

HANGOVER

FROM THE *HANDOVER*

Twenty years after Hong Kong traded one ruler for another, Britain's influence still looms large



Hours before the first firework flew into the night sky, Hong Kongers knocked back free-flow booze at brunches, women filled the air with chatter while enjoying afternoon tea and men crammed into pubs to watch the British Lions play New Zealand at rugby.

It was 1 July, and the city was abuzz with people celebrating the anniversary of Britain's handover of Hong Kong to China. Although the city has officially been part of China for 20 years now, it often doesn't feel like it. Whether you're taking your suit to a British-style tailor or meeting your mates at the pub, there's no denying that some segments of the city resemble London more than Beijing.

This is not entirely surprising, considering that Hong Kong was classed as a Crown Colony from 1841 to 1997. Exactly how many British influences, though, have managed to survive the test of time?

In keeping with the handover spirit, *Gafencu* has compiled a list of 20 British traits and traditions you can still find in Hong Kong today.

STREET NAMES: The remnants of Britain's links to Hong Kong are nowhere more visible than the street signs around the city. If you take a walk around Central you'll probably find yourself meandering past Old Bailey Road, named after the Central Criminal Court in Central London. Caine Road is named after William Caine, who served as acting governor of Hong Kong from 1854 to 1859. Drake Street in Admiralty is named after the Royal Navy ship *HMS Drake*. And while Elgin Street is now known for its posh restaurants, it is named after James Bruce, the eighth Earl of Elgin, who in 1860 infamously ordered troops to loot and destroy the Summer Palace in Beijing.



Hong Kongers will queue for anything, even if they're unsure what they're queuing for

NOONDAY GUN: One of Hong Kong's longest-standing colonial traditions, the firing of the Noonday Gun dates back to the mid-19th century. Owned by Jardine Matheson, a British conglomerate, the gun was originally used to signal when the head of the company sailed into or out of the harbour. However, in typical British fashion, a senior officer of the Royal Navy in 1860 found this offensive, believing that only government dignitaries or military officers should receive such treatment. To punish the company, he ordered Jardine Matheson to fire the gun every day at noon for perpetuity. To this day, it remains a popular tourist attraction.

AFTERNOON TEA: One of the more popular British traditions in Hong Kong – and rightly so, if we say so ourselves – is afternoon tea. Who doesn't love a good cuppa in the afternoon with some sweet treats? Afternoon tea started when well-to-do members of British society in Hong Kong decided to carry on the tradition from England and take a break at half past three. The Duchess of Bedford allegedly started the custom of afternoon tea during the 1830s when dinner times were becoming later and later.

ENGLISH NAMES: Hong Kong is full of Johns, Alices, Richards and Anthonys. However, odder English names that you'd rarely see in the West are becoming more and more common, such as Saint, Fanny and Dodo. Once a symbol of prestige in Hong Kong, English names are now just another way of expressing one's individuality. You do you, Kinky Chan.



This spread from left: A street sign in Central; The firing of the Noonday Gun; Horse racing at Happy Valley tends to be a boozier affair nowadays; Who doesn't enjoy a good cuppa in the afternoon with some treats?



FOOD: The origin of the egg tart is a hotly disputed topic, with some saying it came from Macau via the Portuguese, and others suggesting it was introduced by the British in the 1950s. Even if certain food items are not exactly how the British serve them – a pie made with minced roasted duck meat and flaky pastry; egg tarts; a thin pancake stuffed with canned peach slices; and milk tea poured through a sieve – the original idea is British.

QUEUING: People in Hong Kong will queue for anything – buses, tickets, food and sometimes they'll queue even if they're unsure what they're queuing for. The British are still the world champions of queuing, but Hong Kongers follow close behind. If anyone is audacious enough to jump the taxi queue, they might just be told to bugger off.

HORSE RACING: When a group of colonial horse racing enthusiasts stumbled upon an area of swampland, they

immediately recognised its potential as a racetrack. The flat area, known to locals as Wong Nai Chung, was soon renamed Happy Valley. The racecourse was built in 1845 and the first race was held in 1846, much to the delight of both the British and locals. Nowadays, the races tend to be boozier affairs, but that's not necessarily a departure from English tradition.

