

PUBLIC TRANSIT AS A TOURIST ATTRACTION: HONG KONG

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Like many major cities, Hong Kong has an expansive public transportation system. Made up of a patchwork of companies connected only by the mighty Octopus card, this intermodal network literally keeps the city functioning thanks to its ability to move millions of people quickly and efficiently every single day. For visitors, Hong Kong's public transportation is both a means of getting from point A to point B and a tourist attraction. It's a part of the unique cityscape, interwoven with the intoxicating urban fabric of towering skyscrapers looming over streets squeezed on the edges of islands between mountain peaks and lapping waves. But that doesn't mean all public transportation is equal under the tourist gaze. Historic conveyances such as the Star Ferry, Hong Kong Tramways and the Peak Tram are praised as a way of experiencing the 'authentic' old Hong Kong while the MTR, Light Rail, outlying island ferries, double-decker buses, and minibuses are only discussed in a practical sense. Despite carrying the majority of the city's commuters and thus being the most demonstrably 'authentic' representation of modern Hong Kong, the bulk of the city's public transportation is portrayed having little intrinsic tourist value. *But this three-pronged portrayal of public transportation in tourist-oriented media highlights the farce of the continual tug-of-war over authenticity between 'travelers' and 'tourists.'* Although one group is ostensibly more 'authentic' than the other, both present a similar perspective on Hong Kong's public transportation in their categorizations of what is a standalone tourist attraction versus a mere way of travelling to the things worth seeing.¹

The largest continuity between the supposedly different 'travelers' and 'tourists' is their never-ending search for the 'authentic' Old Hong Kong, and the Star Ferry gladly delivers.

¹ You may be asking "What about the cabs?" Well, they're a bit of a category-breaking transportation method and aren't – strictly speaking – public, even though they are iconic. Thus, they will not be covered in this paper. A standalone look at cabs as a form of tourist branding in Hong Kong compared to other cities (New York, London, etc.) does sound interesting, but must be left for another time.

Originally a convenient and necessary way of crossing Victoria Harbor, its usefulness was gradually superseded with the construction of the various road tunnels and the MTR's Tsuen Wan and Tung Chung lines.² Still, the ferry has been used in tourist advertising for time immemorial as an example of living history and a way of selling tourist products to the point that the image of one crossing Victoria Harbour has become shorthand for Hong Kong itself.³ In the May 1986 edition of the Hong Kong Tourist Association's *Official Hong Kong Guide*, the Star Ferry is described in the opening paragraph as a cheap and short ferry ride that's still "one of the world's outstanding journeys," allowing visitors to "experience the essence of Hong Kong."⁴ Accompanied by a shot of the harbor, this opening paragraph rests on page 15 as the first ten or so pages of the guide are wall-to-wall full color ads for tourist products ranging from luxury watches and custom tailored suits to ceramic figurines and one-hour photo development.⁵ And if passengers want souvenirs from the ferry that's so iconic it's been featured in "just about every movie" made about Hong Kong, the guide recommends stopping by the kiosks selling the sailors' "distinctive navy-blue uniforms" at the end of the terminal.⁶ How convenient!

Hong Kong's trams are also discussed with similar flowery language, with the guide recommending visitors hop on the historic system apparently known as the "pollution solution"

² And the upcoming Sha Tin to Central link. A misnomer, because it actually goes to Admiralty, but whatever.

³ As seen in the 1994 Hong Kong: There's No Place Like It campaign, which also features trams as stars.

Hong Kong. There's No Place Like It [Tram at night], Hong Kong Tourist Association, 1994, Call number PS10/282, Hong Kong Tourism Board Collection, University of Hong Kong Library.

Hong Kong. There's No Place Like It [Star Ferry and yachts on], Hong Kong Tourist Association, 1994, Call number PS10/276, Hong Kong Tourism Board Collection, University of Hong Kong Library.

⁴ *The Official Hong Kong Guide*, Hong Kong Tourist Association, May 1986, Box 94 Part 1 of 3 PB16, Hong Kong Tourism Board Collection, University of Hong Kong Library, 15.

⁵ *Official Hong Kong Guide*, Hong Kong Tourist Association, 4-13.

