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*Hygienic Nature: Afforestation and the greening of colonial Hong Kong**

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Abstract

This article examines the 'greening' of Hong Kong in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with an emphasis on the afforestation of the colony's 'barren' mountainsides from the 1880s. To date, histories of Hong Kong have tended to focus on the colonial state's urban interventions, particularly on the draconian measures it took to 'sanitize' Chinese districts. In contrast, this article connects Hong Kong's urban development with the history of green space and the cultivation of 'nature'. While the state sought to transform the 'barren rock' into a visible correlate of the colony's aspiring status as an imperial hub in Asia, the promotion of hygiene and health provided a further rationale for tree-planting. The article argues that colonial Hong Kong provides insights into the 'tropicalization of modernity' and the constitutive processes by which colonial power was naturalized and legitimated through planning practices that extended from the urban to the natural. A study of Hong Kong's afforestation underscores the importance of the natural environment as a 'contact zone' between colonial and 'native' cultures; it also reveals the extent to which the equation of a 'green' landscape with economic (re)production and colonial order, functioned as a critical trope for framing race and labour.

Introduction: Hong Kong nature and the 'space of disappearance'

One persistent image of Hong Kong is that of the high-rise, neon-lit metropolis where Western colonial history fuses with an ancient legacy of Chinese enterprise. As the cultural critic Ackbar Abbas has

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noted, Hong Kong is invariably depicted in films and in the global media as 'a Chinese junk in Victoria Harbor against a backdrop of tall modernistic buildings' (a red junk is the logo of the Hong Kong Tourism Board). Such representations suggest the seamless conflation of 'West' and 'East', present and past. 'Complex space' is flattened; cultural and political unevenness vanishes 'into a one-dimensional image, structured around a facile binarism'.[1]

This article explores another dimension of Hong Kong as 'a space of disappearance', where oppositional categories level historical complexity to a single plane. On the one hand, the city-state is represented as a high-density, urban environment and, on the other, as a 'natural' topos—a lush garden in the polluted chaos of southern China. The enduring image, here, is that of 'tall modernistic buildings'—or post-modernistic buildings—framed by lush, subtropical vegetation: the forested slopes of The Peak rising above the gleaming skyscrapers of the Central District. Histories of Hong Kong continue to emphasize the city-state's rapid urban development from the early colonial period in a narrative that juxtaposes untrammelled urbanization against the dwindling natural environment, threatened with despoliation by an encroaching modernity.

In contrast to such histories, however, this article argues that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries urban development in Hong Kong was inseparable from concerns with promoting the 'natural'.[2] Hong Kong's modernity, at least in the pre-Second World War period, did not exist in opposition to green space and the cultivation of the 'natural', but rather the one was predicated upon the other. While imperial and colonial histories tend to focus on colonialism's deleterious environmental impact in Asia during this period, the argument advanced here is that urban development in Hong Kong in the nineteenth century was entangled with particular concerns about promoting the 'natural': ecology, culture, and politics were intertwined in distinctive ways. The 'engineering' of Hong Kong's urban and natural landscapes in the nineteenth century might best

[1] Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 71.

[2] From a somewhat different perspective, Jeyamalar Kathirithamby-Wells, in her study of imperial forestry in Peninsular Malaysia, has argued that tropical forests were central to development (and colonial governmentality); see *Nature and Nation: Forests and Development in Peninsular Malaysia* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005).

be understood, in this sense, in terms of a process of coproduction.[3] Arguments for the greening of Hong Kong—particularly from the 1880s—were founded upon the conviction that the amelioration of the natural landscape through planting activities and public works were essential for the colony's sustainable urban growth. Planting was construed as a correlate of the city-state's commercial expansion: both were part of a mission to rejuvenate the fallow land's productive capacities. A well-planned, hygienic city (resplendent with shade-trees and gardens), it was held, provided the foundations for cultivating the colony itself. Health concerns and aesthetic sensibilities overlapped, while 'natural' Hong Kong, as an imaginary, played an important role in defining the city-state's colonial identity.

The emblem of the bauhinia flower (*Bauhinia blakeana*), which became the official symbol of Hong Kong in 1965 and gained prominence following the colony's formal handover to the People's Republic of China in 1997, is suggestive in this context. 'Discovered' in the 1880s in Pokfulam in Hong Kong's Western District, the bauhinia (or Hong Kong orchid tree) was introduced to the Botanical Gardens, where its 'profuse and persistent flowering' was noted by the superintendent of gardens in his report of 1903.[4] By the second decade of the twentieth century, the bauhinia had been planted as an ornamental flowering plant across the colony: in the colonial cemetery, along the tramline, in the grounds of the government's offices, and by the racecourse.[5] The history of the bauhinia—the persistent speculation over its non-'native' provenance and its likely importation to Hong Kong Island by Westerners,[6] its cultivation in the Botanical Gardens, and from thence its indigenization across the colony—exemplifies the extent to which Hong Kong's urban history has been inseparable from its 'natural' history.

[3] See Sheila Jasanoff, 'The Idiom of Co-Production' in Sheila Jasanoff (ed.), *States of Knowledge: The Co-Production of Science and Social Order* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp.1–12 (pp. 2–3).

[4] S. T. Dunn, 'Report on the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (11 April 1904), *Hong Kong Government Gazette* [hereafter, *GG*], Vol. 50, No. 38 (17 June 1904), pp. 1128–1135 (p.1129).

[5] W. J. Tutcher, 'Report on the Botanic and Forestry Department' (23 March 1917), *Hong Kong Administrative Reports* [hereafter, *AR*] (1916), Appendix N, pp. 1–22 (pp. 5–6).

[6] C. P. Lau, L. Ramsden, and R. M. Saunders, 'Hybrid Origin of "*Bauhinia Blakeana*" (Leguminosae: Caesalpinioideae), Inferred Using Morphological, Reproductive, and Molecular Data', *American Journal of Botany*, Vol. 92, No. 3 (2005), pp. 525–533.

Three principal arguments are thus developed in this article, which engages with a growing body of scholarship on imperial 'environmental anxieties' in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—particularly in relation to deforestation, soil erosion, and desertification in Asia.[7] First, the article maintains that the afforestation of Hong Kong from the 1870s (and particularly the 1880s) entailed both the material and symbolic transformation of the land. While greening schemes legitimated the instruments of colonial government through their claims to be 'progressive' and their avowed mission to 'improve' the world, 'landscape' underpinned and reinforced colonial hegemony, in effect functioning as an enveloping but invisible apparatus of power.[8] As James Duncan has suggested in his account of the politics of landscape interpretation in the central highlands of Ceylon, landscape can be understood as a signifying system that naturalizes the social order: 'the tangibility and apparent transparency of landscape features will tend to convince the local viewer of the landscape that the social, political, and economic relations that are enabled by its organization are naturally or even divinely ordained'.[9]

Second, the article contends that while the impetus to afforest Hong Kong was driven by medical and sanitary concerns, the ideal of a 'verdant' Hong Kong fed into an imperial British imaginary that sought to mould the indigenous and insalubrious 'Chinese' landscape—a 'naked tropical rock'[10]—into an ornamental forestscape that interpolated and naturalized racial and social divides, releasing

[7] There is a large and growing bibliography on forestry, empire, and environmentalism, particularly in a South Asian context; see, for example, Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wilderness in Western India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Kathirithamby-Wells, *Nature and Nation*; S. Ravi Rajan, *Modernizing Nature: Forestry and Imperial Eco-Development, 1800–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006). Yet, there has been little focus on empire and forestry in South East Asia, including Hong Kong; see, however, Fa-ti Fan, *British Naturalists in Qing China: Science, Empire and Cultural Encounter* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004). James Beattie discusses empire-wide and local expressions of imperial 'environmental anxieties' in *Empire and Environmental Anxiety: Health, Science, Art and Conservation in South Asia and Australasia, 1800–1920* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[8] For an account of the shifting meanings of 'improvement' in relation to botany, empire, and the expansion of government powers, see Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 85–128.

[9] James S. Duncan, *The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 17–18.

[10] J. M. Price, 'Tree Planting' (28 August 1877), *GG*, Vol. 23, No. 50 (17 November 1877), pp. 506–509 (pp. 507–508).

the island's potential productivity in a landscape of 'beauty and healthfulness'.[11] The colony was frequently and explicitly abstracted into a sexualized and gendered terrain, with the 'naked' and 'barren' landscape (Victoria) imagined as an indecently exposed and brutalized female body whose virtue and reproductive order were to be restored by the rejuvenation and regulation of the land.[12]

Third, the article maintains that colonial afforestation efforts should be understood not simply in terms of a 'dynamic of possession and innocence', or as the enactment of colonial expansion, but rather as a transcultural negotiation which may yield critical insights into the 'interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters'. A study of afforestation, this article suggests, illuminates the social and political processes taking place in the 'contact zone', where colonial and native Chinese subjects were 'constituted in and by their relations to each other'.[13] As Abbas intimates, the space of disappearance marks 'the moment of asignification' when singular notions of identity give way to hybridity and 'a postcolonial subject is invented'.[14]

While local circumstances in Hong Kong certainly acted to moderate empire-wide concerns about the dangers posed to health and productivity by an insalubrious 'tropical' nature,[15] the afforestation of Hong Kong nonetheless needs to be considered within a transcolonial and imperial context. As the surveyor general of Hong Kong, John M. Price, declared in 1877: 'In these efforts to introduce the beginnings of a tree vegetation, Hongkong owes much to the interest and kindness of sister colonies.'[16] The governments of Ceylon, Queensland, Mauritius, New South Wales, and the Straits Settlements, for example, all helped by donating specimens for planting on the hillsides of Hong Kong, while steamship companies and ship-owners offered free freight for

[11] See H. Morphy's analysis of colonialism, history and the construction of place in the context of Northern Australia; 'Colonialism, History and the Construction of Place: The Politics of Landscape in Northern Australia' in Barbara Bender (ed.), *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), pp. 205–243 (p. 206).

