HONG KONG ISLAND BEFORE 1841

JAMES HAYES

Hail, little isle! and Hong's fair haven, hail!
First-fruits of China to the ocean-queen!
New orient realms, new navies' embryo sail
Glass'd in thy shifting horoscope are seen.
May British virtue shine, in thee confest;
And in her colony be Britain blest!*

The cession of Hong Kong evoked different feelings in both China and Britain. In China, needless to say, there was scarcely rejoicing. The sixty-year-old Tao Kuang emperor, monarch of China since 1820, when asked to sanction the proposed Treaty of Peace that granted Hong Kong to Britain, spent the rest of the day and most of the night pacing up and down the corridor of his Palace, deep in anxious thought. Several times he was heard to mutter "impossible" and to sigh deeply. At last, at 3 a.m., he stamped his foot and proceeded to the audience chamber where he affixed the "vermilion pencil" to the draft. One of his subjects, the great Chinese statesman Tso Tsung-t'ang (1812-1885), then an unknown and rather unsuccessful scholar, wrote four poems in which he expressed grief and indignation when he heard that the British had taken over Hong Kong; and when he learned the final terms of the peace he was so overcome that he thought seriously of retiring to some lonely mountain retreat for the rest of his days.  

In England the young Queen Victoria, twenty-two years old and married with a baby daughter wrote to her uncle, the king of the Belgians, "Albert is so much amused at my having got the Island of Hong Kong and we think Victoria ought to be called Princess of Hong Kong in addition to Princess Royal".  

Her Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, was not amused. He received the news of the Chuenpi agreement (January 1841) between Captain Elliot, the British Plenipotentiary, and the Imperial Commissioner Kishen, with disappointment and disapproval.

* See Plates 1-3
Nor did he mince his words. "You have disobeyed and neglected your instructions" he told Elliot. "You seem to have considered that my instructions were waste paper which you might treat with entire disregard, and that you were at full liberty to deal with the interests of your country according to your own fancy." The Foreign Secretary accused Elliot of having settled with the Chinese for much less than he had been told to demand "without the full employment of that force which was sent to you expressly for the purpose of enabling you to use compulsion, if persuasion should fail". He was not impressed by the cession of Hong Kong "a barren island with hardly a house on it" and clogged by conditions which made it doubtful if it was a cession in full sovereignty.\(^5\)

This myth, for myth it was, has died hard. Indeed, I fear it is not yet dead. It has always been more striking to compare the glowing present with such an insignificant past, and this has been the case at all times in Hong Kong's later history. Over forty years after the British occupation of Hong Kong, Governor Sir G.F. Bowen, addressing the Legislative Council at the opening of the 1884-85 Session, stated that "... the Island of Hong Kong ... when annexed to the British Empire in 1843 (sic) was merely a barren rock, inhabited only by a few fishermen and pirates."\(^6\) This view was expressed another forty years on by the American Consul-General, George E. Anderson, writing on the Hong Kong Consular District in an official publication of the American Department of Commerce.\(^7\) "The island of Hong Kong consists of a broken ridge of lofty hills, the highest, Victoria Peak, being approximately 1,800 feet in height. There are few valleys of any extent and scarcely any ground for cultivation ... In general, the hills and mountains are bare and the soil is poor." He added usefully, "The island of Hong kong, 28 square miles in extent, is about 11 miles long and from 2 to 5 miles broad; its circumference is 27 miles".\(^8\)

Is this a justifiable description? Was Hong Kong 'a barren island with hardly a house on it'? Were its people, such as they were, "a handful of fishermen and pirates"? The answer is NO, on both counts. There were several villages of some size, as well as hamlets, and a few larger coastal villages which served as market towns for the villages and as home ports for a permanent boat population and visiting craft. The land people were settled, and as we shall
see, had a reputation for civility. The larger farming villages included Little Hong Kong and Wong Nei Chung. The smaller villages and hamlets included Hok Tsui, Chai Wan, To Tei Wan, Tai Tam (at Stanley), Tin Wan (at Aberdeen), Wan Chai, Tai Tam Tuk, Kwan Tai Lo, Wong Ma Kok, So Kon Po, Shek O and Pokfulam, whilst the port villages cum small towns included Chek Chu (Stanley), Shau Kei Wan and Shek Pai Wan (Aberdeen). Most of these settlements exist today, albeit greatly changed, although a few have gone.

What did these places look like in the 1840s when they first came under British rule? Fortunately, in those days before the camera, one of the officers stationed on the island and entrusted with the first contour survey (1843-1845) entered some useful descriptions in his letters home. This was Lieutenant Thomas Bernard Collinson of the Royal Engineers, a gifted young man who died a major-general at the age of 81 in 1902. In a letter he wrote:

“There is really a great deal more to be seen in Hong Kong than its appearance promises. Besides the town of Chuck Chu [Chek Chu] there are 10 villages and at least 400 acres of well cultivated ground. Some of the villages certainly consist of only 7 or 8 houses, but they are distinct villages with ground attached. The largest is Shapwont as it is printed, or “Chuckpyewan” as it is called by the inhabitants, and “Aberdeen” as it is called by the Governor. Her Majesty’s surveying vessel employed by the Board of Ordnance has been anchored for a fortnight exactly at the figure 6 at Careening island [on the Chart of the anchorage] and begins to know something of Aberdeen and if the old Aberdeen is anything like the new, it must be a straggling village scattered round a small bay, with an ill-paved sort of quay in front and about 50 fishing boats lying about a great rock in the middle, a good supply of shops where bamboo hats, mats, sails, ropes and baskets; rice, fruit, vegetables, tobacco, earthenware and fireworks are all sold together; these being the staple commodities of a Chinese country shop and cakes by the bye, with plenty of pork fat in everything and a thousand of the dirtiest men women and children that ever talked altogether in a singsong:
How they live I don’t know for I seldom see any boats going in or out; but they all manage to look fat somehow.”

Collinson goes on to describe Little Hong Kong. The village still stands at the head of the Wong Chuk Hang valley immediately west of the southern concourse of the Wong Nei Chung to Aberdeen Tunnel, although its few remaining old village houses are buried inside an area of squatter huts and squatter industries. He continued in the same letter,

“The valley between Shuckpyewan and Hong Kong bay (called Hong Kong in the map) is the proper Hong Kong of the Island and is the largest and best cultivated and prettiest in the island. It is almost a dead flat and according to the people’s account has 100 acres of these little fields in it, with the village on an artificial level at the head and a thick wood of evergreens around and behind it and steep rocky hills rising above the wood. Though as dirty as every Chinese place I have been in, it contains a piece of civilisation I did not expect in Hong Kong — a village schoolmaster; who in his black cotton coat and white stockings is ridiculously like both in manner and appearance (if his tail was cut off) the same character in England. He has only nine scholars, but they are certainly the cleanest 9 of the 200 in the village and he teaches them arithmetic, by giving them so many characters to copy and learn by heart. The school room would have shocked Charley and from the number of drawings on the walls I should say “Boys will be boys.” Even in China.”

Collinson concludes by commenting on the village itself and the wood — clearly the fengshui wood — behind it.

“You will have some idea of the way they build villages in this part of China from this one, 70 houses of which are all packed on a space 100 yards by 70. The evergreens behind the town are most luxuriant and reminded me of the oak woods in Wicklow, and the tall bamboo would make a graceful ornament to any garden.”

Another military officer was impressed with the villages and the
scenery of the same area. He wrote,

“In general, the south side of Hong Kong Island is far more picturesque and less bleak than the north. The villages we saw, unlike the mat-huts in the harbour, are exceedingly neat in appearance with blue tiled and white walled houses.”

Nonetheless, there were attractive places on the north and east too. A description taken from the English language Canton Press of January 1842 mentions the view of ‘the whole valley and village of Wong Nei Chung’ obtained from a gap cut in a hill following the line of one of the new roads, and how the branch road to the east

“takes one to the village of “Soo Kon Poo”, at present a sequestered, well wooded and very pretty part of the island”

a character it has not entirely lost even today!”

