on. Several trends can be gleaned from observing these developments. Entertainment in Hong Kong is evolving from one that involves mass participation to one that engages the individual, and it is no longer something to be indulged in at one’s leisure but a consumer activity with commercial interests. In addition, tangible toys, which are played in real time and space, are being replaced by virtual games unfettered by physical constraints.

The essay studies the development of popular entertainment in Hong Kong with focus on the following themes: Traditional Festival Celebrations, Street Entertainment, Horseracing, Football, Amusement Parks, Travel, Theatres, Radio Broadcasting, Television, Toys and Games, Comics, Karaoke and Online Entertainment. By reading the essay, it is hoped that some of your increasingly hazy memories of the not-so-distant past can be evoked.

2. The Development of Popular Entertainment in Hong Kong

Before the British arrived in Hong Kong, the residents in local villages and hamlets had their own forms of entertainment, some of which were local, while others were introduced from Guangdong. Cantonese opera was one of the most popular entertainments that was enjoyed by the locals. Whenever there were festivals and temple fairs, Cantonese opera and dragon and lion dances would be performed as thanksgiving to the deities and entertainment for mortals. Apart from these performances, peripatetic entertainers would perform Cantonese opera songs and material arts displays on the streets. Gradually, a whole *dai daat dei* (flea market) culture evolved, where ordinary people would seek entertainment in their spare time.

After Hong Kong was ceded to Britain in 1842, the British brought in their forms of entertainment such as horseracing and sports like football, some of which became popular in the colony. The racecourse in Wong Nai Chung was completed in 1846, which provided a horseracing venue for Europeans and some Chinese. It also provided the general public with a sizeable location for leisure and entertainment. Similarly, football was at first an exclusive European sport after it was introduced into Hong Kong. However, after the Chinese began to form football teams and audience numbers grew as a result, the game became a popular pastime among locals.

With urbanization, urban entertainment like movies and radio programmes gradually became more popular among the people of Hong Kong. Amusement parks of all sizes also opened, complete with eateries and mechanized games, which provided locals with new forms of entertainment and became public spaces for urban leisure and entertainment.

The population of Hong Kong had reached almost 350,000 by 1931, with Central, Sheung Wan, Wan Chai and Yau Ma Tei being the most densely populated areas. Due to the inadequate transport links in those days, most people in Hong Kong conducted their daily lives and leisure activities within the urban areas; only a handful went hiking or sightseeing in the countryside.

During the Japanese Occupation between 1941 and 1945, large numbers of people left Hong Kong for the mainland. Although radio broadcasts and horseracing events were sustained throughout the occupation and the cinemas continued to screen movies, the unrest and lawlessness of the society meant that people turned to gambling instead.

Popular entertainment in Hong Kong before the Second World War was already indicative of the unique East-meets-West feature of Hong Kong society. This is a place where traditional village entertainments existed side by side with western horseracing and football; a city where people were entertained in movie houses, amusement parks, even on pavements and street corners.

After the end of the Second World War, massive numbers of immigrants entered Hong Kong from the mainland. By the mid-1950s Hong Kong's population had grown to more than two million, most of which were concentrated in the city area. A dense urban population provided the foundation – a market – for the growth of popular entertainment. In the 1960s a new worker class emerged with Hong Kong's industrialization, whose members pursued different forms of entertainment in their spare time. Leisure activities such as watching street performances in *dai daat dei*, movies, football, horseracing, hiking and even gambling developed and found more adherents.

According to the 1961 census, 45.5 percent of the population in Hong Kong were below 15 years old, reflecting the high birth rates in the immediate post-war years. The increase in the children's population supposedly brought the proliferation of comic books and toys. That being said, Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s was not an affluent city. Most children could only hire comic books from pavement book stalls, and toys were frequently shared with other children in the neighborhood.

The ongoing economic development in Hong Kong meant that the number of small factories kept increasing. For the worker class, radio programmes became the major form of entertainment at the work place. To retain their staff, factory owners would organize "party tours" which gave rise to more local hiking and sightseeing activities.

The living conditions of the general public improved in the 1970s. Television sets became essential household items and television programmes provided free entertainment for the hardworking people of Hong Kong. Television also brought outdoor competitions and sports like football and horseracing into living rooms. From then on, watching television became the most popular form of entertainment.

In recent decades, the market has been saturated with many new electronic products and audio-visual equipment. Walkmans, hand-held electronic games, video

cameras and karaoke have revolutionized leisure and entertainment. The popularization of personal computers and the Internet give rise to a new platform for enjoying multimedia entertainment programmes. One can play chess, read, place bets on the computer; television shows, movies and radio programmes can also be accessed via the Internet. Technological and economic advances meant that entertainment is no longer constrained by time and space. Entertainment is becoming individualized and virtualized. At the same time, with the increase in commercialization, hitherto simple leisure activities have now become consumer and commercial pursuits.

3. Traditional Festival Celebrations

The Chinese make up the majority of Hong Kong's population. The entertainment they enjoyed was closely linked to traditional festivals. In the past, whenever there were important feast days, the local Chinese would set off firecrackers and put up lion and dragon dances. Families would also gather for sumptuous dinners. During the Lunar New Year, friends and relatives visited one another and in the evening of Lantern Festival. They would go out to see the lantern displays. Other activities like dragon boat races on the Dragon Boat Festival and moon-and-lantern parties on the Mid-Autumn Festival were all part of traditional festivities.