⁶ *Official Hong Kong Guide*, Hong Kong Tourist Association, 52.

soon because “it won’t last for ever [sic].”⁷ An upper deck seat is recommended for the best photos of the city’s iconic neon signs and street scenes during the slow ride from Kennedy Town to Shau Kai Wan. In addition, there’s the 1981 Tram Tour Commentaries guide, a massive 52-page booklet containing supplemental historical material for guides of special tram tours.⁸ Although technically a form of public transportation, tourists were and are still marketed a curated view of Hong Kong as seen from the upper deck of a private tram tour akin to the style of a modern tourist bus. But despite all that, the legitimate history, cheap fare and status as a semi-practical form of public transportation theoretically used by locals allow both ‘travelers’ and ‘tourists’ to give the Star Ferry and trams the ‘authenticity’ badge of honor.

This is illustrated in *Frommer’s*, a series of guidebooks geared towards American upper middle-class travelers and families, the exact sort of people considered mere ‘tourists’ by ‘travelers’. Their 2011 Hong Kong features two references to public transportation in the opening paragraph – the Star Ferry is one, and the tram is the other. Author Beth Reiber, who resides in Lawrence, Kansas and thus does not carry the local street cred craved by ‘travelers.’⁹ compares Hong Kong to a movie set with the tram and ferry providing some of the most visible differences between old and new in a city of contrast, “an epic drama where the past has melted into the present.”¹⁰ In the Getting Around section, the Star Ferry is talked up even more with

⁷ *Official Hong Kong Guide*, Hong Kong Tourist Association, 54.

⁸ *Tram Tours Commentaries*, Hong Kong Tourist Association Product Development Department, January 1981, Box 86 PB55, Hong Kong Tourism Board Collection, University of Hong Kong Library, 1.

⁹ Beth Reiber, *Frommer’s Hong Kong, 11th Edition*, Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2011, vii.

¹⁰ “Maybe I’m an incurable romantic, but when I stand at the railing of the famous Star Ferry as it glides across the harbor, ride a rickety old tram as it winds its way across Hong Kong Island, or marvel at the stunning views afforded from atop Victoria Peak, I can’t help but think I must have somehow landed in the middle of an epic drama where the past has melted into the present.” Reiber, *Frommer’s*, 1.

language reminiscent to the 1986 guide – the short five-minute ride is called the “best in the world” and its cheap price is touted. But interestingly, the ferry is also portrayed as the truly authentic way of getting across the harbor due to its history. Although most Hong Kongers speed below the waves through the various modern road or rail tunnels, Reiber offers tips on spotting Hong Kong businessmen while crossing by looking for the people seemingly disinterested in the view with their faces buried in newspapers. She also advocates visitors choose the cheaper, ordinary class lower deck over the first-class upper deck because it is “much more colorful and entertaining” since it’s where the aforementioned locals ride.¹¹ Thus, the ferry is portrayed as a form of living history rather than a cross-harbor conveyance like the MTR or buses. It’s a mobile diorama where those riding it are just as interesting as the journey itself.

This attitude continues with Reiber’s portrayal of Hong Kong’s trams, which contrast with the fast, efficient and modern MTR’s use of the “world’s first ‘contactless’ tickets.” as they “rumble through Central.”¹² Tram rides are characterized as extremely atmospheric at night, with a seat in the front upper deck offering a changing kaleidoscope of Hong Kong visual clichés such as hanging laundry, markets, ‘neon’ signs mostly made of LEDs, crowded sidewalks, et cetera.¹³ It’s “easily one of the most nostalgic” ways of getting around Hong Kong, with Reiber even postulating that “in the zeal to modernize Central, it’s a wonder that these trams have survived at all” – a direct parallel to the advertising of the 1986 guide.¹⁴ Luckily, the trams seem that they will, in fact, last “for ever” after all thanks to their tourist value. Similar to the Star Ferry’s attraction-ization of Hong Kong locals, Reiber’s trams turn the passing Hong Kong street scene

¹¹ Reiber, *Frommer’s*, 42.

¹² Reiber, *Frommer’s*, 1.

¹³ Reiber, *Frommer’s*, 41 and 169-170.

