

History of the Hong Kong Institute of Architects. Professionalization and its Impact on the Diversity of Competencies

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Abstract

Despite having a key impact on professionalization and design, the role of the professional institute is often taken for granted in the architectural field. This piece centers on the overlooked history of the Hong Kong Institute of Architects (HKIA) to unravel the complex processes of professionalization in a specific spatio-temporal context – Hong Kong. Compared to other countries, the making of architecture in Hong Kong could be vastly different, where theoretic discourses and nationalistic ambitions have been less influential. As the representative, examination, and accreditation body of Hong Kong architects, HKIA would be a pivotal stakeholder in shaping the architectural practice. The institute's struggle for proper recognition of architects over the years through professionalization would be marked by different and evolving strategies, both inward and outward. It is also emblematic of the struggle between different competencies which makes it challenging to define the role of the architect and consequential when it comes to the profession's agency in shaping the built environment more broadly.

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Professionalization is defined as a process whereby participation in the profession is increasingly limited through various strategies, often spearheaded by a professional institute.

Competency in its simplest definition in relation to professional employment is what makes someone ready for a particular role and perform required tasks (Austin, 2019). In architecture, the spotlight often goes to the “starchitect” or the “master” of landmark buildings, famed for their individual genius. What is often overlooked but increasingly looked at in such a discursive manner is the extent to which professionalization (an arguably collective endeavor) has shaped the ideas surrounding architectural competency and influenced the built environment more broadly.

Professionalization is defined as a process whereby participation in the profession is increasingly limited through various strategies, often spearheaded by a professional institute (Wilensky, 1964). In Hong Kong, that would be the Hong Kong Institute of Architects (HKIA), which was founded in 1956, and originally named the Hong Kong Society of Architects (HKSA). To understand how architectural competency is constructed and contested by different stakeholders in the specific spatial and temporal context of Hong Kong, we analyze the history of HKIA through the processes of professionalization and discuss its implications within the architecture field.

The critical examination of professional institutions’ history is also often not in the mainstream architectural discourse given how they are often taken for granted as regulatory bodies to be adhered to rather than understood. Nonetheless, comprehensive critical histories of the architect profession in western contexts have been written (Kostof, 1986; Duffy, Hutton, 1998), while there is also increasing interest in critically constructing these histories in non-Western contexts (Kvan, Liu, Jia, 2008; Shadar, Orr, Maizel, 2011; İmamoğlu, 2018). It is worth noting that even HKIA themselves have just a 120-word description of their 65 years of history on their website, and do not keep a complete archive of their own.

By referring to its annual reports and publications up till 2000, newspaper articles and other relevant materials, we uncover and critically discuss HKIA’s evolving role in facilitating the professionalization of the architecture profession in Hong Kong, similar to what Orr (2015) did for the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (ACA). In the first part of this article, we cover the various and extensive strategies adopted

by HKIA both within and without the profession over the years. We then move on to bring competency into our analysis, by discussing how different architectural competencies have been contested during this complicated process, opening up questions when considering the field's future.

Multiple Processes of Professionalization by HKIA

At the beginning of the 20th century, only the colonial government had the power to appoint architects. The Public Health and Building Ordinance 1903 introduced the list of authorized architects (AA) system, whereby the Governor would announce in the Gazette architects, engineers and surveyors, who are “deemed qualified” to submit building plans for the Public Works Department’s approval. 53 years later, the setting up of HKSA marked the beginning of a local group of architects increasingly having a say in defining their profession both within and without. They sought to establish and enforce standards within the profession, distinguish themselves from other professions and gain public and legal recognition.

Professionalization within the systems of HKIA

A key aspect of professionalization involves increasingly limiting and defining participation in the profession (Wilensky, 1964), and this is achieved by HKIA through its examination system. The then-HKSA would take over from the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) starting from 1970, when RIBA approved HKSA to hold their version of Examination in Professional Practice and Practical Experience as RIBA Part 3 after five years of preparation. The examination tested Hong Kong’s Building Ordinance Cap. 123, Town Planning Ordinance Cap. 131, and Landlord and Tenant Ordinance Cap. 255 along with HKSA’s Codes of Professional Conducts and Scales of Charges which restricts architects’ unprofessional behavior (HKSA, 1971). Although RIBA’s versions were referenced, they were attuned to local conditions. The Scale of Charges covered common Hong Kong multi-story, low-cost housing typologies (HKSA, 1961). In 1972, the new exam arrangement in the 15th Anniversary of the Society marked the transfer of the power from RIBA to HKSA as the importance of local context was stressed in the colonial qualification system. It was in