Thomas Allom’s celebrated View of China, for which the text was prepared from various works by Revd. G.N. Wright, also pays tribute to the natural beauties of the island:

“The maximum length of the isle is about eight miles, its breadth seldom exceeding five; its mountains of trap-rock are conical, precipitous, and sterile in aspect, but the valleys that intervene are sheltered and fertile, and the genial climate that prevails gives luxuriance and productiveness to every spot, which, by its natural position, is susceptible of agricultural improvement.”

And in another place:

“Few areas so limited include so many scenes of sylvan beauty as the sunny island of Hong Kong. The country immediately behind Queen-town (sic) is peculiarly rich in romantic little glens, or in level tracts, adorned with masses of rock, in the fissures of which the noblest forest-trees have found sufficient soil for their support. These wood-crowned crags rise abruptly from wide-spread rice-grounds that closely encircle them; so
that every spot in the varied surface of the isle is either reduced beneath the government of industry, or made tributary to the beauty of the landscape.”

Turning to the inhabitants of the villages — I will say something about the boat people below — they were, it seems, both Cantonese and Hakkas. The former occupied the larger, longer settled villages like Little Hong Kong and Wong Nei Chung. The latter were to be found in the smaller villages and hamlets such as the Chai Wan villages and Tai Tam Tuk. The Cantonese are the older and more numerous inhabitants of the Kwangtung province but the Hakka constituted a numerous and distinct secondary body, speaking their own dialect — some would say language — which is quite different from Cantonese. The two groups appear to have occupied separate settlements in the island of Hong Kong, though the population of the larger coastal fishing and market villages was mixed.

The village people of that time were generally members of either a single or a few clans, descended from founding ancestors who had come to the area in the preceding century or even before. For instance, the ancestor of the Chow clan of Little Hong Kong — in 1841 it shared the settlement with at least two or three others — came into the area in the mid 17th century. According to a letter I received from Mr. Y.K. Chow, J.P., in 1967, the founding ancestor’s son Yue-tsun (裕進) was born in Hong Kong in 1667. By 1841 their descendants had been settled for seven to eight generations and were clearly well rooted in the local soil. In Pokfulam, the Chan clan had been there since the eighteenth century. At a hearing on 6 July 1893 of the Squatters Board, set up to examine the claims of villagers in 1890, a man of 71 stated that he had been born and lived there ever since. “I claim 15 and 4/10th mows of fields. They are all together in one place. This land was left my ancestors. My father and ancestors have been there 100 years.”

The Wong Nei Chung families, which belonged to several clans, were probably longer settled still. A woman, Ip Chan Shi, giving evidence before the Squatter Board in 1891 about various properties belonging to her late husband who had died the previous year aged 55, said that he had four houses in the village altogether and that his family had been in the village for “many generations”.
Another Ip (Yip), a man of 60 who was a Lukong or Chinese policeman and owned two houses, said he was 10 years of age when the Colony was annexed and that "the village was the same when I was a boy as it is now." All the families mentioned in this paragraph were Cantonese.

As already stated above, it would seem that the inhabitants of the market towns were of mixed origin. The American Baptist missionary, Revd. Issacher J. Roberts of the Hong Kong Mission, reported from "Check Chu" on January 1st 1843 that the village contained "eight or ten hundred Chinese who are divided among the Canton, Kek [Hakka] and Teichau [Chiu Chow] dialects." In an earlier report, undated save "1842", he gave a fuller account which, however, placed the population at a considerably lower figure:

"Have gone around and counted families of Check Chu (note: present Stanley) three kinds of inhabitants

1) Punti, the dialect I learned
2) Hoklo [probably the Teichau dialect spoken of in 1843], dialect of Dean [another Baptist missionary]
3) the Hak-kah

Check Chu including all the shops without families and hence not reckoned as citizens and some scattered families in the suburbs has:

Punti, 63 families and shops at an average of 4 to each 252
Hoklo, 27 families and shops at an average of 4 to each 108
Hak-kah, 55 families and shops at an average of 4 to each 220

Total 145 families 580 persons

Half or more of the 145 are shops leaving less than a hundred citizens families. Of the 580 perhaps 100 can read. The wom-
en are all of the sort that go barefooted and work in the field. I have not seen one small footed woman here. At least 8/10 of men here smoke opium.”22

As we have seen, Aberdeen, about the same time, was, as Collinson reports, also a fishing port. According to another military observer, Captain Cunynghame, it contained about 200 buildings, and had “a very respectable appearance”.23 It is thus very likely that it engaged in the same mixed business as Stanley, and contained a similar size of population and a similar mixture of people.24

The villagers were essentially farmers and fishermen relying on their padi fields for a subsistence rice crop twice a year, supplemented by coastal fishing. The old style of village life, that must have characterized Hong Kong’s settlements before British rule, lingered on in its essentials well into this century until squatters and development ended the old life style. Even as late as 1967, at Little Hong Kong, Old Village, an old lady then aged 80 told me that her’s had been the first family in the village to apply for a mains water supply ten years before, and some villagers were still in 1967 cutting grass to use as fuel to heat water, cook pig food, etc. and going to the foreshore to find edible items.

In earlier days, the hillsides were apportioned for grass cutting between clans and their member families as in the New Territories, and she had changed areas where she married a man in another clan from the New Village. Besides being cut for fuel at home, grass was taken to Aberdeen and Deep Water Bay to sell to the boat people anchored there. They used it to burn the marine growth from the underside of their craft at regular intervals (usually twice a month), as was done in many coastal villages in the area.

The villagers used the adjacent sea shore to supplement their diet, waiting for the tide to go out and spending up to four or five hours daily in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th lunar months (March till May or June) gathering sea eggs, digging in the sand for clams, looking for other shell fish among the stones and gathering sea weed to feed the pigs. Both men and women engaged in the work, and she recalls both her mother and father carrying large baskets of sea
produce from the sea near the present Aberdeen Country Club. Some villagers operated stake nets lowered by windlass into the sea from a rocky headland, and others used lines catching fish like nai mang ( 納猛 ) to make a sweet congee. The old lady’s mother, born about 1860, planted hemp and made it into string used for tying and mending clothes until she was sixty years of age. The village people also grew a kind of rush (cheung po) ( 超蒲 ) when she was young, using it as a charm to hang over their doorways, especially in the fifth moon, in the manner reported in old works on China. 25

The stake nets were an especially favoured form of fishing in local waters. One can see a few surviving sites round the southern coast of Hong Kong island to this day. In the Tangs’ time as subsoil owners — see below — they may have leased sites to local persons, as they were doing in the New Territories in 1899. It is also of interest that no less than 13 sites on the south side of Hong Kong island were leased out by another absentee landlord family of scholar gentry, the Wongs ( 黃氏 ) of Nam Tau ( 南頭 ) and Cheung Chau, as shown in maps in their printed genealogy issued in the 1860s. 26 People walked far to secure a livelihood in those days. One of the persons interviewed in the investigations into the murder of two British officers near Stanley in 1849, was a villager of Little Hong Kong who had a hut and operated a stakenet on the point where Stanley Fort now stands. 27

However, farming was the principal occupation. The Little Hong Kong fields can be seen on the Hong Kong Government’s first survey sheet for the area, whilst the extent of the Wong Nai Chung fields can be gauged by the race course at Happy Valley which was built over them. 28 Rice was favoured because there was a plentiful supply of stream water available that only required damming, leading and terracing, albeit by dint of hard labour, to provide fertile land that would support two crops of rice yearly. An account of harvest time in one of the Hong Kong villages appeared in one of the numbers of the Illustrated London News for 1858.

“On the 1st of November (1857) I took a walk with a friend into the interior of Hong Kong and saw the process of rice-harvesting, beneath a bright, hot sun, the entire village popu-
lation hard at work getting in the second crop of paddy. The principal part of the labourers was the women, owing probably to the fact of the men being generally engaged in fishing. The paddy rice grows to a height of about two feet six inches. The fields are little patches of about fifty paces, on account of the unevenness of the ground. The rice is thrashed out of doors: first, in a tub with a screen, by a man, who takes a bunch in his two hands to strike the ears against the edge of the tub and then gives the rice again to be thrashed on a floor made hard with chunam, the Chinese asphalt. Ploughing is here done with a very primitive plough and a wonderfully small bullock, as the ground is soft and does not contain a single pebble, . . . After being harrowed, it may receive a crop of sweet potatoes, or ground nuts. The women work with children on their backs. No one appears too young to take a part in the work. In the next fields are sugar-canes." 

