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Modern Urban Texture Formation Opportunity From Central to Tai Ping Shan Areas of Hong Kong (1841-1905)

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Abstract:

After Britain entered and occupied Hong Kong Island in 1841, Hong Kong developed rapidly from a small fishing village on the southern border of China. Among them, the Central and Mid-levels areas, as one of the earliest developed areas, also concentrated the topographical features of Hong Kong's "By the mountains and by the sea", and the urban planning of this area laid the foundation for the overall urban development of Hong Kong. From the aspects of politics, economy, society, culture and environment, this paper tries to understand the formation opportunity of early urban texture in Central and Tai Ping Shan areas by collecting and analyzing the data of Hong Kong in its early days as a British colony, and previous studies and field visits.

Keywords:

Hong Kong Central, Tai Ping Shan, Hong Kong Urban Planning History, Hong Kong Street Development, Pedestrian Space

1. Introduction

Hong Kong is one of the most developed and modern cities in the world. It is located in South China, bordering Shenzhen in the north and on the east side of the Pearl River Estuary. It is surrounded by the sea on three sides and the Victoria Harbor in the area. Because of its vast harbor and deep water conditions, Victoria Harbor has become a natural port, which provides convenience for international trade. Since becoming a British colony, Hong Kong has been built by Britain as a trading center in the Far East due to its superior geographical conditions. Following the model of European cities, the United Kingdom built entrepot trading facilities, which promoted the rapid development of Hong Kong as an important international trading city.

As the core area of Hong Kong, the development of the Central and Western districts has played a driving role in the whole of Hong Kong. As one of the earliest areas developed by the British Hong Kong government, Central quickly became the political and economic center of Hong Kong. At the same time, the Taiping Mountain area also gradually developed into the center of Chinese life because of the Chinese moved in, forming a situation in which China and the West are divided but interdependent. The formation of this situation has laid a solid foundation for the prosperity of the Central and western areas in the future.

2. Research Purpose and Value

2.1 Research purpose

The Central and Western District is located in the northwest of Hong Kong Island. It is the earliest development area of Hong Kong after the port was opened. It is now the commercial, financial, entertainment and tourism center of Hong Kong. It is also the seat of Government House, Government Headquarters and the Legislative Council.

Based on the recent history of the Central to Tai Ping Shan district (1841-1905), this paper discusses the evolution of urban construction, road layout and residents' life in Central and Tai Ping Shan District. From the perspective of historical environmental protection, this paper reviews and analyzes the events, people, institutions, laws and regulations related to the planning and construction of pedestrian space in the Mid-levels Mountain area from 1841 to 1905, more clearly shows the historical context of urban development in the region, systematically summarizes the basic characteristics of modern urban planning and pedestrian space construction in the Central and western areas, and explores the internal factors of their formation.

2.2 Research value

From the perspective of historical building conservation and cultural background, understand the formation reasons and historical context of the urban texture of the Central and Tai Ping Shan District.

At the same time, it will accumulate basic information and enrich the research content for the overall study of China's modern urban planning history, which will play a certain reference role in the research and protection of urban historical and cultural heritage in Hong Kong.

3. Humanistic Background

3.1 The division between Chinese and Europeans

In the early days of the port's opening, the Hong Kong British government had already separated the management of local Chinese and Europeans: the Hong Kong British government had always had complaints about the sanitation in the locals' residential areas. In order to highlight the differences between Europeans and local people, the Hong Kong British government relocated the local people who living in the Central area to Tai Ping Shan, and at that time, the sanitation problems in the Chinese residential areas had always been criticized. Some people even raised livestock at home, and the Hong Kong British government ignored the public health management of the Chinese residential areas under the pretext of "respecting Chinese

traditional culture”. Later, due to concerns that the sanitary conditions in the Chinese community would affect European health, they also designated European residential areas and banned Chinese from entering.