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	Number of Papers	Passing Rates (Year)
HKIA	9	59.93 % (2020) (average of 8 written papers)
National Board of Architectural Accreditation (NBAA) (China)	6 (Originally 9 before 2022)	NA
Architect Registration Examination (ARE) (U.S.)	6	45%-66% (2020)
Professional Practice Examinations (Singapore)	2	NA
Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)	4	87% (2018/2019)
Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (ACA)	3	85% (2019)

Source: HKIA, NBAA, NCARB, BOA, RIBA, ACA

Table 1: Comparison of professional assessments of architects across various countries

the same year that HKSA was renamed the Hong Kong Institute of Architects (HKIA) in 1972. This was not only a symbolic move, a “recognition of the increased responsibility of the work of the architect” (HKIA, 1973: 7), but perhaps also an assertion of legitimacy of a professional institution. The affix of “H.K.I.A.” was simultaneously introduced for members to professionally represent themselves, with the hope that members will not need to “look overseas for membership but put faith, support and resources in HKIA” (HKIA, 1972: 7).

The aim of professionalization is not only to ensure architects’ ability in creating safe buildings, but also to maintain their competitiveness in international standards. The logbook assessment format was refined in 1977 to emphasize proper practical experiences, while the case study, which is to ensure sufficient understanding of the processes of a project, was introduced in 1982 (HKIA, 1977; 1982); both assessment criteria were once found in the RIBA system (RIBA, n.d.). Over the years, the HKIA professional assessment has evolved from 2 papers (1971) to 4 papers (1982) to 9 papers (1996). This examination structure can be compared to China’s, where NBAA’s 9-paper exam was developed simultaneously from 1992 to 1995.

(The National Architects Association of R.O.C., 2011). Notably, the expanded sections (Paper 3-7) in 1996 mostly pertain to the technical aspects of building and construction under “Architectural Design Application” (fig. 1), which echo Paper 3,4,5,7 and 9 of China’s NBAA’s Grade 1 registered architect assessment (The National Architects Association of R.O.C., 2011). Compared to exams in other countries such as Australia (Table 1), HKIA’s assessment also includes engineering and planning topics on top of legal and architectural knowledge. The average passing rate of each HKIA exam paper remained below 60% in 2020 (HKIA, 2020), which may be considered sufficient evidence of its difficulty. It rigorously tests the competence of Hong Kong architects to handle the dense and hilly environment with comprehensive technical and legal knowledge, which perhaps affords them the capability to lead other building consultants, including engineers and surveyors who were once referred to as “architects” in the AA system under British colonial rule. If limiting the training and access to become an architect is a key aspect of professionalization (Freidson, 1973), developing such a rigorous assessment system is a clear example of how HKIA professionalized the occupation in the territory to maintain architects’ competitiveness in relation to other building professions as well as in international standards.

Facing outward: HKIA’s discursive strategies to build external recognition

Professionalization also relies on recognition by other stakeholders in society outside the profession. Over time, the organization expanded its impact strategically by interweaving networking, publicity, and most importantly, legislation, in addition to their internal qualification process to promote the exclusivity of architects. Together, these discursive strategies center HKIA as the main architectural organization to interact with the state, other building professions, international organizations as well as frame the public understanding of architects and architecture (Cohen, Arnold, Wilkinson, Finn, 2005; Mieg, Oevermann, 2021).

Firstly, the long battle for architects’ legal status could be traced back to the 1960s, when HKSA loosely included members from Members of the Institute

The average passing rate of each HKIA exam paper remained below 60% in 2020.

Pathway to become an Architect in Hong Kong

HKIE Membership

- (a) Formal Training Route: Recognized Academic Qualifications > Formal Training (2/3 Yrs)> Responsible Exp. (1/2 Yrs)> Professional Assessment (PA)
- (b) General Experience Route: Recognized Academic Qualifications > General Experience (5 Yrs) > Responsible Exp. (1 Yr) > PA
- (c) Mature Route: Age 35+ > (with Recognized Academic Qualifications) min. 6 Yrs of Exp./ (without) 15 Yrs of Progressive Exp. > PA (with interview)

HKIS Membership

- (a) Admission Route: Graduate of Cognate Degree/ Non-Cognate but Relevant Degree/ Other Graduate Degree.> Probationer > Assessment of Professional Competence (with prescribed period of professional training, min. 2-3 Yrs)
- (b) Technical Member of HKIS Recognized Professional Bodies + 1 Yr Local Working Exp. > Assessment of Professional Competence
- (c) Professional Member of HKIS Recognized Professional Bodies + 1 Yr Local Working Exp.