To celebrate the birthdays of deities like Tin Hau, Guanyin, Hung Shing and the occupational patron saints, there would also be activities like the snatching of *huapao* and the parading of deities and children dressed up in costumes. Temple fairs would be set up in front of temples, with stalls selling snacks, whirligigs, incense sticks and candles. Mat shed stages would also be erected for puppet shows and Cantonese opera performances. Although these activities were related to religion and worship, they featured elements of competition and performance, which greatly entertained the local people.

In the past, these festival celebrations and ceremonies were mainly organized by lineage or local groups and attracted many participants. After the 1960s, however, following the ban on certain traditional activities like the snatching of and lighting firecrackers, the number of competitions was reduced and the festivities became more muted as a result. At around the same time, the younger generation of Hong Kong people began to absorb aspects of western culture and western holidays became more attractive. These holidays provided the public with well-deserved breaks and the opportunities to let their hair down.

To date, many festive activities are still extant, but reduced in scale. Other groups also get involved in organizing traditional events, or the events are linked up commercial marketing events, creating a carnival-like atmosphere, which attract both locals and visitors alike.



Lion Dance at Ngau Chi Wan

1960s

2000.52.136



Tin Hau Festival at the Temple in Joss House Bay

1962

1993.52.1



Shap Pat Heung, Yuen Long Tin Hau Festival Parade

1968

1993.52.13

4. Street Entertainment

In the streets of early Hong Kong, the areas that were unoccupied were where the common people went about their business or seek entertainment and fun.

With their tiny living spaces at home, the Chinese preferred to cool themselves off or rest on the streets. This in turn attracted hawkers of cooked food and street performers staging their performances. Often seen were singers, martial arts performers, performing monkeys and fortune tellers. Other forms of street entertainment included storytelling, displays of exotic animals, selling traditional cures and selling olives. These activities were inexpensive or even free of charge, which most people could afford then. These forms of street entertainment could be found everywhere in Hong Kong before the 1960s.

Before the Second World War, there was an empty plot of land at the Sheung Wan end of Hollywood Road, where many performers and hawkers gathered. This area became known as the *dai daat dei*. By the 1960s, a night market rose at the reclamation area at the former Hong Kong-Macao ferry, with many stalls selling all manner of merchandise. At night, when the performers, stallholders and hawkers lighted their kerosene lamps, the area would become the famed “Ordinary people’s nightclub”. There was a night market across the harbour on Kowloon that was similar to the *dai daat dei*. The Temple Street night market, which started in the 1950s, had stalls that sold sundry provisions and cooked food, fortune tellers and, the most unique feature of the area, stalls where Cantonese opera songs were performed. In the 1950s and 1960s, Pei Ho Street in Sham Shui Po was another “Shopping, leisure and entertainment centre” for the masses.

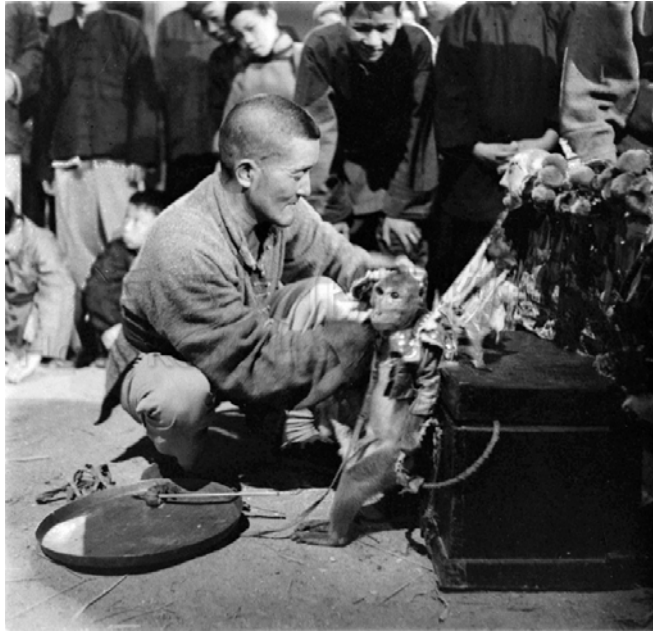
In the 1970s and 1980s, Hong Kong’s economy experienced phenomenal growth. There was non-stop construction in the urban areas, resulting in the gradual contraction of space available for street entertainment. At around the same time, the living standards of Hong Kong people improved and their tastes started changing. With various forms of entertainment becoming available for the first time, especially with the advent of free television programmes, street entertainment declined. Nowadays, fewer people will choose to listen to songs or watch performances on the streets, with the result that street entertainment has been replaced by street marketing activities.



The “Ordinary People’s Nightclub” at Sheung Wan
1950s to 1960s
2001.21.392



Preserved Fruits
1958
1993.52.15



Monkey Show

1952

1999.60.42



A Troupe of Performers

1950s

2000.52.94

Gambling and Betting

Various forms of gambling popular in Guangdong, like *fantan*, *zihua*, *baig*, mahjong, *tianjiu*, *paijiu* and cricket-fighting, were once the rage in Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong government promulgated a law in 1844 to prohibit gambling, but to no avail. Gambling dens were everywhere. By the early twentieth century, games like *zihua*, *tianjiu*, mahjong and *toubao* were still rampant in Hong Kong. At the time horseracing was the only legal betting activity in the colony.

