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KOWLOON CULTURAL DISTRICT

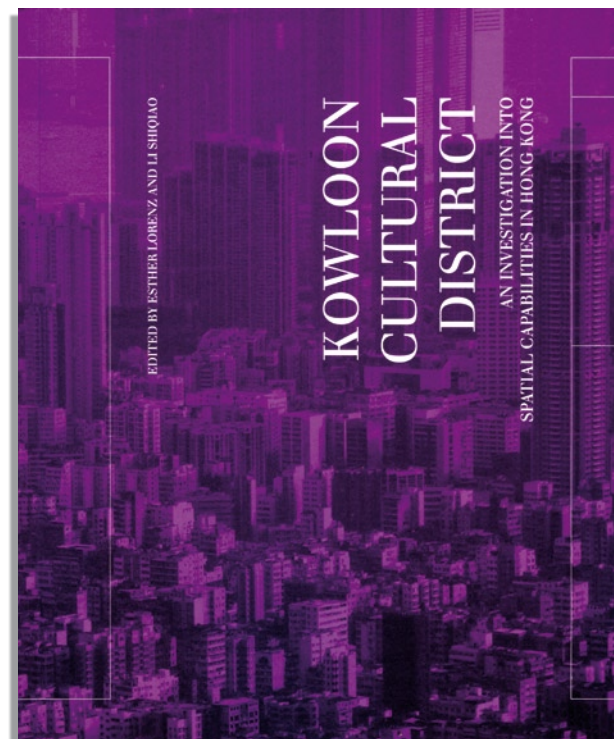
An Investigation into Spatial Capabilities in Hong Kong

Edited by Esther Lorenz and Li Shiqiao
MCCM Creations

As the West Kowloon Cultural District lumbers into its second decade of development, it could be argued that there is no need for it in the first place – Kowloon already boasts a lively and self-sustaining cultural district that evolved as the land sandwiched between the New Territories and Victoria Harbour matured. This premise was initially explored as part of the Hong Kong & Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism\Architecture, 2009-10 edition, ironically held on the then-empty site of the West Kowloon Cultural District from 4 December 2009 to 27 February 2010. It now gets the full technicolour treatment in a book documenting the various idiosyncrasies of Kowloon. The project was initially led by professors Esther Lorenz and Li Shiqiao, both currently teaching at the University of Virginia, along with students from the Chinese University of Hong Kong who put together a composite cabinet of curiosities exhibited at the biennale, and a number of noted scholars and academics.

'Kowloon Cultural District' takes a systematic, three-pronged approach to tackling the highly complex tributaries of discourse its subject evokes. The first part is devoted to an analysis of Kowloon's real-life cabinet of curiosities by careful observation of everyday life on the streets, followed by objective documentation of the same. For example, prize goldfish breeding found along Tung Choi Street in Mongkok is compared to the numerous advertisements in the city for beauty enhancement, showing how uniqueness can be derived through either selective breeding or cosmetic manipulation. Chungking Mansions in Tsim Sha Tsui is also discussed at length, with the numerous ethnicities circulating, and languages heard, within the establishment making it a microcosm of the city itself.

The second part of the book, dubbed 'Archives', features Master of Architecture students' senior-year projects focussing on Kowloon subjects. The final part, called 'Retrievals', is a collection of essays and dialogues



that explore how architects and planners view Kowloon, its potential and its intangible value.

The first part of Kowloon Cultural District is the most accessible, with bold graphics and line drawings to illustrate points made, alongside moody shots of daipaidongs and rooftops worthy of cinematographer Chris Doyle's gaze. The collection of voices throughout the book rings loud and clear: its underlying theme is that homegrown culture already exists in abundance in Kowloon, and that it risks being relegated to the sidelines by the pomp and ceremony of the international acts certain to descend upon West Kowloon Cultural District in the future. Can the two coexist in harmony? Time will tell, when the district "opens".