The Hong Kong British government had auctioned the plots of the upper market and lower market. Due to the low prices, some Chinese had also participated in the auction at that time, but later, as the status of Hong Kong's entrepot port gradually improved, the land value of Central greatly increased. Gordon re-auctioned some plots of the upper market in late 1843 and ordered the Chinese in the upper market to move out within half a year, which caused strong opposition from many Chinese [1].

3.2 Differences in management measures

In the judicial aspect, the Chinese case shall be the responsibility of the British people at first, after the British military court judicial form, the measure lasted for more than a year, in May 1844, the abolition of the British military, Chinese residents litigation can continue to use the Qing statutes [2], when it was not until 1865 changed to Chinese and europeans have equal legal rights [3]. In 1841, the British established a central prison on Hong Kong. At that time, Chinese prisoners were crowded and even subjected to cruel prison treatment, while European prisoners had four or five times more space without being mistreated. This difference in treatment was not improved until 1877 [4].

At the social level, due to the development of entrepot trade industry to absorb a large number of grassroots people, the security problem of Victoria City is a little tricky. In 1844, Chinese people out on the streets after 8 o'clock at night were required to carry a lantern and a annual pass (commonly called “dengzhi [lantern paper]”) as shown in Figure 1, and they were not allowed to go out after 10 o'clock.



Figure 1. Night Pass issued by the Hong Kong Government in 1881, Hong Kong Museum of History, File No. E1994.2a.

Violators could be directly imprisoned or even arrested. The curfew law was carried out until the end of the 19th century, so as to protect the personal safety of Europeans. In Chinese-inhabited areas, the “Chinese manage the Chinese” policy was adopted, with Chinese leaders maintaining the security. This policy was not abolished until 1897.

At the same time, due to ideological differences, most Chinese did not trust Western medicine, but the health conditions of the Chinese community were poor. Some Chinese applied to the government for the allocation of land to build Chinese hospitals, but the Hong Kong and British government ignored the rights and interests of the Chinese and refused to approve [5]. It was not until three years later that a Chinese hospital, managed by Chinese people and treated by traditional Chinese medicine, was set up after the general Registrar of public opinion found that patients

in the Kwong Fook Tsz in Sheung Wan shared a room with corpses. However, due to the conditions, it could only be used as a hospice facility.

All kinds of measures have separated the main activities and residential styles of Europeans and Chinese in Victoria City. It is easy to see that all measures taken by Britain in Hong Kong at the early stage show the depreciation and discrimination of Chinese, and all laws and regulations put the rights of Europeans first, which also led to the increasingly hostile environment of Chinese residential areas and laid the foretaste for the re-planning of Chinese residential areas.

4. Basic Factors of Urban Texture in Central and Mid-Levels

4.1 Initial planning of port opening

In order to monitor the actions of the Qing government in the Kowloon Peninsula and to worry about the resistance of the local fishermen in Hong Kong, the British government of Hong Kong chose to build a city in the north of Hong Kong Island as a military and commercial trade base [6].

In 1842, the British Hong Kong government designated several areas along the northern shore of Hong Kong Island as stronghold city limits, including the Mid-levels area, and named Victoria City after Queen Victoria. On the other hand, Hong Kong Island is mountainous, with up to 82% mountains. The topography of the island is undulating and the highlands are scattered in various districts of Hong Kong Island, while the lowlands are mainly distributed in the north and south banks of Hong Kong Island, forming a long and narrow flat land [7].

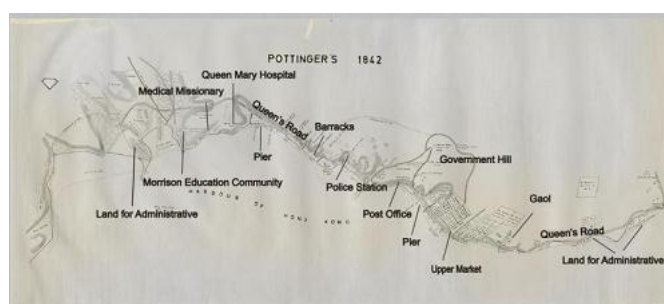


Figure 2. Pottinger's map 1842. Processed according to The UK National Archive FO 925/2427.