Thus long before 1841, the villagers of Hong Kong, and the shopkeepers and local boat people too, had settled into the routine of a settled life. Tied to their fields and houses, and to their businesses and daily occupations, they had established institutions of the kind that is usual in Chinese communities, including the shrines and temples that were the object of periodic and special rites through the calendar year. They were therefore to be numbered among those who, in another place and time, twenty years on at Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon, were described as "the old inhabitants of this site, who are indeed orderly people" in contrast to newcomers who were suspected of being "thieves and outlaws". 

Their good behaviour struck a series of visitors from outside. The famous botanist Robert Fortune, writing of his experiences on the Hong Kong area in the 1840s commented:

"In all my wanderings on the island, and also on the mainland hereabouts, I found the inhabitants harmless and civil. I have visited their glens and their mountains, their villages and small towns, and from all the intercourse I have had with them I am bound to give them this character."

Another observer, the military surgeon Keith Stewart McKenzie,
speaking particularly of the Hong Kong villages, stated:

"The inhabitants, from our knowledge of their character, appear to be industrious and obliging . . . From all accounts they seem in general to have been very peaceably disposed; nor did they exhibit any marked approbation or disapprobation, on their transfer to the British sway."

Another officer, Captain Loch, described a visit to one of the Hong Kong villages, possibly Tai Tam Tuk which was removed for the last of the reservoirs of that name in 1913:

"The path now wound round a tongue of land to the left into a small dell, where there were a few houses built in a line. The patriarch and ruler of this community was standing foremost, ready to receive us. This universal custom of acknowledging the superiority of age has been recognized by us throughout the island."

McKenzie also mentions being entertained by a village elder 'during an excursion into the interior' of the island.

This civility and hospitality was apparently not new, nor wholly to be ascribed to the circumspection that was surely felt at the change of rulers. A guide to navigation on the South China coast published in 1806 quotes a report on Hong Kong and its approach dated September 1793 which says of the island.

"You will be supplied here with almost every kind of refreshment; especially fish, hogs, beef and poultry. We found the Inhabitants very civil and were daily on shoar at the Villages, and fowling in the interior parts of the Island (sic)."

Sentiments of a similar kind relating to some years later, are contained in Sir John Davis' account of his visit to China as part of the Amherst embassy in 1816. Describing some Hong Kong persons, "mostly fishermen", encountered on the way to the Pearl River he added "To such of the embassy as were accustomed to the impertinence of the Canton people their behaviour appeared very quiet and civil."
This did not mean, however, that local villagers were not averse to minor piracy and smuggling, and generally to taking advantage of opportunities for gain. There are too many accounts of villainy from the surrounding waters for us to rule out the occasional initiative. In this connection, the remarks of a Chinese brigade general ordered by his superiors to cooperate with two young British navel officers against pirates thought to belong to villages in the present day Yuen Long area of the New Territories, has to my ears the ring of truth to it:

"Having seen these eighteen villages we have, becomingly and properly, together admonished the people thereof, and I think that they will be compliant and obey our orders. But this is merely an affair of vagabonds who rob with violence and make forays, who are not in the same category with confirmed rebels and pirates."  

The English officer in charge commented:

"It must clearly be borne in mind that piracy in China differs from piracy elsewhere in this respect that there the pirates live on the land and only put to sea occasionally to carry on their depredations . . . Nor is this state of things confined in this vicinity to the neighbourhood of Deep Bay. Piratical villages exist along the whole coast wherever the native traffic is sufficient to render such an occupation remunerative."  

Writing specifically of Hong Kong itself on 11th April 1846 to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in his annual despatch on the state of the Colony, Sir John Davis observed that "A principal obstacle to the Chinese commerce of the place is the system of piracy which infests the approaches from the east and west." In another despatch dated 26 February 1848, Davis commented on the subject as follows: "The former prevalence of piracy has been checked (as appears best proved by the increase of native trade) through the active exertions of Captain Loring of HM's ship 'Scout', by whom nearly 300 pirates were captured in the last year, and delivered over to the Chinese government."

Whether the Hong Kong villagers joined in such behaviour
might, then, depend on the existence of a local junk trade. Such a trade existed east and west of the island, before and after British rule, and though it cannot be proved that they did act in this way, there were certainly fearful attacks outside the Lyemun Passage in the 1840s and after, with piratical craft from or operating out of Shau Kei Wan blamed among others. At the least, the town's shopkeepers probably victualled pirates and helped to sell or dispose of stolen goods.

An experienced official wrote at a later time:

“Previous to 1866, Piracy in Colonial and neighbouring waters was of common occurrence, and Shau Kei Wan bore a very bad name as the centre where Junks fitted out for piratical purposes. Its close proximity to the Lyemun Pass enabled Masters of heavily manned and armed Junks to follow vessels that had been ascertained to have opium, or other valuable cargo, on board. These were too frequently come up with and attacked at night, stinkpots and arms of all descriptions being freely used.” Governor MacDonell's “notice was [then] attracted to the unenviable character Hong Kong bore as a Pirate resort.”

The demands of agriculture and shopkeeping, and the pleasures of occasional or indirect piracy apart, the main pursuits of Hong Kong at the time of its cession were the production and export of granite building slabs and the trade in fish, landed by fishing vessels at the coastal market villages, and then dried and salted, and then graded, warehoused and subsequently shipped out to major centres of population in the surrounding and adjacent parts of China. Quotations from contemporary sources confirm the position. Charles Gutzlaff, Prussian missionary and civil servant, holding at the time the appointment of Chinese Secretary to the Government of Hong Kong, wrote in 1846:

“The only produce of Hong Kong, for exportation, is granite, and, though a very contemptible article, still it employs many hands, a great number of boats, each about 70 to 100 tons, and some capital. There are seldom less than a hundred of the above craft which monthly leave this with a full cargo for the
interior; and it is considered a profitable trade, because stone
blocks are constantly in demand, and will always fetch a good
price in proportion as buildings are in course of erection.”

The clearest evidence of this trade in granite blocks comes from
the Hoi Sam Temple in Shau Kei Wan. This temple was built in
1845, the year before Gutzlaff’s report, and the tablet in the temple
stresses that the construction was a community effort extending
over some time. The tablet records 232 donors whose names can
still be read, of whom no less than 48 were identified as quarries
(塘) who donated about 28% of the total sum raised. Of the 14
most generous donors to the temple construction project 5 were
identified as quarries, with 6 out of the next 14, and 5 out of the
next 17. Collinson’s survey of 1843-45 shows the coast pock­
marked with quarries all the way from Quarry Bay through Quar­
ry Point (both so named by Collinson), to Ah Kung Nam, with
each group of quarries with a few houses for the quarry workers
and a landing place for boats. Some of the quarries contributing to
the Hoi Sam Temple project may have been from the Kowloon
side of the bay, where there were numerous quarries in the Kwun
Tong area, but most undoubtedly came from the Shau Kei Wan
area. 30 quarries donated to the restoration of the Hau Wong
temple in Kowloon City in 1822, of which only 4 also donated in
1845, strongly suggesting this. There can be no doubt that quar­
rying was the dominant economic activity of the whole north-east
cost of Hong Kong. The importance of long-distance trade in the
blocks is, perhaps, shown in the eagerness of the quarry operators
to contribute generously to the construction of a temple to the
seaman’s goddess.

In the same report, Gutzlaff speaks of the fish trade:

“The fisheries carried on from Aberdeen and Stanley are in a
flourishing condition, and consequently, also the trade in salt
fish, which the mass of the people use generally for seasoning
their rice. How many smacks belong to these places has never
been ascertained; but at New Year, when they make up the
accounts with their partners and owners, the harbours are full
of them.”
In the years before 1841 many fishing vessels from other places made use of the local harbours, especially Stanley and Aberdeen. An official report from the 1840s refers to the situation:

“I have not inserted under the head of “Fisheries” anything with respect to the large quantities of fish caught off the south side of the Island as the fishing ground being off the Lama Island cannot strictly be claimed on behalf of the Colony. Some of the boats employed in the traffic belong to Stanley and Aberdeen, but the greater number and all those of the largest class (called To-Ku) carrying from 30 to 50 tons belong to various places in the district[s] of Heangshan and Sinan and merely use these Harbours during the fishing season to take in provisions and water. The fish caught is generally sold to smaller vessels who carry it to different places for sale. About 500 tons are annually dried at Stanley.”

