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Between Typologies and Representation: The Tong Lau and the Discourse of the "Chinese House" in Colonial Hong Kong

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Since its return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 Hong Kong has seen a surge of popular interest in its built heritage. And in contrast to the focus in official preservation practice on buildings with exceptional architectural merit, growing attention has been drawn to the mundane, everyday built forms that once proliferated in the city's working-class districts.[1] Among these is the *tong lau* [唐樓], or "Chinese building"—a common mixed-used housing type similar to the shophouses in many former colonial cities in Southeast Asia.[2] In the popular media, the *tong lau* is frequently presented as a unique "Chinese heritage" and a living testimony to Hong Kong's triumphal rise from a backwater colonial entrepôt to a modern international city. (Figure 9.1)

Cultural commentators have explained the "sudden enthusiasm" toward heritage as a consequence of decolonization, which has produced a fever of nostalgia across Hong Kong and a concomitant search for a collective postcolonial identity (Abbas 1997; Taylor 2003; Chu 2007; Huppatz 2009). Yet, despite recognition of their historical significance, the number of *tong lau* continues to dwindle. Local preservationists further contend that the poor condition of most remaining *tong lau* has made them vulnerable to demolition in a housing market predicated on continuous redevelopment.[3] Indeed, relentless cycles of building and rebuilding

1 In order to receive legal protection from demolition, a building has to be declared a "monument" by the Hong Kong Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO). Until recently, the criteria for "monuments" were based primarily on an assessment of a building's architectural and historical values. However, increasing attention is being paid to the "intangible values" of buildings that do not necessarily possess distinct architectural features. Details of the criteria and assessment procedures are outlined in the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance, which was first enacted by the British colonial administration in 1976. For a discussion on the changing policy of heritage preservation in Hong Kong, see Chu and Uebergang 2002.

2 For a discussion of the history of shophouses in Southeast Asia, see Ho-Yin Lee 2003.

3 Hong Kong has long prided itself on its "laissez-faire" credentials, and has thus been hesitant to impose restrictions on redeveloping property. Since the beginning of the colonial period, however, the sharp restriction on new land for development has encouraged the redevelopment of low-value properties for higher-value uses. This process has also ensured that the government "landlord" and the developer "lessee" share the income gained from the

9.1 a), b) and c) Existing *tong lau* in Hong Kong. Photos by author

were a key driver of Hong Kong's phenomenal economic growth and a potent symbol of its prosperity throughout the colonial period, and the change to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 has only increased the fervor for property development and speculation.

While the future of the *tong lau* may have already been determined, the growing embrace of these crumbling buildings as a representation of Hong Kong's collective identity—and the simultaneous indifference in the face of their continued destruction—raise a number of curious questions. Although *tong lau* are often portrayed as a distinct Chinese heritage, their actual configurations were shaped by colonial building policies and investment practices that involved many non-Chinese agents. If their hybrid character thus problematizes their "indigenous essence," what has allowed their ideological appropriation as a symbol of Chineseness? Furthermore, even though *tong lau* accommodated many migrants from Mainland China, few of those who claim them as heritage today actually lived in them. How, then, can the nostalgia associated with these otherwise unremarkable, dilapidated structures be explained? What kinds of meanings, values, and symbols have been inscribed in them to make them poignant as objects of a historical gaze at the end of the colonial era?

Recent scholarship of colonial urbanism has explored the reconstruction of the past vis-à-vis the built environment and the roles of colonial epistemologies in the shaping of collective imaginations (AlSayyad 1992, 2001; Kong and Yeoh 2003; Scriver and Prakash 2007). As a spatial frame in which colonial policies and everyday social life were enacted, built forms were not only representations of dominant ideologies but also a medium through which cultural meanings and values were continuously reconstructed by different groups (Scriver and Prakash 2007). In keeping with the theme of this volume, which explores colonial architecture as a frame of social practice and a source for nationalist agendas, this chapter traces the processes through which the *tong lau* was transformed from an indigenous built form into a specific housing type defined and refined by colonial policies. By comparing the contradictory interpretations of the *tong lau* by those with stakes in its development, I elucidate how particular cultural stereotypes were reproduced and rearticulated to serve very different agendas in a racialized colonial territory that was nevertheless known as a land of market freedom. These included the interests of native Chinese property owners, who sought to maximize capital accumulation through housing investment enabled by the colonial land system. Despite their experience of discrimination in a colonial context, their dealings with British and European merchants and their close ties with foreign capital brought them into a complex, ambivalent relationship with the "colonizers." At the same time, their expanding role in Hong Kong's economy and their rising social status prompted them to identify with and profit from the colony's modernization and economic progress under British tutelage.

I have argued elsewhere that although the turn to heritage in postcolonial Hong Kong has sometimes been interpreted as a sign of growing national consciousness,

conversion. For discussions of Hong Kong's land and housing policies, see Brown and Loh 2002; Nissim 2008; Fung 2006; and Webb 2010.

a closer examination of preservation debates indicates a more ambivalent attitude among the Hong Kong Chinese toward reunification (Chu 2007). Indeed, the nostalgia evoked by the *tong lau* and other "mundane heritage" is predicated not on appreciating the actual qualities of the buildings, but on a comparison between their representation of a humbler past linked to poverty and hardship and the "reality" of an affluent and modern present. Seen this way, the *tong lau* is a crucial structural component for the narration and celebration of the "Hong Kong success story"—a story of modernization and progress that corresponds to and reaffirms the colonial discourse of development. From this perspective, the current trend to embrace the *tong lau* as heritage may be read as an attempt by Hong Kong Chinese to reassert their (colonial) identity. This has been threatened by reintegration with the Chinese nation—long conceived as an alien territory less advanced and modern than capitalist Hong Kong.[4] There is, however, a double irony in this assertion of local identity and agency. First, the "Chineseness" that the *tong lau* is perceived to embody is intrinsically tied to the categories produced under colonial rule; from its beginning this was premised on maintaining a bifurcation of cultures that enabled the application of different rules to different peoples.[5] Second, the power of the *tong lau* as testimony of Hong Kong's "coming-of-age" can only be made manifest by reaffirming its "irrelevance" in ongoing capitalist development as an outmoded, low-value dwelling. As "negative evidence" of modernity, the actually existing *tong lau*, along with their actually present, still-poor inhabitants, have been abstracted into a nostalgic image disassociated from current economic reality.

To excavate some of the multiple meanings and values that the *tong lau* has come to acquire, this chapter revisits urban development in Hong Kong in the late nineteenth century. This was a formative period, in which a sustained housing shortage, combined with a dynamic land boom, caused a rapid expansion of *tong lau* in the central city. While property speculation enriched many native landlords and brought sizable revenues to the colonial government, it also incited calls from some European residents for racial segregation and more stringent building regulations. These debates eventually resulted in the formation of a "European reservation," in which no "Chinese houses" were allowed.

After tracing how colonial building typologies were established, I illustrate some of the ways in which the *tong lau* defied these categories, and how the construction of difference was based on other forms of stratification not aligned with the established stereotypes. The contradictory attitudes toward the *tong lau* can only be understood with reference to the ambivalent history of Hong Kong as a colonial capitalist enclave and the multiple discourses that continue to shape the self-image of its Chinese citizens. The nostalgia of heritage in the postcolonial era derives essentially from the paradox of Hong Kong's colonial modernity, with the *tong lau* being recast as a key part of a continuing "Hong Kong success story."

4 As explained by Jeremy Taylor (2003: 65–66), the nostalgic depiction of the past derives from Hong Kong's ambivalent history in regard to both the Chinese "nation" and European imperialism.

5 For a theoretical discussion of the rule of colonial difference, see Chatterjee 1993: 18–22. For examples of specific governing strategies in other colonial cities, see Yeoh 2003 and Chattopadhyay 2005. Also see the chapters in this volume by Anoma Pieris and Imran Bin Tajudeen.

A DUAL CITY IN THE MAKING: THE *TONG LAU* AND THE "CHINESE HOUSE" IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY VICTORIA

While the exact origin of the *tong lau* has remained debatable, the building form is commonly assumed to have derived from the traditional townhouses of South China (Cheung 2000; Lu 1990: 35–38, 51–57; Fong and Chan 1993: 36). As a general rule, the dimensions of these houses were determined by the length of the wooden poles used in their structural frame, the result being a long and narrow configuration, with a width between twelve and fifteen feet (Chadwick 1882: 100–25; Pryor 1983: 8–13). Until the 1950s the term *tong lau*, which translates as "Chinese-style building" in Cantonese, was used to describe any house built with this construction method, with no specification as to layout, usage, or decorative style.[6] Due to this loose definition, *tong lau* became an umbrella term associated with buildings with many different kinds of function, even though a large number of *tong lau* in Hong Kong took the particular mixed-use pattern of a shop on the ground floor and a residence above. In time, however, the upper floors of many *tong lau* were divided into tenements in response to a sustained housing shortage and high demand for low-cost accommodations for laborers.