Pre-Professional Degree (3-4 Years)

Local Accredited Programmes

- Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Architectural Studies, City University of Hong Kong
- Bachelor of Architecture (Hons), Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Architecture, Chu Hai College of Higher Education
- Bachelor of Social Science in Architectural Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- Bachelor of Arts in Architectural Studies, The University of Hong Kong

Non-local Professional Programmes Currently Recognized

- The National Board of Architectural Accreditation (NBAA) of China
- The Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA)
- The National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) of USA
- The Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA)
- The New Zealand Registered Architects Board (NZARB)

↑ accredits

Average age after finishing this stage: 21-22

Professional Degree (2-3 Years)

Local Accredited Programmes

- Master of Architecture, The University of Hong Kong
- Master of Architecture, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- Master of Architecture, Chu Hai College of Higher Education

Non-local Professional Programmes Currently Recognized

- The National Board of Architectural Accreditation (NBAA) of China
- The Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA)
- The National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) of USA
- The Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA)
- The New Zealand Registered Architects Board (NZARB)

↑ accredits

Average age after finishing this stage: 23-27

5-12 Months of Year-out Experience

Minimum of 12 Months of Recognized Practical Experience

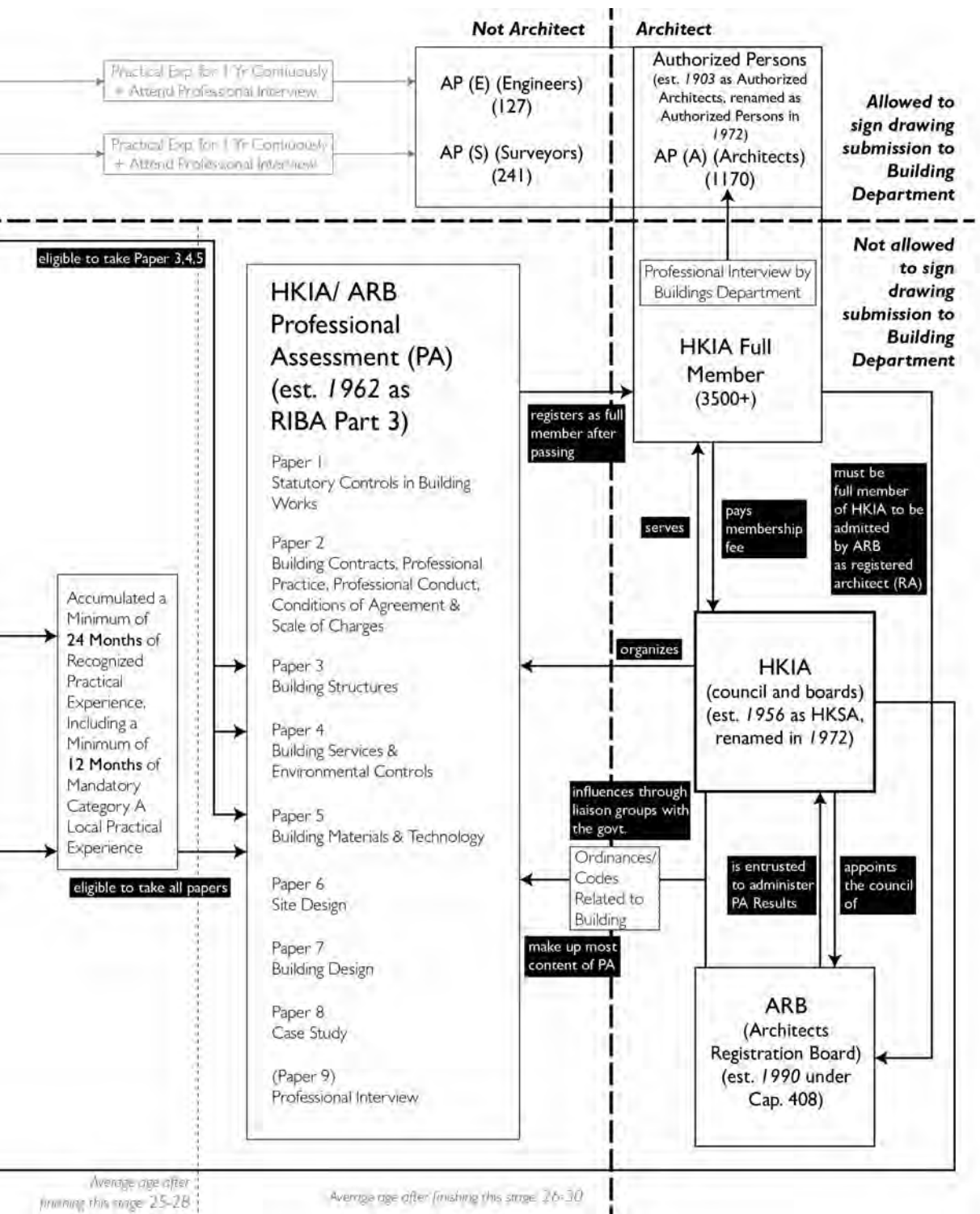


Fig. 1 - Pathway to become an Architect in Hong Kong. This diagram indicates the path to become an architect in Hong Kong, which include a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, a minimum-24-month working experience and a 9-paper Professional Assessment. Also, note the relationship between Authorized Person and Registered Architect. A further exam is needed to be taken for one to sign off building drawings submitted to Buildings Department.

