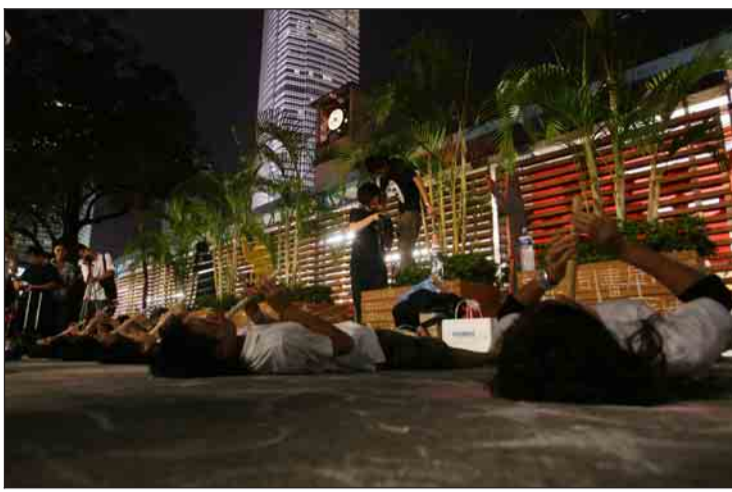


With paint, chalk and songs, protesters show their dismay at the demolition of a city landmark

A final, frustrated farewell



Flute-playing protesters stage a musical lie-in late last night.



People light candles as crowds stage a final protest at the closure.



"Sam the clock tower" gets his anti-demolition point across.



Protesters hold a banner on the roof demanding the pier be preserved.

Norma Connolly and Winnie Yeung

A kettle of steaming water, a man in a clock tower suit, singing, chalk drawings on pavements and hundreds of hand-drawn pictures fluttering in the breeze were just some of the artistic-themed protests that marked the last day of the Star Ferry at its Central home.

Organised by heritage group See Network, scores of volunteers urged visitors to make known their feelings on the demolition of the clock tower, Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier by way of painting, singing and writing.

To spur them on, a man named Sam wearing a white clock tower costume ran through the crowds yelling: "Keep the pier where it is."

"Obviously there are a lot of people here today who are not happy about the demolition of the clock tower," he said. "There was no consultation throughout this whole process. The fact there are so many people here shows what the people want."

He and three protesters then climbed on to the roof of the tower at about 6pm and unveiled a banner demanding the pier be preserved. They stayed for 15 minutes before heeding appeals by pier staff to come down.

An unusual petition was hung up throughout the building, on a green string that crisscrossed the ceiling of the concourse. It consisted of small stickers featuring the clock tower on which petitioners had signed their names. As the day progressed and the stickers ran out, people began drawing pictures of the clock tower and writing messages on sheets of paper, which were also stuck to the string.

Written beside one drawing of the clock tower was: "Ding dong, ding dong, please don't take me away". Others took a more serious tone, accusing business interests and the government of ruining the city's heritage.

Yuen Chi-yan, a volunteer who was handing out strips of pink adhesive tape and blank pieces of paper, said: "This place is part of our collective memory. It's very important to us."