FOOTBALL: While betting on horses is still one of the most popular forms of legal gambling in Hong Kong, football betting is also commonplace. The first football club of Hong Kong was founded in 1886 and the sport has been going strong ever since.

TRAMS: Trams have rattled through the streets of Hong Kong Island since 1904. Established by the British, the first trams were built in England and then shipped out to Hong Kong piece by piece. The slow-moving mode of public transport still remains popular among locals and tourists due to its cheap fares and unique photo opportunities.



POLICE FORCE: It didn't take long for the British to establish a police force after they'd claimed Hong Kong as a colony. In fact, it only took 12 weeks. However, the days of British bobbies patrolling the streets of Hong Kong are coming to an end. The last foreign copper was appointed in 1993 and by 2016 there were fewer than 100 policemen from overseas on the force. To put this decline into perspective, around 1990 there were an estimated 900 officers from overseas in Hong Kong.

LEFT-HAND DRIVING: Even under Chinese rule, Hong Kong's traffic laws have stuck to the British way of driving on the left. This is because Britain was the dominant global power when vehicle traffic started to take off in the early 1900s, and the powerful men who ran the city passed a law stating that all vehicles must drive on the left. At any rate, we reckon that changing it now would be a bloody disaster.

MEASUREMENTS: Even though the Hong Kong government now uses the metric system of measurement, the British imperial method is still used in stores and among wider society. Some road signs still show distance and speed in imperial units, and some real estate agents use it when discussing how big – or more often, how small – an apartment is.

BOXING DAY: We all know why people celebrate Christmas, but the British tradition of Boxing Day is something that Hong Kongers also take seriously. Of course, any day off from work is reason enough to celebrate. Boxing Day originated in Britain as a day off for servants, allowing them time to visit their families. Servants were typically given a box to take home which contained gifts, bonuses and sometimes leftover food.

LANGUAGE: Hong Kong officially has two languages: Cantonese and English. However, under British rule speaking English was required to get ahead in business and society. Even



This spread from left: Trams have rattled through the streets of Hong Kong since 1904; Horsehair wigs are still seen in courtrooms today; British pubs offer a large selection of beer