There exists no exact translation of the word *tong lau* in English. From the beginning of the British occupation, the term was used simultaneously in Hong Kong colonial documents to designate "Chinese house" and "Chinese tenement" (Ordinance No. 16, 1888). In other words, even though not all *tong lau* were tenements, they were officially categorized as a housing type designed to be subdivided for rent to multiple households (Simpson and Chadwick, May 14, 1902: 987–88; Leeming 1977: 20–27). Under this classificatory system, the antithesis of the *tong lau* was the "European house," which was defined by its singular function either as a commercial enterprise or a single-family residence (Ordinance No.16, 1888).[7] While these building types were categorized solely according to usage, they nevertheless came to acquire a broader range of stereotypical associations that included architectural style and their "types" of inhabitant. Meanwhile, the frequent invocation in everyday language of the prefixes "Chinese" to describe "things local" and "European" to describe "things foreign" further reinforced a binary frame of reference to make sense of the spatially and socially divided colonial landscape.

Planning historians have noted that racial segregation in European colonies reached its peak between the 1880s and 1920s, a period when many cities established "European reservations"—areas formally zoned as residential districts for the "white race" (Home 1997; King 1976). While racial prejudice underlay discriminatory planning legislation, the shaping of "dual cities" involved contested processes that had to reckon with competing economic and political agendas (Ross and Telkamp 1985; Chattopadhyay 2000; Yeoh 2003; King 1985, 1990; Smart 2006;

6 The meaning of *tong lau* changed after the mid-1950s with the advent of elevators in multistory buildings. Thereafter, *tong lau* came to refer to buildings without elevators, regardless of their construction method or materials. Note also that by this time buildings in Hong Kong were no longer built with wood; hence, the earlier derivation of the *tong lau* form was no longer applicable.

7 Also known as *yang lau* in Cantonese, meaning "foreign building."

Pieris, this volume).[8] In the British colonies, local authorities were also required to justify such policies with arguments that aligned with an emerging discourse of science and public health (MacLeod and Lewis 1988; Yeoh 2003; Home 1997). To legitimize segregation between the "natives" and the "Europeans," the latter were thus posited to be physically vulnerable to tropical diseases, hot climate, and congested living environments—and therefore in need of areas to reside that were at a higher altitude, away from crowded native quarters. The need to protect the "vulnerable white race" became increasingly urgent in Hong Kong in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when escalating property speculation placed some Europeans at risk of losing their properties to Chinese investors. However, the call to implement racial segregation was complicated by the need of the colonial authority to retain the native investment capital that had become an important basis for economic growth. But before discussing the advent of discriminatory planning legislation in the late 1880s, it is necessary to examine patterns of development and housing investment in early Hong Kong.

Like many colonial port cities set up primarily for trade, the early development of the city of Victoria—the largest settlement in the colony of Hong Kong—assumed a haphazard character without a long-term plan (Evans 1975: 11–39; Tregear and Berry 1959: 8; Bristow 1984: 22–31).[9] Until the 1880s the only mechanism for regulating urban growth were conditions written into government land leases, which required all new buildings to be constructed in the same "type" and "style" as those in the same neighborhood (Price, May 8, 1877: 649; Bristow 1984: 30). As in other British colonies, such as Dar es Salaam in East Africa, the categorization of building types worked well as a "backdoor policy" to segregate the populations without explicitly mentioning the notion of race (Smiley 2009: 179). Thus, by the mid-nineteenth century Victoria was divided into several districts in close proximity. These included the Central business district along the waterfront, which was lined with Neo-Renaissance and Georgian style buildings, and which housed all the major international trading houses and government administrative offices, as well as recreation clubs, churches, hotels, and other commercial enterprises primarily owned and used by British and European merchants. Uphill, overlooking the Central district, was the Midlevel, which had been developed as a European residential district dominated by palatial bungalows and villas. And to the west of the Central district was the Chinese district, or so-called "Chinatown" (Figure 9.2). This area was packed with hundreds of rows of *tong lau*, and had from early on become a bustling center of domestic trades. It was also the principal home for many Chinese laborers, who found lodging in tenements concentrated in the neighborhood of Taipingshan (Evans 1970; Leeming 1977; Bristow 1984: 30).

8 For definition of the dual city, see Abu-Lughod 1965. Also see the discussion of the concept by Pieris in this volume.

9 Although this is the general view of historians who have written on the subject, Bristow has disagreed with Tregear and Berry's claim that Hong Kong's early development was entirely piecemeal, without any planning. According to Bristow (1984), roads and plots were properly surveyed and laid out, despite disputes that arose later with the commencement of land reclamation.

9.2 Taipingshan district, 1880s. Notice the more spacious European houses located at the Midlevel in the background. Source: CO1069/444 1869–1900, The National Archives of the U.K.: Public Records Office

Until the early 1900s there were no explicit rules that prevented Chinese from acquiring "European houses" in any part in Victoria.[10] But no Chinese had ever been invited to participate in the public auctions in which properties in the "European district" were put up for sale (Evans 1975: 19). In the early years, land lots intended for Chinese occupation were selectively granted to individual leaseholders by the colonial government through private agreements.[11] Later on, the government began to introduce public land sales in the "Chinese district" as a means to encourage urban development. Unlike the exclusionary auctions for "European properties," these lots were open to purchase by either Chinese or non-Chinese proprietors. This arrangement resulted in a highly mixed pattern of property ownership in the "Chinese district," even though most of the buildings erected there were of a similar "type" that corresponded with the requirements of the land leases.[12]

An important factor that shaped patterns of housing investment was the government's reliance on land leases to generate revenue (Evans 1975; Nissim 2008). Under the leasehold system, the sizable profits gained from initial land sales convinced the administration to adopt a "high land price policy." This meant that to maximize revenue, the government needed to restrict land supply to keep

10 See the later discussion regarding enactment of the 1904 Hill District Reservation Ordinance (Ordinance No.4, 1904), which prohibited all Chinese persons (except servants and laborers working for European households) from residing in the Peak district.

11 Most of these early Chinese landlords belonged to the boat population, or Tankas, a marginalized ethnic group in south China. As pointed out by Carl T. Smith (1985), the fact that they were "outcastes" in Chinese society made them more likely to cooperate with the British in return for quick profits.

12 The mixed pattern of property ownership in Taipingshan was reflected in a government report that had been reprinted in *The Hong Kong Daily Press* on March 11, 1895.

land values elevated, while making sure that regulations on development were not so onerous as to drive away investment capital. Although this system was successful in boosting fiscal reserves and creating a competitive "laissez-faire" land market, it also led to a chronic housing shortage and rampant property speculation, which drove rents up to an exorbitant level. The problem was worst in the neighborhood of Taipingshan, where many Chinese laborers had little choice but to share bedspace in overcrowded tenements. Ironically, the fact that *tong lau* were able to accommodate so many heads through subdivision also made them highly profitable as property holdings. It is for this reason that many builders and speculators preferred to invest in *tong lau* rather than "European houses," which were restricted to single households.

In line with policies in other British colonies, the institution of private property was conceived as an important means to establish legal obligations between the colonial state and native subjects, thereby encouraging stability through the rule of law (Chattopadhyay 2007: 171).[13] Since it was a nonsettler colony, the government understood that Hong Kong's economic viability would depend on attracting native capital to foster development and entrepôt trade. And from early on, the highly lucrative housing market lured many Chinese to invest in Victoria, where many were able to amass substantial fortunes from speculation and rental profits (Smith 1985; Munn 2001). Although they were excluded from the land sales for "European properties," their investment practices nonetheless led these Chinese to identify some of their interests with those of foreign merchants and landholders. Meanwhile, the sustained housing shortage also provided opportunities for profiteering by natives with lesser means. An example was the emergence of a large number of "rentier lords," who rented part of a *tong lau* from the primary leaseholder and sublet it to multiple households (Simpson and Chadwick 1902; Fong and Chan 1993). As caricatured in local popular writings, these were much-hated figures who constantly attempted to "squeeze" money from their poor tenants (Fong and Chan 1993). But despite the daily conflicts that erupted in the tenements, the similar backgrounds of the rentier lords and the tenants also helped to draw them together whenever their common interests were threatened.[14]

This brief examination of the early development of Victoria illustrates some of the contradictory dynamics that shaped its growth under a "high land price system," and offers insight on the complex social relations that developed between local constituencies. Although the "Chinese house" and "European house" were defined as opposite categories, their values were intrinsically tied to the functions of a competitive housing market. Despite the persistent stereotype of *tong lau* as squalid native dwellings, they eventually became a vital source of revenue for the colonial state, a preferable form of investment for native and European property owners, and the only dwelling available to many thousands of Chinese laborers.