Taking advantage of the breakdown of social order during the Japanese Occupation, *zihua* factories stepped up their productions. After the end of the Second World War, the game of *zihua* gained widespread popularity. *Zihua* was popular because players placed bets amounting to only a few cents, which meant that it was affordable for most people. The smallness of the bets in relation to the size of the winnings made *zihua* especially attractive to large swathes of Hong Kong's population, which increased sharply during this period. Several tabloid newspapers began to publish news relating to *zihua*, as well as tips and results, making the activity even more rampant than it already was.

To curb the influence of *zihua*, the government from the early 1960s onwards provided Hong Kong people with other gaming alternatives. In 1962 the government started the Government Lotteries, followed by the Mark Six in 1975, where players picked six numbers out of 14. Both proved to be unpopular among Hong Kong people. In 1976 the Government Lotteries Board revamped the Mark Six, where players picked six numbers out of 36, and where the draw was conducted "Live" on television. The new format, together with the attractive winnings, made Mark Six very popular. To eradicate illegal football betting in Hong Kong, the HKJC Football was launched in 2003. Members of the public can now place their bets in the off-course betting branches of The Hong Kong Jockey Club or through the telephone and the Internet.

5. Horseracing

The British introduced horseracing into Hong Kong in the middle of the nineteenth century. The earliest race on record was one held in Pokfulam in 1845. The first race held at the Wong Nai Chung racecourse was took place on 17 December 1864, which attracted many non-Chinese and Chinese audience. Founded in 1884, The Hong Kong Jockey Club gradually expanded the scale of horseracing since then.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century horseracing had become a form of entertainment for the region's Europeans, Eurasians and Chinese, and the racecourse turned into a nascent "social venue". Those Chinese who were ineligible to enter the spectator stands would gather at "The Black Rock" near the racecourse to watch the races. In the early days, races were held once a year, usually around the Lunar New year. On race days, the racecourse would assume a carnival-like atmosphere with crowds and families, and hawkers selling cooked food who set up their stalls within premises.

During the Japanese Occupation, the Japanese military government set up the Hong Kong Race Club and horseracing activities continued. After the end of the Second World War, horseracing revived within a short space of time. In 1971 the Jockey Club replaced amateur horseracing with professional races, and started inviting foreign jockeys to compete to improve the quality of the races. Night racing was introduced in 1973 and in the following year, punters could place their bets in the off-course betting branches and through the telephone. The new Sha Tin Racecourse started operations in 1978, marking a new development of the horseracing in Hong Kong.

Technological advancements have altered the form of horseracing in this day and age, where racing results can be transmitted everywhere with radio, television and the Internet. Horseracing and the prize money continue to provide thrills and hopes for the people in Hong Kong.



Happy Valley Racecourse

Early 20th Century

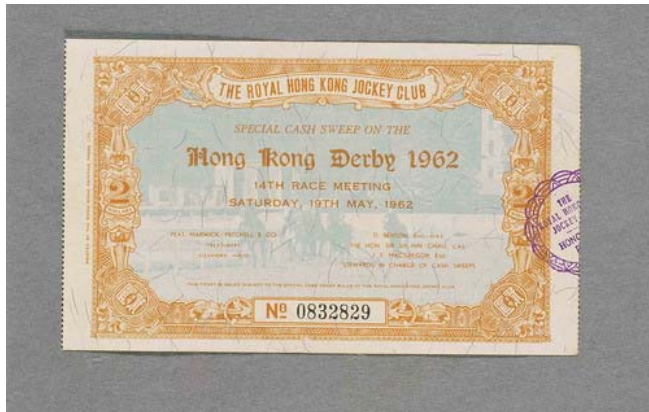
1996.59.269

Horseracing and Betting

In the early days horseracing punters had to place their bets within the premises of the racecourse. It was not until 1974 that The Hong Kong Jockey Club opened off-course betting branches and set up a telephone betting service. Members of the public could find out details of the races through radio and later, “Live” television broadcasts, and place their bets accordingly. Nowadays, they can obtain betting information and place their bets using their Customer Input Terminals or the Internet.

The Jockey Club and other organizations started selling lottery tickets to the public in the early 20th century. Lottery tickets, categorized into “Special Cash Sweep” and “Cash Sweep” were lottery games that popularized horse betting. The “Special Cash Sweep” lottery tickets were usually sold three times a year after the Second World War, they are usually in conjunctions with major races like the Kwangtung Handicap Cup, the Pearce Memorial Cup and the Hong Kong Derby. Cash prizes for the “Special Cash Sweep” lottery ticket were substantial, with first, second, third and consolation prizes at stake. The “Cash Sweep” lottery tickets were more frequent but the cash prizes were smaller. Members of the public could purchase these lottery tickets in places like stores and teahouses. Similar horseracing lotteries were also sold during the Japanese Occupation. The Club finally ceased operating cash sweeps altogether in 1977.