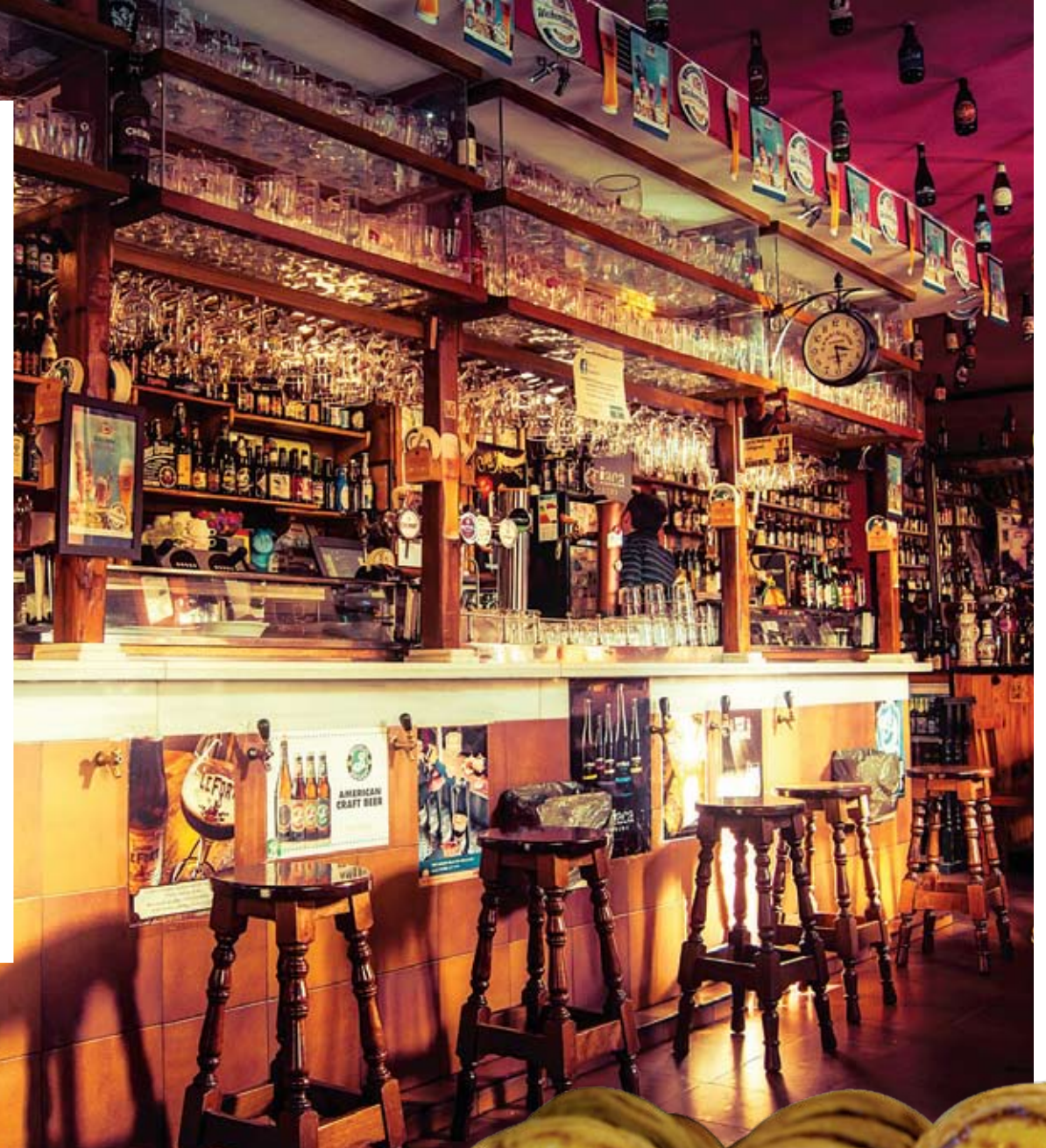
though Cantonese is the mother tongue, a lot of locals are bilingual. For foreigners, it's easy to get by in the city, even if *m goi* is the only Cantonese word they know.

FASHION: Hong Kongers love fashion! Trends are picked up and then tossed away as soon as the next hot thing comes along. However, the one fashion they have not discarded is the British tailor. The classic tailor has arguably never been as popular as it is today, with brands like Gieves & Hawkes opening stores. If it's from Savile Row, it will likely always be in vogue.

ARCHITECTURE: Hong Kong has changed a lot since British Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston described it as "a barren island with hardly a house upon it" in the mid-19th century. Examples of British colonial architecture are scattered across Hong Kong. History buffs and tourists can visit Victoria Prison on Old Bailey Street, the Old Supreme Court, Flagstaff House, Rawlinson House and many more.

ENGLISH COMMON LAW: English Common Law still governs Hong Kong, meaning that its legislative process is similar to that of Britain. That brings us to our next item...

HORSEHAIR WIGS: Horsehair wigs – a 17th-century British fashion item worn by judges as a way to fend off lice – are still seen in Hong Kong's courtrooms today. The wigs are heavy, hard to maintain and expensive, but their impracticality hasn't stopped some legal professionals from carrying on the tradition.



EDUCATION: Learning is big business, with parents sending their tiny tots off to evening and weekend classes so they can get ahead in life. Frederick Stewart, dubbed "The Founder of Hong Kong Education", brought in the British education model when he served as headmaster at the first government school in 1862. Education today is still largely modelled on the British system.

PUBS: The British have been drinking ale since the Bronze Age, so they know a thing or two about boozing. Considering the long hours that Hong Kongers put in at work, their presence at British pubs throughout the city is no surprise. British bars typically have a large selection of beer, lively conversation, hearty pub grub and a homey feel. As Queen Victoria once said, "Give my people plenty of beer, good beer and cheap beer, and you will have no revolution among them." Regardless of whether it's Britain or China running the show, the government and the citizens will never agree on all things – but they can, perhaps, agree on beer. ■



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Text: Andrew Scott Photos: AFP