13 Also see Chattopadhyay's discussion (2000: 154–79) of patterns of native property ownership in Calcutta.

14 For an excellent discussion of the complex social relations between different native Chinese factions in early Hong Kong, see Tsai 1993.

"THE INVASION OF CHINESE HOUSES UPON EUROPEAN TERRITORIES"

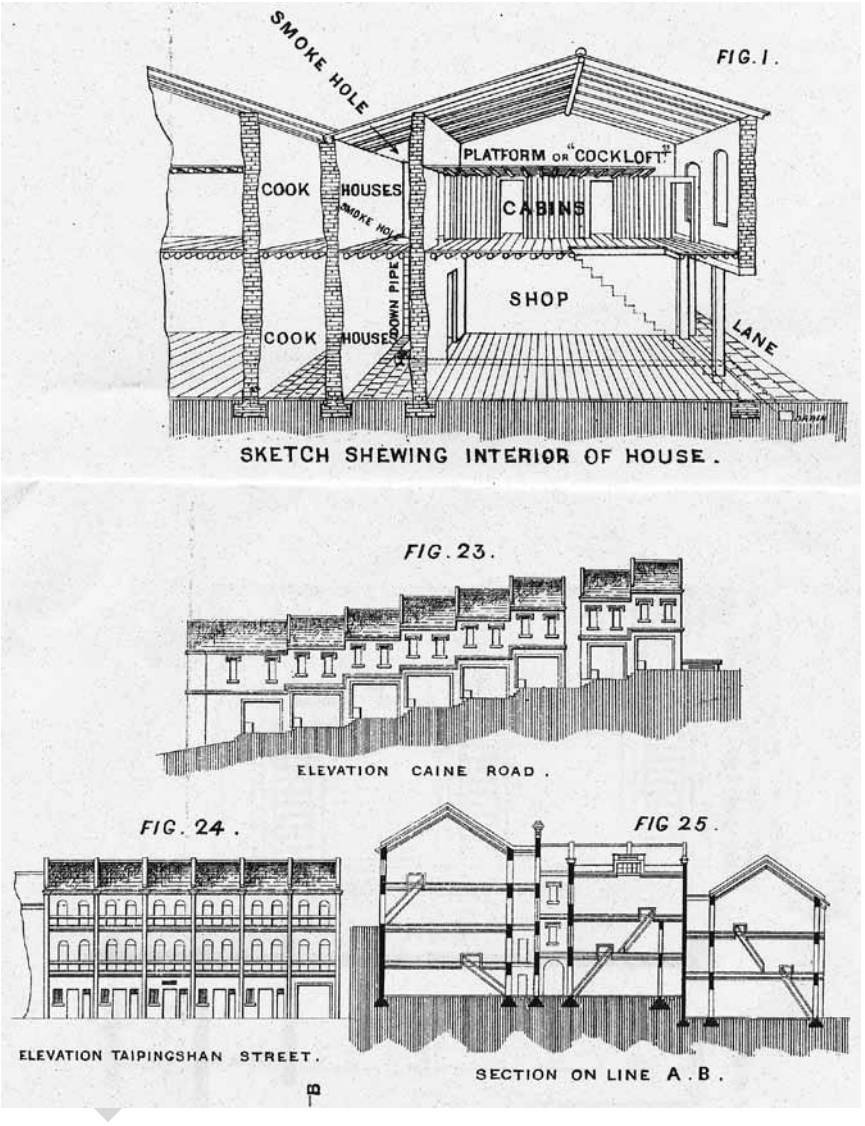
By the second half of the nineteenth century the significance of rentier interests centered on *tong lau* began to transform the appearance of urban forms and topography. Although their basic construction method did not change, the Hong Kong *tong lau* evolved into a form quite different from its mainland precedents. As documented in a colonial report of 1882, this was "primarily due to the necessity for economy of space on account of the high price of land and great cost of preparing level sites for building" (Chadwick 1882: 100). Contrary to the more spacious, two-story townhouses of mainland Chinese cities, most *tong lau* in Hong Kong were built back-to-back, densely packed with inhabitants, and were often three or more stories high (Figure 9.3). The report noted that the cost of constructing these buildings could also be cut in a number of ways. For example, the wooden floors of the upper stories were often sparsely jointed, making it impossible to cleanse them with water. And the bricks used in their construction were often porous and poorly manufactured, making them prone to rapid deterioration and collapse. Although a building ordinance was enacted in 1856 requiring every house to comply with a set of construction standards (Ordinance No.8, 1856), the rules were rarely observed in practice.[15] And as a colonial official admitted, failure to enforce regulations was due not to a lack of manpower for supervision, as commonly assumed, but to a systematic tolerance on the part of a government that relied heavily on the continuous expansion of private property investment to generate public funds.[16] Although individual officials often condemned the tenements as unsightly squalor, "Chinese houses" continued to be built with fervor, and by the 1870s overtook "European houses" as the major form of property holding in the colony (Hennessy, June 6, 1881: 720–721; May 23, 1881: 723).

The shortage of housing was exacerbated after the 1860s by continual political unrest in China, which drove waves of refugees to Hong Kong in search of shelter and jobs.[17] At this time the rapid expansion of "Chinese houses" became a subject of concern for some European residents, who worried about the depreciation of their properties as "Chinese houses" began to encroach upon the "European district." Although the terms of the standard land lease managed to keep the "European" and "Chinese" houses apart in the early years, this mechanism was ultimately unable to stop the gradual spread of *tong lau* into the Central district and the Midlevel. The reason was that as these buildings spread, they could always be shown to have similar "types" next to them, and thus satisfy the requirements of the land lease (Price, May 5, 1877: 647). The scenario of "Chinese houses invading upon European territories" generated much alarm when a number of prominent commercial buildings at the edge of the Central district were torn down to make way for *tong lau*. The incidents incited criticism in the local English press, condemning property

15 For a summary of the changing regulation on Chinese houses, see Ng 2004.

16 Some of the fiercest criticisms came from Surveyor General J.M. Price and Colonial Surgeon Phineas Ayres. Both were highly critical of Governor Hennessy, who was said to have delayed much-needed sanitary legislation for the colony (Price, August 15, 1881: 739).

17 Hong Kong saw successive influxes of refugees during the Taiping Revolution, which lasted from 1850 to 1864.



9.3 Drawings showing typical configurations of Chinese houses in Victoria, 1882. Source: Chadwick, CO882/4/15, 1882, The National Archives of the U.K.: Public Records Office

speculators for their profit-seeking mentality, and faulting the government for failing to protect the well-being of the ("European") community.[18]

This anxiety over the surging number of *tong lau* must be seen in relation to two other historical developments. The first was a changing pattern of property ownership after the 1860s, when a growing proportion of properties came under the control of Chinese businessmen. Unlike the sojourning laborers and "vagabonds" who made up a majority of the native population in the early years of the colony, these landlords were mostly wealthy proprietors who had migrated to the colony from Canton and brought substantial capital with them. Along with

18 These kinds of discussions appeared frequently in editorials and letters in local English newspapers, including *The Hong Kong Daily Press, The China Mail,* and *The Hong Kong Telegraph*.

other early settlers who became prosperous through trade and investment, these Chinese began to establish themselves as a new native elite (Carroll 2005; Smith 1995; Smith 1978). The emergence of this new "power bloc" generated a mixed reaction in the colonial administration. Some officials, including Governor John Pope Hennessy (1877–1883), believed that the expansion of Chinese investment would instill social stability and enhance the "overall commercial interest of England" (Hennessy, June 3, 1881: 731). Other officials were more ambivalent toward the rising economic status of the Chinese, sensing that the government was increasingly caught between its duties to ensure "laissez-faire" competition and to protect the privileges of the European residents.