¹⁴ Reiber, *Frommer’s*, 41.

into a theme park attraction, a tourist bus without a dedicated guide. The trams are apparently so authentic and “so much a part of Hong Kong life” despite the dominance of buses and the MTR that they were chosen as the Hong Kong exhibit at Expo ’86 in Vancouver – a literal representation of Hong Kong.¹⁵

Praise of these two conveyances continues, albeit with less verbose and romantic language, in the backpacker-oriented 2017 *Lonely Planet* city guide to Hong Kong. For ‘travelers,’ the book immediately scores authenticity points as author Piera Chen is actually a Hong Kong native. She’s a fan of the city’s complexity and diverse culture who’s happy that the rule of law¹⁶ and an “awesome transport system” keep the intensity from “whirling into chaos.”¹⁷ Despite that, Chen still takes up the same portrayal of Hong Kong’s historic public transit as Reiber. The Star Ferry is still, quite literally, number one – this “floating piece of Hong Kong heritage and sightseeing bargain” is the first on the book’s list of the city’s top 16 attractions.¹⁸ But as she’s writing for the ‘traveler’ audience, Chen goes into even more detail on the ferry’s history and its bona-fide authenticity by highlighting the continued use of a billhook to moor the boat since 1880 and the ferry’s use during the surrender of Hong Kong to the Japanese.¹⁹ In addition, she contrasts the “uninspired” island-side pier – the original was demolished in 2006 to make way for land reclamation despite massive protests – with the “untouched” and “charming”

¹⁵ Reiber, *Frommer’s*, 169.

¹⁶ I wonder what is implied by rule of law? Is it a stealth reference to the fear and uncertainty surrounding the potential erosion of Hong Kong’s freedoms and political/legal system at the hands of the mainland government, which reared its head in 2017 with the arrest of several Umbrella Movement leaders?

¹⁷ Piera Chen, *Lonely Planet Hong Kong City Guide, 17th Edition*, Melbourne, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, May 2017, eBook (EPUB) edition, viewed in Apple Books at the default resolution with 2,414 total pages. 29-30.

¹⁸ Chen, *Lonely Planet*, 31.

¹⁹ Chen, *Lonely Planet*, 449-450.

art deco one on the Kowloon side.²⁰ The message is clear – the more authentic pier is notable whereas the newer pier is not worth thinking about.

As for trams, Chen ranks a ride eleventh on her list of Hong Kong’s top 16 attractions as an environmentally-friendly, cheap and scenic form of living history.²¹ Although she holds back from Reiber’s film-like aesthetic, trams are described as an almost magical way of watching the city go by “like a carousel of images” to the point where high fives between passing trams are supposedly “not unheard of.”²² Right. For a more practical take, we must turn to the similarly backpacker-oriented Wikivoyage.²³ Like Wikipedia, the community-sourced articles tend to be concise and easy to read as an introduction to a topic, and the portrayal of Hong Kong’s tram network follows that expectation. There’s the standard talking up of the tram’s history as an “obvious relic of the British administration,” the praise of its cheap fares, and the contrasting views of old and new Hong Kong offered by riding from Kennedy Town to Shau Kai Wan.²⁴ But the Wikivoyage coverage stands out as the most practical with one fact – the article is the only tourist publication to mention that a tram ride would be “best on a weekday,” as many of Hong Kong’s domestic helpers ride it on Sundays.²⁵

²⁰ Chen, *Lonely Planet*, 32 and 451.

²¹ Chen, *Lonely Planet*, 64-65.

²² Chen, *Lonely Planet*, 65.

²³ Wikivoyage is part of the Wikimedia Foundation, which is the nonprofit that runs Wikipedia and various sister sites such as Wiktionary and Wikimedia Commons (images). It serves as a crowd-sourced online guidebook to destinations worldwide, as just like Wikipedia anyone can create and edit pages. The site holds a vast resource of information and tends to take a backpacker-oriented tone, especially for larger destinations where the quality and number of contributions is higher. Although not a trustworthy source in the traditional sense, it’s relevant here for its extensive cataloging and portrayal of unconventional tourist itineraries using Hong Kong’s public transportation.

