

# Global Geotourism Perspectives

13

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## **Hong Kong Geopark**

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# 13

## Hong Kong Geopark: uncovering the geology of a metropolis

Young C.Y. Ng, L.W. Fung and D. Newsome

### Introduction

This chapter describes the issues and processes surrounding the development of the Hong Kong geopark and provides a brief account of the main geotourism resources of Hong Kong. The possibility of establishing a volcanic geopark in Hong Kong was first mentioned in a seminar at the Hong Kong University in 2005 by some Chinese geologists. However, the idea was challenged by some local academics who believed preservation was the only way to protect geology and a geopark and geotourism could only cause more harm than good to rocks and landforms. They were concerned that increased visitation to valuable geological sites could pose potential threats on significant geological features. However, the volcanic geopark idea inspired other local geologists, geotourism and ecotourism specialists (Li *et al.* 2007) to seriously consider the possibility of establishing a geopark that could achieve geotourism and geoconservation objectives in Hong Kong.

In a global geopark conference in 2007, it was proposed that an urban geopark might well fit the urban character of Hong Kong (Ng, 2007a, b). The urban geopark idea ignored the normal pre-assumption that geoparks could only be established in remote areas rather than in a city. The idea is particularly applicable in Hong Kong as it is a small city but contains a very rich geodiversity. Geological science in Hong Kong mainly serves geotechnical engineering purposes and is vital for infrastructural and housing developments. As yet little research has been conducted in evaluating the geodiversity and sites of geological significance in Hong Kong. Most people, including local geologists have little or no knowledge about the importance of geological conservation. The urban geopark concept reveals and reminds the people of Hong Kong that there are valuable geological features in their vicinity which are readily accessible and deserve better attention and protection.

However, the geopark idea was not welcomed by local geologists, academics and some government officials. Many believed that rocks and landforms did

not need as much protection as fauna and flora and the 'world geopark' idea is a 'disguised geoconservation' (Chen, 2007). Many were happy with the current protection under existing environmental laws and regulations. Some academics are strongly against the geopark initiative as they believe it would encourage more people to visit important geological sites, causing damage to geological features. On the other hand, the promotion of geosciences by the geopark movement appeared to highlight that opposing academics had not done enough in the past few decades to make geological knowledge more easily understandable and acceptable by the public.

Misunderstanding of the Hong Kong Geopark's concepts is an underlying factor contributing to criticism of the geopark idea in the past. The proposed geopark has often been misinterpreted and regarded as a normal theme park similar to Disneyland or Wetland Parks which involve the setting up of many man-made features at the expense of geological features and environment. Most of these misunderstandings have, however, been addressed through numerous talks, seminars, meetings and media interviews during the initial lobbying and preparatory stages of geopark nomination (Li and Ng, 2008).

A UNESCO global geopark is set up for geoconservation, popularization of the geosciences and sustainable development. These objectives match the needs of Hong Kong as geoheritage has been largely ignored in the new Nature Conservation Policy and Strategy (AFCD, 2009c). The over-emphasis on biological conservation such as protecting trees, marine life, birds and other wildlife has omitted rocks and landforms as fundamental components of environment. Non-biological components such as water, rocks and landforms provide habitats and resources for ecosystem structure and function. Without proper knowledge and management, the geodiversity of Hong Kong is likely to be at risk from rapid urban development in the future.

Geoscience popularization in Hong Kong has always been a challenge for academics and teachers. Geology is studied at the university level as a trivial subject under the geography or geosciences streams. Students taking geology are trained mainly to serve geotechnical engineering. In this system, geology has lost its status as an independent discipline. Furthermore, geography study at high school level, is optional and very limited physical geography has been included in the curriculum in the past 20 years. This has hampered popularization of geosciences to young people. In terms of public education, very few lectures, seminars and field trips have been organized by the government, green groups or academic societies. Few books on the simplified geology of Hong Kong are available to the public. Available publications are either too academic or technical for most people and most of them are not directly relevant to Hong Kong. The following is a brief and simplified account of the most important geoheritage/geotourism sites in Hong Kong.

**Chapter extract**

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