The other cause for unease was the perceived danger of epidemic outbreaks in the crowded tenements. The focus on the relationship between disease and the built environment was closely linked to the emerging discourse of public health (MacLeod and Lewis 1988; Joyce 2003; Yeoh 2003). At the same time, in the absence of reliable explanations for the causes of many diseases, this discourse was bound up with moral and cultural prejudice. As shown in the sanitary reports published by colonial doctors and engineers of the period, native peoples were deemed likely carriers of diseases due to their "dirty habits" and "uncivilized way of living" (Levine 1998; Echenberg 2007; Yeoh 2003). In this context, the portrayal of the "Chinese house" as a backward, unhygienic dwelling, in every way different from the normative, decent "European house," also provided a convenient frame for making essentialized statements about the Chinese race. As the next section illustrates, the drawing of racial boundaries along the lines of health and culture would be used to legitimize a new set of segregation policies. However, the institution of a new planning system would involve a contested process in which a host of existing and new discourses were brought to bear.

BLURRING BOUNDARIES: THE LIMITS OF HOUSING TYPOLOGIES

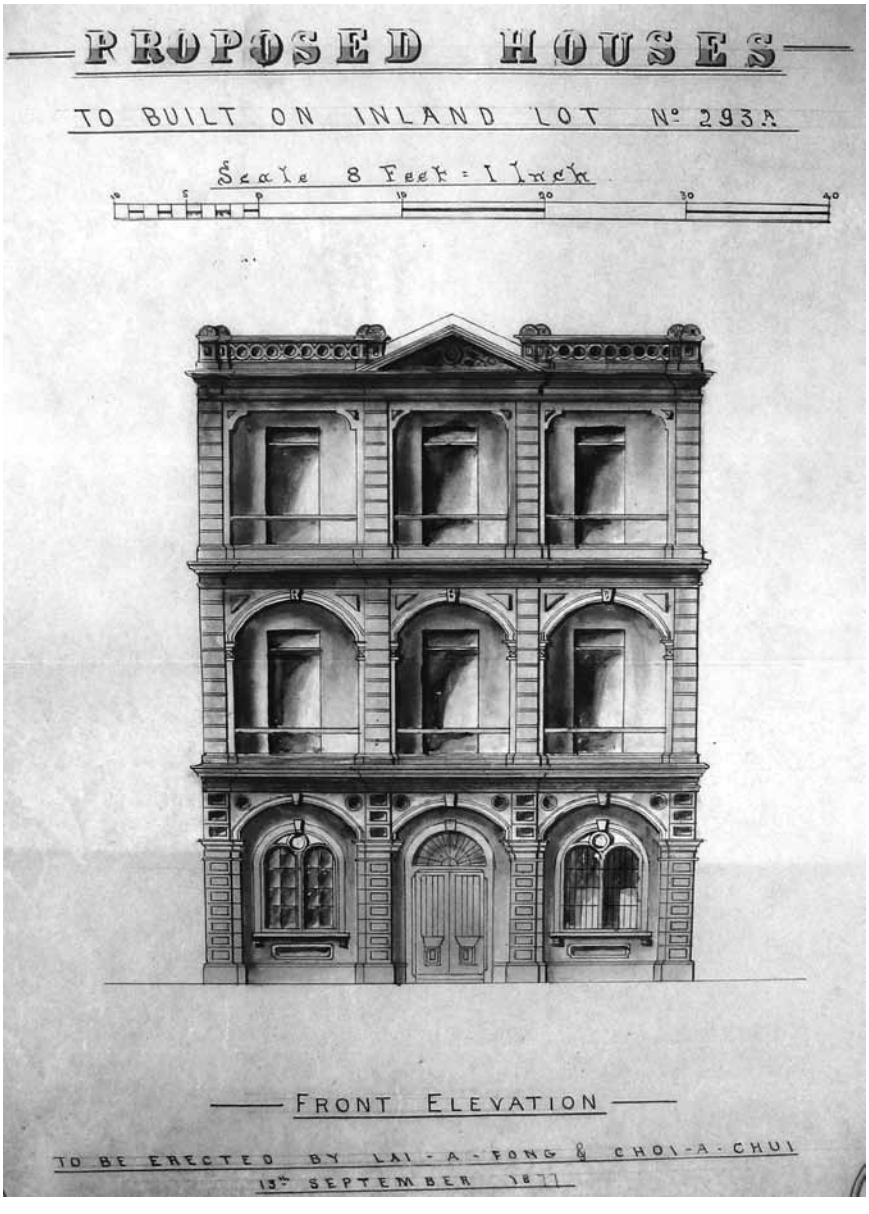
In short, the economic boom in the 1870s saw two parallel development trends in Victoria. One was the rapid rise of Chinese property ownership coupled with expansion of the "Chinese district"; the other was a tendency among landholders to convert existing "European houses" into *tong lau*, with the intention of dividing them into profitable tenements. Although the "Chinese house" and "European house" were conceived as mutually exclusive building types in official terms, the actual distinction between them was not always very clear. This was particularly the case for houses located in the border zone between the "European" and "Chinese" districts, along the western portion of Queens Road, which had been developed into a bustling commercial precinct with an eclectic mixture of "native" and "foreign" businesses (Figure 9.4).[19]

19 Under the governorship of Hennessy, an increasing number of Chinese merchants were encouraged to establish businesses in the western portion of the Central district along Queens Road.

9.4 View of Queens Road, Victoria, 1890s. Source: LC-USZ62-120618, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

An example of this blurring of building typologies was an application submitted to Surveyor General J.M. Price in 1877 by Catchick Paul Chater, a prominent Armenian merchant and unofficial member of the Hong Kong Legislative Council. In the application, Chater proposed converting two European commercial buildings along Queens Road into "Chinese houses" with shops and dwellings (Hennessy, September 7, 1877: 647–48; Price, May 8, 1877: 649–50). To meet the requirement of the lease, the exterior appearances of the new houses would be designed to match the architectural style of their adjacent "European buildings" (Figure 9.5). The proposal was promptly approved by Price, who said he could "see no legal impediment obstructing the sale," and that "to disallow it would not only be injudicious but also counter to the business interests of the colony as a whole." In addition, Price assured that

> *By making these concessions the government could to some extent prevent the disfigurement of the city ... [This was] a matter in which its European inhabitants no less than the Government must take a direct personal interest, by insisting upon as high a standard of street architecture for Chinese shops as we have prescribed for European buildings in our most central thoroughfares (Price, May 8, 1877: 649).*



9.5 Façade design of the Chinese house proposed to be erected on Queens Road by Paul Chater. Source: CO129/179/13355 1877, The National Archives of the U.K.: Public Records Office

Although Price lost no time approving the construction of "Chinese houses" in the Central business district, he rejected a similar application by a British trading firm to convert a row of "European houses" into "Chinese houses" in the Midlevel district. This latter case should be treated differently, he explained, because "it was neither necessary nor urgent for native dwelling-houses to occupy [the Midlevel] district" (Price, May 8, 1877: 649). To substantiate his judgment, Price stated that there existed "fundamental differences" between the two kinds of buildings and their inhabitants:

> *The two types of structure, European and Chinese, and the habits, customs, and general method of life of their respective inmates, differ so essentially as to render the close neighborhood of the latter in many ways inconvenient to the former, and the question therefore arises whether in directly sanctioning the erection of Chinese tenements contiguous to valuable European ones, the Government would not be lending its sanction to the depreciation of the latter.*
>
> *Experience teaches us that a European house standing next to or between Chinese properties, will not let as profitably as one standing among buildings of its own class, and it would therefore, I think, be but prudent to consider whether in issuing the building permits alluded to, we do not really expose ourselves to the possibility of legal claims from those European house owners whose interests may be prejudiced under such permits (Price, May 8, 1877: 649).*

While this statement discriminated against "Chinese houses," it is worth noting that the key terms of reference were not race, but the forms of architecture and the cultural practices of the inhabitants associated with building types. Price's double standard in the two cases seems to be an attempt to resolve the contradiction between the perceived monetary and symbolic values of the "Chinese house" – that it was both a profitable property holding, benefiting the overall economy, as well as a disdainful native dwelling, threatening to depreciate the value of European properties and endanger public health. By permitting "Chinese houses" to be built in the European commercial district and not the residential district, Price believed that the government could cater to the colony's "business interests" while protecting the integrity of European properties in the Midlevel.