²⁴ Subsection “Seeing different sides of Hong Kong by public transport” in “Hong Kong,” *Wikivoyage*, San Francisco: Wikimedia Foundation, Accessed November 23, 2018, https://en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Hong_Kong.

²⁵ Subsection “Seeing different sides of Hong Kong by public transport” in “Hong Kong,” *Wikivoyage*.

This sentence serves as a representation of an authentic side of Hong Kong not featured in tourist marketing – the large and somewhat exploitative use of domestic helpers from the Philippines and Southeast Asia. In addition, the accompanying photo of Hong Kong’s historic double-decked ding ding features a tram wrapped in an advertisement for the exclusive Coach handbag brand. This branding of a singular tram parallels the way the more authentic and historic parts of Hong Kong’s public transportation are branded as tourist attractions and illustrates how Wikivoyage’s stripped-down approach as a free guide editable by anyone leads to something rather authentic, both good and bad. Overall, it’s the most removed from the descriptive influence of Hong Kong’s tourist advertising despite not directly courting a ‘traveler’ clientele in its aesthetic as the *Lonely Planet* does.

In contrast to the Star Ferry and Hong Kong Tramways, the city’s other public transportation tourist attractions are far less ‘public’ and ‘transit.’ The Peak Tram and Ngong Ping 360 are both featured heavily in tourist marketing, ridden almost exclusively by tourists, and comparatively expensive to other mass transit. But one is considered more authentic than the other, with the lynchpin once again resting on history. Just like its two more practical partners, the Peak Tram is prominently featured in tourist advertising up to the point of getting its own poster campaign in 1977.²⁶ But unlike the Star Ferry and non-funicular trams, the Peak Tram has never really served the average Hong Kong local. It was built in 1888 as an exclusive conveyance to an even more exclusive neighborhood reserved for white residents only until after World War II, and now serves as a highly priced \$52 roundtrip conveyance to the tourist section of the same exclusive neighborhood. The top is even a tourist trap, with two fancy malls and

²⁶ *Hong Kong [Peak Tram]*, Hong Kong Tourist Association, 1977, Call number PS10/135, Hong Kong Tourism Board Collection, University of Hong Kong Library.

several gimmicky museums such as Madame Tussaud's wax people and the South Korean Trick Eye Museum taking up the real estate. Finding the famous view of Hong Kong from Lugard Road lookout is a bit of a hassle, as it's only pointed out on small signs hidden far from the tram's exit.

But the Peak Tram is still cited as a must-take in both Lonely Planet and Frommer's thanks to its historical authenticity. Just like trams and the Star Ferry, Reiber gushes over its history with descriptions of the eight-minute vertical journey and a mention of the tram's very own historical gallery at the lower station.²⁷ She does mention the cheaper number 15 double decker bus as an alternative, but almost immediately dismisses it as an option because "then you'd miss the tram."²⁸ The minibus is not mentioned. Likewise, Chen rates a visit to the Peak second out of her top 16 Hong Kong attractions, and a ride up to the viewpoint on the Peak Tram is "a classic Hong Kong experience."²⁹ Interestingly, the supposedly more authentic *Lonely Planet* does not mention either bus option, as Chen clearly views the expensive and exclusive Peak Tram as the best way of reaching the summit. Once again, Wikivoyage stands out as being the most removed from tourist advertising. Their article directly calls out bus 15 as a "more picturesque, cheaper and slower way" of reaching the peak than the venerated Peak Tram!³⁰ Although the modern double decker bus may lack the history of the funicular railway, it is arguably more authentic as the Hong Kongers working in the Peak's various shopping malls and museums likely use it to commute at the cheaper price of \$9.80 per person. But still, at least both

²⁷ Reiber, *Frommer's*, 168.

²⁸ Reiber, *Frommer's*, 168.

²⁹ Chen, *Lonely Planet*, 34, 454-455.

³⁰ Subsection "Victoria Peak" in "Hong Kong/Central," *Wikivoyage*, San Francisco: Wikimedia Foundation, Accessed November 23, 2018, https://en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Hong_Kong/Central.

the bus and funicular take Octopus cards like any true public transportation, unlike Hong Kong's biggest imposter.