In the early years there were only few types of horseracing lotteries available, but more categories and betting combinations like Quartet and Double Quinella were added later. These increased the number of betting types and the amount of prize money, and made betting on horses much more attractive.



Special Cash Sweep Ticket, Hong Kong Derby
19 May 1962
1996.12.213



Cash Sweep Stall
1960s
2001.21.487

6. From Hikers to Tourists

Transport links in Hong Kong before the Second World War were rudimentary and the people in Hong Kong, the great majority of whom lived in the urban area, sought entertainment well within the city. There were only a handful of people who went hiking in the countryside or travelled. Several private walking groups like the Tai Po Hiking Association, Hung Fung Hiking Association and the Yung Sheh Hikers were organized to visit places in the New Territories. Their travels and hiking experiences were then written up and published in the newspapers.

In the 1960s a new worker class emerged as a result of Hong Kong's industrial growth. To cultivate loyalty in their workers and foster good relationships among them, factories and other organizations arranged tours for their staff during holidays. Hiking and travelling became a new pastime for many people in Hong Kong. Newspapers like *New Evening Post*, *Hong Kong Commercial Daily* and *Wah Kiu Yat Po* had columns dedicated to hiking and travelling, and published upcoming events of various hiking or tour groups. With improvements in transport, the ease with which travel information could be obtained and the passing of the Country Parks Ordinance in 1976, the two decades of the 1970s and the 1980s was a period when hiking activities and travelling to the countryside reached a peak.

Prior to the 1970s, most people in Hong Kong did not travel abroad, except to the mainland for family visits or to Macao. With improvement in living standards, more people in Hong Kong began travelling overseas to nearby places like Southeast and Japan, or to places as far away as Europe and the United States. The number of Hong Kong residents returning from abroad was 142,129 in 1970. By 1980, this number had increased to 916,042.

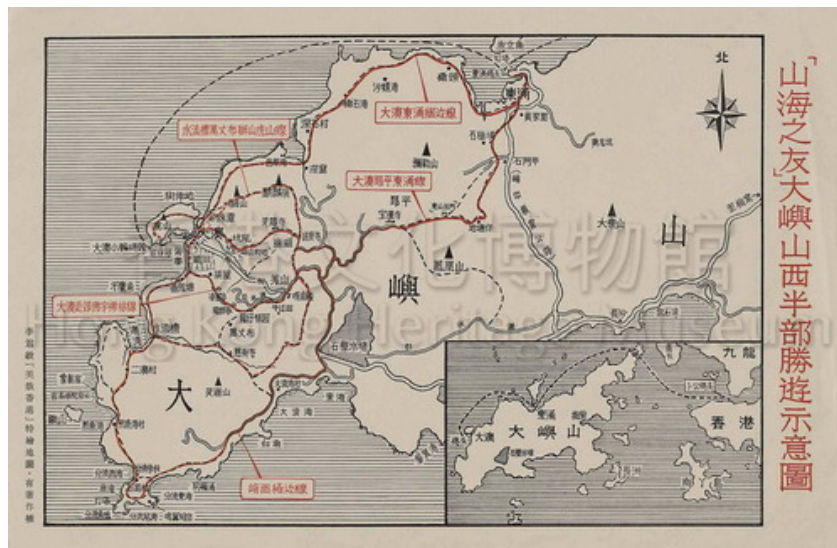
Entertainment and leisure activities became even more varied in the 1990s. The number of people taking holidays abroad continued to increase and going overseas had become a part of many people's lives in Hong Kong. There are fewer hikers now than before, but ecological and heritage tours have become popular in recent years, which injected a new stimulus into local tours. More groups and tour agencies are organizing one-day trips, creating a whole new tourism and consumer experience.



Nam San Wai Jetty

1960s

2001.21.166



Touring Map of Lantau Island

1970s

2005.46.4

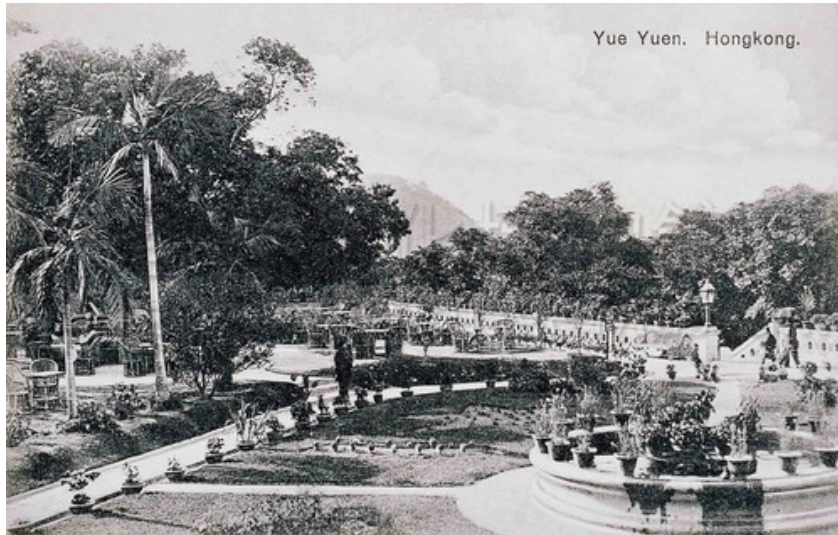
7. From Amusement Park to Theme Park

In the early twentieth century, the most well known amusement parks in Hong Kong were the Cheung Yuen, Yue Yuen, Lee Gardens, Ming Yuen and Tai Bai Lau – known collectively as the “Four gardens and a mansion”. Facilities in these amusement parks included eateries, cinemas, carousels and rides. Although there was a time when these amusement parks were thronged with visitors, they all folded within a short time after their openings.