The main fishing in the waters off the South China coast was seasonal, with the main fishing fleets moving up and down the coast with the migrating shoals of fish. The larger vessels would travel up and down the coast, landing their catch at the ports next to the areas being fished and then moving on to the next fishing ground and the next port. The smaller vessels fished the water off their home port all year around, but were particularly busy during the migration season. Thus Stanley and Aberdeen would have been extremely busy and crowded with boats during the two short northward and southward migration periods, when huge quantities of fish would have been landed, to be dried, batched, and exported at leisure during the less hectic normal periods, when only the smaller local boats would be in port.

Though the descriptions of the granite and fish trade here quoted all come from a period shortly after the establishment of British Hong Kong, by which time the salt fish trade had become, as Gutzlaff said, “the most flourishing of all the branches”, I believe they are equally applicable to the period before 1841.

It is in connection with this seasonal migration of the fishing fleet up and down the coast that the presence of Chiu Chow, or Hoklo, groups in the little ports makes sense: they were essentially
there to support the dried fish trade in their native places and also
to provision the merchant boats which followed the fishing fleets.
Their presence is recorded for Shau Kei Wan before 1841, which
is in line with their presence on Cheung Chau from the eighteenth
century. At Stanley, village tradition ascribes the foundation of
the Pak Tai temple there in 1803 to them. This widespread pres­
ence of outsider merchants is clear evidence of a substantial trade
not limited merely to the immediate marketing area.

I come now to a particular feature of the Hong Kong scene
before 1841 that was to be encountered again in Kowloon in 1860
and in the New Territories in 1899. According to a near contempo­
rary account compiled by three knowledgeable British officers in
the 1860s:

“Hong Kong so far back as the Ming dynasty was owned by a
respectable family of the name of Tang. When Kanghi ordered
the Coast to be cleared of its inhabitants [1662] the possession
of Hong Kong was abandoned. But when the Emperor re­
voked his decree [1668], the occupation of it was again re­
sumed and title deeds granted, authenticated records of which
remain to this day in the offices of the chief magistrates of Sin
Ngan [新安縣 ] and Tungkwan [東莞縣 ]. The land tax for
two centuries and upwards had been regularly paid by this
family, its members being considered by the government as its
true and lawful landlords.”

The authors continue that, when ceding the Island to Britain:

“No provision seems to have been made by the Chinese Gov­
ernment for the original proprietors of the soil, who made suit
to the British Government humbly praying for remuneration.
It was said that some eight or ten thousand dollars were paid
for certain fields in Wong-nei-chong and Su-kon-pu — not to
the members of the Tang family, however, but to the persons
occupying the soil and claiming to be its true and rightful
owners. Whether they were so or not does not appear.”

The Tang family — to whose claims to land ownership of Hong
Kong Island I shall return presently — continued to suffer from
British ignorance of their position under Chinese law and practice, and incoming Chinese settlers' disregard of it. In 1858, their land at Tsim Sha Tsui, on account of its proximity to Hong Kong and its fine position on the harbour, was being occupied for all manner of business by persons who gave no thought to paying rent to the Tangs. They caused a public notice to be prepared, which found its way in translation into the English language paper the Friend of China on 24th July 1858. This was two years before this part of Kowloon was first leased, then ceded, to Britain in the course of the year 1860. The printed version was as follows:

"Tung Wing-Fook-Tong [sic] of the Sun On district, was formerly sole proprietor of the Island of Hong Kong, and of the hills and coast of the North Side of the Harbour under the general name of Tsin Shat-Choy . . . . . . . . Lately Tung Wing-Fook-Tong petitioned the Magistrate of Sun-On to examine Tung's claim to Tsin Shat-Choy and the Magistrate issued a proclamation declaring that Tung Wing-Fook-Tong is the real owner of the Property . . . . . . . ." 51

The editor of the newspaper was not sympathetic, being downright sceptical of the Tung (Tang) claims to Hong Kong:

"As to his having been a Lord of this Isle, as well as of Tsim-shat-choy," he wrote, "in a word, we do not believe a word of it".

Indeed, he went further, dismissing the unfortunate Tangs as being 'mythical as the Hong Kong agents for Holloway's pills'. 52

Yet the fact remains that the Chinese records corroborate the Tang family's claims to Hong Kong and much else, and their exchanges with the various Chinese authorities at the district, prefectural and provincial level in the 1840s reveal some essential characteristics both as to their own situation as owners of Hong Kong and as to the mind and operation of the imperial bureaucracy. The Tangs were essentially absentee owners, entitled through the registered ownership to be regarded as the true owners of the sub-soil and eligible to exact a rent charge from tenants on it. 53 The officials with whom they dealt in the course of pressing their
claims, besides being initially ignorant of their position, were as sceptical and cautious as can be expected. Ultimately, however, they were quite prepared to find precedents for a solution after confirming the situation, leisurely, and to their own satisfaction.

The exchange began with a petition dated 8th day of the 4th lunar month of Tao Kuang 21st year (28 May 1841) to the magistrate of Hsin-an district:

“We inherited from our forefathers the taxable lands in the following places [named severally]. There are official registration records in respect of our ownership of the aforesaid lands which are collectively known as Kwan Tai Lo (群大路) of Hong Kong Island (香港山). These areas have previously been leased to farmers Pang Shun-yau (彭信有) and Chow Ah-yau (周亞有) for cultivation. The situation had always been peaceful and quiet until they came to us and complained of forcible occupation of the lands around Kwan Tai Lo area by English barbarians (英夷) whose ships were anchored in the neighbouring bay. These barbarians destroyed their crops to make way for roads and built huts on the unploughed fields. Knowing the fierce and violent nature of these barbarians, our tenant-farmers dared not negotiate with them.

We depend on the rents collected to pay our tax and support our families. Now that we have been robbed of our vital resources, where are we to turn to for our livelihood? Faced with such stringent circumstances, we feel obliged to bring the case to your attention. Should we be exempted from the payment of land tax for the ravaged areas or are we to join forces to expel the barbarians? We should be most grateful if you would give us advice on this urgent matter at your earliest convenience.”

Official instructions, presumably to a subordinate, were given as follows:

“With reference to the case of the Tangs, please furnish us with a full account of the individual areas, the amounts of tax payable and the names of the registered owners of the forcibly
occupied lands. We shall carry out investigation of the case when the barbarians are somewhat pacified. Advice on the proper course of action to be taken will then be sought from the higher authorities.”55

Thus far the complaint was against the English barbarians. But two years later, in another petition to the district magistrate dated 28th day of the fifth moon of Tao Kuang 23rd year, (25 June 1843) there entered a new aspect, the behaviour of the Tangs’ tenants on the land in question. The petitioner wrote,

“It happened that the treacherous barbarians have usurped these lands for building purposes and the crops in the area are destroyed. Following this the dishonest tenant Yip Shin-tak (葉先德) and others made use of this chance and declared their own the field behind the houses at Wong Nei Chung, which was the same piece of land leased to them [by the Tangs], and sold it to the English barbarians. Thus my land was usurped and sold. I have lost this piece of land, together with the rent and grain that I should receive from my tenants. I have reported this case to the former magistrate begging him to defer my payment of taxes, and he had granted permission to investigate my case . . . . I also beg your excellency to order the arrest of the treacherous tenant Yip Shin-tak and help me to recover my land.”56

The authorities were sceptical of this charge against the Tangs’ tenants and commented in reply:

“You do not seem to have considered the fact that when these barbarians were making troubles on your land, they would not possibly be willing to pay for it. This is not logical. Moreover, we have checked the various letters you sent to the officials concerned, and in them you have never mentioned this Yip Shin-tak case, but had said only that the English barbarians have usurped your land for building purposes. Now you have added this new plaint, your intention is indeed dubious. This will not be permitted. Enclosed are the deeds and bills you have submitted.”57
Nearly a year later, the case still unsettled, four of the Tangs’ tenants from Little Hong Kong and ten from Wong Nei Chung and Soo Kon Po were listed as refusing to pay rent in another petition of 23rd of the 4th moon of Tao Kuang 24th year (8th June 1844). Perhaps there were others, given the Tangs’ limited knowledge of their tenants — they had cultivated the land from father to son since settling at Wong Nei Chung and elsewhere in the eighteenth century or before — and the added difficulties of the island having passed under British rule.