Although portrayed as a part of Lantau Island's public transportation, Ngong Ping 360 is really a tourist cable car masquerading as a viable option. This deception is possible thanks to the cable car's status as a subsidy of MTR Corporation, the massive property development company with a side gig of running Hong Kong's railway system. Built in the early 2000s as a way of promoting tourism on Lantau Island, the cable car connects Tung Chung MTR with the relatively recently constructed Tian Tan Buddha and thus solely serves tourists. Despite that, the MTR Corporation has always included the cable car on system maps as an integrated part of the network in such a way that a layman may assume it's a normal line with a normal fare structure. Although it has since been downgraded to a mere icon next to Tung Chung station similar to other non-MTR transportation hubs such as the airport and the new high-speed rail station, older maps from before the opening of the Island Line Extension in 2014 showed the cable car as its own little thin grey line similar to the yellow ones currently used to represent the MTR's Light Rail system.³¹ But unlike every other MTR line – with the arguable exception of the new high-speed rail – Ngong Ping 360 is also featured in numerous advertisements scattered throughout the system.

In aesthetics, the cable car system is basically the Peak Tram minus the historical authenticity with all the tourist trap elements on steroids. At the top, riders must meander through Ngong Ping Village – a whitewashed theme park style recreation of a typical Chinese village complete with overpriced souvenir shops and restaurants, 360 virtual reality experiences,

³¹ *Discover Hong Kong by Rail*, (Hong Kong Tourism Board, November 2009), Collection box 2010/09-02, Hong Kong Tourism Board Collection, University of Hong Kong Library, 73.

staged photo opportunities, and the intro-to-Buddhism multimedia attraction Walking with Buddha.³² It's also exorbitantly expensive, with an adult one-way ticket clocking in at \$160 for a regular cabin and \$215 for the gimmicky, glass-bottomed Crystal Cabin – more than a ride on the semi-exclusive Airport Express.³³ Oh, and this MTR Corporation line which appears on MTR maps with a design similar to the MTR's Light Rail lines does not take Octopus cards. In Hong Kong, that's about as far from public transportation as you can get. But visitors looking to save and avoid the massive lines to purchase tickets can instead invest in the various bundles and guided tours. How convenient.

So, although it is demonstrably not authentic, why is Ngong Ping 360 given such a positive review in both *Frommer's* and the *Lonely Planet*? It all goes back to the view. Reiber considers the Big Buddha one of Hong Kong's top attractions – just like the Star Ferry and a visit to the Peak – and urges visitors to “complete their pilgrimage” to the monastery with a visit to Ngong Ping Village and a ride on the cable car.³⁴ Despite that, Reiber also mentions the alternative bus options for reaching the village. Once again, the supposedly more authentically-minded *Lonely Planet* does not. A visit to the buddha and nearby monastery ranks nine out of 16 for Chen, and the 25-minute cable car ride is mentioned as the “most spectacular way” of reaching the area while the extremely inauthentic village is regarded as “skippable.”³⁵ The artificial village may be below the standards of ‘travelers,’ but considering the public bus as a

³² Did I mention that the actual Tian Tan Buddha is free to visit? “Ngong Ping Village,” *Ngong Ping 360*, Hong Kong: Ngong Ping 360 Limited, Accessed November 23, 2018, <https://www.np360.com.hk/en/explore-np360/ngong-ping-village>.

³³ “Single / Round Trip Cable Car ticket,” *Ngong Ping 360*, Hong Kong: Ngong Ping 360 Limited, Accessed November 23, 2018, <https://www.np360.com.hk/en/ticketing/ticket-tour/ticket/single-round-trip-cable-car-ticket>.

³⁴ Reiber, *Frommer's*, 267.

³⁵ Chen, *Lonely Planet*, 1435-1436.

means of transport instead of the overpriced, tourist cable car is apparently too much to ask. Thus, Hong Kong's least authentic form of 'public transportation' is worth taking due to the beauty of the journey – the very core of public transportation as a tourist attraction.