From the end of the 1940s to the 1960s, a number of amusement parks opened in Hong Kong, like the Great World Amusement Park, Lunar Park, Lai Chi Kok Amusement Park, Tsuen Wan Amusement Park and Kai Tak Amusement Park. Lai Chi Kok Amusement Park was opened in 1949 with great fanfare. Its advertising slogan was “The only modern big amusement park in southern China”. It kept on expanding its operations and facilities following its opening to include a theatre, more game stalls, rides and even a zoo. Feeding Tinnu, the resident elephant, became a highlight for visitors to the amusement park. The opening of Kai Tak Amusement Park in 1965 provided the densely populated East Kowloon area with a new leisure venue. The new amusement park, whose advertising slogan was “10 million-dollar rides – the best in Southeast Asia”, banked on its new and exciting rides to pack in the crowds. Many visitors would recall being thrilled by Kai Tak Amusement Park’s unforgettable rocket-launcher and rollercoaster

Ocean Park Hong Kong, a marine theme park, was opened in 1977 featuring an Atoll Reef and an Ocean Theatre. More facilities and attractions like the Ocean Park Tower and rides were added later. There was another amusement park with a water theme in the 1980s located in Tai Wai. However, the Happy Dragon Recreation Park closed down and was demolished in 1999. Although the major amusement parks were demolished and their lands given to other uses, chains of small amusement centres continue to be operated within shopping malls. The world-class theme park Hong Kong Disneyland opened in September 2005, providing yet another venue for leisure and entertainment for both locals and visitors to Hong Kong.

In the past members of the public simply bought their tickets and enjoyed themselves in the amusement parks. Nowadays, a visit to theme parks will not be complete without making purchases of tie-in products and services. Apart from entertaining visitors within their premises, theme parks have also given rise to a new consumer culture.



Yue Yuen
Ca. 1915
1994.116.300



Kai Tak Amusement Park
1960s
2001.21.135

8. Football

The British introduced football into Hong Kong in the middle of the nineteenth century. The first local football club, the Hong Kong Football Club was founded in 1886, and in 1897 the first major football tournament, the Challenge Shield, was held in Hong Kong. By the early twentieth century Chinese students in English language schools started forming football teams. In 1914 the Hong Kong Football Association (HKFA) was founded to expand and regulate the sport. In that same year, the Confucius Clubs and Liam Liong took part in Junior Division League organized by the HKFA, the first Chinese football teams to do so.

In the early twentieth century, Chinese football teams like South China Athletic Association and Chinese Athletic Association did very well in local and overseas matches, and became popular among the Chinese people in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong public responded enthusiastically to the visit by English football club Islington Corinthians in 1938, and its matches attracted both society bigwigs and ordinary folk.

Between the end of the Second World War and the 1960s, local football tournaments like the League, Senior Shield and the Seven-a-side Stanley Shield were very popular. The clashes between the Combined Chinese and the Combined Services, and those between home and visiting teams also packed in the crowds. The unforgettable 1951 match between South China Athletic Association and Kowloon Motor Bus Sports Club is still talked about today. In those days, spectators had to queue up for hours to buy tickets for important matches, so much so that tickets to major tournaments were considered very generous gifts.

In 1968 football in Hong Kong turned professional, making it the first region in Asia to do so. This meant that the sport could now receive corporate sponsorship and import professional foreign players, thus enhancing the competitiveness in local football matches.

After the end of the 1970s, local and overseas football matches were often televised “Live” bringing the sport into people’s living rooms. With globalization, matches from all over the world are beamed “Live” to our television sets, and watching overseas matches on television has become the norm.

9. Television

In 1957 Rediffusion Television started cable television operations in Hong Kong. Subscribers had to pay an installation fee of \$25, a television set rental fee of \$45 and an additional \$36 for the licence. The high prices and the exclusively English-language programming meant that it never caught on among the local public. After Rediffusion Television added Chinese-language channels, the number of subscribers increased.

Television Broadcasts Limited made its first television broadcast in 1967, opening a new chapter in Hong Kong's television history. Its free-to-air television programmes became the main source of popular entertainment among Hong Kong people. The widespread popularity of television prompted the government to install television sets in numerous parks and public housing estates, allowing members of the public to watch television programmes. With raising living standards among Hong Kong people, the percentage of households owning television sets jumped from a mere 12 percent in 1967 to 90 percent in 1976. By the mid-1970s, the television set was no longer considered a luxury item but a household necessity, resulting in the changes in people's habits and what they did for entertainment.

Hong Kong people began to receive satellite television programmes from 1991, and in 1993 Hong Kong Cable Television Limited began operations. Subscribers were able to watch programmes on local and overseas television channels with a decoder. The emergence of pay TV meant more choices of programmes that cater to the different tastes of viewers. By March 2006, Hong Kong television viewers could choose from four free-to-air television channels, over 200 pay TV channels and numerous free satellite channels. Television brought local and overseas programmes into the living rooms of Hong Kong people, and transformed the hitherto participatory nature of entertainment into a passive spectator event at home.