HKSA framed the effort as putting “in order” the three houses of architects, engineers and surveyors through a joint ordinance and collaborative registration board.

of Civil Engineers (MICE) and Fellow of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (FRICS) (HKSA, 1961). Nowadays, the registration of architects is protected by the Architects Registration Board (ARB) under the Architects Registration Ordinance (ARO) (Cap 408, 1990), ensuring that only HKIA members could be qualified as architects in Hong Kong. HKIA persisted in the ARO as they believed that the legislature was compulsory for the profession to gain “leadership in all matters related to the built and planned environment”, and most importantly, to “command the respect of the Government, commerce, industry and the general public” (HKIA, 1972: 10). It is eminent that the architects, who are led by HKIA, strive to protect their rights as designers and dominate the industry. When the ARO was passed in 1990, the Hong Kong Institute of Architects Incorporation Ordinance (Cap. 1147) was also incorporated. By setting up a Registration Board, HKIA handles issues of disciplinary proceedings and the statutory use of the title “architect”. It also took over partial duties and power of the Building Authority (Haffner, 1989).

As early as 1962, the need for an Architects’ Ordinance was raised by the HKSA council to protect the title of “architect” and “architecture” (HKSA, 1963). However, contrary to the rapid development of the professional exam system, its progress was particularly slow because both architecturally trained and non-architecturally persons could be named as AAs. Hence, engineers and surveyors were irritated as they believed that their rights as AA may be forfeited, thus losing the job opportunities originally afforded to them (HKSA, 1968). In this light, HKSA had to step back to pacify them by denying that the architects’ registration creates a monopoly. Instead, HKSA framed the effort as putting “in order” the three houses of architects, engineers and surveyors through a joint ordinance and collaborative registration board (HKSA, 1968). Yet, due to the complexities of the conflicting interests, the negotiation on the Bill remained stagnant and the joint board was never established. HKIA also capitalized on specific events in their advocacy for the government’s recognition, fitting Wilkensen’s (1964) observations that legal protection of the profession is often prompted by safety concerns. They did so by utilizing the newspaper editorial

HKIA has actively been involved in various regional and international architectural organizations, rising to worldwide recognition in the 70s.

to the general public, the amendment was crucial in defining the term “architect” and paved the way for the ARO in 1990. This shows how publicity was also a tool to garner public support for legal reform. HKIA argued in various newspaper articles about the necessity of the ordinance by comparing themselves to other professions such as lawyers and doctors who have statutory protection, as well as the existence of an Architects Registration Act in the United Kingdom since 1931. They also complained about how the term “architect” was abused by other consultants who did not have to go through years of training and exams. Over the years, more than 20 HKIA editorials were published to instill a proper understanding of an “architect” in the public realm. As they mentioned in their yearbook when the Architects Registration Bill was gazetted, “the main point [they] are asking for is the protection of the title ‘Architect’” (HKIA, 1989: 7). Above all other concerns, HKIA was particular about the limitation of the use of “architect” to ensure the members of the profession are properly acknowledged and respected as the leader of the building team (Haffner, 1989). In parallel, HKIA has been getting international recognition to foster reciprocal acknowledgment of its professional license. This is particular for Hong Kong’s situation as a colonized city with a marginalized position in nation-based international architectural organizations. Since its formation, HKIA has actively been involved in various regional and international architectural organizations, such as the East Asia Regional Organization, the Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA) and the International Union of Architects (UIA), rising to worldwide recognition in the 70s. In 1971, HKIA became one of the founding members of the Architects Regional Council Asia (ARCASIA) along with India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Singapore (ARCASIA, 2010), where the reciprocity of registration of overseas professional qualifications was a major item in its conferences (HKIA, 1973). In 1978, HKIA’s multiple attempts to apply as candidate resulted in it attaining full membership of UIA from an associate membership despite Hong Kong not being a country and its affiliation to RIBA (HKIA, 1978). In the 90s, HKIA was among UIA’s discussions of freeing up services across national boundaries (HKIA, 1995). Ten years after the passing of ARO, HKIA has reached a mutual recognition agreement of

qualification with The National Administration Board of Architect Registration (NABAR) of China since 2000, CAA since 2001, The Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA) since 2010, The New Zealand Registered Architects Board (NZRAB) since 2012 (Canberra Accord on Architectural Education, 2017).

