



Politics of Place Making in Asia's World City: 168 Years of Harbor Reclamation in Hong Kong

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This paper examines the history and politics of reclamation, a mechanism that has produced 25 percent of urban land from the sea, in Hong Kong. Through detailed review of historical records and documents, the 'heroic conquest' of the sea by reclamation in Hong Kong in the past 168 years can be divided in four broad phases: a tug-of-war between the pro-reclamation colonial Government and the anti-reclamation British military force and the private sector in the first forty years in the City of Victoria; a prolonged period from the 1880s to the Second World War with Government-planned but private sector-driven reclamations spread to Kowloon, annexed in 1860; the post-war decades up to the 1990s when public-sector led reclamation had been instrumental in accommodating and fueling industrialization and urban growth spatially and financially; and finally in the last decade when the civil society groups have been proactive in arresting further Harbor reclamation and demanding a right to design an accessible, vibrant and sustainable Harbor front. This historical review offers us a window to decipher the politics of place-making in an evolving open market economy 'facilitated' by an executive-led government increasingly challenged by a developing post-colonial civil society.

KEY WORDS: Reclamation, politics of place making, executive-led government, civil society.