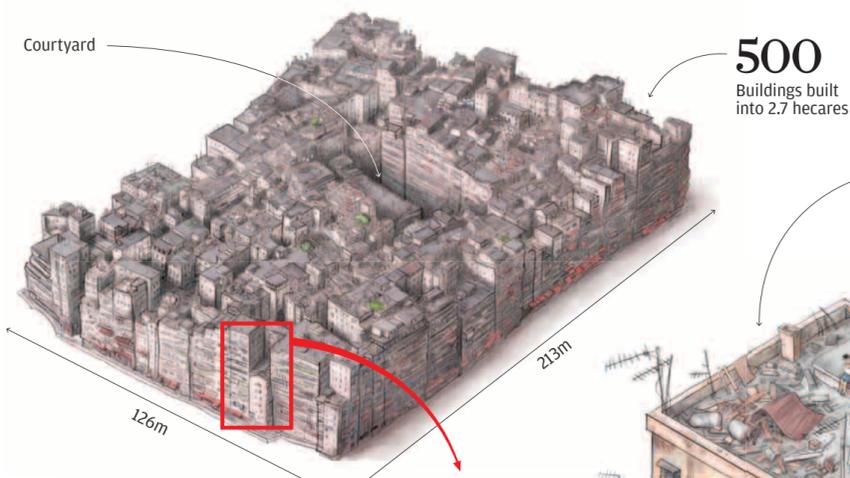


City of anarchy

Kowloon Walled City, located not far from the former Kai Tak Airport, was a remarkable high-rise squatter camp that by the 1980s had 50,000 residents. A historical accident of colonial Hong Kong, it existed in a lawless vacuum until it became an embarrassment for Britain. This month marks the 20th anniversary of its demolition.



500
Buildings built into 2.7 hectares

Without municipal services, there was no rubbish collection. Old television sets, broken furniture, discarded mattresses and other bulky items were hauled to the roof and abandoned

Other rooftops were used for exercise, playgrounds, relaxing and even pigeon racing

There were 77 wells inside the city some 90 metres deep. Electric pumps delivered water to big tanks on rooftops. From there, water was funnelled through narrow pipes to the homes

HK\$35
monthly room rent

Despite its daunting, squalid appearance and reputation for lawlessness, many of Kowloon Walled City's former residents remember it fondly. It may have been the City of Darkness to outsiders, but to thousands who called it home, it was a friendly, tight-knit community that was poor but generally happy

Electric wires were placed outdoors to prevent fires

40sq ft
per person

The area's interconnected high-rise towers were built without architects and engineers, and ungoverned by Hong Kong's building and sanitation regulations

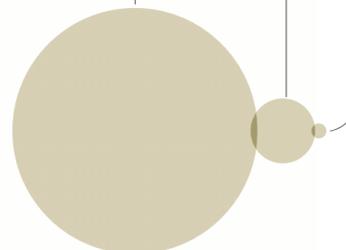
There were several schools and kindergartens, some of them run by organisations such as the Salvation Army

Tiny metal fabrication shops made up a good number of the 700 or so industrial premises. Most were found between the ground and fifth floors

There were many heroin dealers but they were untouchable. Police could only arrest non-residents

Population density
per square kilometre

KWC	Mong Kok	Hong Kong
1,920,000	130,000	6,700



The street-level shops were a mix of unlicensed dentists and doctors, market stalls and cafes that often included dog on the menu. Fish balls, barbecued and roast meat and other foodstuffs were manufactured in premises with little or no sanitation

Brothels and gambling dens operated with impunity

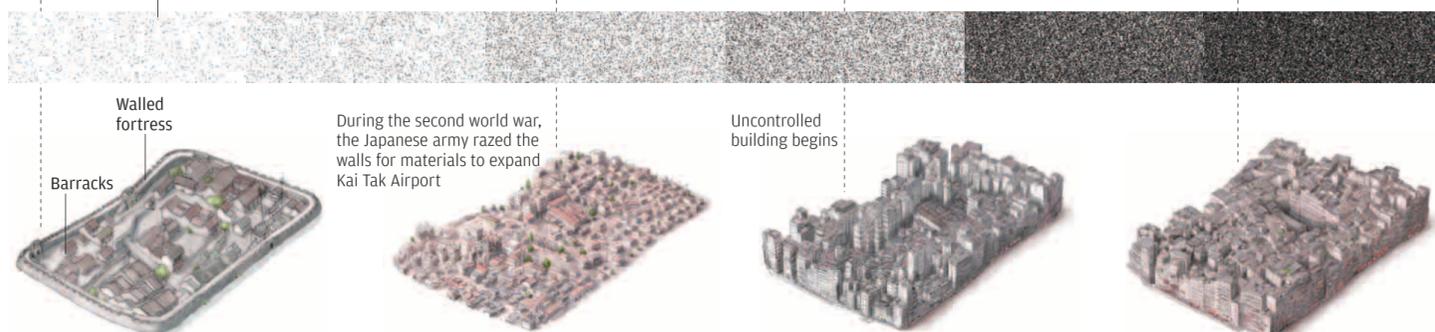
Residents carried umbrellas to shield themselves from constantly dripping water pipes above the narrow alleys

Authorities installed eight freshwater standpipes – one inside the city, and the others outside its perimeter

From fortress to park

The Walled City underwent a dramatic transformation in the final decades of the 20th century

1898 700 inhabitants	Each point is an inhabitant	1940 2,000 inhabitants	1950 5,000 inhabitants	1973 10,000 inhabitants	1980 30,000 inhabitants	1990 50,000 inhabitants
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Fresh start

In March 1993, the settlement was demolished and a park that looked like a typical Chinese garden was built in its place. But it kept a few original elements from the Walled City, such as old cannons and remnants of the South Gate and its entrance plaques



Sources: *The Darkness City: Life in Kowloon Walled City* - Greg Girard and Ian Lambot, Leisure and Cultural Services Department

SCMP Graphic: Adolfo Arranz