[12] As Anne McClintock has argued, race and gender are 'articulated categories'—that is categories which 'come into existence *in and through* relation to each other'; see *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 4–5.

[13] Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 6–7.

[14] Abbas, *Hong Kong,* p. 14.

[15] On the ways in which local settings moderated worldwide concerns, see Beattie, *Empire and Environmental Anxiety*.

[16] Price, 'Tree Planting', p. 507.

their transportation to the colony. In his report for 1879, Charles Ford, superintendent of the Government Gardens and Tree Planting Department, quoted extensively from Sir Joseph Hooker's 1878 report on the Royal Gardens, Kew, which envisaged an expansive 'chain of independent interchanges' predicated on public usefulness and the benefits of scientific research.[17] The contents of government dispatches and official correspondence further underscore the extent to which local planting activities and public works were considered within a wider international setting of botanical research, imperial forestry, and hygiene.

Cultivating shade: greening the 'barren rock'

One classic trope of colonialism is 'enlightenment': the lifting of shadows and the dispersal of light on the dark, 'occluded corners of the tropical world'.[18] In Hong Kong, however, the emphasis was on the cultivation of shade in an 'intolerable', denuded, and unremittingly stark landscape, where the 'hot glaring tropical summers' threatened to overwhelm Europeans.[19] For colonists, the pre-British environment of Hong Kong was perceived, for the most part, as being poorly managed and largely under-utilized; a place of piracy, disorder, and disease. As the botanist George Bentham declared in his *Flora Hongkongensis*, summarizing earlier travellers' impressions, the island's 'general aspect, especially when viewed from the south-east during the dry or winter season, [is] barren and bleak in the extreme, and apparently denuded of anything like arboreal vegetation'.[20]

[17] Ford, 'Report from the Superintendent, Botanic and Afforestation Department' (15 April 1880), *GG*, Vol. 26, No. 23 (26 May 1880), pp. 433–437 (p. 435); see also Ford's insistence on the scientific importance of the Botanical Gardens in Great Britain, Colonial Office, General Correspondence: Hong Kong, Series 129 [hereafter, CO129] 183 (11 March 1878), pp. 282–286.

[18] James S. Duncan, *In the Shadows of the Tropics: Climate, Race and Biopower in Nineteenth-Century Ceylon* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 1–8 (p. 1).

[19] Ford, 'Report of the Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (22 February 1890), *GG*, Vol. 36, No. 20 (3 May 1890), pp. 363–371 (p.369).

[20] George Bentham, *Flora Hongkongensis: A Description of the Flowering Plants and Ferns of the Island of Hongkong* (London: Lovell Reeve, 1861), p. 7. Despite the recurrent descriptions of Hong Kong's environmental 'deficiencies', early travellers also noted how Hong Kong's 'barrenness' did not extend to the whole of the island; see *Flora Hongkongensis*, p. 8. Far from being a 'barren rock', pre-British Hong Kong was populated by agricultural and fishing communities; see James Hayes, 'Hong Kong

Hong Kong's progress from minor trading outpost in 1841 to major global hub by the end of the century (touted as the third largest port in the empire) was posited by contemporary commentators within the framework of a 'barren rock' legend, which pictured the economic transformation of the colony from pre-British 'barrenness' to colonial fecundity as an environmental transformation in which commercial and financial productivity found their correlates in the transfiguration of Hong Kong Island from denuded rock ('sterile and treeless') to 'a scene of greater verdant beauty'.[21]

The view of Hong Kong as a 'barren rock' persisted from the early 1840s when, on the island's accession by Britain, Lord Palmerston, the British foreign secretary, wrote to Captain Charles Elliot, British superintendent of trade in China, to complain that the outcome of the negotiations with China had been far from satisfactory. Echoing an anonymous letter in *The Times*, Palmerston declared that Britain had been ceded nothing but 'a barren rock with hardly a House on it'.[22] The 'barren rock' description gained ground, particularly from the second half of the 1850s, as the physical appearance of Hong Kong began to change with the expansion of its port and the development of Victoria. The surgeon and British diplomat Sir Rutherford Alcock, for example, wondered how the island's 'properties of unlimited granite and bare hills', formerly a 'pirate haunt', could have 'become the postal and financial terminus, or great centre' of commercial relations with China, its port humming with intercontinental business. 'What is the secret', he reflected, 'of this sudden and enormous growth in population and in trading importance, of a barren rock?' Although the island produced 'nothing but granite boulders and the thinnest scrub—beneath the hottest of suns, and least healthy of climates', nonetheless, trade converged on the island from all corners of the globe, drawn by a 'magnetic power', as if 'its hills and granite rocks were loadstone, and ships must needs be drawn within its landlocked

Island Before 1841', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch*, Vol. 24 (1981), pp. 105–142.

[21] Ford, 'Report of the Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (22 February 1890), p. 368. On the ways in which the colonial narrative of the 'barren rock' has been challenged, see Tak-Wing Ngo, 'Colonialism in Hong Kong Revisited' in Tak-Wing Ngo (ed.), *Hong Kong's History: State and Society Under Colonial Rule* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1–2; John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empire: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007 [2005]), pp. 164–165.

[22] Susanna Hoe and Derek Roebuck, *The Taking of Hong Kong: Charles and Clara Elliot in Chinese Waters* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009 [1999]), p. 158.

bay'.[23] British imports—namely the rule of law, together with a benign taxation system (the colony had no customs duty)— were, in Alcock's view, the principal reasons for the island's transformation.

The afforestation of Hong Kong was another visible sign of the munificent change wrought on the 'barren rock' by the British. The greening of the colony should perhaps be viewed, in this context, as part of an environmental 'engineering', planning, and regulation of the land, alongside other projects including the construction of the Pokfulam Reservoirs (1863, 1871), the Tai Tam Scheme (proposed in the 1870s, with the first phase completed in the 1880s), the establishment of sanitaria, and the founding of the dairy farm at Pokfulam in 1886 by the physician Sir Patrick Manson. Indeed, several years after Ford's appointment as superintendent of gardens in 1871, there was a move to assign the responsibility for forestry and tree-planting to the surveyor general. Governor Sir Arthur Kennedy made the gardens a sub-department of the surveyor general's office, leaving Ford in charge solely of the arboriculture department, while 'the management of the tree-planting remained in the hands of the Surveyor-General, assisted by Mr. Cerneau during most of the time, from February 1877, until December 1879'.[24] Like other public works, the task of afforesting the colony was conceived as an attempt to surmount the 'deficiencies' of Hong Kong's 'waste lands'[25] with the purpose of reconfiguring and 'improving' the impoverished terrain.[26]

As a state-sponsored project, tree-planting amplified and systematized the earlier and parallel greening endeavours of private citizens. While travellers to Hong Kong frequently noted the

[23] Sir Rutherford Alcock, *The Capital of the Tycoon: A Narrative of a Three Years' Residence in Japan*, Vol. 1 (London: Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1863), pp. 16–17.

[24] Ford, 'Report from the Superintendent, Botanic and Afforestation Department' (15 April 1880), p. 436. The tension between Price and Ford blew up into open hostility in 1878, with Price petitioning Sir Michael Hicks Beach at the Colonial Office for Ford's removal on the grounds that considerable funds would be spared if the post of superintendent were abolished and the responsibilities for forestry merged with those of the surveyor general. In the event, Price's proposal was rejected with a memorandum by Hooker that urged the government to extend, rather than curtail, the scope of Ford's activity.

[25] John Pope Hennessy, 'The Governor's Report on the Blue Book' (29 April 1881), *AR* (1879–1880), paragraph 128.

[26] There were, of course, contending visions of how the landscape was to be developed; see, for example, the superintendent's opposition to a proposal to run the new cable tramway to the Peak through part of the Public Gardens; Dunn, 'Minute on the Peak Tramway Bill by the Superintendent, Botanical and Forestry Department' (26 May 1909), *Sessional Papers* [hereafter, *SP*] (1909), pp. 41–42.

inhospitality of the physical environment, they also celebrated Western garden-building initiatives, which were construed as forms of frontier cultivation, involving a spatial reordering of the 'native' environment—in effect, a drive to enculturate the Chinese land. Private gardens were evoked as enclaves of peace and domesticity in an otherwise sterile and hostile land. The writer Albert Smith, for example, noted the many 'luxurious gardens' stocked with bamboos and flowering creepers belonging to the British residents who lived above Victoria. On a visit to breakfast with Thomas Anstey, the attorney general of Hong Kong, whose bungalow was sited on a spur of Victoria Peak, Smith observed that the house was 'surrounded by a large and pretty garden, a great ornament everywhere being a creeping convolvulus that covers everything'.[27] Similarly, on a social call to Sir John Bowring, he found the governor—an amateur botanist—in his well-stocked garden 'with a native, gathering flowers for the table'. Sir John demonstrated his botanical knowledge, pointing out 'a specimen of the "ribbon bamboo"', which he noted was also grown at Kew.[28]

These private greening projects were similarly connected to the development of the colony's botanical gardens, supervised by Charles Ford—a botanist by training who was also in charge of the colony's forestry department. First mooted in the 1840s, Governor Bowring had called for funds to establish a 'Public Botanical Garden', which were finally sanctioned by the secretary of state in 1856 and opened to the public in 1864.[29] The gardens were invariably represented as an oasis of green in an otherwise parched landscape. As James Cantlie observed:

> The Botanical Gardens are at once an ornament and of high scientific value. The director of the gardens has done good work, not only by importing and growing rare plants and trees, but has completely altered the aspect of the island and converted it from a bare rock into a miniature forest.[30]

[27] Albert Smith, *To China and Back: Being a Diary Kept Out and Home* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1859), p. 23.