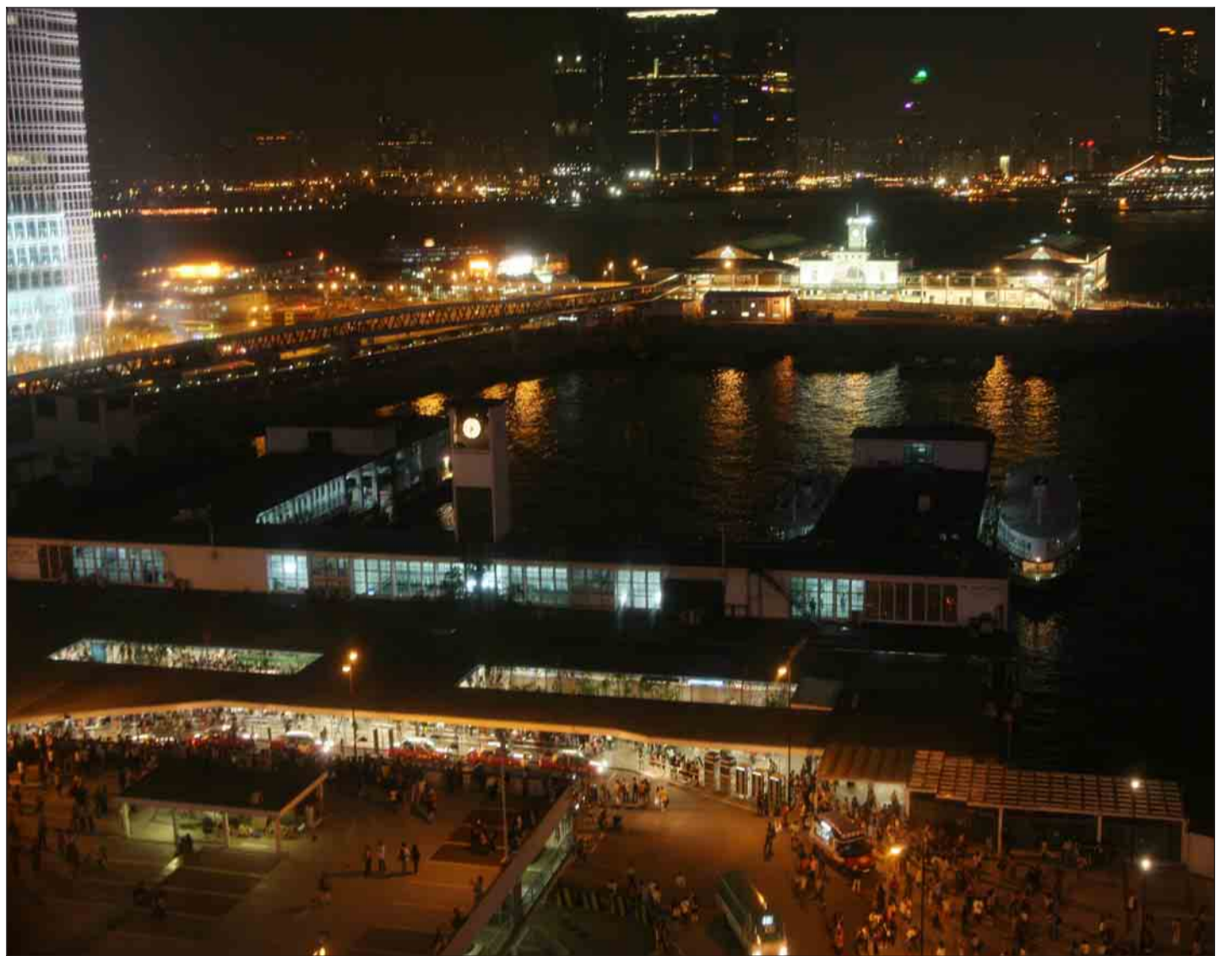
Music played a large part, with groups singing and playing instruments. A poignant note was added when a group of seven flautists re-enacted the chiming of the clock tower.

Others made chalk drawings on the ground, stretching from the entrance gates of the ferry pier to the taxi rank.

Chan Chun-lai, six, was among the pavement artists. "It's good fun. I've never drawn on the ground before," he said, watched by his mother, Carol, who said: "It's difficult to teach my son the right values when the government is destroying something that is still useful. It's difficult to teach him how to treasure something and not throw it away when he doesn't like it."

A City University media student named Kanji tied himself to a pole, with steam wafting from a kettle. The steam signified memories that could not be recaptured.

Star Ferry managing director Frankie Yick said: "I think they have the right to ask the government to consider keeping the old pier because there is a lot of affection for it."



Crowds bustle around the Central pier, with the new pier, in use today, in the background. Photos: Oliver Tsang, David Wong, Martin Chan



Passengers on one of the final four sailings capture the moment on film.



Staff lock the gates for the last time. Turnstiles were packed all day.



A Star Ferry captain waves off one of the four charity sailings.

Memories of a slow boat to China

Norma Connolly

With a bamboo pole balancing luggage slung over his young shoulders, Roger Ho Yao-sheng shoved his way through the teeming masses and fought for a seat on the first Star Ferry ride of the morning.

Wrapped in layers of winter clothing that would soon be given as gifts to relatives on the mainland, the 12-year-old settled down to watch the sun rise unhampered by skyscrapers or pollution over Victoria Harbour.