Nowadays, almost every household has a television set, and watching television programmes remains the top and most frequent entertainment activity for the people in Hong Kong.



Advertisement of the Rediffusion (HK) Limited

1957

1995.110.22

Television Programme

The main functions of television are to disseminate information, educate and entertain. The majority of Hong Kong's television programmes are television dramas, cartoons, variety shows and sports programmes. Entertainment forms a large percentage of the programmes on offer.

Starting from the 1970s, television stations started showing their television dramas at prime time in the evening, a time when most people were having their dinners. This cultivated the habit of the whole family eating and watching television at the same time. Workers were also able to catch their favourite programmes when they got home from work. The economic boom in Hong Kong at the time brought about the immense popularity of television dramas that depicted the struggles that led to the eventual successes of the protagonists. Several lengthy television dramas had more than 100 episodes, which became the talk of the town. At the time when these hugely popular television dramas were showing, there were only a handful of people in Hong Kong who were not faithful followers of these serials. Large-scale variety shows, which featured artists, film stars, well-known Cantonese opera singers and celebrities, became important fundraising vehicles for charity.

Television stations also made frequent broadcasts of cartoons and children's specials,

which attracted many viewers. These programmes form the collective memory of many grown-ups in Hong Kong today. The delayed or “live” transmissions of sporting events reduced the distance between Hong Kong and the rest of the world. Viewers could now watch sporting competitions without stepping out of their front doors.

The advent of television also prompted corporations to market their products and services in television commercials, which helped generate many trends in Hong Kong society. Publication and products relating to television started appearing in the market.



Television Set
1970s
2000.37.1

10. Theatre and Cinema

There were already theatres in the Central and Western areas at the turn of the twentieth century, though these venues put up mainly Cantonese opera performances with movies as occasional add-ons. Movies, then known as “curious and clever western pictures” were also screened in cinemas and on the streets.

After 1949 many film companies in Shanghai moved to Hong Kong. This development, together with the influx of Shanghai capital into the colony, resulted in Hong Kong becoming a movie-making hub. Big cinemas with affordable admission prices ensured that movies developed into a form of popular entertainment for Hong Kong people in the 1950s.

The 1960s was a period of industrial growth in Hong Kong. Local factories had three shifts, which meant that the screenings at different times always played to large audiences. The new worker class, especially female factory workers, formed the bulk of the movie-going public. The large audience numbers meant that big cinemas with front stalls, back stalls and dress circle were always full-house.

Cinema attendance figures fell from the 1966 peak of 90 million to 53 million in 1975 due to the competition from free-to-air television programmes. Changing market and consumer tastes in the 1980s saw the building of many multiplexes, with multiple auditoriums, each with a fewer number of seats, housed under one roof. The mid-1980s also saw the popularization of home video cassette recorders (VCRs). Video stores opened up all over Hong Kong, allowing the public to buy video tapes or discs of movies for their own viewing pleasure at home.

With the popularization of pay television, multimedia computer programmes and home entertainment systems, the public can now enjoy Cantonese opera and movies using different channels or in various ways.

Cantonese Opera

Cantonese opera, is also known as “Guangdong Drama”, is a form of folk theatre found in the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi. During the birthdays of deities and festivals, opera troupes would be hired to perform in the villages and market towns. In the late nineteenth century, there were purpose-built theatres in Central and Sheung Wan where Cantonese operas were performed. Troupes would also perform in theatres where movies were screened. By the early twentieth century, Hong Kong Island boasted fine theatres like the Ko Shing Theatre, Tai Ping Theatre, Lee Theatre and Central Theatre, while over on Kowloon, the Astor Theatre and Pei Ho Theatre held sway.

After the end of the Second World War, theatres and cinemas continued to put up Cantonese opera performances, which were transmitted “live” to people’s homes through radio. Newspaper like *Zhongying wanpao* and *Rediffusion Daily* would publish the programmes for that evening, while entertainment newspapers like *Daily Pictorial* and *Chun Lam Yat Po* featured news about Cantonese opera and famous opera stars.

Movie

Hong Kong movie-goers were already enjoying films that came with sound as early as 1930s. From the end of the 1940s up to the 1950s, Cantonese opera remained a firm favourite with audience. However, Hong Kong of that period was an immigrant society with large numbers of refugees from the mainland. This diversity was reflected in the cinemas where preferences, choose between films in Mandarin, Cantonese, the Amoy dialect and English.

With the intermingling of the old and new cultures in the 1960s, the movies made in that decade featured traditional as well as new themes. Films genres ran the gamut from contemporary drama, martial arts films and romances, to movies about espionage and lives of factory workers. All these movies proved popular among the youngsters and female factory workers.

Bruce Lee’s kung-fu movies and comedies starring the Hui brothers went down extremely well with Hong Kong audience in the 1970s. This was followed by a period when “Made in Hong Kong” movies and western productions formed the

mainstream of the local market. Nowadays, with the effects of globalization, movies that do well in the box office tend to feature actors from different countries and regions.