Apart from Ngong Ping 360, Hong Kong's extensive and efficient MTR system is treated as more of a facilitator of tourism than a tourist attraction by both the MTR Corporation and tourist media. In many stations – especially the ones most likely frequented by tourists – the MTR has helpful system maps that show local tourist attractions across Hong Kong sorted by line and station. The profiled sites are diverse, ranging from no-brainers like the Peak and Temple Street Market to the less visited, far-flung Hong Kong Wetland Park and Lam Tsuen, and visitors looking to carry the information with them are encouraged to download the MTR Mobile app with a handy QR code³⁶. In line with the system's own marketing, *Lonely Planet*, *Frommer's*, and Wikivoyage all profile the MTR under the 'getting around' section instead of as a dedicated tourist attraction. Reiber characterizes the system as “modern, efficient, clean, and easy to use” and says that it's much faster than the older, more historic methods of transportation, but her language is rather functional with descriptions of the various lines and fares.³⁷ Although nearly 4 million enter the system every day – making it the most authentic way of getting around Hong Kong as it transports more than half of modern Hong Kongers – there are no tales of the Hong Kong experience and atmosphere as experienced through the train windows and station platforms apart from the recommendation to avoid rush hour unless one wants “to be a sardine in a can.”³⁸ Wikivoyage highlights the system's practicality and speed, but notes the

³⁶ Jakob Lazzaro, “MTR system map with local tourist attractions,” taken 25 November 2018 at Central station. See appendix A for photo.

³⁷ Reiber, *Frommer's*, 38-39.

³⁸ Reiber, *Frommer's*, 38.

extra expense and lack of views as negatives when compared to Hong Kong's buses and trams. The guide also offers practical tips such as walk left, stand right and tidbits of supposed local authenticity – locals always meet in front of every station's Hang Seng bank branch and refrain from the “mad dash” for seats common on Chinese metro systems out of a respect for civility, for example.³⁹

However, Wikivoyage refrains from diving into the system's history. Instead, we turn to the *Lonely Planet* as it actually presents the most authentic portrayal of a form of public transportation in Hong Kong for once. Chen blends the aforementioned themes of a “clean, fast and safe” system best avoided during rush hour with historical and cultural insights that offer the MTR the same degree of cultural authenticity as the Star Ferry and trams. More than just a way of getting around, it's a system of “colour-coded and colorfully storied” lines and stations.⁴⁰ The traditional calligraphy in cramped Island line stations is meant to soothe waiting passengers, the stations are colored in decoration matching their names – Lai Chi Kok is orange because that's the color of a ripe ‘lai che,’ for example – and numerous ghost stories abound, from children playing in the tunnels that vanish “just when the train hits them” to an industrial accident victim dangling from the catenary wires who was driven away after staff lit incense and offered apologies.⁴¹ Although she does not indulge in the rapt praise reserved for Hong Kong's public transit tourist attractions, Chen's portrayal of the MTR offers backstory and authenticity that make the system just a little more interesting to tourists. It's a better promotion of the standalone tourist value of the MTR than the MTR's own promotional materials, but it does not elevate the system to the level of a standalone tourist attraction.

³⁹ Subsection “By Mass Transit Railway” in “Hong Kong,” *Wikivoyage*.

⁴⁰ Chen, *Lonely Planet*, 2178-2182 and 2183.

⁴¹ Chen, *Lonely Planet*, 2183-2187.

But the true dark horses of Hong Kong's supposedly practical-only public transportation are the double-decker buses. At face value, they seem like they should be an afterthought for tourists apart from their use as a way of reaching far-flung locations. They have the drawbacks of getting stuck in traffic just like the historic trams with the just as modern MTR offering a better way of getting around at speed. But the mere fact of having two floors coupled with the available views endear them to tourists. In *Frommer's*, Reiber describes the city's buses as "a delight," with extra praise for the "British-style double-deckers" offering these modern conveyances some of that Old Hong Kong street cred by conveying the legacy of British colonialism in their mere form.⁴² They're easy to use, with widespread electronic English signage regarding destination, fare and the upcoming stop visible both inside and outside the bus. In contrast, *Lonely Planet's* Chen takes a neutral tone by saying buses "will take you just about anywhere" in the city but may be confusing for tourists.⁴³ But the best example of bus tourism comes, once again, from Wikivoyage. There's the standard recommendation of the front upper deck seats for their views, yes, but the guide also includes a unique section devoted to bus routes worth riding just for the differing views of Hong Kong – elevating those buses to the same level of tourist attraction as trams. Recommended routes include KMB 270A for its journey from Jordan in Kowloon to Sheung Shui in New Territories, the Peak Tram alternative NWFB 15, and Citybus 973 for its cross-harbor path from Tsim Sha Tsui to Stanley via the University of Hong Kong.⁴⁴ While *Frommer's* contains several paragraphs on tourist bus services true to their target audience of 'tourists,'⁴⁵ from the 'traveler' viewpoint of Wikivoyage, the dreaded tour bus is even less

⁴² Reiber, *Frommer's*, 39-40.