Having dressed down the Tangs, the authorities were not pleased with the tenants’ behaviour either. After complaining of the insufficient information and proof of ownership given to him, the magistrate went on:

“On the other hand, it is said that the tenant Wong Wah and others had refused to pay the rents and grain that are their due. Moreover, they had gone as far as to make up a pretext to usurp the land and, not satisfied with even that, had reported to the foreign officials untruths against their own landlords. They are the emperor’s subjects: that they could willingly subject themselves to these barbarians is really a case of utter obduracy and obtuseness. We have lately found out that Yip Shin-tak and others had refused to pay rents and this case has been reported to the [Chinese] officials at Kowloon. The said Kowloon officers would arrest all tenants concerned and if necessary, might discuss the case with the English barbarians. Further steps might be taken as the situation requires.”

Ultimately, the provincial authorities to whom the case was sent for decision realized that there was no putting back the clock. It was concluded that

“since the English barbarians who had been granted permission by His Imperial Majesty to stay in Hong Kong built quarters on the plots of land owned by the petitioner Tang Chicheung ( ), it was impossible for him to carry on farming there [sic]. It was suggested that the land tax thereof should be exempted in accordance with the precedent set by the Magistrate of Pun Yue county ( ) when houses
owned by local people were demolished for the construction of a fortress; also that investigation should be made as to whether there were other land taxes, apart from those of Tang Chi-cheung, which had not been paid.  

This decision was passed to the British Plenipotentiary, Sir John Davis, in a communication from “Hwang, Treasurer of Kwang-tung” towards the end of this same 24th year of Tao Kuang, to the effect that

“As the said Tang’s fields are situated within the jurisdiction of Hong Kong the Chinese high officials consider it not proper to exact the [land] tax from Tang, because Hong Kong is made a possession of your Honourable Country.”

The Tang clan’s tenants on perpetual leases were thus freed of their payments to the sub-soil owner, and held land on payment of Crown Rent to the Hong Kong government thereafter. I have given the story only as it is contained in the Tang family records; but as expressed on the tenants’ side and handled by the Hong Kong authorities, it is elaborated in official British papers contained in the Public Records Office, London.

The Tangs’ claims to be the sub-soil owners cannot have been exclusive; or else there had, by one means or another, been inroads into their rights over the years. Very few Chinese land papers indeed seem to have survived from Hong Kong island from before 1841, but among them is a red deed issued in 1797 to a resident of one of the Chai Wan villages. The nature of a red deed is such that it is either an initial direct grant of the sub-soil or the official recognition of a transfer from the person previously registered as the taxpayer of the land in question. Also, and as mentioned above, the Wong family of Nam Tau and Cheung Chau leased out 13 fishing stations on the south side of Hong Kong to local people: a right which would usually have gone with ownership of the sub-soil or would have been appropriated by its owner.

I turn now to the boat people of Hong Kong, for it is certain that the local population before 1841 comprised boat families as well as villagers. The Tanka or boat people of South China have long
been characterized as being a group apart. They were conceived, born, lived, married and died upon their craft, often no more than the cockleshell sampans which used to be so common a feature of our coastal waters. They were not allowed to live on shore, did not attend the village schools and were excluded from the official examinations and hardly ever intermarried with the landsmen, though some of their girls became the secondary wives of wealthier villagers. Generally, they lived a life apart, under separate official regulation, and were despised and often oppressed by the land population as the popular and long received legend has it.  

The Tanka people manned the larger fishing craft that were usually based on the fishing ports of the Hong Kong region in places like Cheung Chau and Tai O. They also congregated in small groups that frequented sheltered bays and inlets for generations at a time. I have encountered this in various parts of the New Territories, and found it also at Tai Tam Tuk on Hong Kong island when I enquired into the land and boat populations there in the early 1960s. I learned that the elder fishermen and their fathers had been born at Tai Tam Tuk which had been used as a permanent anchorage by a group of Tanka boat people for at least the previous eighty years, one old lady having been born there in 1884. They were always at Tai Tam Tuk during the main typhoon season from the fifth to the eighth lunar month of every year, fishing the surrounding waters for the rest of the year. From what they said, there were about twenty families living in boats there when the village was removed in 1913 for the reservoir. About half these families were surnamed Cheng, while the remainder came from four or five other surnames. It was very likely a man from one of these boat families who, under the recorded name Chun-Fat-Che, gave evidence against a mandarin junk charged with piracy in May 1874 during the Chinese so-called "blockade" of Hong Kong. "I am a fisherman and have a small fishing boat about 18 feet long. It has one sail and carries myself and wife, my four sons and their two children. My fishing place is at Stanley, Tai Tam and Cape D'Aguilar. I have fished there ever since I was a child and I am 62 years of age, and my father before me. My [eldest?] son generally accompanies me in another boat."

Whilst this information comes from the 1870s, its reference to
practices dating back to the complainants childhood and before suggests that the Tanka were using the Tai Tam Tuk anchorage from at least the very beginning of the nineteenth century.

I turn now to the important question of how far back was Hong Kong occupied? This is practically an impossible question to answer for lack of sufficient information. As in many other places, like Tsuen Wan and north-west Kowloon, the present old, local, formerly tenant families appear mainly to have come into the area after the Great Evacuation of the Coast ordered by the Kanghsi emperor, 1662-69, and many of them not until the eighteenth century or even after. Yet it is an interesting fact that the maps in a later 16th century geographical work on Kwangtung, the Yueh ta-chi ( 育大記 ) contain names that are familiar to us today, on Hong Kong island as well as on the other islands and mainland of the Hong Kong region. Thus we find Chek Chu (Stanley), Tai Tam, Wong Nei Chung, Tit Hang, Chun Hoi and Shau Kei Wan, as well as Hong Kong itself, implying surely, that these places were settled at that time or were at least resorted to periodically. Also, the Tang correspondence from the 1840s quoted above specifically refers to recultivation of their land in various places in the late seventeenth century — though not necessarily by the former tenant farmers — after revocation of the edict of 1662 referred to above. We also learn that the Tang land on Hong Kong island was entered in the Tung Kwun district land registry, suggesting that the registration might well be earlier than 1573, at which date the San On district was carved out of Tung Kwun and established as a separate country.

The island was certainly well-established in settled communities long before 1841. The temples alone give proof of that. To this day, two existing temples at Stanley, and two at Aberdeen (one at the former village and one on an islet now joined by reclamation to Ap Lei Chau) and the Tin Hau Temple at Tin Hau Temple Road, Causeway Bay (formerly called Hung Heung Lo or "Crimson Incense Burner") contain items that go back to the eighteenth or very early nineteenth century. There were others now demolished or resited that probably predated 1841. Details are given in the Table below.
Temple on Hong Kong Island in 1841

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temple</th>
<th>Objects dated before 1841</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tin Hau, Stanley</td>
<td>Bell, 1768, Honour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Board 1820, Couple 1820</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pak Tai, Stanley</td>
<td>Cloud Gong, 1803</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tin Hau, Aberdeen</td>
<td>Bell, 1727</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Hung Shing, Apleichau</td>
<td>Bell, 1774</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Tin Hau, Tunglowan</td>
<td>Bell, 1727</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sam Shing Kung, Stanley</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Tin Hau, Shek O</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Hung Shing, Wanchai</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Pak Tai, Wong Nei Chung</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Hoi Sam (Tin Hau)</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments

1. This temple (destroyed in the War) is not shown on Collinson's survey, which specifically marks the other two Stanley temples as "Josshouse". The site, however, is of fung shui significance, guarding the left hand entrance to the harbour as the Pak Tai temple guards the right hand entrance. It was probably in existence in 1841, perhaps, however, only as a small shrine rather than a full scale temple.

