

Coming into this summer, I carried a lot of misconceptions about Hong Kong, the city I call home. Although I was born and raised here, I can't help but feel disconnected from it. Maybe it was the distance that grew between my childhood friends and I as we grew to have different values; or perhaps it is the never-ending redevelopment, erasing every familiar corner of the city. I chose to work on a project based in Hong Kong because I wanted to deepen my understanding of its culture, industries, and people. What I did not expect was that this summer would give me a completely new perspective on a city I thought I knew and understood all too well.

In Hong Kong, it is very common for households to hire domestic workers to take care of chores, kids, and elders. Many families have working parents with a high demand for an extra helping hand at home. 30% of the minority population in Hong Kong is Filipino, with most being female domestic workers. That said, I have personally observed an indifference between the local Hong Kongers and the Filipino population, due to the hierarchical nature of their employment structure. From the early stages of this project, I have set out to learn more about the underrepresented Filipino overseas domestic worker population in Hong Kong.

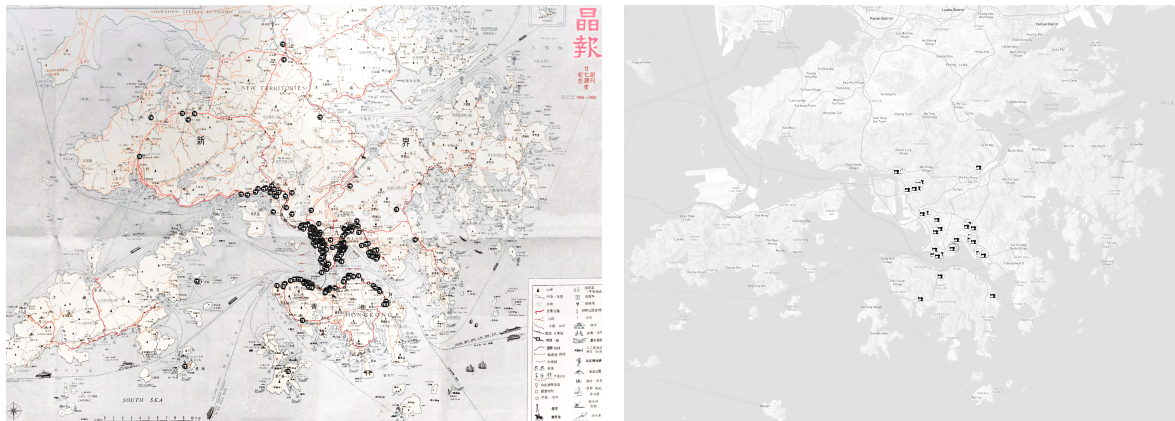
With the desire to learn more about Filipino culture, and numerous failed ideas, I finally decided to make my nanny, Cecilia, a Terno (Filipina dress) in preparation of Hong Kong's Filipino Independence Day celebration. Cecilia took care of my family for twelve years. Before staying with us, she worked in Taiwan, Singapore, and many other cities in Asia. When I still lived with her, I remember her attending Philippines Independence Day celebrations, but never bothered to learn more. Therefore, this summer, I wanted to create a Terno that both holds cultural significance to her Filipina heritage, but also carries a piece of my culture and my touch. The Terno is a traditional garment of the Philippines, and requires a very distinctly butterfly-shaped sleeve. Historically, the term Terno, derived from the Spanish word for "matched" would mean an entire set of clothes.¹ However, for this modern rendition of a Terno, I have decided to create something suitable to wear during the Hong Kong heat. The blue Terno features the traditional sleeve, with an embroidered sun of the Filipino flag on each side. Its center panel's Chinese silk brocade compliments the traditional pattern with the rest of the Terno—combining Chinese and Filipino culture in one.

Other than making a Filipino dress, I also explored the process of creating my own Qipao—a traditional Chinese dress that features a mandarin collar, asymmetrical flap design, and a meticulously tailored bodice that molds to the person. During the process of purchasing the necessary materials for my project, I pushed myself to engage in conversations with people that I come across through every stage of constructing a garment. Through a conversation with a fabric store owner, I found out the reason The Sham Shui Po fabric market relocated to its current location. The relocation happened because the government bought up old land to build private housing, forcing long-time store renters out of their familiar market and community. The new

¹ Kathleen Dinah Trocino, "The Terno," Narra Studio, September 30, 2021, .

units are cheaper on paper, but its smaller size demands the owners to rent more units to fit their fabric inventory, increasing the cost for these store owners to continue this work in order to sustain their livelihoods. This lack of care towards the handicrafts industry is consistent with my understanding of the culture of this city, as I look at my peers studying to have high-paying jobs despite having no interests in these subject areas. A sewing machine repairer, 黃師傅², told me his story. In the 60s, he dropped out of secondary school to enroll in a course about sewing machine repair. Through this program, he entered this industry and has been repairing machines for decades. He commented that less and less young people are studying to be fashion designers, let alone clothes manufacturers or sewing machine repairers. In fact, due to the migration of manufacturing companies to Mainland China, many of these programs, including the one that he graduated from, have been put to an end, rendering this entrance to the industry obsolete.

Through 黃師傅, I was able to meet Sylvia and Wing, a duo operating the antique store, “夕拾”³, in To Kwa Wan of Hong Kong. Wing began his personal collection of old goods in the 80s, and opened his first store in 2018. In assisting them with preparing for an exhibition on the history of Hong Kong’s clothing manufacturing industry, I created two maps comparing the number of factories in 1971 and 2025.



More importantly, working on site with them meant I learned more about both Sylvia and Wing’s personal life. Sitting in the store was like opening a floodgate to a side of Hong Kong I’d never known—people would come in and speak with passion about art, history, and collecting.

Through this experience, despite all the discontent I had with this city, I found my people.

² Translates to “Master Wong”

³ Translates to “Past Collection”.