⁴³ Chen, *Lonely Planet*, 2134 and 2168.

⁴⁴ Subsection "Seeing different sides of Hong Kong by public transport" in "Hong Kong," *Wikivoyage*.

⁴⁵ Reiber, *Frommer's*, 40.

necessary in Hong Kong thanks to the proliferation of scenic public bus rides and thus an authentic way of seeing the city via bus.

But this question of authenticity is brought into greater focus when comparing the venerated double-decker buses to their cousins, the mysterious red and green minibuses. Although they are a unique part of Hong Kong's public transportation system and almost exclusively carry locals to the point of having minimal English signage, all three guides dismiss them as too complicated and confusing for tourist use. Reiber is by far the harshest, characterizing the 16-seat buses as "the poor person's taxis" in her first sentence.⁴⁶ Their tourist usefulness is downplayed further with her descriptions of English-signage so small that one "almost needs a magnifying glass" to decipher it as the bus speeds by.⁴⁷ Several potentially useful green minibus routes are given, but in contrast red minibuses "shouldn't be used by anyone not familiar with Hong Kong" due to their lack of fixed routes.⁴⁸ Chen's portrayal in *Lonely Planet* is so stripped down that it amounts to little more than 'the red and green minibuses exist, and you could take them.'⁴⁹ Keeping with its love of buses, Wikivoyage provides the most helpful and neutral overview with green minibuses described as more user friendly and red ones as having a "more Chinese feel" with non-set routes and prices but still implies visitors should err on the side of caution by recommending they "always use minibus seatbelts where available" and highlighting the historically unsafe driving standards that led to the legally mandated digital speedometer viewable to passengers.⁵⁰ It does not exactly inspire confidence. Although

⁴⁶ Reiber, *Frommer's*, 43.

⁴⁷ Reiber, *Frommer's*, 43.

⁴⁸ Reiber, *Frommer's*, 43.