But the rationale used to justify this decision was somewhat contradictory. If there was no danger that the values of "European buildings" in the Central district would depreciate insofar as their neighboring "Chinese houses" conformed to a high standard of architecture, why then could the same rationale not be applied to houses in the Midlevel? Note that Price avoided mentioning architectural aesthetics altogether when discussing the latter case, but redirected the focus to the correlation between the types of houses and the "habits, customs and general methods of life" of their inhabitants. It would thus appear that the decision to ban "Chinese houses" in the Midlevel was not so much about protecting the property value of "European houses" as retaining the homogeneity of the European population there. It also seems that the term "European" took a wider range of associations in a residential context. Although not explicitly mentioned, the preservation of Europeanness there implied not only the exclusion of "Chinese houses" but all non-European persons. However, the argument about the correlation between the housing types and their inhabitants was arguably rhetorical in two ways. First, the so-called "Europeans" living in the Midlevel were hardly a homogenous group, but included many ethnicities who did not share a "European way of life." Second, by this time a number of wealthy Chinese and Eurasian families were already living in "European houses" they had acquired in the district. Despite these circumstances, the Midlevel was continuously referred to as a homogenous "European residential district." And, notwithstanding the fact that some of the Chinese and Eurasians living there had

adopted a Western lifestyle, these peoples were persistently seen as outsiders because of their race.

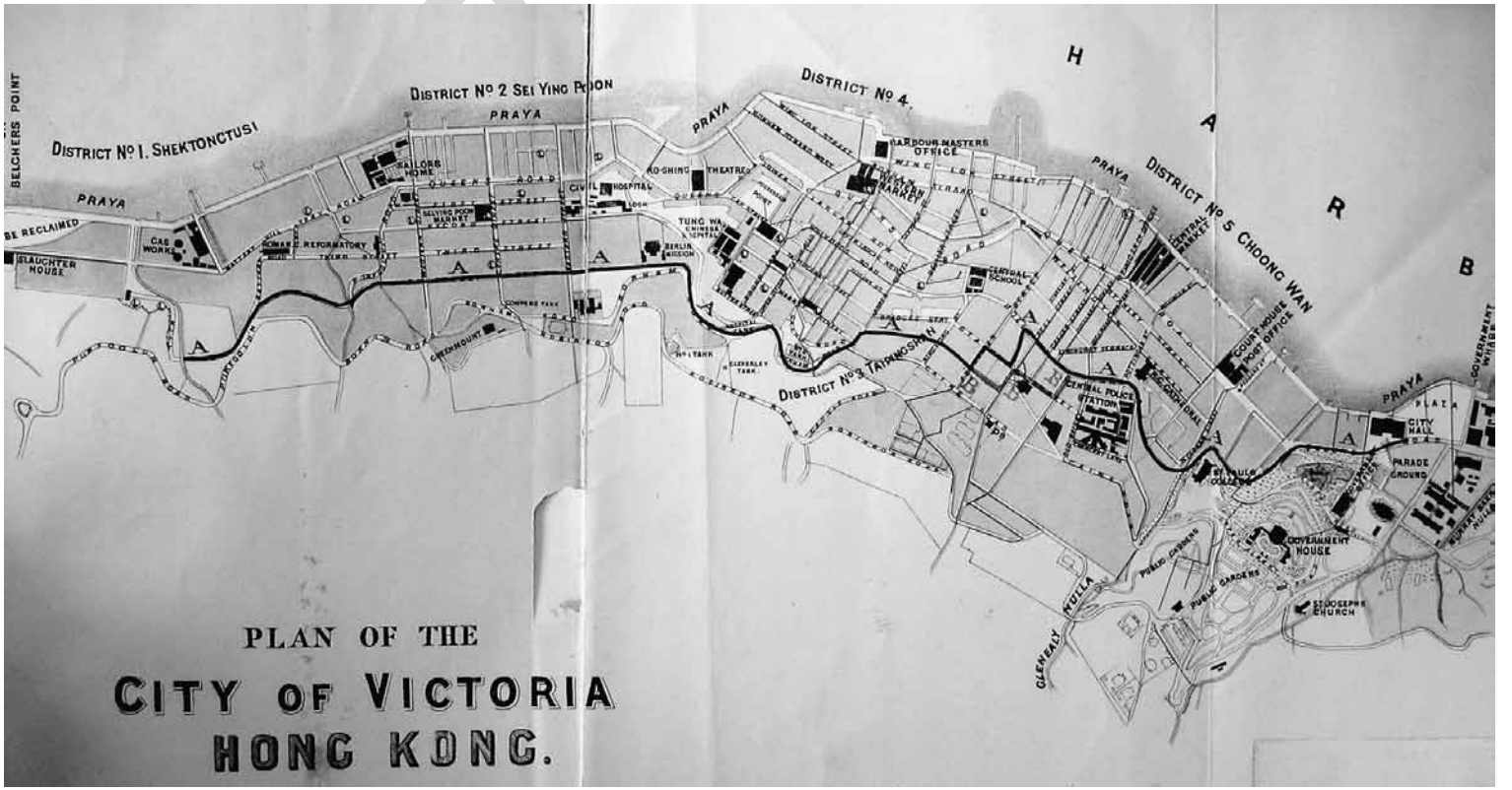
Although the emphasis on the relationship between architecture and culture was used to justify racial exclusion, it is worth noting that underlying this emphasis was a certain belief in environmental determinism, which assumed human behaviors were modifiable according to their physical settings. This assumption corresponded with an emerging liberal universalism, which viewed all human beings as equal and "improvable" through the provision of positive environments and the acquisition of Western knowledge. Such views were a central rationale behind the civilizing mission that supported British colonial capitalist expansion in the nineteenth century (Mehta 1997; Metcalf 1994). As William Glover (2005) has shown in his study of colonial India, the presumed connection between material settings and human sentiments was a core feature behind many colonial projects, which were designed to transform the existing social norms of native peoples, and thereby turn them into modern, "governable" subjects. However, this liberal ideology of "improvement" would repeatedly collide with another entrenched belief: the discourse of difference, which insisted on the irreconcilable "characters" of the colonizers and the colonized—claims that ultimately aimed to preserve European privileges and hierarchical social order in actual colonial contexts.

CONSOLIDATING THE DIVIDE: THE 1888 EUROPEAN RESIDENTIAL RESERVATION ORDINANCE

The two proposals for Chinese houses alerted Price to the loophole in the existing government land lease, which he now saw would be unable to control the expansion of the Chinese district. To provide a long-term solution, he suggested drawing a permanent boundary between the Midlevel district and the lower part of Victoria (CO 129/228/18826 1902: 235–60) (Figure 9.6). This suggestion did not gain immediate support from the colonial administration, however. Instead, Governor Hennessey, who had been known for his "pro-market" (and so-called "pro-Chinese"[20]) position, commented that the protective mechanism of segregation did not do justice "either to the Chinese who want to buy property, or to the Europeans who want to sell it" (Hennessy, September 27, 1877: 648). Nevertheless, other officials, including Registrar General Cecil C. Smith, argued that the perceived high demand for Chinese houses was mainly fictitious, and they opted for stronger state intervention to control the rental market, since the colonial authority had a moral responsibility to protect "European properties" from depreciation (Smith, May 16, 1877: 651).

The contradictory stance toward racial segregation among colonial officials would persist for another decade. However, by the later 1880s the tide of opinion began to turn to support establishment of a "European reservation." A major driving force was the anticipated completion of the Peak Tramway, which helped

20 For a discussion of the "pro-Chinese" policies of Governor Hennessy, see Lowe and McLaughlin 1992.



9.6 A map showing the proposed demarcation line that separates the Chinese and European residential districts, 1879. Source: CO129/228/18826, The National Archives of the U.K.: Public Records Office

accelerate the development of the Peak district. Located 1,200 feet above sea level, the Peak had formerly been populated only sparsely by the colony's wealthiest residents, who journeyed up and down in private sedan chairs carried by Chinese "coolies." To many British and Europeans who were not of elite origins, the prospect of moving to the Peak was seen as a means to raise their social status (Lethbridge 2003: 528; Lai and Yu 2001: 301). However, the increased accessibility of the Peak also prompted demands to police its boundary against unwanted entrants, especially wealthy Chinese who had been fast establishing their presence in the Midlevel district (Wesley-Smith 1987).

In May 1888, shortly before the official opening of the Peak Tramway, the Hong Kong Legislative Council passed the European Residential Reservation Ordinance, which designated a large area above the Midlevel as a "European reservation," in which only "European houses" were permitted (Ordinance No.16, 1888). The ordinance stated that its purpose was to ensure the well-being of Europeans, who were by nature more vulnerable to the tropical climate than the native Chinese.