[28] Ibid, p. 29.

[29] D. A. Griffiths and S. P. Lau, 'The Hong Kong Botanical Gardens, a Historical Overview', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch*, Vol. 26 (1986), pp. 55–77 (pp. 58–60); see also D. A. Griffiths, 'A Garden on the Edge of China: Hong Kong, 1848', *Garden History*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1988), pp. 189–198.

[30] Cantlie, 'Hong-Kong', in *The British Empire, Vol. 1: India, Ceylon, Straits Settlements, British North Borneo, Hong-Kong*, with an introduction by Sir R. West (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1899), p. 520.

The island's greening is conceived as an aggrandizement of the gardens; forestry is an extension of preliminary horticultural interventions. As Ford noted in an 1876 report to Kew:

> cultivation of trees has been extended in a new direction, the rearing and planting of *Pinus sinensis* on the hills. Before this was done, trees were only planted along the streets and roads for shade; but now we annually plant many thousands on hills above and surrounding the town.[31]

Colonial planting initiatives thus extended the garden enclave to include the city and surrounding land, thereby recuperating the scorched, unwholesome space of the colony. The aim, in effect, was to transform Hong Kong into a giant enclave; a bounded and self-sufficient zone of leisure, beauty, and productivity.[32] The Edenic garden-as-island trope here overlapped with an appreciation of Hong Kong's 'real' island topography.[33]

The concerted planting of the colony, particularly from the 1880s, was represented in books, articles, and official reports in terms of 'progress', 'transformation', and the unlocking of a dormant potential.[34] As the botanist Robert Fortune—dispatched to China by the Royal Horticultural Society—had noted of Hong Kong as early as 1843, even the nature of the island's infertile soil, which he deemed unconducive to luxuriant vegetation and fundamentally 'unhealthy', could be 'overcome by the liberality of the Government, or even by the

[31] Griffiths and Lau, 'The Hong Kong Botanical Gardens', p. 65.

[32] See the arguments made by Robert Peckham and David M. Pomfret, who note that 'the era of colonial public health should perhaps be understood, not in terms of the demise of enclavism, but rather as its radical reaffirmation'; 'Introduction: Medicine, Hygiene, and the Re-ordering of Empire' in Robert Peckham and David M. Pomfret (eds), *Imperial Contagions: Medicine, Hygiene, and Cultures of Planning in Asia* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), pp. 1–14 (p. 4).

[33] For an account of island metaphors in colonial discourse, see Aparna Vaidik, who notes the ambiguity of islands as Edenic and 'wild' spaces: 'The Wild Andamans: Island Imageries and Colonial Encounter' in Deepak Kumar, Vinita Damodaran, and Rohan D'Souza (eds), *The British Empire and the Natural World: Environmental Encounters in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 11–42; for a comparative perspective on the island trope in nineteenth-century Europe, see Robert S. Peckham, 'The Uncertain State of Islands: National Identity and the Discourse of Islands in Nineteenth-Century Britain and Greece', *Journal of Historical Geography*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2003), pp. 499–515; on 'tropical' islands within the context of utopian, physiocratic, and medical thinking in the history of environmentalist ideas, see, classically, Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[34] See R. L. Bryant, 'Romancing Colonial Forestry: The Discourse of "Forestry as Progress" in British Burma', *Geographical Journal*, Vol. 162, No. 2 (1996), pp. 169–172.

energy and taste of private individuals'. Fortune pointed to the trees 'growing beautifully' in the grounds of some of the island's prominent residences as evidence to support his prediction that Hong Kong had the capacity to 'become in a few years very different from what it now is'.[35]

Charles Ford and tree-planting in Hong Kong

Although, as Richard Corlett has noted, Hong Kong provides an early (sub)tropical example of afforestation in Asia,[36] surprisingly little has been written about the cultural history of the land, including the acclimatization of non-indigenous species in the colony or Hong Kong's afforestation programme in the late nineteenth century.[37] In 1871, under the governorship of Sir Richard MacDonnell, and at the suggestion of Hooker, the botanist Charles Ford was appointed superintendent of the government gardens. In 1872, the Government Gardens and Tree Planting Department was formally constituted, a title changed in 1880 to the Botanic and Afforestation Department, and subsequently to the Botanical and Forestry Department in 1905.[38] As superintendent, Ford initiated and oversaw the planting of several million trees on Hong Kong Island, Lantau, and Kowloon. Ford was also in charge of planting shade-trees along streets and roads, landscaping Government House and public amenity spaces, including

[35] Robert Fortune, *Three Years' Wanderings in the Northern Provinces of China: Including a Visit to the Tea, Silk, and Cotton Countries* (London: John Murray, 1847), p. 12.

[36] Richard T. Corlett, 'Environmental Forestry in Hong Kong: 1871–1997', *Forest Ecology and Management*, Vol. 116, Nos 1–3 (1999), pp. 93–105 (p. 93). Corlett suggests that deforestation most likely occurred in the period between 1300 and 1600 CE. For accounts of the human impact on the flora of Hong Kong, see: 'Human impact on the Flora of Hong Kong Island' in Nina G. Jablonski (ed.), *The Changing Face of East Asia During the Tertiary and Quaternary* [Proceedings of the Fourth Conference on the Evolution of the East Asian Environment] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), pp. 400–412; P. A. Daley, 'Man's Influence on the Vegetation of Hong Kong' in L. B. Thrower (ed.), *The Vegetation of Hong Kong: Its Structure and Change* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1995), pp. 44–56; David Dudgeon and Richard Corlett, *Hills and Streams: An Ecology of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1994).

[37] See, however, Griffiths and Lau, 'The Hong Kong Botanical Gardens'; Fan, *British Naturalists*, p. 65.

[38] Frederick Flippance, 'Report of the Botanic and Forestry Department', *AR* (1939), Appendix N, pp. 1–17 (p. 1).

the Cemetery.[39] He supervised a wide range of activities that included seed collecting, seed drying, seed sowing in nurseries, transplanting the plants from nurseries to the hills, pruning, thinning, and watering, alongside general supervision.[40]

In 1877, at the insistence of Governor Pope Hennessy, the Legislative Council had agreed to increase the budget of the Botanic Gardens by 2,000 dollars[41] 'to be expended on forming nurseries for seedlings and paying a regularly organised staff of tree planters' in order 'to transform the appearance of this island, and permanently improve its sanitary conditions'.[42] Previously some 700 dollars had been set aside for tree planting, but by 1880 the governor was reporting an annual budget of 10,000 dollars, with the number of trees rising steadily from 1877, when an estimated 15,000 were planted.[43] According to Ford's annual reports, 777,914 trees were planted in 1881, and 1,096,230 in 1882 (including seeds sown *in situ*).[44] By 1880, bamboos in ravines and on hilltops, and maturing banyan trees were transmuting 'glaring roads to green avenues with a rapidity that would surprise arboriculturists in Europe'.[45] With this expansion of forested land came 'a corresponding increase in departmental responsibilities'.[46] Reflecting on his achievements in 1890, Ford declared that the colony had been physically transformed through the systematic planting of trees:

[39] Ken Nicolson, *The Happy Valley: A History and Tour of the Hong Kong Cemetery* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), p. 37.

[40] On Ford's remuneration for this diverse work, see the correspondence: CO 129/230 (1 February 1886), pp. 490–497; CO 129/230 (6 August 1886), pp. 448–453; CO 129/230 (19 August 1886), pp. 453–456.

[41] A number of currencies were in use in Hong Kong during the nineteenth century, including Spanish and Mexican silver dollars. In 1862/3 the government made the silver dollar legal tender, issuing its own coinage; see William F. Spalding, *Eastern Exchange Currency and Finance*, 3rd edition (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1920 [1917]), pp. 316–335.

[42] 'Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council' (12 November 1877), *GG*, Vol. 23, No. 51 (24 November 1877), pp. 521–528 (p. 525); Pope Hennessy, 'The Governor's Report on the Blue Book' (29 April 1881), paragraph 129.

[43] Ibid, paragraph 128.

[44] However, there is some ambiguity in the estimates of trees planted, with discrepancies in the statistics reported in different official documents. Ford, 'Report from the Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (22 March 1882), GG, Vol. 28, No. 13 (25 March 1882), pp. 324–327 (p. 326); Ford 'Report from the Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (4 April 1883), *GG*, Vol. 29, No. 17 (14 April 1883), pp. 344–349 (p. 349).

[45] Pope Hennessy, 'The Governor's Report' (29 April 1881), paragraph 133.

[46] Flippance, 'Report of the Botanical and Forestry Department' (1939), p. 1.