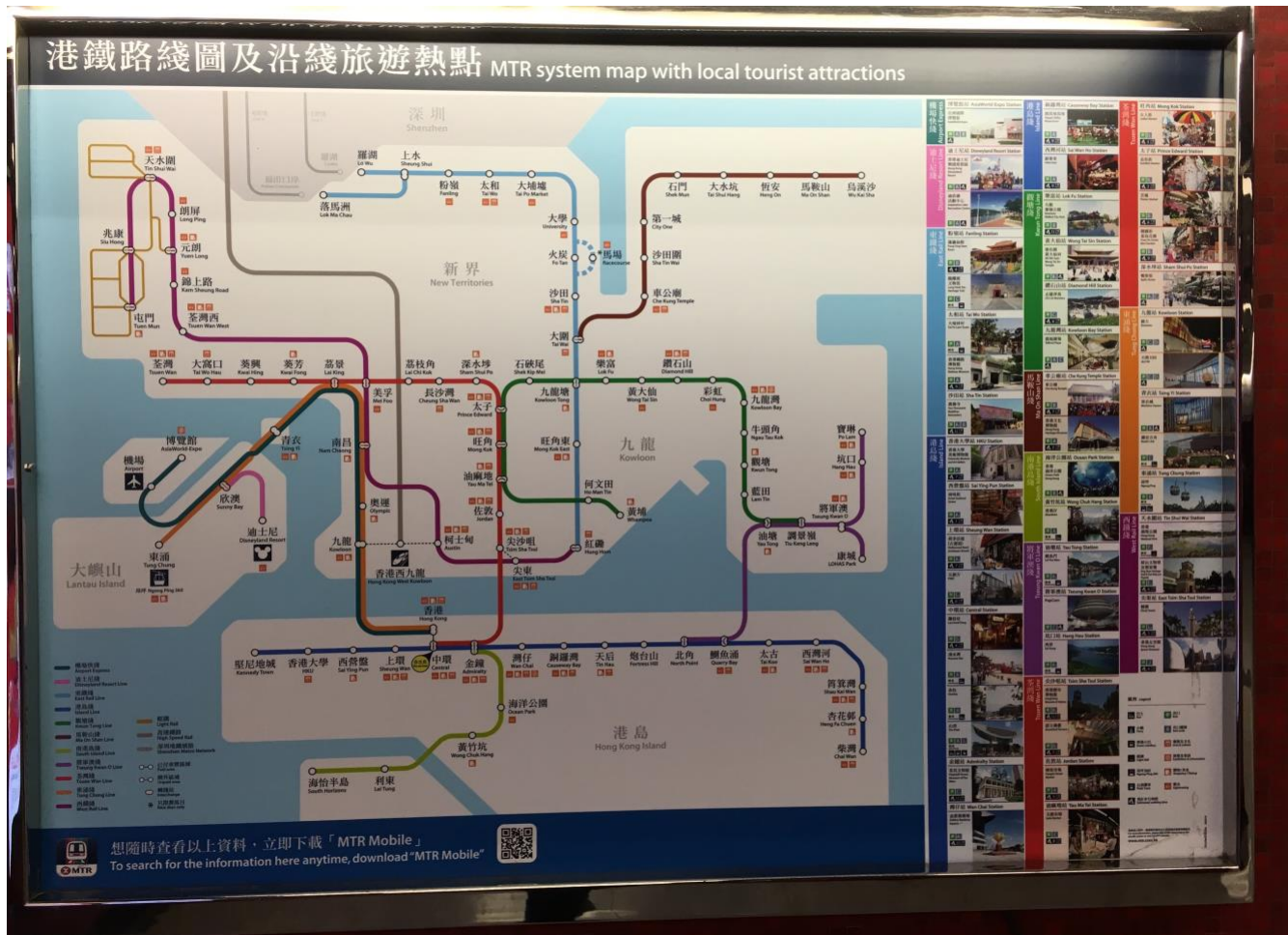
⁴⁹ Chen, *Lonely Planet*, 2176-2178.

⁵⁰ Subsection "Seeing different sides of Hong Kong by public transport" in "Hong Kong," *Wikivoyage*.

extremely authentic and certainly a very unique Hong Kong experience, the world of green and the even more intimidating route-less red minibuses is one of lurching at high speeds down narrow streets with the only way out requiring some basic knowledge of Cantonese to yell for the driver to stop. And thus, minibuses are pushed to the side while both ‘travelers’ and ‘tourists’ are directed towards the easier routes.

Hong Kong’s public transportation is an integral part of the city’s fabric and aesthetic and thus the tourist experience, just as the ‘L’ in Chicago or the Underground in London or the freeways of Los Angeles. But in contrast to what the supposed more authentic ‘travelers’ would have you believe about those mere ‘tourists,’ the portrayals of the authenticity of the various modes do not vary along the expected lines and thus highlight the hypocrisy of the moral superiority of travel. In line with tourist advertising, *Frommer’s*, the *Lonely Planet* and Wikivoyage all rate the Star Ferry and Hong Kong Tramways as authentic tourist attractions instead of mere transport thanks to their historic value. But the guides also brush aside the tourist trappings of the Peak Tram due to its history and recommend the Ngong Ping 360 cable car for the views, a direct contradiction of the supposed quest for authenticity ‘travelers’ claim to stick to at all costs. The MTR is mainly praised for its practicality as a way of getting around, in line with the system’s own advertising, and double-decker buses only get a few extra bonus points towards tourist attraction thanks to their views. The authentic and unique minibuses are mostly dismissed by all three publications as too complicated for tourists. Although slight differences in the language and portrayal of Hong Kong’s public transportation in the three publications show there is still a measurable distance between ‘travelers’ and ‘tourists,’ it is one of meters as opposed to kilometers. Like it or not, we’re all still visitors.

APPENDIX A



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