There is also a reinforcing aspect between legal status within the city and international recognition. Specifically, proper statutory status is a criterion when mutual accreditation for architectural education between Hong Kong and other countries (Canberra Accord on Architectural Education, 2017). This suggests that legal status within the city was also relevant for greater international recognition, such that its qualification could also be recognized outside of the city, making its pursuit more important.

In 1970, the HKIA report wrote: “The buildup of sound relationships with the regional and worldwide parent body must be one of our constant future aims, second only to the development of a stronger Hong Kong Society,” (HKSA, 1971, p.3). This quote suggests that the society’s discursive strategies, despite directed to different stakeholders, are interwoven and interdependent. All its effort in publicity, networking and legislation helped HKIA in building up Hong Kong architects’ authority and legitimacy.

Yet, it must be noted that even after the ARO was enacted in 1990, HKIA members were still not recognized as the sole building designer. In fact, HKIA approached the government several times for the possibility of self-licensing of AP but received “considerable resistance from the government” in 1993 (HKIA, 1993: 5). Under the current government-controlled system, engineers and surveyors are still allowed to submit plans after passing a further interview to be authorized as AP.

Contested Competencies in the Process of Professionalization and their implications

Having outlined key strategies and processes in the professionalization of the architecture profession facilitated by HKIA, we move on to discuss how various competencies, including the cultural, creative and critical, have been contested. We observe that HKIA’s role in promoting certain competencies over others is not static, and can be understood in the context of the changing socio-political conditions of Hong Kong.

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Prior to HKSA and the ARO, the colonial government mandated who could practice as an architect using the AA List, most on the list were engineers.

Cultural Competency - Localization

Our understanding of HKIA's origins must be rooted in the context of Hong Kong being a British colony with its unique context and environment compared to the UK. We argue that HKIA's origins were an example of cultural competency, whereby local architects saw the importance of understanding local contexts for overall society and fought for their rights to take up more space within the field of architecture.

As explained earlier, prior to HKSA and the ARO, the colonial government mandated who could practice as an architect using the AA List, most on the list were engineers, especially in the post-war period. The heightened need for housing meant that the concern was safety and quantity rather than design. Meanwhile, British architects were appointed to design iconic governmental buildings such as the Supreme Court (1912) and the Central Police Station (1919). The colonial government's undermining of local architectural talents and thus the neglect of design for the majority was what prompted HKIA to work on improving professional standards and promoting recognition of Hong Kong architects.

Six years after the Architecture Faculty at the University of Hong Kong was set up by Gordon Brown from Britain and after multiple failed attempts in the 40s, HKSA was established in 1956 with a prominent Chinese architect Gin-Djih Su as the first president (Hong Kong and Far East Builder, 1956). This is more than a century after the British took over Hong Kong Island, and is an important milestone in developing a group of local professional architects. Moreover, the establishment of HKSA membership allowed for multiple ways to be recognized as an architect other than the appointment by the colonial government (although it did not equate to authorization for signing off architectural drawings like an AA), as those who had apprenticed under an architect for more than 8 years could also join. Such resistance to colonial power in the architectural realm was proven successful. In 1969, HKIA's former Vice-President would rebuke Mr. Daniel Jones, a then-visiting MP from the UK, who had suggested importing a British planner to plan the city in a letter to the press. The Hong Kong architect declared that "I believe the architects here are just as competent if not more so than our colleagues in

Britain,” and also questioned their competency: “In Britain, I do not think any architect has ever had the experience of planning to a density of two thousand persons per acre,” (Ouyang, 1969, p. 11). Such a position shows HKSA’s advocacy for local architects who have a better understanding of the built environment and socio-cultural context.

Design Competency – Creativity, Project Management or Building Codes?

If cultural competency is what differentiates a Hong Kong architect from a British one, design competency is perhaps what differentiates him or her from surveyors or engineers, who we have established as competing with architects for the exclusive right to sign off on architecture projects since British’s AA system and now under the HKSAR’s AP system. However, while creativity would be a competency stressed by HKIA in their earlier discourse and activities, we infer that it is increasingly marginalized at the individual architect level as architects’ role is increasingly managerial within projects. However, as a professional association, HKIA would indirectly influence the design of buildings through building codes.