The portions of the island on which planted trees have attained sufficient dimensions to catch the eye from adjacent or distant roads on which the public travel have effected a most marked and beautiful effect compared with the once barren and naked appearance of the hills. Only the older residents who are of an observant nature can fully appreciate the great change which has been effected, but even those who are new to the Colony cannot fail to form a most favourable opinion of the enhanced beauties of scenery when they imagine what the treeless aspect of the hills was before re-afforestation was taken in hand.[47]

Ford's work was continued after 1903 by his successors as superintendent, Stephen Troyte Dunn and William James Tutcher.[48] By 1938 an estimated 18 of Hong Kong Island's 32 square miles was covered by forest.[49]

Clearly, the relatively small-scale afforestation programme and the negligible economic role of forestry in Hong Kong stand in contrast to the extensive and valuable hardwood forestry concerns in India, Malaya, Borneo, and elsewhere in the British empire. In Hong Kong, the systematic exploitation of forests for timber was rarely contemplated and remained very much subsidiary to efforts aimed at suppressing 'the denudation of unprotected areas' with a view to dealing with 'water conservation and erosion problems'.[50] As Ford asserted, 'in Hongkong the money value of tree planting is not the object in view',[51] although in deciding which species of trees should be planted he considered their value 'for timber and other economic uses'.[52] With the increase in the scale of afforestation and a lack of forestry staff, the department began contracting out

[47] Ford, 'Report of the Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (25 June 1891), *GG*, Vol. 37, No. 32 (18 July 1891), pp. 572–580 (p. 577).

[48] Dunn and Tutcher were the coauthors of *The Flora of Kwangtung and Hong Kong (China)* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1912).

[49] Flippance, 'Report of the Botanic and Forestry Department' (1939), p. 3, 15.

[50] Ibid, p. 1; see, also, 'Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Colony of Hong Kong', *AR* (1939), p. 21. However, the possibilities that large-scale forestry in Hong Kong might supply the timber market for house-building and ship-building were discussed; see, in this context, the correspondence between the surveyor general and J. D. Humphreys in *GG*, Vol. 23, No. 50 (17 November 1877), p. 510. Ford had argued for the cultivation of camphor trees; see CO 129/163 (14 May 1905), pp. 490–493; CO 129/303, pp. 319–321.

[51] Ford, 'Report from the Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (4 April 1883), p. 348.

[52] Ford, 'Report from the Superintendent for the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (18 April 1881), *GG*, Vol. 28, No. 11 (11 March 1882), pp. 269–272 (p. 272).

seedling supply and planting work in the early 1880s.[53] Nonetheless, the scope of forestry operations remained circumscribed. The annual reports are punctuated by urgent requests for 'European assistance' and complaints about the menial work that the superintendent was compelled to perform as a result of limited staff who were 'quite unequal to the requirements of the office'.[54] The average number of daily temporary employees had risen to 58 by 1938 and 116 by 1939.[55]

Certainly, there were numerous setbacks to the colony's afforestation programme and there were those who questioned its success. In his report of 1888 to the secretary of state for the colonies, Governor Sir William Des Voeux was dismissive of Ford's efforts, remarking that there had been little discernible impact on the land. Although more than five-and-a-half million trees had reputedly been planted, 'from personal observation, a very large proportion of these plants have either failed altogether, or are merely stunted shrubs'.[56] Ten years previously, in a report of 28 August 1877, Price had noted acerbically: 'If our planting operations were continued at their present tortoise speed . . . it would take us eleven hundred years to complete the job.'[57] And he went on to declare:

> However imposing this array of figures may look upon paper the result is by no means so telling on the ground itself, and it is somewhat disheartening to think that after all, the entire seventy-six thousand trees have only sufficed to dot here and there a few streets and suburban roads, a ravine, or two of Victoria Peak, and to cover but sparsely the small, isolated and insignificant patches of incipient forest to be seen on the mountain slopes overlooking the harbour, and which, from the contrast of their greenness and luxuriance,

[53] Ford, 'Report from the Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (4 April 1883), p. 347.

[54] Ford, 'Report from the Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (25 June 1891), p. 572; see also, CO 129/206 (20 November 1882), pp. 220–228.

[55] Department staff included two senior officers (one part-time), three intermediate officers, three foresters, 13 forest guards and 35 'others'; see Flippance, 'Report of the Botanical and Forestry Department' (1939), p. 5. The frequent failures of contractors to fulfil their planting contracts forced the Botanical and Forestry Department to take over the large forestry operations previously carried out by contractors in 1907; see Dunn, 'Report on the Botanical and Afforestation Department', *GG* [Supplement No. 15] (31 July 1908), pp. 417–434 (p. 421).

[56] 'Report on the Condition and Prospects of Hongkong by his Excellency Sir G. William Des Voeux, Governor' (31 October 1889), *SP* (1889), pp. 289–304 (p. 297).

[57] Pope Hennessy, 'The Governor's Report on the Blue Book' (29 April 1881), paragraph 128.

serve like oases in the desert, only to remind one the more painfully of the glaring bareness of the surrounding hills.[58]

Particularly on the south-facing slopes, direct seeding was often pointless, while rain dislodged the soil and birds ate the seeds. Trees were thus cultivated in nurseries, rather than planted *in situ*, the nurseries providing a place:

> for raising a supply of trees for planting in situations where sowing *in situ* may be impracticable, and also for rearing other than pine trees which demand nursery treatment preparatory to planting, as it will be an object kept steadily in view to experiment with, and introduce, where successful, such foreign trees as are suitable for our soil, climate, and exposure, as will relieve the monotonous aspect of too much of any one kind of tree, besides, if possible, introducing others which may be valuable for timber or other economic uses.[59]

As Price described it, between November and December, the native head forester and five men, assisted by contracted 'coolies' went out over the mountains with large baskets and long iron crooks 'to gather the berries and seeds of the indigenous trees found growing in the more sheltered valleys of the Islands'. After drying, the seeds were sown in the nurseries and, when they were 12 inches high, 'taken out and transplanted on the hills overlooking the City and Harbour, and in other suitable places, the baldness of which they are gradually covering'.[60]

However, by the late 1880s, the Forestry Department was seeding directly onto the hillsides, 'without any preparation of the ground'.[61] Visitors and longer-term Hong Kong residents overwhelmingly shared Ford's belief that planting initiatives were substantially enhancing the colony's appearance. Writing in the 1890s, for example, James Hyde Clark commented on the 'lofty hills' which enclosed the Harbour, largely recycling the description of Hong Kong from the annual *Chronicle and Directory for China*, where the colony's slopes were described as being 'bare of foliage, except where trees have been planted near the city. But pleasingly green during the southwest monsoon. An extensive scheme of afforestation has, however, been lately commenced.' At

[58] Price, 'Tree Planting', p. 507.
[59] Ford, 'Report from the Superintendent, Botanical and Afforestation Department' (18 April 1881), p. 272.
[60] Price, 'Tree Planting', p. 507.
[61] Ford, 'Report of the Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (13 April 1888), *GG*, Vol. 34, No. 33 [Supplement] (14 July 1888), pp. 703–709 (p. 708).

night a constellation of lights twinkled from the houses amidst the trees, while the city's public gardens were lauded as 'unrivaled for beauty', and the 'thoroughfares' were deemed to be 'delightfully shaded with well-grown trees'.[62] The missionary and educationalist Ernst Eitel likewise noted how the planting of trees (albeit 'patchy') had begun to transform the 'vegetative surroundings' of Victoria into a bucolic setting in keeping with the colony's fine new colonial villas:

> the increased attention given to the cultivation of trees along the public roads and around European dwellings on the hill side, had already done very much to displace the pristine barrenness of the site on which the city was built by patches of beautiful shrubbery.[63]

Denuded China, verdant Hong Kong

One rationale for remodelling the natural environment was the impulse to differentiate British-controlled Hong Kong from the mainland, which was frequently evoked by travellers and colonial officials as impoverished, badly managed, unproductive, and unhealthy. As a British traveller noted in 1853, 'throughout the entire country, with the exception of the gardens belonging to some temple or joss, scarce a tree is ever seen that would make an Irish shillelah'.[64] This pitiable, denuded environment, in turn, was taken to reflect the indolent and backward character of the Chinese peasantry who inhabited it. Reporting in 1898 on the British leasing of the New Territories, for example, the *British Medical Journal* noted:

> Here, as elsewhere, the country is destitute of trees. China is practically devoid of forests; the Chinaman cuts down every tree as though it were a curse. Fuel, in spite of the immense coal fields to be met with almost everywhere in China, is scarce and dear, and the peasantry dig up the roots of every patch of grass they can lay hold of. Since the British acquired Hong Kong over fifty years ago, the aspect of the island has been largely changed. Trees have been planted abundantly, and what was once a bare granite rock has

[62] James Hyde Clark, *Story of China and Japan: Embracing Their Geographical Positions* (Philadelphia: Oriental Publishing, 1894), p. 118; see, also, *The Chronicle and Directory for China, Corea, Japan etc.* (Hong Kong: Hongkong Daily Press, 1884), p. 243.

[63] Ernest J. Eitel, *Europe in China: The History of Hong Kong from the Beginning to the Year 1882* (Hong Kong: Kelly & Walsh, 1895), p. 403.