2. Nothing is known of this temple earlier than 1891 when an honour board was hung there. That board does not seem to record the building of the temple, but a providential escape from storm (the board reads "海不揚波 — The Sea Shall not Raise Waves". A building is shown on the approximate site of the temple on Collinson's survey.)
3. E.J. Eitel (Europe in China, (Hong Kong 1895) p 190) states that this temple was built “75 to 100 years” before 1841. However, a detailed large-scale survey of the Wanchai area of 1843 shows no building on the site, although the temple building is shown on maps from 1846. The temple site is adjacent to the tiny village of Wanchai, shown on the 1843 map but removed in 1845. The villagers received new lots in compensation for the village, and it seems entirely likely that the present temple was built in 1845-46 on one of these compensation lots (personal comment from Rev. Carl J. Smith). Probably, before 1845, there was a small shrine at the foot of the fung shui rock against which the temple now stands rather than a full-scale temple — this is suggested also by Eitel’s referring to the temple as Taiwongkung (Earthgod shrine) rather than by its present title of Hung Shing Temple, suggesting a lowly origin.

4. This temple was demolished late in the nineteenth century, and rebuilt at its present Ventris Road site in 1901. There seems to have been a delay between the demolition and reconstruction (see Temple Directory, unpub., Temple Section, Home Affairs Dept. H.K. Government 1980, p.30) and no datable items from the old temple were transferred to the new temple. The temple is shown on maps from the 1860s, but it is not clear if it is shown on Collinson’s survey. It was probably built before 1841.

5. This temple was founded in 1845, but the tablet recording this mentions a previous “altar” (郊区) on the site. The other Shau Kei Wan temples are all later (To Ti, 1877; Tin Hau, 1872; Tam Kung, 1905), although the Tam Kung Temple was also preceded by a simple shrine on or near the site.

The governance of the Hong Kong community was in the hands of the Hsin-an magistrate from his yamen at Nam Tau on Deep Bay just outside the present Sino-British boundary. He had assistant magistrates at several places in the district. The officer responsible for the good order of the Hong Kong villages was located at Kwun Fu Shih (官富司). This sub-magistracy had
previously been located near Sham Chun, but, shortly after the
cession of Hong Kong the sub-magistracy was moved to Kowloon,
known as Kowloon City after a wall was built around it in 1847. A
military garrison was transferred to Kowloon City from Tai Pang
in north-east San On, at about the same time.\textsuperscript{73}

There had been a few small military posts on the island of Hong
Kong established long before 1841. These were manned by sol­
diers and ratings of the Tai Pang battalion which served as a kind
of military marine constabulary, sailing war junks and manning
small posts scattered across this part of the district. However, they
may have been discontinued before 1841 as there does not seem to
have been any civil or military establishment on Hong Kong is­
land when it was taken over. Johnston wrote in 1843

\begin{quote}
"no public buildings were found on any part of the Island of
Hong Kong when it was first occupied by the English, except a
small tumble-down Chinese house at Chek-choo (now Stan­
ley) and another at Shek-pie-wan (now Aberdeen) where the
petty mandarins stopped occasionally . . . ."\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

It seems, then, that the magistrate sent collectors and runners to
the island in connection with the land tax and that a clerk was sent
in a boat to issue licences to the boat people. There are reports of
the district magistrate's officers still attempting to collect land
taxes at Stanley as late as 1844\textsuperscript{75} and the boat people may have
been subject to the annual charge of 400 cash said to be levied on
the 150 boats privileged to fish in local waters. The San On magis­
trate was still trying to collect this in 1844.\textsuperscript{76} Such visitations were
being reported by the inhabitants in the few years following the
British occupation of Hong Kong, and the British official corre­
spondence gives the impression that this had been a regular prac­
tice in past days. However, it was not to be tolerated after the
cession, and after representations by the Hong Kong Govern­
ment, the provincial treasurer of the Canton province indicated
that any claims to the former land tax would now be relin­
quished.\textsuperscript{77}

Otherwise, the inhabitants were left to their own devices. In
common with other communities of the region, large and small
alike, they made their own arrangements for self-management in clan, village, sub-district, coastal centre and market town. So long as they paid their taxes and did not commit crimes or affrays they were left alone by the authorities. Being settled, in many cases, for so long, the inhabitants had intermarried over generations, sending their daughters to other villages and taking wives from neighbouring settlements as well as from further afield, from Kowloon and nearby places in the present New Territories. Some villages were linked by blood ties in the male line, as at Little Hong Kong and Pokfulam where the Chans and Chaus had settled or branched off, and some Wong Nei Chung clans had male cousins at Little Hong Kong. These links made it natural for the villages to join together in periodic communal protective rites like the ta chiu (打醮) which according to old residents still persisted into this century; whilst the temples attracted large gatherings at major festivals, especially on the birthdays of their patron deities.

This is not the place to provide yet another description of the forms which the local village communities used to provide for the regulation of their society. Full descriptions have been given elsewhere of the role of the clan, centred on the ancestral hall and the ancestral graves; of the village, centred on the earthgod shrines, village school, and the village fields and water supply; and of the market town and the nexus of villages it served, centred on the kaifong, the temple and its management committee, and the ta chiu. All that is needed here is the emphatic confirmation that all the parts of this traditional system, so well-known from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century New Territories, were present on Hong Kong Island in and before 1841.

Ancestral halls certainly existed in all the major and some of the minor villages although few now survive. Tai Tam Tuk and Law Uk (Chai Wan) both had one, and there were others at Little Hong Kong and Wong Nei Chung, and the Tai Tam villagers had two, although it is likely that both were built after 1841. Earthgod shrines equally certainly existed — the very name of To Tei Wan village (“Earthgod Bay”) suggests this, and we have seen that the Hung Shing Temple in Wanchai probably originated in an earthgod shrine. Several of the quarry hamlets in the Quarry Bay to Shaukeiwan area had shrines, and others survive built into the
The village temples of Hong Kong Island were the centre of community activities at more than a single village level, as elsewhere in South China. A letter from Collinson of 29th April 1845 refers to:

"a great feast . . . celebrated in Chuck Chu [Stanley] for the last 3 days, which was nothing more or less than a fair in front of the principal Joss house."

This “fair” was clearly celebrating the birthday of Tin Hau, which falls on the 23rd day of the 3rd moon, which in 1845 was 30th April. A temple fair to celebrate Tin Hau’s birthday, still held on the land in front of the main Stanley temple, is still celebrated at that season each year. There can be no doubt, too, that the double festivities at Aberdeen, on the birthday of Tin Hau, and on that of Hung Shing (23rd of 3rd moon), on each of which celebrations the statue of the deity whose festival is not being celebrated is solemnly carried in procession to the other’s temple “as a guest”, as a concrete demonstration of the local people’s feeling that their prosperity and safety at sea depends on both deities, also date to before 1841.

Temples required management committees, and it was usual for temple management committees to take on, as the Kaifong, the general oversight of the market towns or the community of villages in or near which they stood. The towns on Hong Kong Island certainly had kaifongs. A couplet of 1820 in the Tin Hau temple at Stanley was given by the Chik-sze (僱事 — managers) which certainly implies the existence of a management committee at that date. If the tradition that the Pak Tai temple was founded in 1803 by the Hoklo community of Stanley is correct, it is possible that the Kaifong was built around ethnic groups, as was almost certainly the case at that date in Cheung Chau, and which was common later. Certainly the 1820 Chik-sze are typical of later kaifongs in that, of the eleven Chik-sze named, five certainly, and at least a further two in all probability, were names of commercial enterprises, showing dominance of the kaifong Temple Committee by the market shopkeepers. Equally typical was the likelihood that
the Chik-sze were the larger and more prosperous commercial enterprises: three of the four Stanley shops whose scope of business and general prosperity were such that they felt inspired to donate to the restoration of the Hau Wong temple in Kowloon City in 1822 were included among the 1820 Chik-sze. These four Stanley shops were the only Hong Kong donors to this restoration. This kaifong continued to flourish: in 1847 it built, or rebuilt, an office for itself, a building which it still today used as the office of the local Kaifong.

At Shau Kei Wan, the evidence for the existence of a kaifong is equally compelling. The foundation of the Hoi Sam Temple in 1845 is presented as a community action on the foundation tablet, which states

"Therefore, the matter was discussed and a general agreement reached: everyone was happy to lend a hand to make a success of it. One man raised the suggestion, and it was unanimously acclaimed by the whole mass of the devout people."