> *Whereas the health and comfort of Europeans in a tropical climate demand conditions which are inconsistent with the neighborhood of houses crowded with occupants and otherwise used after the manner customary with the Chinese inhabitants, and whereas the influx of Chinese into the Colony tends constantly to narrow the area of the City of Victoria where such conditions are attainable, and it is desirable to reserve by law a district where such conditions may be secured.*

The ordinance emphasized that Europeans in Hong Kong were unfortunate victims of climate and property speculation, and that due to the constant pressure of the housing market, it was legitimate to reserve the cooler and more spacious hills district for their occupation. It is interesting to note that, as in the earlier sanction on "Chinese houses" in the Central district, the ordinance displayed ambiguity in its interpretation of the relation between house types and their inhabitants. On the one hand, it stated that Chinese and Europeans were physically different and should live separately in areas suited to their natural inclinations. On the other, it compromised this rationale by an additional clause stating that the ordinance was not meant to prevent "Chinese persons" from living in the reservation insofar as they built their houses according to "European standards." This statement led some British historians to conclude that the ordinance was not discriminatory (Sayer 1975: 129).[21] But, in reality, only one Chinese family managed to establish a residence in the reservation throughout the effective term of the ordinance. And, as accounted by one of its members, the family experienced constant discrimination from white neighbors and were for the most part isolated from the rest of the "European community" (Gittins 1969: 12).[22]

21 This seems to be the general view of many early British historians. An example is Geoffrey Robley Sayer, who saw it as "a reservation, which, so far from excluding the Chinese, expressly admitted them on terms (namely the acceptance of European conditions) to territory hitherto closed to them" (Sayer 1975: 129).

22 The only Chinese person who established residence in the Peak was Sir Robert Ho Tung (1862–1956). Ho was, in fact, a Eurasian, but he identified himself as Chinese throughout his life.

These contradictions raise two related questions. First, if it was obvious that the purpose of the reservation was to protect the homogeneity of the Peak district by segregating populations, why did the government have to insist that Chinese (aside from coolies and servants for European households) were able to establish their residence there as long as they lived in "European houses"? Second, why was it that no Chinese—except for the one lone family—moved into the reservation, given that many of them could afford to purchase "European houses"?

An examination of the legislative debates of the period suggests that the additional clause permitting Chinese residence in the Peak was inserted largely as a symbolic gesture to "give face" to the native elites. This is substantiated by the fact that prior to passage of the legislation, colonial officials discussed the matter with "leading Chinese" to solicit their support.[23] Although there were no written records of a deal between the two parties, it was clear the Chinese agreed not to protest the ordinance before it was presented in the legislature. Also worth noting is that the governor, William Des Veoux, was highly aware of the sensitive nature of the legislation and repeatedly stressed that there was no racial discrimination involved (*Hong Kong Hansard*, March 27, 1888). Again referring to the ordinance's focus on houses and not "persons," Des Veoux claimed that "the rights of all races [would] be not less equal in this district than elsewhere," and that the reservation would be beneficial to the health of the whole community by reserving much-needed open space for the fast-expanding city.

One possible way to explain Chinese accommodation to the arrangement is to look further at the convergence of their interests with the strictures of the colonial system, and to consider the kinds of truth claims commonly held and shared by the native elites and their European counterparts. Notwithstanding the prevalent social tensions throughout the colonial period, the idea of a "free and harmonious colonial society" had continuously been hailed as the foundation of Hong Kong's economic success in both official and popular discourse (Ngo 1999; Wu 1999). Among those who most often repeated this claim were well-to-do Chinese, whose economic and social standing had advanced greatly under British colonial rule (Lethbridge 1978; Carroll 2005; Chan 1991; Sinn 2003; Smith 1985). Although subject to discrimination, many elite Chinese residents had cultivated close business ties with the colonial government and with European merchants, and had been enlisted as representatives of the Chinese community by the administration to help maintain social peace. In this regard, it can be argued that their intertwined political and economic interests led them to accept, albeit unwillingly, some discriminatory policies and regulations in exchange for longer-term cooperation with a government that granted them important concessions to pursue their various investment and business practices.

Another possible explanation for Chinese consent to the reservation may have been economic. As pointed out by Lawrence Lai and Marco Yu (2001) in an analysis

23 As stated by the Chinese member in the Legislative Council, the "leading Chinese" in Hong Kong had made it clear they were not opposed to the European reservation, insofar as the governor-in-council reserved the right to grant them exemptions (see *Hong Kong Hansard*, April 19, 1904).

of changing property values in the Peak district, the protectionist mechanism of the reservation led to an unintended dissipation of rents from European houses and a heightened demand for Chinese houses in other areas of the city. Thus, as property speculation in the rest of Hong Kong continued to escalate after passage of the ordinance, houses in the Peak, in fact, became unattractive as investments. In other words, the establishment of discriminatory zoning, like other price-control measures, created distortions in the housing market, and was economically "inefficient" (Lai and Yu 2001: 297). Indeed, this can be seen as one reason for the eventual dissolution of the segregation policy in the 1930s, when many European landowners were desperate to liquidate their properties amidst the onset of a recession.[24]

As noted by Tsai Jung-Fang (1993: 292), Hong Kong's colonial situation brought the local Chinese elites into a complex, interlocking web of ambivalent relationships that were simultaneously characterized by collaboration and hostility, partnership and antagonism. Despite the existence of profound inequalities, to many Chinese, Hong Kong was still a land of opportunities, where they could advance themselves by using resources not available on the mainland. This is certainly not to presume that their concern for improving livelihoods had rendered them wholly subservient to their "colonial masters." As Tsai and other scholars have illustrated, many elite Chinese in Hong Kong maintained a sense of patriotism to China and were resentful of European domination of their home country. However, their close ties to foreign capital and their expanding role in both Hong Kong and the regional economy prompted them to support peaceful reforms along Western capitalist lines to strengthen China under British tutelage (Tsai 1993: 295). At the same time, as evidenced by examination of their investment practices, most such Chinese merchants maintained a desire to eventually "defeat" the Europeans through economic competition (Zhong 1996).

Far from fitting with the stereotype of "docile natives" frequently portrayed in the English press, the Chinese elites were highly aware of their bargaining power, which derived from their growing access to capital, and they had used their "nonpolitical" stance to position themselves vis-à-vis the colonial authorities and foreign businesses. That said, although such activities can be seen as evidence of "indigenous agency," and shed light on the complex power relations between the "colonizers" and the "colonized," they also indicated a process through which the native elites were incorporated more tightly into the colonial governing regime, and by which class stratification was accelerated among the Chinese population (Tsai 1993; Chan 1991).

24 The European Residential Reservation Ordinance was superseded by the 1904 Hill District Reservation Ordinance, which explicitly prohibited Chinese to live in the Hill district. See the discussion later in this chapter.

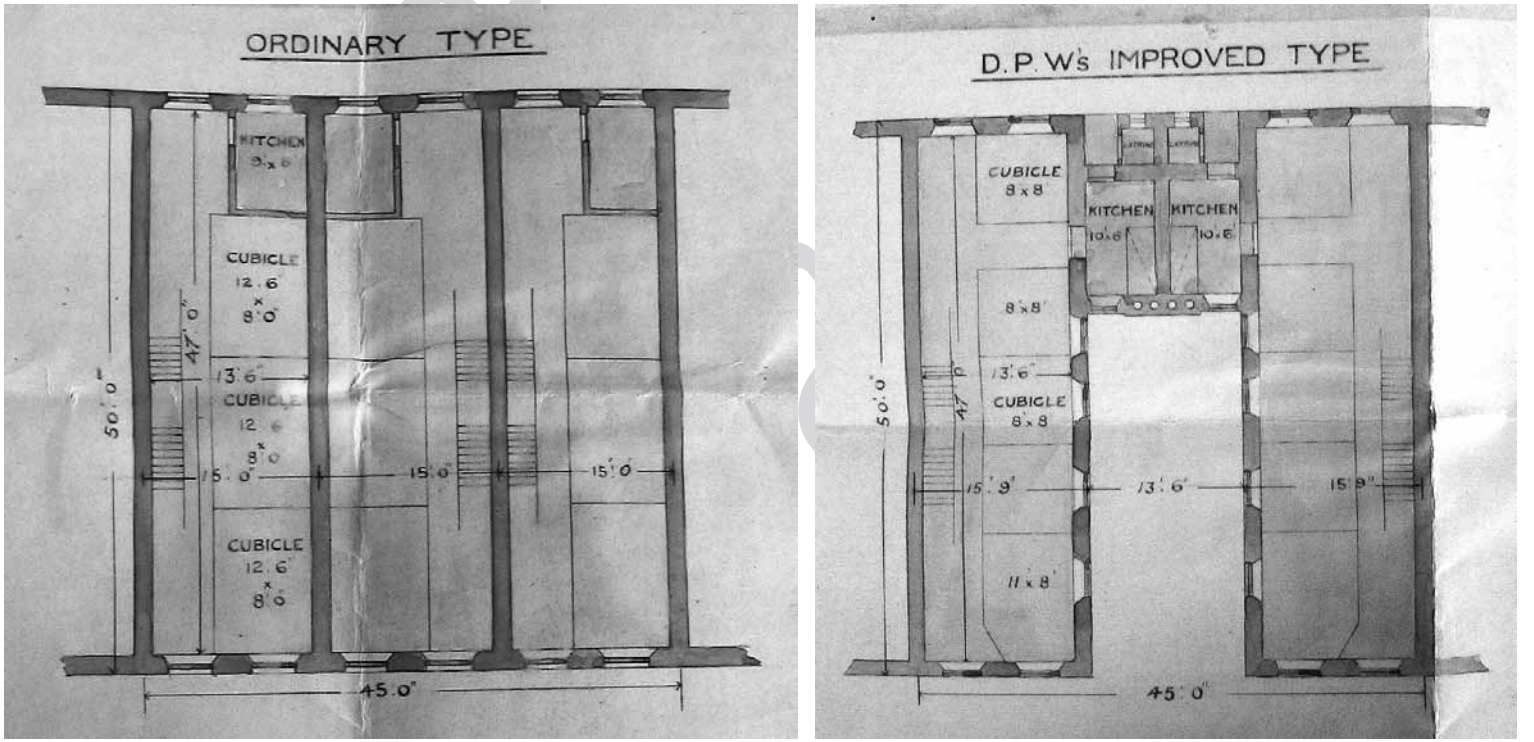
REAPPROPRIATING CHINESENESS: THE LANDLORDS' PETITION AGAINST THE "IMPROVED" TENEMENTS