[64] Arthur Augustus Thurlow Cunynghame, *An Aide-de-Camp's Recollections of Service in China, a Residence in Hong Kong, and Visits to Other Islands in the Chinese Seas*, Vol. 2 (London: Saunders and Otley, 1844), p. 150.

been enhanced in beauty and healthfulness by the work of the afforestation department.[65]

China is characterized in this passage by a bareness, a 'destitution' that reflects a fundamental Chinese backwardness and aversion to technological progress (the failure, for example, to exploit its extensive coalfields). If the Chinese are construed as inherently superstitious ('cutting down every tree as though it were a curse'), they are also represented as primitives who 'dig up the roots of every patch of grass' in a manner reminiscent of foraging beasts. Finally, the geology of the land, with its 'bare granite rock', presents an impediment to growth, which the resourceful and diligently industrious colonial state must overcome through 'work' in order to produce 'beauty and healthfulness'. There is a moral dimension to this landscape; efforts to surmount physical impediments with assiduous labour acquire an ethical tinge.

Hong Kong is represented in this literature—at least, botanically speaking—as a 'fallen world', where the trees that once covered the island have been systematically felled by the benighted and indigent natives.[66] There is an implicit tension in such views between a geological explanation for Hong Kong's destitution—the 'masses of bare, blackened rocks'—and a socio-cultural reasoning that attributes deforestation to the reckless behaviour of the Chinese population. In his report of 1907, Dunn, Ford's successor as superintendent of the Botanical and Forestry Department, noted:

> It is evident to the most casual observer that primeval forest has almost ceased to exist in this part of China. There can be little doubt that our valleys and probably the greater part of our mountains were once plentifully clothed with luxuriant virgin forest.[67]

The once sylvan isle is suggestively gendered and depicted by Dunn in terms of a productive modesty and virtue ('plentifully clothed with luxuriant virgin forest'). While the destruction of the forests is attributed to the negligent Chinese, the replanting is implicitly equated with the restoration of a despoiled innocence and healthy (re)productivity by the British. There is an implication that the 'virgin' land has been raped by the brutalizing Chinese, while Dunn's

[65] 'The Extension of Hong Kong from a Sanitary Point of View', *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1955 (18 June 1898), pp. 1608–1609 (p. 1608).
[66] Ibid.
[67] Dunn, 'Report on the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (1908), p. 506.

repetition of the possessive pronoun ('our valleys', 'our mountains') accentuates British entitlement to the land and suggests that rights of ownership derive, at least in part, from the 'healing' endeavours of the patriarchal colonial sate aimed at restoring the island's 'virgin' dignity. The abstraction of the land into a sexualized and gendered topos suggests the extent to which the 'greening' of the colony functioned as 'an organizing trope for other social forms', echoing McClintock's argument about the ways in which imperial power, economic production, and an emergent 'global order of cultural knowledge' took shape '*in and through* relation to each other'.[68]

Assumptions about Hong Kong's defective geology were also frequently evoked to explain the colony's inimical environment. The insalubrity of the island's geological foundations ('decomposing granite') continued to be cited as an explanation for the scarcity of vegetation and the prevalence of disease. In his Sanitary Report of 1882, Osbert Chadwick began by describing Hong Kong's 'bare slope', drawing implicit connections between the island's geology, its barrenness, and the propensity for infection:

> A few small patches of garden cultivation in the valleys are the only agriculture. The bare slopes of the hills afford pasture to a few goats and cattle. With these exceptions the island is uncultivated, and judging from the soil, and from the state of the adjacent and similar country on the main land, it does not appear likely to come under cultivation, to any great extent.[69]

While concentrating primarily on the built environment and the unsanitary conditions of Chinese dwellings in Taipingshan, Chadwick telescopes in from the island's shattered geology, observing that most of 'the soil on which the city is built is derived from the decomposition of granite or other primitive rock'.[70] The language, here, reflects the application of cultural and racial categories (and a terminology redolent of degeneration theory) to the physical environment, which is implicitly described as reverting back through a process of atrophy to the 'primitive'.

In such accounts, the yardstick for success is invariably measured in terms of the visible transformation of a depleted and

[68] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 5.

[69] Osbert Chadwick, 'Report on the Sanitary Condition of Hong Kong' in *Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 26. China: Correspondence, Annual Reports, Conventions, and Other Papers Relating to the Affairs of Hong Kong 1882–99* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1971 [1882]), pp. 97–160, 99–100.

[70] Ibid, p. 97.

unprepossessing land. Aesthetic sensibilities—the look of the land—become inseparable from concerns about health and sterility.[71] Sir James Cantlie, founder, with Manson, of the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese in 1887, prefaced his account of Hong Kong with the observation that:

> ... although nature has done little to beautify the island, the Colonial Government, since the island has been acquired, has devoted laudable pains to make up for the defects in natural afforestation, by planting trees in profusion, so that now there is an arboreal clothing of no mean extent.[72]

The emphasis, here, is on the conversion of an unsightly bareness—'defects' in Cantlie's words—into a picturesque 'scenery'. The drive to embellish and uplift the impoverished land through environmental interventions was certainly one spur to colonial afforestation. As Mann and Sehrawat have demonstrated, in India the planting of the Delhi Ridge from 1883 was in large measure an attempt to set the scene for colonial power.[73] In the same way, albeit on a miniature scale, the spur of Mount Gough above Kennedy Road in Hong Kong was planted at the suggestion of the governor, Sir John Pope Hennessy, with large bamboos, oaks, pines, and banyans, expressly to transform the skyline of the ridge. 'The effect is very good', Ford remarked in his annual report, 'and the plantation is a marked improvement to the scenery'.[74]

This conflation of aesthetics with industry characterizes descriptions of Western settlements in China, which are depicted by Western travellers and colonial officials as a harmonious congruence of industry and nature. In effect, the cantonments are gardens writ large. European settlements in China are places where industrialization coexists with a verdant nature. The 'rootedness' of the colonial or quasi-colonial presence is pitted against the 'deracinated', migratory Chinese population that threatens to overwhelm the harmonious

[71] On early nineteenth-century European responses to tropical lands 'as an object of colonial fear and desire, utility and aesthetics', see David Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape, and Science, 1800–1856* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), p. 3.

[72] James Cantlie, 'Hong-Kong', pp. 498–531, 499.

[73] Michael Mann and Samiksha Sehrawat, 'A City With a View: The Afforestation of the Delhi Ridge, 1883–1913', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2009), pp. 543–570.

[74] Ford, 'Report from the Superintendent for the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (18 April 1881), p. 272.

enclave.[75] James Recalton's turn-of-the-century account of the European concession in Canton, for example, begins with the depiction of 'a group of mission children gathered under the shade of a range of large banyan-trees'.[76] Established on an island in the Pearl River (Shameen Island), the European concession is evoked as an Eden where efficient productivity, leisure, and beauty coexist, and where modernity and nature are at one:

> ... a bower of beauty; the rows of the modern buildings are flanked by magnificent banyan-trees ... There are beautiful flower-gardens, tennis-courts, cycle-paths and avenues of trees.[77]

While birds flock to this island paradise, its salutary influence emanates out into the chaotic and denuded Chinese districts. Similarly, European Shanghai is characterized by its industry (a place 'where all is bustle and activity'). Here, '[t]he streets are broad, well macadamized and lined with beautiful trees', while '[t]he houses are surrounded by gardens filled with fragrant shrubs and flowers'.[78] Conversely, Chinese areas are defined by their lack of industry and by an absence of verdure and beauty. Tall chimneys are 'symbols of modern manufacturing industry that cannot be Chinese', just as the telegraph wires point to 'a busy, ceaseless, commercial enterprise that is not Chinese', and the 'well-paved streets lined with shade-trees' and 'green lawns' are self-evidently foreign.

Chinese nature and colonial disavowal

As many commentators observed, the toponym 'Hong Kong', meaning 'fragrant harbour', may have originated from the incense trees, native to Southern China, that once grew there in abundance (incense trees were processed as joss sticks and exported from the port-city globally). As one reader noted in the pages of the *Hongkong Daily Press* in 1873:

[75] William Lobscheid, *A Few Notices on the Extent of Chinese Education and the Government Schools of Hongkong; with Remarks on the History and Religious Notes of the Inhabitants of this Island* (Hong Kong: China Mail, 1859), p. 26.

[76] James Recalton, *China Through the Stereoscope: A Journey Through the Dragon Empire at the Time of the Boxer Uprising* (London and New York: Underwood & Underwood, 1901), p. 57.

[77] Ibid, pp. 57–58.

[78] Ibid, p. 77.

Little Hong Kong, or Heung-kong-wai, is said to have been so called on account of the quantity of Pak, mu-hiung-shu then growing there, the wood of these white-wood fragrant trees is called 'Nga-heung' (i.e. fragrant wood white as a tooth), is odoriferous when burned, and although the wood-cutters have left but few trees there and at Wong-nei-chung, yet formerly it grew abundant there.[79]

While colonials descried the plundering of the lush landscape by Chinese woodcutters, the lexical archaeology of the toponym—in effect a celebration of the landscape's luxuriance—paradoxically emphasized the importance attached by the 'native' Chinese population to the island's plant-life.

A tension is manifest between recognition of a long history of Chinese respect for—and cultivation of—the land, and a dismissal of that history as a story of rape and pillage based on the assumption that 'the want of appreciation for open spaces and fresh air [is a] characteristic of the Chinese race'.[80] If the Chinese mainland was often viewed as 'denuded', it could also be depicted as lush and well-stocked with varieties of 'interesting' plant specimens. Ford, for example, in his capacity as superintendent of gardens, undertook expeditions into the Chinese hinterland 'for the exploration of its rich and interesting botanical treasures'. On one such trip to the mainland, Ford collected 'upwards of 850 living plants', in addition to 320 dried species for the herbarium.[81]

Thus, even as the Chinese were being castigated for their destruction of the colony's vegetation—and their superstitious reactions to colonial public works, such as the 'abject terror and fright' provoked by the cutting of a road to Happy Valley[82]—other commentators were noting the cultural significance of trees and plant-life for the local population.[83] Eitel, in his book *Feng-shui*

[79] 'The Name of Hong Kong', *Hongkong Daily Press* (5 February 1873), p. 2.