The year was 1975, and the boy was on his way with his parents to catch a train at Kowloon-Canton Railway Station in Tsim Sha Tsui, along with other mainland-bound passengers.

"It was around January, near Chinese New Year, and it was three or four degrees, almost freezing. We'd taken a rickshaw from Queen's Road Central in the early morning at about 4.30am. The first

vessel left at 6am. There were only three trains to Canton each day so if you missed the ferry, you missed the train," recalled Mr Ho, now 44.

"The ferry pier was packed with people, all like us carrying lots of luggage. There were lots of arguments and everyone was crashing into each other with all their luggage and the wooden poles would hit you in the eye or head. We took the second-class section – it was 10 cents. First class was 20 cents."

A project manager for the Conservancy Association Centre for Heritage, Mr Ho laments the demolition of Queen's Pier. He avoided yesterday's crowds at the pier by taking his last trips on the ferry throughout the week. "I wanted to enjoy it in a quiet way."

Memories of the Star Ferry pier will also be rekindled for him

next weekend when the Conservancy Association will host a talk and display of historic and modern images of the iconic boats and its piers in Sheung Wan.

Among some of the pictures on display will be those taken by transport enthusiast Dennis Law Chung-yan, who over the past few days has taken hundreds of photographs of the Star Ferry and the Central pier.

Mr Law, a manager, said: "I'm taking many photographs of the Star Ferry pier during its last moments."

"The removal of the original ferry pier is a turning point in the Star Ferry's history and I must be here to witness this event."

Another enthusiast, Alan Cheung Shun-kwong, has gone one step further and designed souvenir covers of the Star Ferry to mark its last day at the original pier and its first day today at the new one.

Mr Cheung, who is the vice-chairman of the Hong Kong Collectors Society, has created about 60 souvenirs based on old photos of the pier that he will distribute.

His work will also be on display at the Conservancy Association Centre For Heritage, Annex Block, 36A Western Street, Sai Ying Pun, on Saturday.



Alan Cheung with his special covers. Photo: Dustin Shum

CLOCK CHIMES WILL RING OUT IN MUSEUM

The Star Ferry pier may have closed but the chimes of its clock will not be silenced.

Recordings of the chimes were made last week, ahead of its demolition, as part of a plan to reconstruct the clock tower at the Museum of History.

Star Ferry has already offered to donate the two clock faces and the clock's mechanism to the government for exhibition. Managing director Frankie Yick Chi-ming confirmed the donation yesterday but said Star Ferry needed to negotiate with the government on whether it would also give the museum the four small bells in the clock tower that chime every 15 minutes.

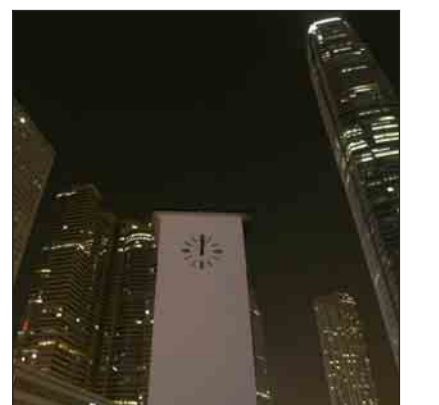
Staff from the Museum of History recorded the chimes last Wednesday and Thursday.

There is also a big bell that rings on the hour. Star Ferry said this would be exhibited at the new pier.

A Leisure and Cultural Services Department spokeswoman could not confirm what would be constructed at the museum until the ferry company had finalised its donation to the government.

Legislator Kwok Ka-ki said reconstructing the clock tower was a meaningless exercise because it would have no soul.

"What matters most with the clock tower is its historical value – where it is situated now," he said. "If I saw the reconstructed tower at the museum one day, I would only remember that it was demolished because of reclamation."



The Star Ferry clock ticks to midnight for the last time. Photo: David Wong

LAST DAY

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Today 11:00am to 7:00pm

SEMINAR:

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Sunday 2:30pm, room 402

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 Phuket: Mr Graham Bibby, Chairman, Richmond Group, Mr Larry Cunningham, MD, Phuket One Real Estate.
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