Ticket of Queen's Theatre

1981

1995.15.222



New York Theatre

1964

1998.109.4

11. Radio Broadcasting

In 1928 a radio station called GOW made the first radio broadcast in Hong Kong, marking a new milestone in local broadcast entertainment. It changed its name to ZBW the following year and produced only English-language programmes. With the founding of the Chinese-language ZEK station in 1934, the number of radio-listeners increased. In those days, members of the public had to obtain a radio licence before they were allowed to listen to radio programmes. In 1928 the number of radio licences issued was 214; by 1938 the number had jumped to more than 8,000. At the end of the 1940s, people in Hong Kong could receive radio programmes from Hong Kong itself and Guangzhou. In 1948 ZBW and ZEK were officially renamed Radio Hong Kong.

Rediffusion started its cable broadcasts in 1949, opening a new chapter in local broadcast entertainment. Subscribers receive programmes through a land line, and initially they paid an installation fee of \$25 and a monthly subscription of \$10. Before its first broadcast, Rediffusion had less than 70 subscribers, but by March 1950, it claimed to have 29,707. From the start, Rediffusion programmes were in Mandarin, Cantonese, the Amoy dialect and the Chaozhau dialect, making it popular with Chinese people of different dialect groups. In those days herbal tea shops made use of Rediffusion sets as a means of attracting customers, which contributed to the popularization of radio among the people in Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Commercial Broadcasting Company Limited made its first broadcast in 1959. It coincided with the emergence of the inexpensive and convenient transistor radio, which did not require a land line. Not only could members of the public listen to their radios at homes, now they could also do so in their factories, which provided much needed relief from the boredom at work. The government scrapped radio licences in 1965, which made the radio even more popular. By the end of the 1960s, almost every household owned one.

The Walkman was introduced into Hong Kong in the early 1980s. These radios with earphones were portable and people could now listen to radio programmes and audio cassette tapes on buses and ferries. Listening to the radio and music became an individualized activity, free from the constraints of location. Nowadays, apart from radios, the public can listen to radio programmes using their computers and MP3 players.



Rediffusion Times

1953

1995.110.7

12. Comics

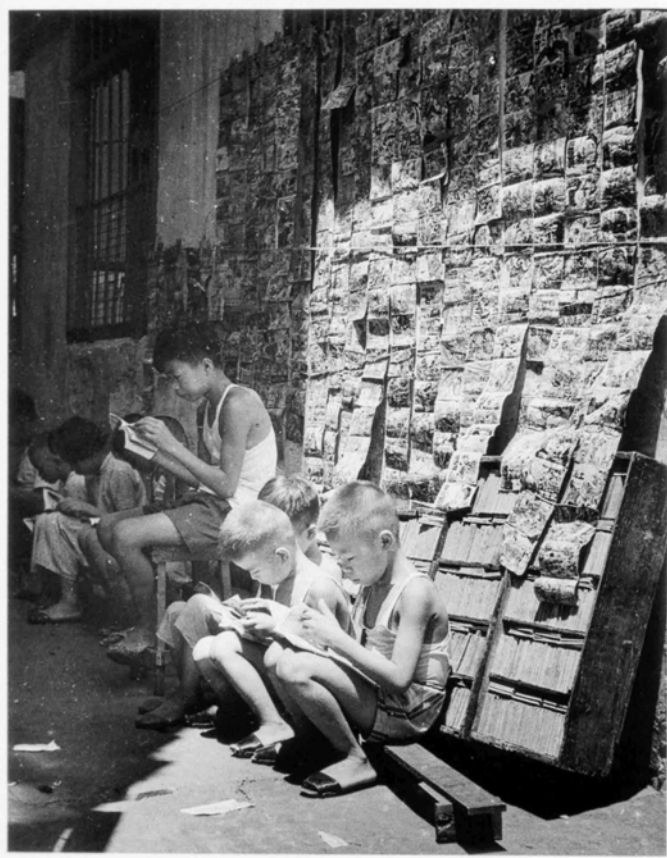
In the 1920s the comic books from Shanghai that were sold in Hong Kong were very popular. After the Second World War and the resumption of trade, tabloid newspaper flourished and four-framed comic strips like *The Arrogant Chiu* were serialized in these newspapers. The themes of these comic strips centred round the everyday lives of ordinary Hong Kong people; their accessible content and use of vernacular language attracted many readers.

In the 1950s and 1960s the main target readers of comic books were children. Apart from traditional folktales, these comic books also incorporated elements of heroism, the supernatural, romantic love and science fiction. At the time, many book rental stalls and barbershops were set up on the roadside. Children could either rent comic books for a small fee or read them free of charge while getting their hair cut. These stalls even set aside a space for children to read comic books on the spot.

After the 1970s, comic books could be purchased from newsstands, and readers could read them in eateries, at home or even on public transport. To attract local readers, some of these comic books were set in Hong Kong. At the same time, television cartoons and dramas introduced a new element into comics, for the most popular comics then were influenced by Japanese and American cartoons on television. Popular television dramas from overseas were also printed into books, attesting to the effects of television culture.

In the 1990s Japanese *manga* began moving into the mainstream among Hong Kong comic-readers; shops that offered Japanese *manga* for rent sprang up all over Hong Kong. Publishers began publishing these comics as pocket-sized books for easy portability and readers could read them anywhere they liked. These comics became more varied and their target readers now included children as well as adults. However, comics ceased to be just a publication; they were issued in tandem with cartoons, toys, gifts and household items, thus becoming mass produced consumer products of bewildering variety.