[80] Price, 'Site for Central School' (25 April 1876), *GG*, Vol. 23, No. 50 (17 November 1877), p. 501.

[81] Ford, 'Report from the Superintendent, Botanic and Afforestation Department' (30 April 1884), *GG* [Supplement] (24 May 1883), pp. 466–477 (p. 470). On Ford's trips to Mainland China, see the correspondence: CO 129/202 (20 September 1882), pp. 593–596 and CO 129/206 (8 July 1882), pp. 166–169.

[82] 'When the Hongkong Government cut a road, known as the Gap, to the Happy Valley, the Chinese community was thrown into a state of abject terror and fright, on account of the disturbance which this amputation of the dragon's limbs would cause to the Feng-shui of Hongkong . . . '; see Ernest J. Eitel, *Feng-shui, or, The Rudiments of Natural Science in China* (London: Trübner & Co., 1873), p. 2.

[83] See 'Notes on the Vegetation of the West River', *Hongkong Daily Press* (4 September 1882), p. 2.

(1873), for example, argued that although the Chinese may not have developed inductive natural sciences, they had nonetheless evolved an appreciation and 'sacred reverence for the divine powers of nature'.[84] In successful British greening activities, the Chinese saw an expression and mastery of geomancy:

> Hongkong, with its abundance of rock and boulders scattered about on the hillside, abounds accordingly in malign breath, and the Chinese think our Government very wise in endeavouring to plant trees everywhere on the hill to screen these harbingers of evil.[85]

There is an overlap, Eitel suggests, between miasmic and zymotic beliefs and the Chinese tradition that 'the best means to keep off and absorb [such] noxious exhalations is to plant trees at the back of your abode'. In contrast to the descriptions of a 'denuded' China, Eitel claims that trees are central to feng shui and that 'in South China every village, every hamlet, every isolated house has a little grove of bamboos or trees behind it'.[86]

Plants, too, were central to Chinese medicine, and during the plague epidemic in 1894 Ford noted how the local Chinese collected the stems of native tree-ferns to use in a 'cooling beverage' for plague patients.[87] Indeed, the putative medicinal dimension of plants was acknowledged by colonial elites who took an interest in Chinese folklore and medical practice. Under Ford's supervision, botany was incorporated as a field of study within the basic science syllabus of the newly established College of Medicine for Chinese established at the Alice Memorial Hospital in 1887.[88] Ford himself collaborated with the physician Kai Ho on the study of Chinese materia medica or the 'many interesting substances used in medicine by the Chinese'.[89] Landscape thus involved, on one hand, specific forms of colonial disavowal, and on the other hand, it furnished a 'contact zone' wherein colonial

[84] Eitel, *Feng-shui*, p. 5.
[85] Ibid, p. 53.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ford, 'Report on the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (27 May 1895), *GG*, Vol. 61, No. 28 (8 June 1895), pp. 657–671 (p. 661).
[88] Manson, Cantlie and William Hartigan, who had formed a joint medical practice in Hong Kong, taught other areas in the syllabus. On Ford's role in teaching botany to medical students, see Ford, 'Report of the Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (13 April 1888), p. 706.
[89] Charles Ford, Ho Kai, and William Edward Crow, 'Notes on Chinese Materia Medica', *China Review*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (1887), pp. 214–220 (p. 214).

and native Chinese assumptions were negotiated, challenged, and reassessed.

Yet, afforestation in Hong Kong also served to heighten the differences and tensions between colonial authorities and the Chinese population over the value and meaning assigned to the wooded landscape. As Ford noted in 1881: 'Afforestation consists not merely of *planting* trees but of conservation and preservation from wanton and accidental destruction of trees, shrubs, and seeds at present on the ground.' With this expansive remit in mind, 'forests guards' were appointed 'to check the destruction of, and damage to, tress and shrubs'.[90] The conflict over the use of the forests and the everyday 'resistance' of Chinese locals to the colonial state's forest management undermined the colonial discourse of forestry as 'progress'.[91] As early as 1863, two watchmen had been assigned by the police force to protect the Government Gardens.[92] In 1872, responsibility for the protection of the Gardens was transferred to the newly created Department of Government Gardens. A decade later two new posts of forest guards were established. As Ford reported:

> The people at Little Hongkong have again been very troublesome in cutting down and damaging trees near the village. These people have always stated that the work was done by boat people arriving in and making raids from Deep Water Bay. Recently I noticed in the woods a quantity of fine trees cut half through, and some cut quite down. The forest guards were set to watch the place constantly, and eventually a party was seen to come to work with saws and axes. When pursued, the people fled to the village, but the guards succeeded in capturing one of the party who was convicted and fined, since then no more tree cutting seems to have been done.[93]

Chinese villagers continued to undermine this vision of the island garden. In 1883 there were 25 arrests and 24 convictions for criminal acts in relation to the forests, with fines imposed by magistrates ranging from 24 cents to 10 dollars.[94] In 1885 the penalties imposed by magistrates increased with the possibility of up to three weeks'

[90] Ford, 'Report from the Superintendent, Botanic and Afforestation Department' (18 April 1881), p. 272.
[91] See Bryant, 'Romancing Colonial Forestry'.
[92] See Sheilah E. Hamilton, *Watching over Hong Kong: Private Policing, 1841–1941* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), pp. 83–87.
[93] Ford, 'Report from the Superintendent, Botanic and Afforestation Department' (4 April 1883), p. 348.
[94] Ford, 'Report on the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (4 February 1897), *SP* (1897), pp. 23–130 (p. 126).

imprisonment. By 1908, following a review and mapping of some 4,000 acres of forest in the New Territories (1905), the argument was being made by Dunn for the establishment of a Government Forestry Reserve, although lack of funds prevented the implementation of a forest preservation initiative.[95] Even when the Chinese did cultivate their flower gardens, they did so in ways that undermined the health benefits of their greening activities, for example, by 'manuring their plants and vegetables with offensive liquid manure' which helped to propagate disease and posed a serious threat to health.[96]

The ideal cantonment, as we have seen, was a place of industry and natural beauty, where work overlapped with leisure. Ford concluded his report of 1881 with the suggestion that opening up the 'thick and impenetrable' woods would help to counter the 'depredations of wood cutters' in two ways: first, by making it easier for the guards 'to patrol the woods efficiently', and, second, by rendering 'the woods accessible to pedestrians and picnic parties'. Ford suggests here that the role of the colony's forestry service is, in part, to tame the island, transforming 'impenetrable woods' into a domesticated leisure ground for colonial enjoyment. In effect, the purpose is to enculturate and thus recuperate the formerly 'impenetrable' land, rendering it 'a little more attractive by artificial means'. Such 'artificial means' entail Ford's suggested creation of a 'Japanese or Chinese tea garden' as a focal point to attract visitors.[97] Ironically, then, the Chinese are to be repulsed by enticing colonials; the 'depredations' of the Chinese 'woodcutters' are to be avoided by the addition of a Chinese ornamental garden to transform the woods into a place fitting for the gratification of Westerners.[98] Ford's suggestion, in other words, is to create a colonial picnic ground made safe from marauding Chinese woodcutters by the construction of idealized Asian topographic features (Chinese or Japanese), and the presence of patrolling forest guards.

[95] Dunn, 'Report on the Botanical and Forestry Department' (1908), p. 422.

[96] 'Petition of Residents at Western End of the City', Appendix A, *Report of the Commissioners to Enquire into the Cause of the Fever Prevailing in the Western District* (Hong Kong: Noronha, 1888), p. 1.

[97] Ford, 'Report from the Superintendent for the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (18 April 1881), p. 272.

[98] Although picnics posed dangers to the woods: a party which disembarked for a picnic at Deep Water Bay was responsible for one of the worst fires of 1893; Ford, 'Report from the Superintendent for the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (7 May 1894), *GG*, Vol. 40, No. 25 (12 May 1894), pp. 432–440 (p. 437).

As it is imagined by Ford, the landscape becomes a 'hybrid' in the sense that its Chinese or Asian identity is both denied and reaffirmed in the evocation of the 'Chinese' ornamental garden. Or, as the cultural theorist Homi Bhabha would have it, Ford's representation reverses 'the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other "denied" knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority'.[99] In a similar way, although Eitel notes local tensions between the Chinese and British over public works (such as the construction of the 'Gap' to Happy Valley which was deemed by the Chinese to contravene the premises of feng shui), the British are nonetheless construed as feng shui experts—indeed, they are better at reading the lay of the land than the Chinese, who recognize British geomantic skills:

> When foreign residents of Hongkong began to build villages in Pok-fool-lum (which Feng-shui declares to be the best site of the island), when the Government began to build a reservoir there, when tanks were built on the north side of Hongkong, and the hill-side studded with trees, when the cutting of the earth was forbidden in places where there is much decomposed rock, the Chinese in all of these cases supposed foreigners to know more about Feng-shui than they would tell, and the Surveyor General was put down as a profound adept in Feng-shui.[100]

This politicization of nature and the 'indigenization' of colonial knowledge (or the 'colonization' of indigenous knowledge) is exemplified in accounts of the bauhinia tree's 'discovery' in the 1880. As Dunn observed:

> The mysterious origin of the tree and its flowers at once arrest the interest. A tree of it was discovered between 20 and 30 years ago in the woods on Mount Davis from which it was introduced by its finder into the gardens of the Pokfulam Sanatorium and from there to the Botanic Gardens and to the Roman Catholic Cathedral at Canton. No fruit has yet been observed on these trees; they are therefore probably not native here, but, so far, all efforts to identify them with any foreign species have failed.[101]

Referred to by Dunn as the Hong Kong Orchid Tree, it was formally named *Bauhinia blakeana* after the governor, Sir Henry Blake, an amateur botanist.[102] This often-reiterated account of

[99] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 114.
[100] Eitel, *Feng-shui*, p. 3.
[101] Dunn, 'Report on the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (11 April 1904), p. 1129.
[102] Dunn, , 'New Chinese Plants', *Journal of Botany*, Vol. 46 (1908), pp. 324–326.

the tree's discovery maps out the filaments of power that tie the landscape (Mount Davis) to health (sanatorium) and colonial authority (Botanical Gardens, Roman Catholic Cathedral).