In 1991, the then-President wrote in an op-ed following the passing of the ARO that there is an increased role for architects in Hong Kong which is differentiated from others in the building industry such as engineers and surveyors, as they are also concerned with “the ways of life, tradition and culture in a broader sense” (Chung, 1991: 20). He also argued that the architecture profession must differentiate itself from other professions like engineers by showing the public “what [they] can do apart from designing buildings”, which he specifies as having a social mission and conscience (Chung, 1991: 20). There were some attempts in the earlier part of HKIA’s history to play a greater role in influencing the built environment in more visible and creative ways. For example, HKIA submitted comprehensive design plans to the government to redevelop the entire Central district, and promoted them in the press (Ta Kung Po, 1960) (Fig. 3). Though these plans were partly adopted, the association would stop spending similar energy on later planning ideas. Even though a Metroplan Workshop on West Kowloon design was held in 1989, it remained an

As a professional association, HKIA would indirectly influence the design of buildings through building codes.

由建築師學會設計 中區海塢發展計劃 擬就

交通善改時同心中業商作開

此項發展計劃，把行人車道與電車軌道分開，把行人車道與電車軌道分開，把行人車道與電車軌道分開...

此項發展計劃，把行人車道與電車軌道分開，把行人車道與電車軌道分開，把行人車道與電車軌道分開...

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【本報訊】香港建築師學會設計委員會，昨日下午五時在該會舉行全體會議，討論中區海塢發展計劃...

該報告會第三十三頁，建議的設施如下：(一)興建足時的停車場；(二)改善行人道；(三)興建行人道與電車道之間的緩衝帶；(四)改善行人道與電車道之間的緩衝帶；(五)改善行人道與電車道之間的緩衝帶...

該計劃如能實行，中區海塢將由一個混亂的街道，變成一個井然有序的步行區。此外，在該區興建一個步行區，不但可以減少汽車的數量，而且可以減少汽車的數量...



1. 步行區

2. 電車道

3. 商業區

4. 公園區

5. 住宅區

6. 學校

7. 政府建築

8. 碼頭

9. 巴士站

10. 電車站

Fig. 3 - Central District development planning by HKIA that balanced walkability and vehicular access (Tai Kung Po, 1960:1).

artistic expression rather than a practical plan. Instead, the present-day examination system emphasizes extensive technical knowledge about regulations and project management. Architects in Hong Kong may indeed have gained “leadership in all matters related to the built and planned environment” (HKIA, 1972, p.10), but perhaps by converging the profession towards what engineers and surveyors can do, while neglecting the development of the design and social consciousness more unique to the role of the architect. While more and more small-/ mid-scale offices with licensed architects are progressively participating in design discourses of the city nowadays, such as One Bite Studio which focuses on placemaking, as well as LAAB that emphasizes fabrication (One Bite Studio, n.d., LAAB, 2022), most architects still take up administrative roles in ‘running projects’ rather than design (Fig. 4). On one hand, this culture results in the marginalization of idealistic design proposals, which are deemed unrealistic. On the other hand, in a city heavily influenced by building codes and developers’ demands, an adminis-

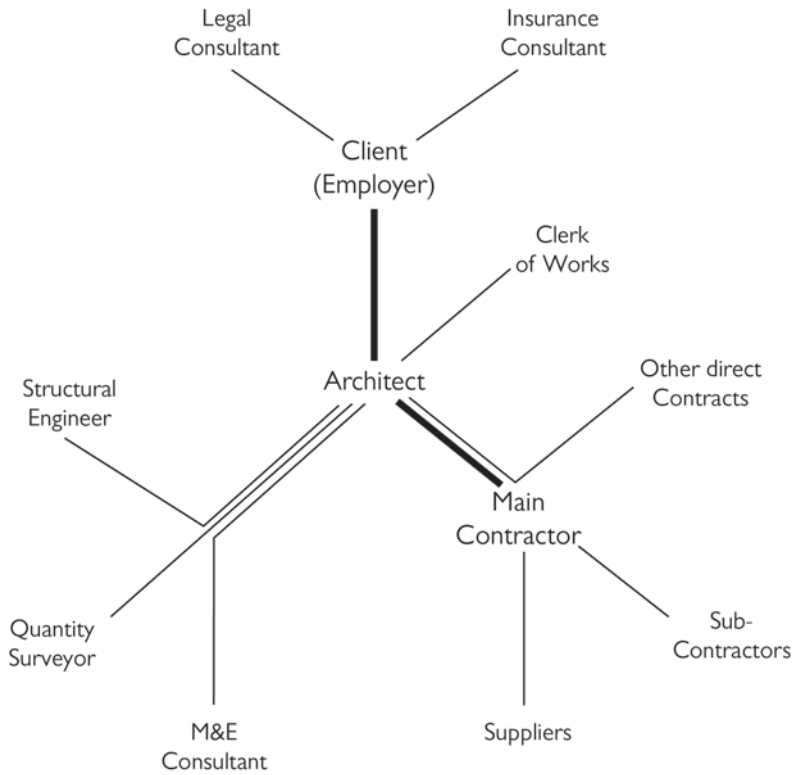


Fig. 4 - Conventional organization of the Building Team. Redrawn from Christopher Haffner's (HKIA's former president) speech in 1989 (Haffner, 1989).

trative architect's leading role in liaison and managing procedures become crucial to balance the economy, safety and function of a building.