Reading comic books is still very much a popular form of entertainment in Hong Kong. However, they have been commoditized by tie-in products like gifts and household items.



Roadside Comic Stall(s)

1950s to 1960s

1997.149.62

13. Toys and Games

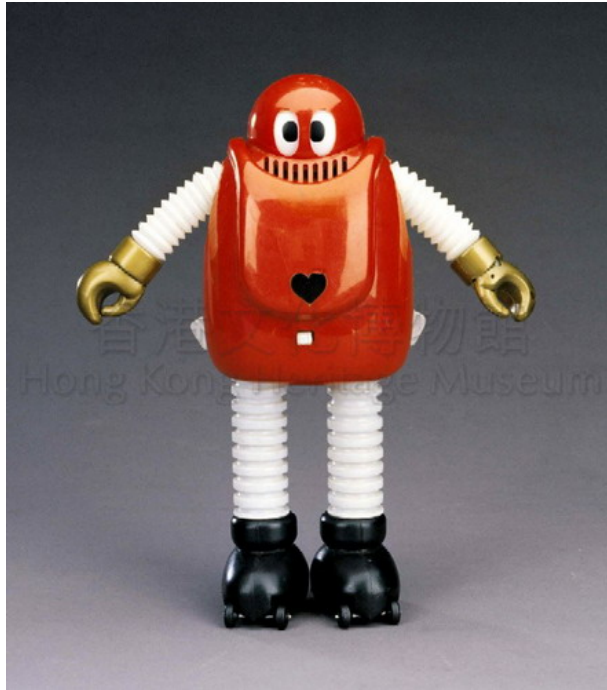
In the early days, most children in Hong Kong played with homemade toys, rice bags, marbles and picture cards that came from cigarette boxes. Toys like rocking horses and clockwork cars were luxury items that only the wealthy could afford.

Hong Kong's birth rate soared and its population grew sharply in the period from the end of the Second World War to the 1960s. The low standard of living meant that children played all sorts of communal games in the empty clearings and corridors found in squatter areas, resettlement areas and housing estates or out on the streets. They also played with tin toys, tops and miniature trishaws, which could be bought cheaply from roadside stalls and stationery shops, Hong Kong society as a whole was not affluent in those days, and these toys were often shared among other children in the neighbourhood.

1970s television exerted a strong influence on children's toys. Children's specials and cartoons were watched by a large number of local children, and manufacturers began producing and marketing toys depicting characters like Ultraman and Robocon. These became the toys that most Hong Kong children grew up playing. Toy manufacturers also made use of television programmes to market their products, which started toy fads like the yo-yo and Rubik's Cube.

Electronic games were introduced into Hong Kong by the end of the 1970s, and some shopkeepers started installing electronic games within their premises to attract children into their shops. Some families bought TV game sets which allowed children to play electronic games in the comfort of their own homes. Following this trend of electronic games was the arrival of hand-held game devices in Hong Kong, which spawned an entire sub-culture. Communal children's games and the toys of the past have given way to the virtual reality of electronic games.

The 1990s saw the huge popularity of electronic games and the transformation of toys from inexpensive items to commodities that are both high in price and highly-prized. The decade also saw the popularization of personal computers and the Internet, and online games became *de rigueur* among both children and adults. As these games are conducted online, players may not know one another at all. Thus, we see the evolution of communal game towards individualized amusement.



Robocon
1973
1997.173.32

14. Karaoke and Online Entertainment

The development of Hong Kong's popular entertainment in the 1980s was closely related to the popularization of electronic products. One leisure activity that surged in popularity during that period was karaoke.

Karaoke, a Japanese word meaning "empty orchestra" was introduced to Hong Kong from Japan in the late-1980s and soon became extremely popular. Karaoke singers could sing to their hearts' content in karaoke lounges or at home. It was different to merely listening to songs; instead of passive music appreciation, singers were actively involved in performing their selected songs.

Home computers became popular in Hong Kong in the mid-1980s. They could be used for word-processing, calculation, drawing and playing games. By the end of the twentieth century, the Internet had found many users, and this development changed Hong Kong people's habits and modes of entertainment. Apart from searching for information on the computer via the Internet, users could now chat online with friends and even stranger, or make face-to-face contact through webcams. The Internet has replaced letter-writing and made the world seem much smaller.

Users could also download all kinds of games, mobile ringtones and files from the Internet. They could set up multimedia portals to download songs and movies, or to enjoy television and radio programmes. Of course, they could also play computer and online game. The audio-visual entertainment of the past made use of different gadgets but now, computers are able to bring all these together into a single appliance. Games like chess and mahjong, which were group activities involving two or more people, have become a contest between the individual and the computer, or a competition among online friends or strangers.

Internet bars and cafes, which started becoming popular in the late-1990s, have multiple computer terminals installed, where customers can play games or use them for other purposes. They can also read the comic books or watch the discs that are found in the premises.

Technological advancement has already brought us new forms of entertainment. Apart from the emergence of the karaoke and online cultures, it has also spurred the development of individualized and virtualized entertainment.