Trees, hygiene, and health

Despite the emotive appreciation of tropical and sub-tropical landscapes, they were also viewed as dangerous places of lurking disease and threat.[103] The suffocating luxuriance of tropical vegetation was singled out by William John Simpson, professor of hygiene at King's College London (and author of an influential 1903 report on the plague in Hong Kong) who noted the dangers of trees in proximity to human habitation. 'Short grass beyond this is the most suitable and most healthy kind of vegetation to be near a house', he observed. 'Trees ought not to be so close as to obstruct the ventilation or tend to make the house damp.'[104]

While Sir Charles Bruce, erstwhile governor of Mauritius, emphasized 'the economic uses' of forest cultivation in the colonies, he identified seven further beneficial contributions of forestry cultivation, namely: preservation of the soil and of the water supply, protection against injurious air circulations, the benefit to public health, prevention of avalanches, and the role of forests in the defence of the country.[105] As Dane Kennedy has observed in his account of the hill stations of the British Raj, while trees and 'vegetative matter' had earlier been seen as threats to human health, 'by the second half of the nineteenth century, it was the absence rather than the presence of trees that aroused anxiety'.[106] In his study *Health in the Tropics*, W. J. Moore argued that the scope of 'sanitary art' extended from the built environment to the management of 'nature':

> Thus the different essentials which unite in producing any given climate, the direction of the winds, the presence or absence of ozone, the rainfall,

[103] David Arnold, 'Envisioning the Tropics: Joseph Hooker in India and the Himalayas, 1848–1850' in Felix Driver and Luciana Martins (eds), *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), pp. 137–155 (p. 143).

[104] W. J. Simpson, *The Maintenance of Health in the Tropics*(London: John Bale and Danielsson, 1905), p. 35.

[105] Sir Charles Bruce, *The Broad Stone of Empire: Problems of Crown Colony Administration*, Vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 142–143.

[106] Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 54–55.

the temperature, the latitude and longitude, the presence or absence of rivers, marshes, forests, jungles, mountains, the geological formation of the ground, cultivation, the situation of trees, structure, position, and condition of buildings, draining, and in short, both the labours of man and the works of nature, *all* require due consideration under the head of sanitary science.[107]

Moore further declared that, in the tropics, the 'absence of trees is a certain cause of disease'. Conversely, other vegetation posed serious risks to health and, as a consequence, needed to be 'ruthlessly rooted up and destroyed'.[108]

From the 1880s, there was an increasing interest in plants as 'sanitary agents', a preoccupation with the 'chemico-vital action of woods', and concerns about the relation between vegetation and diseases such as malaria, as well as the 'protective influence of trees'.[109] Studies proliferated which considered, for example, the 'hygienic effects' of eucalyptus, pine, and camphor forests[110] and 'the extreme importance of afforestation' for human health.[111] The purpose of these works was broadly:

> to recognize and describe the far-reaching influences of forests and trees on climate, flow of water, erosion of the soil, shelter from wind, purity of air and water, etc. Such influences affect directly the health and comfort of man.[112]

These late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century arguments about vegetation, health, and disease provide an important context for the debates on afforestation in Hong Kong. The disease-inducing quality of plant-life—such as it was on Hong Kong Island—was a constant refrain, both in official publications and in the newspapers, where, particularly from the 1870s, editorials pondered the health properties of particular plants and trees.[113] In his report on the bubonic plague in 1894, James A. Lowson, acting superintendent of the Civil Hospital, had also noted that the 'Kennedytown Barracks provide a

[107] W. J. Moore, *Health in the Tropics, Or Sanitary Art Applied to Europeans in India* (London: John Churchill, 1862), p. 12.
[108] Ibid, p. 122.
[109] J. M. Anders, *Houseplants as Sanitary Agents; or, The Relation of Growing Vegetation to Health and Disease; Comprising also a Consideration of the Subject of the Practical Floriculture and of the Sanitary Interests of Forests and Plantations* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1887).
[110] C. T. Kingzett, *Nature's Hygiene: A Systematic Manual of Natural Hygiene* (London: Baillière, Tindall, & Co., 1888).
[111] Augustine Henry, *Forests, Woods and Trees in Relation to Hygiene* (London: Constable & Co., 1919), p. vi.
[112] Ibid, p. v.
[113] See, for example, 'The Virtues of the Eucalyptus', *China Mail* (23 March 1877), p. 3.

fairly good hospital, but its proximity to the trees of Mount Davis made it a hunting ground for flies and mosquitoes, which sometimes added greatly to our patients' sufferings.'[114]

The shifting scientific and biomedical understanding of the aetiology of infectious disease from the 1860s—miasmatic, zymotic, germ theory, contagionist, and anti-contagionist—influenced arguments about the imperative (or not) for afforesting the colony. As Worboys has argued in a British context, the elaboration of the germ theory in the 1870s and 1880s did not mark a sudden and decisive shift in theories of disease causation, as some have argued: in the late nineteenth century many different theories of disease causation coexisted, reflecting different understandings of the role played by the environment in the causation and propagation of disease.[115] Indeed, notions of the disequilibrating effects on colonial health of exotic and profuse (sub)tropical vegetation recapitulated earlier beliefs in health as a balance of 'humours'.[116]

Afforestation was invariably classified in administrative reports as a public health and sanitary concern. Tree-planting was argued, in part, on health grounds and 'barrenness' was frequently equated with disease. Efforts were made to protect the vegetation from 'abuse' by the local Chinese. Government notices declared the collecting of dried wood and the breaking or rooting up of any tree or shrub on Crown lands a criminal act 'liable to a heavy punishment'.[117] In 1878, a man was fined five dollars for cutting branches for firewood on Morrison Hill, Wanchai, and imprisoned for a fortnight when he could not pay the fine.[118] A Tree Preservation Ordinance was passed in 1888, empowering the governor 'to levy a special rate upon districts in which the mutilation or destruction of trees and plantations takes place'.[119] Within this drive to preserve trees, gardens were deemed models of

[114] James A. Lowson, 'The Epidemic of Bubonic Plague in Hong Kong, 1894' (1 March 1895), *GG*, Vol. 61, No. 16 (13 April 1895), pp. 369–422 (p. 395).

[115] Michael Worboys, *Spreading Germs: Diseases, Theories, and Medical Practice in Britain, 1865–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[116] For an analysis of how 'wild' frontier places were understood to exert a disruptive influence on the balance of the 'humours', see Conevery Bolton Valenčius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

[117] 'Police Notification' (29 March 1876), *GG*, Vol. 22, No. 14 (1 April 1876), p. 166.

[118] 'Destroying Trees', *Hongkong Daily Press* (6 April 1878), p. 2.

[119] Governor Des Voeux to Lord Knutsford, CO129/237 (4 April 1888), pp. 306–310.

a 'healthy' environment and a reminder of the need for cultivation. As Governor Sir Hercules Robinson remarked in 1861, the formation of public gardens would 'contribute to the embellishment of the City of Victoria and the health and enjoyment of its inhabitants'. High rates of mortality in Hong Kong were attributed to the insalubrious tropical weather, particularly in the early colonial years, leading the government to forest the island in the hope that this would improve the climate and reduce disease.[120]

Sir Michael Hicks Beach acknowledged in a dispatch to the governor that 'the subject of the preservation and reestablishment of forests as one of great and increasing importance, in which the health and prosperity of the Colony may be very deeply concerned'.[121] On the grounds of its reputed hygienic properties, in the 1870s there were experiments with cultivating the eucalyptus or 'blue gum' trees in Hong Kong: 'small plantations of which have been made in the more malarious districts of the Islands, with the view, when the trees shall have grown and spread, of testing their reputed prophylactic virtues'. As Price declared:

> It is unnecessary to descant upon the benefits which the realization of this project of increased tree-planting promises to Hongkong. It is universally acknowledged that the improved health of the Colony is in a great measure due to the little that has already been done in clothing the granite with arborescent vegetation. [122]

The governor noted in his report on the Blue Book for the year 1880: 'Of late years, the medical *dictum* about the fever-producing quality of trees has been reversed, and the sanitary advantage of tree planting established.'[123] A report commissioned to investigate a malarial fever outbreak in the colony's Western District in 1888 concluded that plants and trees were critical to the prevention of disease:

> The cultivation of plants, herbs and trees is of recent date in Hongkong, and it is possible that the afforestation has not even, where best developed, advanced sufficiently to produce the maximum good. In the Western District

[120] Fan, *British Naturalists in Qing China*, p. 65.