Moreover, the donors to the foundation are grouped into three groups: Managers (four in number) (經理 ), "Ritual Leaders" (首事 ), and "Devout People" (信士 ). The mention of "Managers" makes it clear that, here again a management committee is in place, which, equally clearly, represents the community. As we have seen, quarry operators dominated the donors for the Hoi Sam temple, but there were other commercial groups there, too — only sixteen other commercial enterprises are identified as such, but others probably lie behind some of the 170 non-commercial donors listed. The management committee was here, too, therefore, probably dominated by the quarrymen, shopkeepers and other commercial men. This kaifong remained dominant in Shau Kei Wan affairs up to the last War, and it was the kaifong which founded the other Shau Kei Wan temples later in the nineteenth century. The Stanley Kaifong still retains control of the Stanley temples, but the Shau Kei Wan Kaifong lost control of the temples it had founded in 1928, when the Chinese Temples Ordinance was passed.

There is no evidence for early kaifong groups in Aberdeen, but
equally there is no reason to doubt that arrangements similar to those at Stanley and Shau Kei Wan were to be found there.

This account does not claim to be a comprehensive account of Hong Kong before 1841, but aims to stimulate an interest. If it reaches members of old Hong Kong village families by one reason or another, I hope it will encourage them to dig into their family chests to see if anything remains that will fill out the story.89

NOTES

The material for this essay is varied. I am in the considerable debt of several good friends; Ian Diamond, Tom Poon, Anthony Siu Kwok-kin, Patrick Hase, and Carl Smith among others. Nineteenth century writers, including officials, especially those who saw Hong Kong in its early colonial years, are also valued contributors to the story. Correspondence in the possession of the Tang family of Kam Tin figures prominently. I have also been fortunate to have spoken with old persons in their 'seventies' and 'eighties' back in the 1960s. They were able to give valuable information about life in their youth, when the life style and appearance of the Hong Kong villages and boat people's anchorages had changed relatively little since the 1840s, compared with the total obliteration and change all too frequently experienced in the past fifteen years. These interviews took place in a variety of places: in an old tenement in Shaukeiwan, in one of the old hillside villages there, in a resettlement estate, in a Housing Society estate for fisherman's families, on a friend's pleasure craft manned by a boatman whose family had been living on boats in Deep Bay for generations, on a working cargo boat in a typhoon shelter, in a converted stake-net fisherman's hut, in a village house overwhelmed by squatter huts, and so on. Each of these locations testified to how modern Hong Kong was dealing cards to the persons concerned and their families, swept along or thrust to one side in the maelstrom of intensive postwar development and redevelopment. To all the above contributors, I tender thanks and appreciation.


3 W.L. Bales, Tso Tsungtang, Soldier and Statesman of Old China, (Shanghai, Kelly and Walsh, 1937), p. 69.

4 The Letters of Queen Victoria, A Selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence between the Years 1837 and 1861, ed A.C. Benson and Viscount Esher, (London, John Murray, 1908), Vol. 1, p. 262.


6 Sessional Papers (Papers laid before the Legislative Council of Hong Kong) 1884-85, p. 2.

Ibid. It is, however, only fair to record that E.J. Eitel Europe in China: the History of Hong Kong from the Beginning to the Year 1882 (Hong Kong 1898) pp. 130-134 gives a more balanced picture of Hong Kong before 1841.

The Chinese characters for most of these places can be found in the Hong Kong Government's Gazetteer of Place Names in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories (Government Printer, nd 1960) but variously at pp. 90-98, 103-106 and 114-117. See also “Original Gazetteer and Census, May 15th 1841” at Appendix II of Geoffrey Robley Sayer, Hong Kong 1841-1862 Birth, Adolescence and Coming of Age (Oxford, University Press, 1937), p. 203.

The extracts from the Collinson letters reproduced here are taken from transcripts in preparation kindly made available by Mr. Ian Diamond who advises that they should be checked against the originals. For the owners of the letters, and their whereabouts, see file MSS 23 at the Public Records Office of Hong Kong.

A reference to Collinson's military mapping of Hong Kong, described by Mr. Diamond in an unpublished memoir as follows:

"Collinson completed his survey at the end of October, 1845. The work had taken him almost exactly two years. The survey was principally of Hong Kong Island but the resulting map took in also the islands immediately adjacent to Hong Kong, Kowloon Peninsula and the coastline of the mainland as far as Tsuen Wan in the West and Fat Tong Point in the east.

Drawn to a scale of 4" to one statute mile (1/15840) the finished map was on four joinable sheets covering north-west, north-east, south-west and south-east Hong Kong respectively. The map is meticulously detailed and very finely drawn.

One of the most interesting features of Collinson’s map is that it employs contour lines instead of shading, or hatching, to show land heights and is said to have been the first such map ever to be published. Collinson did not invent the technique. Contour-line mapping was first employed by military engineers in France, but it seems to have been used there largely in the siting and planning of fortifications. By the early 1830s the concept had been taken up by the Royal Engineers who, especially after about 1834, began to give it a more general application, largely in connection with the great surveys of England and Ireland . . . . . . . . . . . . His map was published by the Ordnance Map Office, Southampton in 1846, prior to any contoured map of the United Kingdom, the first not being printed until December, 1847.

Collinson submitted, together with his map, a portfolio of “Ten Outline Sketches of the Island of Hong Kong”. These were pen and ink drawings of the Island landscape viewed from ten locations and were designed to illustrate its salient topographical features and the nature and location of important buildings and settlements."

Ibid. A few years earlier, Dr. Edward H. Cree, Surgeon R.N., also recorded a visit to a village school, under date 7 April 1841, “Went into the village school where we saw a lot of moon-faced urchins were acquiring the rudiments of the celestial learning and put one in mind of some of the village schools at home.” (ed) Michael Levin, The Cree Journals, The Voyages of Edward H. Cree, Surgeon R.N., as related in his private journals 1837-1856 (Exeter, England, Webb and Bower, 1981)
There was a custom-made school building on the edge of Wong Nei Chung village which is shown on maps from Collinson's survey onwards.

By "town", Collinson means village.


Cited from the Canton Press for January 1842 by G.R. Sayer op. cit., p. 121. For information on present day So Kon Po, see the Notes by Revd Carl T. Smith and myself in JHKBRAS, Vol. 23 (1983) p. 7-77.

Wright and Allom, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 17 and again at p. 33, "Bamboo Aqueduct at Hong Kong".


A copy of this letter from Mr. Chow Yat-kwong, JP, dated 30 March 1967, is now in the Public Records Office, Hong Kong.

This statement can be found in the manuscript volume Summary Report of the Squatters Commission 1891-1906 in the Public Records Office, Hong Kong, under the date of hearing 6 July 1893. By "100 years" is meant "from before anyone now alive can remember," as normally in local village usage.

Ibid, hearing of 26 January 1891 of claims at Wong Nei Chung.


American Baptist Mission Archives, folder of Revd I.J. Roberts, No. 1 — China, also by courtesy of Revd Smith.

Captain A.A.T. Cunynghame, quoted in Sayer, op. cit., p. 104.

Stanley and Aberdeen in 1841 would seem to have been very similar in size and composition to the New Territories Market Towns in 1898 and earlier. Thus, Sai Kung had 50 shops and 150 houses in 1898 with a population of 512 (cv C. Fred Blake Ethnic Groups and Social Change in a Chinese Market Town. (Hawaii, 1981 p. 27-28), Tai Po New Market had 38 shops within eight years of its foundation (J.W. Hayes The Hong Kong Region, op. cit. p. 36 and n. 78), and Yuen Long Old Market had about 160 buildings of which at least 100 were shops (see unpublished Report 24 (Yuen Long Kau Hui) produced by Antiquites and Monuments Section, Hong Kong Government). 100 shops specifically noted as being from the Yuen Long Old Market donated to the restoration of the Tai Wong Temple there in 1837. At the Yuen Long Old Market many of the families working in the Market lived in the adjacent villages of Nam Pin Wai and Sai Pin Wai. As well as the 100 shops donating in 1837, 7 residents in the Market, 52 in Nam Pin Wai, and 22 in Sai Pin Wai donated, suggesting a total community of about 200 families, about half of which had shops. Tai O must have had more than 100 shops: 119 shops donated to the restoration of the Tin Hau temple there in 1838, 98 to the restoration of the Hung Shing temple there in 1838, 98 to the restoration of the Hung Shing temple there in 1841, and between 105 and 126 to the restoration of the Man Mo temple there is 1852 (in each case counting "workshops" and "ferries" as shops).