One of the ways in which the Chinese elites tried to use their "nonpolitical" leverage vis-à-vis the colonial government and the Chinese community was through regular petitions to the government on matters affecting their interests, such as taxation, house rent, regulation of property, and distribution of public resources. Depending on the issues, these petitions sometimes enlisted the support of other colonial constituencies, and at other times they claimed to speak on behalf of the "Chinese community." One example was a petition against the regulation of "Chinese houses." In 1878, not long after Chater obtained approval to construct the two "Chinese houses" in the Central district, another application was sent to Surveyor General Price by a Chinese landholder, Li Tak-Cheong, to erect a total of eighty-seven *tong lau* on the new Praya in the Chinese district (Price, March 23, 1878: 750). After reviewing Li's plans, Price rejected the proposal on the grounds that the new houses did not meet the sanitary standards outlined in the building regulations. Price then issued a set of instructions for Li to improve the design by including additional alleyways, windows, and backyards that would bring more light into the dwellings and improve their ventilation. Calling the proposed houses "the most aggravated type of fever-den," Price lamented that part of the problem lay with the Chinese tenants' ignorance about sanitation, which allowed speculative agents such as Li to extract high rents for poorly designed dwellings.

The proposed *tong lau*, in fact, did not differ significantly from the colony's existing tenements, which had long been condemned for their appalling conditions by sanitary officials.[25] However, what made this case particularly alarming to the surveyor general was its unprecedented scale, which involved not only house-building but also the creation of private streets and alleyways on a site newly reclaimed by the government. In his letter to the colonial secretary, Price pointed out that Li had "become by far the largest builder in the colony and had been carrying out his operations on a wholesale scale." As Li's only apparent concern was to maximize his profits, Price urged the government to implement a more comprehensive set of planning laws to safeguard the future growth of Hong Kong (Price, March 23, 1878: 750–51) (Figure 9.7).

After seeing Price's requested changes to his proposed houses, Li was alarmed. He immediately met with other Chinese landlords and sent a collective petition to the governor (Leong, July 27, 1878: 678–79; Hennessey, July 13, 1878: 679). And as the battle over the building plans continued, this petition, which was jointly signed by all the "leading Chinese" in Hong Kong, subsequently found its way to the Colonial Office in London. In the petition, the property owners argued that Price's proposed improved tenements, which would accommodate far fewer tenants due to requirements for alleyways, backyards, and more windows, were not suited for the Chinese at all. Chinese people, they claimed, were essentially different from "Westerners" in their living standards, and would not appreciate such

25 These opinions can be seen in the annual sanitary reports published by the Colonial Surgeon. For example, see Ayres 1874.



9.7 a) and b) Example of an improved tenement layout proposed by the Public Works Department, 1908. Source: CO129/348/29048 1908, The National Archives of the U.K.: Public Records Office

sanitary provisions, designed for a "very superior class of residence." Chinese habits were, they went on to say,

> *... the outcome of a lengthened experience among the Chinese living in large and crowded cities, and are as deep rooted as most of their social customs, so that it is quite certain that the tenants for whom these houses are intended as they would not understand the reason, would in no way avail themselves of the facilities for the free access of light and air which the Surveyor General's proposed alternations would provide for them.*
>
> *The windows looking out into the proposed alleys would be kept closed and the alleys themselves not being intended for use as thoroughfares, would be made receptacles for the deposit of refuse and filth which would beyond question be suffered to accumulate to an extent in itself dangerous to health.*

The landlords also claimed that back-to-back housing, which was from the point of view of Western sanitarians "unhealthy" due to the lack of light and air, was a legitimate form of housing throughout Chinese history (Leong, July 27, 1878: 679). Citing examples from Mainland China that were free from epidemic diseases, they argued that "it [had] been the practices from time immemorial to build houses back-to-back." The petition then went on to state that the new proposal would lead to a waste of land resources, and that since land was extremely valuable in Hong Kong, it was necessary to make the best use of space in order to enable housing investments to be profitable. Meanwhile, since Chinese tenants were "as a rule unwilling to pay high rents," it was only by dividing the houses into tenement dwellings that many families and individuals could find suitable shelter.

While the petition was obviously aimed at preserving the rentier interests of the property owners, its main argument was structured around a generalized claim about racial difference. Building on the existing cultural divide between Chinese and Europeans, it sought to discredit the sanitary regulations—now cast as a product of "Western science"—by affirming that it was wrong to apply "Western standards" to the Chinese, who possessed a different, but no less sophisticated system for managing their health and environment. The assertion of the Chinese ability to take care of themselves according to their own cultural knowledge also had the effect of arousing a sense of collective pride and nationalistic sentiment—even though the ultimate intention was, ironically, to reinforce the status quo of colonial laissez-faire practices. By framing the sanitary debate around the notions of race and culture, the petition sought to elide simmering discontent about speculation and the housing problem as well as the divide between different classes within the Chinese population.

This case raises question about the position of the Chinese living in the tenements. To what extent did they fit with the various stereotypes ascribed to them by the landlords, the colonial officials, and others who condemned the "Chinese houses" for endangering public health? While there exists no first-hand

account of the views and experiences of these people, it is possible to discern some of the contradictory influences acting on them from indirect sources. According to government reports of this period, "lower-class natives" were surprisingly receptive to some of the sanitary measures advocated by colonial doctors and social reformers.[26] As pointed out by Colonial Surgeon Phineas Ayres, one of the staunchest critics of the "unhealthy" tenements, Chinese tenants were generally not opposed to the sanitary improvements insofar as they did not increase their rents. Ayres attributed the problem to the owners of the buildings, who were unwilling to sacrifice rental income to improve the well-being of tenants. When forced to conform to new building standards reducing rental space, they would typically raise rents to force tenants to cover the cost (Ayres 1880; Smith 1877).

It may be tempting to conclude that property owners were only concerned with maximizing profits—a depiction corresponding to the view of many social commentators and colonial officials, who assumed the moral high ground.[27] But these criticisms must be interpreted against a context in which the colonial administration had long been reluctant to invest public funds in infrastructure and urban services. A case in point was a proposal to extend the universal water supply to all houses in the "Chinese district" (Chadwick 1902). Although colonial engineers had long argued that the provision of running water was of utmost importance for sanitation, the government remained noncommittal to these improvements, and had persistently stated that it was inappropriate to supply water to "Chinese houses" because the "lower-class natives" inhabiting these spaces were too ignorant to appreciate modern technologies, and would waste a significant amount of water (CO 129/312/40595 1902: 280–89). Contesting this unequal treatment, the Chinese landlords petitioned the government and argued that the provision of water to every house was the only way to induce all the Chinese tenants to develop "clean habits" and keep their dwellings sanitary, thereby preventing disease outbreaks and ensuring the well-being of all Hong Kong residents (CO 129/312/40595 1902: 291–93).