In 1843, the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Pottinger, appointed Alexander Gordon as the City's Land Officer, Surveyor and Inspector of Roads, responsible for drawing up the blueprint for the city of Victoria [8]. As shown in Figure 2, Gordon conceived of a coastal strip city modeled on the European cities of the same period. In the planning, the Queen's Road and a seaside road along the island are opened along the contour line, and the mid-levels of Central are opened as the Government Hill to build various government organs and residences. Around the government organs, various religious and civil activity buildings are built, such as churches, courts, shops, post offices, police stations, markets and European residential areas. Commercial and residential areas along Queen's Road were slowly formed, laying the foundation for Central as a political and economic centre.

As shown in Figure 3, the construction of the waterfront road required the construction of a seawall to make the coastline more flat for pedestrians and horse-drawn carriages, and to facilitate the use of the pier, and the road was also named Des Voeux Road after the then Governor of Hong Kong, Des Voeux. In 1890, due to the

development of traffic, a new road was built across the east and west, when the British Prince of Connaught visited Hong Kong, the British Hong Kong government named the new road Connaught Road. These roads, which run from east to west along the northern shore of Hong Kong Island, are still the main arteries of Hong Kong Island. The north-south roads were mostly steep paths due to the topography, which could only be passed by sedan chairs or pedestrians at that time. To this day, many north-south streets in the Central and Western District are still dominated by ramps and stairs.



Figure 3. 1860 plan of the proposed pier during construction. The UK National Archive MFQ 1/1050/16.

4.2 Land reclamation

During the construction of Hollywood Road, Queen's Road and Bonham Street, a large amount of sand and gravel was generated. In order to reduce the transportation cost, the British government of Hong Kong poured sand and gravel directly into Victoria Harbour to expand the development area of Victoria City. This action became the first informal reclamation in Hong Kong. Due to the mountainous terrain of Hong Kong Island, the flat ground is mostly curved and narrow. In order to facilitate the docking and unloading of ships, the British government of Hong Kong began to fill the coast to build seawall and roads [9]. On December 28 1851, a fire broke out in the Chinese residential area in the north of Queen's Road. As most of the Chinese houses were wooden at that time, the British army used 100 pounds of explosives to blow up the houses to avoid the spread of the fire. As a result, nearly 500 Chinese-style houses were burned down. Hong Kong government will fill the rubble into the sea after the fire, government official also planning on Hong Kong island [10]. In the later period, the Hong Kong British government reclaimed the coastline to form Connaught Road, which was later widened due to the service of trams and buses [11]. According to Figure 4, we can see the part of reclamation in successive dynasties. However, the streets in the inner part were not widened due to the mature development of various buildings and the high cost of re-repair.



Figure 4. Several reclamation projects. Processed according to Hong Kong Reclamation map.

4.3 Area Resumption

Due to various disasters such as plague, typhoon, fire house and so on, the poor environment of the Chinese residential area further deteriorated the health situation, which seriously endangered the life of the Europeans, and the city fell into a governance crisis. With the development of the city and the improvement of sanitation standards, the implementation of mandatory housing sanitation standards made it difficult for some old-style Chinese houses to meet modern standards, and these houses were demolished or renovated, and the street shape changed accordingly.

F.A.Coooper, Secretary for Works, proposed to improve the Chinese residential area and rezone Tai Ping Shan [12]. In order to prevent the epidemic from recurring, the British Hong Kong government reclaimed 272,000 square feet of land to replan, burned some houses, removed rainwater channels, and tried to improve public health in the Chinese community in a new way [13].

According to Figure 5 and Figure 6, the area of Kau U Fong between Aberdeen and Gough Streets was rebuilt in 1903. In the process, twenty-four houses in the west and south of Kau U Fong and eight houses in An Wo Lane were demolished to create a new street up to 30 feet wide. It is expected that the remaining land will be used for building purposes [14].