If HKIA did not promote an architectural profession that emphasized design, it still had an extensive influence on Hong Kong's built environment through its engagement in related legislation. They started trying to influence legislation by setting up committees to draft professional reports in response to various bills. A liaison group between the Public Works Department (PWD) and Authorised Architects (AA) was set up in 1959, marking the first of many such bilateral liaison groups which effectively place HKSA and later HKIA firmly in the inner circle of policymaking. By 1971, efforts to engage PWD would be under the Association's Board of Architecture Practice and it was mentioned in their annual report that the liaison group was an "invaluable link with Government" (HKIA, 1972: .9). In 1991, HKIA had members on 7 governmental committees/ sub-committees, and 12 government-HKIA liaison groups were set up to let HKIA members have

HKIA still had an extensive influence on Hong Kong's built environment through its engagement in related legislation.

While university curriculums encourage critical inquiry, the HKIA examination is more about mastery of the existing guidelines.

their say on matters like codes. They would end up influencing multiple codes related to means of escape, fire safety, thermal transfer, etc. that shaped and restricted architectures in Hong Kong. Therefore, instead of engaging in design discourses and stylistic concerns, the competency to design in this city is inherently shaped by professionalization through codes and procedures, with a more subtle but no less impact on Hong Kong's built environment.

Marginalized Competency of Criticality

To maintain the coherency of professionalism, cultures of open and critical debates are often marginalized. A case in point would be the controversy which was caused by then-President Tao Ho's public comments about the design of the Central Library in 1997. His comments had been perceived as jumping out of line and a breach of the HKIA professional code of conduct, whereby members should not criticize the works of other members in public (Hon, 1997). He emphasized in his defense that the intention of his comments was not to criticize the design abilities of the architects in question, but to question the system, which perhaps explains why it was heavily criticized. He also encouraged fellow HKIA members: "Members of our Institute must seize this golden opportunity of the handover to stand up courageously and to challenge the passive mentality of always saying "Yes, sir!" to asking "Why not?" (HKIA, 1997:4). Unfortunately, but unsurprisingly, he would be one of the few Presidents to ever encourage such an open culture of being critical in the long line of HKIA's history.

The issue of whether the competency of criticality is considered relevant for the architectural profession can also be seen in the gap between the 9-paper ordinance-based assessment and the 6-year education offered in universities in Hong Kong. While university curriculums encourage critical inquiry, the HKIA examination is more about mastery of the existing guidelines. The incongruence between education and practice can also be seen in how there is a reverse correlation between the percentage of HKIA-licensed architects in a school versus its ranking. The ratio of HKIA members (full & associate) to non-HKIA teachers at the top two accredited architecture schools (The University of Hong Kong and The Chinese Univer-

1.0 ★★★★★ ▼

Former Employee, more than 1 year

[Lucky if you see this!]

2 Nov 2020 - Architecture Intern in Causeway Bay

✗ Recommend — CEO Approval ✗ Business Outlook

Pros

sea view, west people, No

Cons

OT till 9 pm per day, occasionally need to work overnight, 1-2 times a month, no pay for OT most of the time, basically in charge of everything, no AA above, A or associate is too busy for you; expensive lunch in cwb, the whole team has left, just a cheap labour working A's job, transportation redeem is accounted in a way that increase your tax, while reducing the company's

sity of Hong Kong) is only 1:6 while that in Chu Hai College of Higher Education, the lowest-ranked school among the three, is as high as 1:1 (Chu Hai College Department of Architecture, 2018; CUHK School of Architecture, 2019; HKU Faculty of Architecture, 2021). The ratio above indicates that fewer scholars in higher-ranked universities opt for HKIA licenses. Despite having stronger backgrounds and international acclamation, academics engaged in critical research may not find the contrasting focus of the 9-paper professional assessment (which emphasizes technical knowledge) worth undertaking. This is a huge difference from earlier relationships between HKIA and HKU, with scholars highly involved in HKIA's policies till the 1980s. With this increasing schism between studio course design and real practice, whereby designs based on idealism and critical thinking are being encouraged at school, students who learn architecture are either designing without consideration of context during their studio, or merely rule-following when they get into practice.