Unlike the earlier petition against the new building regulations, wherein "cultural differences" between the Chinese and Europeans were highlighted, this time the Chinese landlords fought for their right of access to water by appealing to the "universal need" for sanitation and public health. Conversely, the colonial administration, in struggling to balance the budget and minimize expenditure, resorted to a racial argument that blamed the "ignorant Chinese" for misusing urban services. Yet, despite the contradictions in these narratives, all vowed to protect the best interests of Hong Kong by laying claim to established discourses. The oscillating positions of the property owners and the government thus illustrate the ambivalent relations between health, cultures, and the built environment, and emphasize how economic considerations always played a key role in shaping and reshaping these relations. The comparison of the different ways in which "Chinese

26 See Hennessy 1881: 723–24. See also Elizabeth Sinn's discussion (2003: 65–66) of the vaccination work performed by the Chinese-run Tung Wah Hospital.

27 These included sanitary engineers and surveyors whose training was in line with that of public health reformers in Britain (Hamlin 1998).

houses" and "Chinese habits" were interpreted also elucidates the malleability of these categories, as well as how class distinction became a significant factor in rearticulating the meanings of "nature" and "culture."

PRESERVING THE DUALISTIC LANDSCAPE

As mentioned earlier, the actual differences between "Chinese" and "European houses" were not always immediately discernable.[28] Like the shophouses in other colonial cities in Southeast Asia, *tong lau* incorporated an eclectic mix of "foreign" elements in their design (Lee 2003; Cheung 2000). Although colonial building regulations specified rules of construction, the actual form and condition of a building varied according to its speculative potential, the intention of its owners, and the economic status of its occupants (Hughes 1951). While the mixed ownership of *tong lau* revealed the ambiguous division between Chinese and European properties, this relationship was further complicated by the fact that throughout the colonial period, not all Chinese lived in *tong lau* and not all *tong lau* were subdivided into tenements. For example, by the 1880s many wealthy Chinese landlords who owned *tong lau* in the Chinese district were themselves living in "European houses" in the Midlevel.[29] However, these circumstances did not change the long-established perception that the Midlevel was a "European district," where the presence of Chinese was a threat to its Europeanness.

While the establishment of the reservation at the Peak helped created a dualistic landscape comparable to those in other colonial cities, it also produced spatial orderings that facilitated the construction of difference in specific ways. Just as many Europeans desired to move to the Peak to raise their social status, wealthy Chinese conceived of living in the Midlevel as a means not only to distinguish themselves from poorer Chinese, but also to signify that they had assumed a modern, civilized way of life that measured up to their white neighbors. Indeed, despite the change of demographic trends over time, this spatial ordering and symbolic representation of social status remain largely intact today. The hierarchy of prestige attached to property ownership at each level, going from the Midlevel to the Peak, can still be described by a passage written a century ago: "The Peak looks down on everything and everybody. The lower levels look up to the Peak" (Lethbridge 2003: 528).

It should also be noted, however, that although many wealthy Chinese adapted some aspects of a Western lifestyle and lived in "European houses," most were simultaneously keen to affirm their Chinese identity, and they took pains to underscore their respect for Chinese tradition. As John Carroll and Tsai Jung-Fang have both argued, the exclusion of these Chinese from the European community prompted them to find other ways to strengthen their social capital and elite status (Carroll 2007; Tsai 1993). Thus, British segregationist policies helped well-

28 See also chapters by Tajudeen and Pieris in this volume.

29 For an illustration of some of the wealthy Chinese living in the Midlevel, see Wright and Cartwright 1990.

to-do Chinese develop a paternalistic relationship with their fellow countrymen and to establish a cultural hegemony by appealing to the traditional Confucian idea of social hierarchy (Tsai 1993: 290). By referring to themselves as "a better-class Chinese," they were also able to bolster their legitimacy as representatives of the indigenous population in a colonial system. Yet, while this deployment of tradition served to consolidate the power and position of the Chinese elite, it also reinforced the mutual exclusion of "Chinese" and "European cultures," as displayed most prominently in the colonial landscape.

Although the 1888 European Reservation Ordinance effectively precluded the potential migration of Chinese to the Peak district, the rapid expansion of Chinese property ownership in the Midlevel ushered in new anxieties among the European residents throughout the 1890s. Unlike the earlier debate over segregation, which focused on the depreciation of "European properties" with the invasion of "Chinese houses," concerns were now explicitly raised about the invasion of "Chinese persons" into the European reservation. It was in this context that in 1904 the Legislative Council drafted a new Hill Reservation bill with the aim of permanently disallowing Chinese from acquiring properties above the Midlevel. The new bill reinstated the principles of the 1888 ordinance aimed at safeguarding the health of the Europeans by keeping them at higher level of the city. However, the bill explained that there was now a greater urgency to preserve the Peak as a "European district" because most of the available sites in the area had already been developed. Because of the limited supply of land, it was necessary to implement a set of new measures to ensure that the Europeans could retain this "sanatorium" with their wives and families (*Hong Kong Hansard*, March 17, 1904).

Although the basic rationale for the new bill was similar to that of the 1888 ordinance, the statement that Chinese living in a "European house" were permitted in the reservation was dropped, signaling a decisive turn to a race-based argument for segregation. At the same time, the new legislation indicated an underlying ideological shift, wherein a discourse of improvement began to give way to a discourse of difference. Yet, while the subsequent enactment of the Hill District Reservation Ordinance (Ordinance No.4, 1904) represented a new phase of racial segregation that paralleled developments in other parts of the empire, it also opened a myriad of channels for cultural negotiation and resistance, fueling new discourses of race, culture, and the built environment in a bifurcated colonial landscape.

CONCLUSION

In the one-and-a-half centuries since Hong Kong came under British colonial rule, countless writers have depicted the colony's urban scenes with fascination. In many of these narratives the contrasting built forms of the city have been presented as symbolic of a burgeoning commerce, growing prosperity, and harmonious coexistence of "cultures," enabled by the smooth coordination of British administration and Chinese entrepreneurship. While the pairing of modernization

and economic progress has been a persistent theme of the "Hong Kong success story," the telling and retelling of this story also naturalized a particular discourse of colonial capitalist development predicated on relentless speculation and accumulation.

In contrast to the familiar "East meets West" narrative, this chapter has tried to reveal a more complex history, one shaped by continuous contestations between different constituencies under colonial rule. By examining the development of the *tong lau* and the varied ascriptions of the "Chinese house" in the late nineteenth century, it has attempted to illustrate some of the underlying tensions between the liberal, laissez-faire ideology that legitimized colonial development and the social reality of a colonial city marked with exclusionary spatial practices. These contradictory dynamics gave rise to new discourses and representations that solidified a dualism between "European" and "Chinese" cultures. While this bifurcated milieu helped justify different rules for different peoples, it also created new channels for cultural and political negotiation. And among those who participated were Chinese property owners, who sought to advance their economic and social standings vis-à-vis the colonial system and the Chinese populace.

A hybrid house form that emerged out of Chinese building tradition and colonial building policies, the *tong lau* constituted contested ideological terrain, embodying multiple meanings and values that continually reshaped investment practices and ongoing urban transformation. Notwithstanding the rise and fall of their property values over time, the *tong lau* remained an "anti-normative" housing type, associated simultaneously with poverty and backwardness and a resilient native culture that evaded colonial domination. While the assertion of cultural autonomy endowed these built forms with a sense of pride and nationalistic sentiment, the "Chineseness" that the *tong lau* was perceived to embody was nevertheless inseparable from the categories produced under colonial rule.

Although the transfer of sovereignty to the People's Republic of China in 1997 brought new interest in Hong Kong's heritage and history, the nostalgia that gathered around the *tong lau* is best understood not so much as a reflection of a growing "national belonging" among Hong Kong Chinese than as an attempt to reassert their (colonial) identity, which has been threatened by reunification with the Chinese nation. In this context, the *tong lau* assumes a more prominent role in the narration and celebration of the "Hong Kong success story," where, ironically, the colonial past is reclaimed as a resource against a threatening larger nationhood. Yet, as negative representation of colonial modernity, the *tong lau*'s symbolic significance can only be manifested by reaffirming its own irrelevance and obsoleteness in contemporary urban development.

The tensions within the current debate over the *tong lau*'s future echo, then, the many silenced tensions of the past. The resilient duality of the postcolonial landscape has concealed much of the social contestation and conflict in Hong Kong's history. In tracing some of these trajectories, this chapter has attempted to shed some light on the ambiguities in the categorization of building forms and cultural norms, as well as the intimate link between architectural representation and political and economic processes.

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