*China Mail* No. 212, 8 March 1849, Witness No. 23 at the recorded Coroner’s Inquest. Possibly also nos. 19 and 22.

A large scale map of Little Hong Kong at 80’ to 1", in five sheets, showing the Old and New Villages and their fields (1892) is in the PRO of Hong Kong. In 1844 it was stated that the Wong Nai Chung fields measured 75.1 acres (CSO 129 6 9807, p. 277).

*Illustrated London News*, 16 January 1858.


Robert Fortune, *Three Years Wanderings in the Northern Provinces of China* (London, John Murray, 2nd edition 1847) p. 17. He qualifies his remarks slightly, but the substance is as stated. See also his general very favourable verdict on the Chinese people at p. xv.


McKenzie, op. cit., p. 163.

Dalrymple’s *Observations on the Southern Coasts of China and the Island of Hainan* (London, 1806). After p. 20 in the text. This willingness to trade with strangers continued into the period of hostilities between Britain and China when the local people appeared to have been very ready to supply the British forces and the civilian population with food and other necessities. Indeed this extended to such a degree that led Captain Elliott to state in one of his despatches to Lord Ellenborough, Governor-General of India, that the retention of Hong Kong would be "an act of justice and protection to the Native population upon which we have been so long dependent for assistance and supply. Indescribably dreadful instances of the hostility between these people and the Government are within our certain knowledge; and they cannot be abandoned without the most fatal consequences." Hosea Ballou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*, 3 vols, reprinted by Book World Company, Taipei, Appendix I to Vol. 1, pp. 650-1. See also pp. 241-2 for local provisioning.

CO 129/99, Despatch No. 115 of 28 July 1864.

Ibid. The report, by Lieutenant Adams, R.N., dated 'Woodcock', Hong Kong, 28 June 1864, is at pp. 37-45.

Reports on the Past and Present State of Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions (hereafter Blue Book) 1845, No. 38 Hong Kong, p. 149.

Blue Book for 1847, No. 36 Hong Kong, p. 308.


Harbour Master's Report for 1887 in Sessional Papers (Papers laid before the Legislative Council of Hong Kong) September 1887-December 1888, p. 258.

Blue Book for 1845, No. 38 Hong Kong, p. 151.

Mayers, Dennys and King, op. cit, p. 2. Sin Ngan (新安縣) variously romanized herein as San-on, Sun-on and Hsin-an was the county to which Hong Kong Island belonged in 1841. Tungkwan (東莞縣) otherwise Tung-Kwun was the older, larger county from which it was created in 1573. For Hsin-an see Peter Y.L. Ng, prepared for press and with additional material by Hugh D.R. Baker, New Peace County, A Chinese Gazetteer of the Hong Kong Region (Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 1983).

Mayers, Dennys and King, op. cit. p. 3


Ibid.

See J.W. Hayes The Hong Kong Region op. cit. pp. 46-53. See also J.W. Hayes, The Rural Communities of Hong Kong, Studies and Themes (Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 1983) pp 9-10.

Petition dated 8th day of 4th lunar month, Tao Kuang, 21st year, i.e. 28th May 1841, to the District Magistrate of Hsin-an. This and other quoted papers belong to the Tang family of Kam Tin, New Territories. I am grateful to the District Officer, Yuen Long and Mr. J.T. Kamm for the translations that appear here. They have been checked against the originals by my friend Dr. Anthony K.K. Siu. Kwan Tai Lo was a village near the foot of the present Leighton Hill.

Copy of an undated instruction to a presumably subordinate office following the above.

Petition dated 28th day of 5th lunar month, Tao Kuang 23rd year i.e. 25th June 1843.

Undated reply to the petitioners, presumably from the District Magistrate, following receipt of the foregoing petition.
Petition dated 23rd day of 4th lunar month, Tao Kuang 24th year i.e. 8th June 1844.

See notes 19-20 above and relevant text.

Response or comment, presumably again by the District Magistrate, following the petition of 8th June 1844.

Instruction dated sometime in Tao Kuang 24th year, but date and originator not clear to me.

Communication dated 15th day of 11th month, Tao Kuang 24th Year, i.e. 24th December 1844 (from Series CO 129 7 9807, p. 326). See also Mayers, Dennys and King, op cit., p. 57.

Public Records Series CO 129 and FO 233.

Copies of this deed, together with a few other papers from Chai Wan, belonging to Mr Law Wan-yeung ( 見九龍 ) of Chai Wan, are available in the Public Records Office of Hong Kong.

See note 26 for the Wong holdings. The Tangs leased out similar properties on Tsing Yi Island in the present New Territories, where they apparently did hold the sole rights to the sub-soil up to 1899.

See the account given in J.W. Hayes The Hong Kong Region op cit, p 32 and in J.W. Hayes The Rural Communities of Hong Kong op cit., pp. 34-37 and 244-246.

For accounts of these places see chapters 2 and 3 of J.W. Hayes The Hong Kong Region op cit.

See J.W. Hayes The Rural Communities of Hong Kong, op cit., pp 68-9 and relevant notes on p. 254.

See the information on settlement in north-west Kowloon and Tsuen Wan in J.W. Hayes The Rural Communities of Hong Kong, op cit., chapters 5 and 7.

Kuo Fei ( 龔氏 ) Yueh Ta Chi ( 揚德記 )

This is perhaps misleading and more information is required. The list of places where land was claimed to be in the private ownership of the Tangs, with dates of purchases and names of sellers is given in a petition to the Hsin-an District Magistrate dated 18th day of the 10th moon in Tao Kuang 24th year, i.e. 25 November 1844. This shows that part of those Hong Kong lands registered in the Tung-kwun district yamen, presumably before 1573, had been purchased by the Tangs from another family in the Ch'ien-lung reign, and therefore cannot be used to show Tang ownership in or before the Ming dynasty, although they do suggest that the lands were cultivated and of value in the Ming. Nor do we know whether land registered in what later became Hsin-an had earlier been registered in the Tung-kwun yamen but with the relevant registers transferred to the new district yamen in 1573.

For the dates of these temples, and especially for the items mentioned in the Table, see Kuo Fei ( 龔氏 ) Yueh Ta Chi ( 揚德記 ) op cit. (D. Faure, B. Luk, A. Ng, The Historical Inscriptions of Hong Kong), passim.

See J.W. Hayes The Hong Kong Region op cit. chapter 7.


Endacott, op cit., p. 59

The possibility certainly exists. Revd. Carl Smith's researches show that some Hong Kong village men took advantage of the new situation to acquire language skills and advance their fortunes through service as government interpreters and clerks to solicitors, or by acting as comradores for Western business firms. The most famous of them all, Sir Shouson Chau, born in Little Hong Kong in 1861, was sent to America with the “First Hundred” Chinese boys (of the Chinese government's educational mission) in the 1870s. He graduated later from Columbia University, served the Ch'ing government as a high official and afterwards returned to Hong Kong where he was a member of both the Executive and Legislative Council. His father was comrador of the Canton Hong Kong Steamship Company with its head office in Canton, and according to family history his grandfather, the village head of Little Hong Kong in 1841, assisted Captain Charles Elliott in posting up one of his first official proclamations on the Island in 1841. (Letter quoted at note 18 above, together with the biography in Chinese and English at pp 4-5 of Prof. Woo Sing-lim's The Prominent Chinese in Hong Kong (Hong Kong, The Five Continents Book Co., 1937)). See also D. Faure Visit to Stanley elsewhere in this Journal.
1. Wong Nai Chung Village. From a photograph taken about 1883 which appears in Henry Ching's *Pow Mah* published by the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club in 1965 and owned by the Club.

Ink and sepia drawing by A.F. Robertson, in author’s possession.
These were, then, still typical of the craft to be found
in the small anchorages of the Hong Kong Region before 1842.