[121] Governor Sir Pope Hennessy to the Earl of Kimberley, CO 129/189 (2 August 1880), pp. 198–237.

[122] Price, 'Tree Planting' (28 August 1877), pp. 507, 509; 'Cultivation of the "Eucalyptus" in Hongkong', *GG*, Vol. 25, No. 12 (26 March 1879), p. 152, which contains a report by Ford dated 12 March 1879.

[123] Pope Hennessy, 'The Governor's Report on the Blue Book' (29 April 1881), paragraph 25.

moreover the afforestation is developed to but small extent, to so small an extent in fact that the benefits accruing therefrom are as yet practically nil.

Evidence as to the existence of good bestowed upon malarial districts by plants obtained in a negative way thus: - It is well known that, in many districts with plentiful vegetation, when large clearances have been made, malarial fever previously in abeyance has broken out subsequent to such clearance, and in such a manner that they are looked upon as cause and effect.[124]

In their cross-questioning of key 'witnesses', the commissioners reiterated the importance of planting the colony, noting:

That cultivation of plants, herbs, or trees be proceeded with. – Encouragement should be given to private individuals to cultivate, but it is the duty of the Government to see to such cultivation as speedily as possible.

In the absence of direct evidence upon the subject, it is considered expedient that the Blue Gum, the Eucalyptus Globulus of Australia should be largely planted. The tree is largely planted in many malarial districts, markedly in Italy, and the enormous rate of growth of the tree, combined with its drying influence on the sub-soil, point to its being likely to benefit the climate of Hongkong.[125]

Of course, the afforestation of the colony with fast-growing imported species from Australia was not unique to Hong Kong. Aesthetic and practical considerations, including the maintenance of health and fuel supplies, had led to concerted efforts in India after the middle of the century to conserve forests and to promote the planting of Australian blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), wattle (*Acacia dealbata*), and blue gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*). As Kennedy has noted, these imports fundamentally transformed the appearance of the hill stations of the Raj, encircling them with 'healthy' green slopes.[126]

Although the 'luxuriance' of tropical undergrowth was deemed unhealthy, since it led to decay, Ford played this down in his report on forestry for 1889:

The vegetation of this region being of such a character that but little is shed periodically, and the hills of the island being so steep, there is rarely much accumulation of leafy matter which reaches the state of unhealthy decay. The existence of healthy living trees, undergrowth or scrub in themselves, will not, on due consideration being given to the subject, be blamed, when

[124] 'Report of the Commissioners appointed by His Excellency Sir G. William Des Voeux to Enquire into the Cause of the Fever Prevailing in the Western District' (Hong Kong: Noronha, 1888), p. viii.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Kennedy, *Magic Mountains*, pp. 55–60.

the chemical action of the leaves of plants is considered, for importing an unhealthy character to a neighbourhood, but, so long as there is no undue accumulation of decaying vegetation, an abundance of trees and shrubs should be beneficial to the inhabitants so long as due circulation of air and admission of light is not impeded by them.[127]

Trees—'healthy living trees'—were beneficial from a sanitary perspective, as they converted decomposing substances in the soil into health-giving matter, while absorbing noxious gases. Indeed, this was a key argument for the planting of trees in Hong Kong's cemeteries:

> The hygienic treatment of burial grounds being under the consideration of the Government it may serve a useful purpose to keep in prominent view the important position which arborescent and other vegetation should occupy in any scheme that may be devised for sanitary or aesthetic improvements of the cemeteries of the Colony. The action of the roots of plants being to convert into health-giving, living, vegetable matter the decomposing animal and vegetable substances of the soil, and the functions of the leaves of plants being to absorb injurious gases which emanate from the soil, there can be no doubt that provision should be made for the encouragement of the growth of vegetation in the forms of trees, shrubs and grass turf around and within all burial grounds.[128]

Furthermore, Chadwick commented that while falling leaves might contaminate the reservoir at Pokfulam, 'moderate planting within the Pok-fu-lam gathering ground will be beneficial to the water supply by consolidating the ground and thus neutralising the evils which have arisen from the extensive earth movements within this area'.[129]

Conclusion

This article has argued that 'environmental anxieties' in Hong Kong, which focused on the importance of vegetation for the colony's development, health, and prosperity, were moderated by local circumstances. While transcolonial and imperial contexts were certainly important, the colony's afforestation programme cannot be viewed in terms 'of the emergence and spread of a set of common practices that are claimed to have refashioned forests in ways to make

[127] Ford, 'Report of the Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (22 February 1890), p. 370.
[128] Ford, 'Report of the Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department' (25 June 1891), p. 579.
[129] Ibid.

them legible, predictable and productive'.[130] Scholars are increasingly challenging such reductive and totalizing accounts of imperial planting initiatives which claim that a set of practices were exported from Europe and applied uniformly across the empire. Instead, the emphasis has increasingly been on how professional forestry empires were constituted under colonialism through local politics that were specific to particular colonies and technically uncolonized regions. As Peter Vandergeest and Nancy Lee Peluso have persuasively argued in the context of the history of professional forestry institutions in Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia: 'Local economic and ecological conditions constrained the forms and practices of colonial forestry.'[131]

Nonetheless, although debates about the meaning and value of planting in Hong Kong were local, colonists and travellers to the colony in the final decades of the nineteenth century inevitably brought with them assumptions about what the ideal landscape ought to be: their conceptualization of the colony was mediated through experiences of other colonial and quasi-colonial contexts.[132] In particular, Hong Kong was frequently recast as an Asian version of the 'Celtic Fringe', a term which was gaining currency in the late nineteenth century to describe those areas on the margins of the English nation where '"primitive" cultures [were] vanishing in the face of the forward march of civilization and reason'.[133] In the 1840s, the architect, artist, and topographical illustrator Thomas Allom had alluded to Hong Kong's 'romantic little glens' and 'wood-crowned crags',[134] implicitly framing the land as another version of the Scottish Highlands. Similarly, for Fortune, the glassy waters of Victoria Harbour resembled a 'highland lake'. In what would become a commonplace analogy, Captain Granville Gower Loch of the Royal Navy noted how the island's scenery reminded him 'forcibly of that of the N.W. coast of Scotland; and if, instead of vessels with mat sails, painted bows, and high trelliced sterns, there had been compact boats, with

[130] Peter Vandergeest and Nancy Lee Peluso, 'Empires of Forestry: Professional Forestry and State Power in Southeast Asia, Part 1', *Environment and History*, Vol. 12 (2006), pp. 31–64 (p. 32).

[131] Ibid, p.31.

[132] See Kennedy, *Magic Mountains*, pp. 39–40.

[133] James Vernon, 'Border Crossing: Cornwall and the English (imagi)nation', in G. Cubitt (ed.), *Imagining Nations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 153–172 (p. 156).

[134] Thomas Allom, *China, in a Series of Views, Displaying the Scenery, Architecture, and Social Habits of that Ancient Empire*, Vol. 2 (London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1843), pp. 33–34.

well-set tanned canvas spread to the breeze, the association would have been complete'. In Loch's picturesque appreciation of the landscape, a stream is reminiscent of 'a Highland burn', while the roads appear to be 'shaded here and there by a species of Scotch fir'.[135] And writing in the 1860s, the Reverend J. L. McGhee remarked on Hong Kong's 'natural beauties', observing that the colony 'resembles the highlands of Scotland and Ireland; were it more planted its charms would be multiplied tenfold, and by the increase of the few deer which it still holds, it would become a noble forest'. By way of conclusion, McGhee added: 'I wish Hong Kong was not in China.'[136] The analogy with Scotland, particularly in the 1880s, is suggestive, given that from the 1870s, estate forestry in Scotland began to develop as a systematic 'science' with the introduction of more comprehensive colonial forestry practices from India.[137]

In short, the impetus to reshape Hong Kong's barren land, familiarizing the foreign Chinese landscape and reasserting the primacy of 'home', might be understood within the context of late nineteenth-century imperial acclimatization societies which sought to recreate nostalgic British landscapes overseas for pleasure and for sport.[138] This romanticization of the land reinscribed and reaffirmed divisions between colonizer and native, even as it blurred divisions by creating landscapes that were fundamentally ambiguous: never wholly native or fully colonized, this was a primitive space to be brought under imperial control, even as its indigenousness was celebrated for its uniqueness.[139]

[135] Granville G. Loch, *The Closing Events of the Campaign in China: The Operations in the Yang-Tze-Kiang and the Treaty of Nanking* (London: John Murray, 1843), pp. 18–21.

[136] Robert James Leslie McGhee, *How We Got into Pekin: A Narrative of the Campaign in China of 1860* (London: Richard Bentley, 1862), p. 34.

[137] Jan Oosthoek, 'The Colonial Origins of Scientific Forestry in Britain' (2007), http://www.eh-resources.org/colonial_forestry.html, [accessed 6 October 2014].

[138] Thomas R. Dunlap, 'Remaking the Land: The Acclimatization Movement and Anglo Ideas of Nature', *Journal of World History*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1997), pp. 303–319; M. S. S. Pandian, 'Hunting and Colonialism in the Nineteenth-Century Nilgiri Hills of South India' in Richard H. Grove, Vinita Damodaran, and Satpal Sangwan (eds), *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 272–297.

[139] See, in this context, Kenneth McNeil's discussions of the conflicted representations of the 'Highlands' in *Scotland, Britain, Empire: Writing the Highlands, 1760–1860* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007).