Implications of certain competencies being prioritized over others: Homogeneity and Commodification

Overall, the professionalization process by HKIA can be said to have reduced the diversity of competencies that are deemed relevant to being an architect in Hong Kong. This seems to go against their position when they were first set up. In the earlier days of HKSA, they allowed architects to have diverse design trainings to be recognized as architects. Other than

Fig. 5 - Glassdoor review by an Architectural Intern in a local firm (Note: AA: Architectural Assistant (a graduate who has not gotten a license), A: Architect (a HKIA-licensed architect) (Glassdoor, 2020).

The professionalization process by HKIA have reduced the diversity of competencies that are deemed relevant to being an architect in Hong Kong.

The issue of “cheap labour” is generally unquestioned by the industry under the notion of educating year-outs for the professional exam.

being registered as AA in Hong Kong or the UK, people who apprenticed for 8+ years under an architect were as well eligible as members (HKSA, 1959). For example, member no. 86 Lee Yin Chuen had no professional membership or qualification but was promoted to a full member presumably due to his accumulation of working experience (HKSA, 1959). This condition to membership was removed in 1972, when the society rebranded as a professional institute (HKIA, 1973). Meanwhile, RIBA is planning to abandon its existing Parts 1 to 3 assessments and switch to a more flexible system for wider pools of talent (Waite, 2022). We recall a quote from HKSA's Yearbook in 1962: “[...] when the authorities have full confidence in the integrity of all practising architecture in the Colony that there will be room for a relaxation of the rules” (HKSA, 1963: 4). This quote may have been forgotten in the dust of the Institute's history, given its current prominence in rule setting and enforcing.

The other issue is the commodification of architect's qualification, some of which HKIA itself participates in. On top of paid lectures by HKIA, PassHKIA is a private tutorial website set up by several persons who claimed to have passed the professional assessment of the institute. It provides charged services, which include quizzes on Paper 1-6 to “save time and money for another exam” (PassHKIA, n.d.). The emergence of such a service is an example of how the difficulty of such a critical exam has led to the creation of a market, and those with more financial resources can purchase educational advantages which are then translated to qualifications for greater earning power. Another example in which the qualification process becomes subject to the market and therefore susceptible to exploitation is the *encouraged* year-out practical experience. The year-out experience, equivalent to Stage 1 practical experience under the RIBA system, must be 5-12 months and requires the signature of a registered architect in HKIA's Logbook (HKIA, 2020). In some offices, the ratio between year-outs and seniors could be as high as 1:2. In smaller offices, year-outs are often asked to handle the job duties of an architectural assistant while receiving 60% of their salary and with deplorable working conditions (Fig. 5). The issue of “cheap labour” is generally unquestioned by the industry under the notion of

educating year-outs for the professional exam. In fact, the year-out experience is not compulsory for professional assessment, yet most students automatically take it as a prerequisite (Refer to Fig. 1). The non-existent requirement also reflects professionalism has dominated the discourses of architectural practice, as unstipulated procedures are construed as unspoken but “necessary” and accepted without question.

Conclusion

For more than half a century, Hong Kong architects have constantly been establishing its identity and power in relation to other stakeholders, including the state (first the colonial and later the SAR government) and other professional institutes whether in competition or cooperation. By tracing the history of the architecture profession in Hong Kong through the history of the professional institute, we show ongoing tensions between various architectural competencies in defining the readiness to be an architect, and invite those part of the institute and field to consider whether change, in the form of more diversity, is necessary. After all, the history of HKIA precisely shows the kind of agency architects have amidst the kind of structure and context they have had to operate within.

Not only has the architect profession been shaped by architects themselves through the architectural association, but their endeavor can also be grounded in the historical and unique context of Hong Kong. Just as the article was also initially an attempt to decenter the grand monographs of starchitects within architectural discourse through exploring professionalization as a collective effort, there is also a need for more studies into trends in architectural history on topics such as professionalization in places not in the West, each with their contingencies. The kind of professionalism championed by HKIA, while hegemonic, is neither colonial nor nationalistic, and has influenced this city's built environment and anchored its identity in the form of legislation and standards. Spanning across the colonial era and the handover to China, the efforts and outcomes accompanying professionalization are counter to the pigeonholed characterization of Hong Kong as a “borrowed time, borrowed place,” where ephemeral is the constant.

Not only has the architect profession been shaped by architects themselves through the architectural association, but their endeavor can also be grounded in the historical and unique context of Hong Kong.

Ultimately, there is a need to critically comprehend and unpack the professionalization system i.e. understand how it came to be besides noting its current hegemony. It is only when professionalization is properly discussed and critiqued can the issues of marginalization of other competencies and schisms between studio and reality be resolved and reconciled. Embedded in the complex structure and evolution of professionalization, it is time for us to look beyond solid built forms to understand and define architectural competency in Hong Kong to move forward.

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