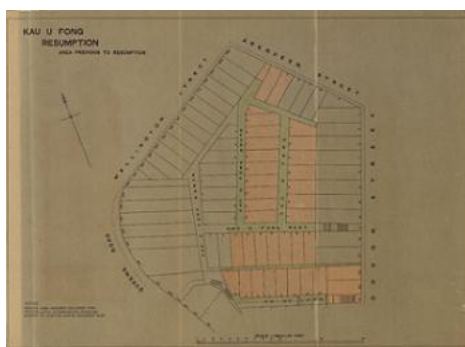


Figure 5. *Kau U Fong resumption plan (previous). “Insanitary Properties Resumptions”. Hong Kong Sessional Papers 1905.*



Figure 6. *Kau U Fong resumption plan. “Insanitary Properties Resumptions”. Hong Kong Sessional Papers 1905.*

In order to improve the health conditions in Chinese residential areas, the British Hong Kong government promulgated the <Public Health and Building Ordinance> in 1903. The enactment of this Ordinance marked an important milestone in Hong Kong’s urban development system, the basic principles of which were used until the Second World War. The regulations specify that each adult should occupy an average of 50 square feet of land, and that all homes must have at least 550 cubic feet of space to ensure air circulation. Otherwise, it will be considered illegal.

Refer to Figure 7, the Cleaning Bureau had issued a notice stating that the living conditions on the fourth floor of 44 Aberdeen Street were overcrowded and asked the owners to reduce the number of residents within one week. The announcement highlighted the government's concern about overcrowded living conditions and its determination to improve public health.

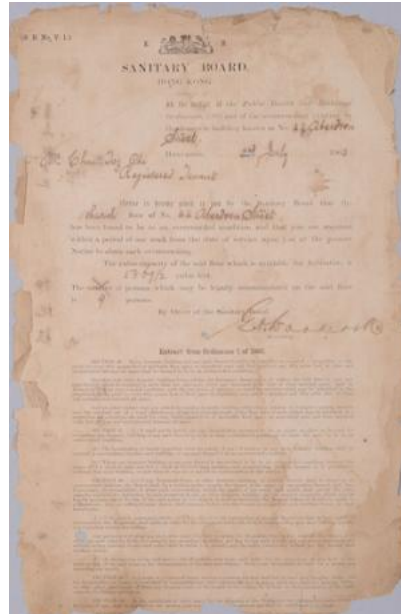


Figure 7. Rectification notice issued by the Cleansing Bureau. Hong Kong Museum of History, File No. E1995.687.

Tai Ping Shan District was the primary residential region for early Chinese settlers in Hong Kong. It was characterized by overcrowded living conditions, with numerous families often residing within a single dwelling. This led to poor hygiene and sanitary conditions, making it vulnerable to infectious diseases such as the plague that broke out in 1894. Following this outbreak, the government took decisive action to improve the living standards of the Chinese population.

A major step in this effort was the demolition of structures in Tai Ping Shan District. This was done to eradicate the breeding ground of the plague and to mitigate the overcrowded conditions. As shown in Figure 8, the government embarked on a rebuilding program, constructing new buildings with terraces. These terraces served a dual purpose: they not only provided better ventilation and air circulation, thus reducing the spread of diseases, but also increased the available living space, improving living conditions for the residents.



Figure 8. Resumption of the Tai Ping Shan District. Hong Kong Museum of History, File No. P1964.109.

It underscored the importance of urban planning and infrastructure in promoting public health and social well-being. The subsequent rise in living standards in Tai Ping Shan District contributed to the overall development and progress of Hong Kong society.

As can be seen from the Figure 9 and Figure 10, a public gardens were built to reduce housing density after houses were burned down in the original epidemic area, and theaters and temples were rebuilt to ensure entertainment and religious facilities for the Chinese. The road between the buildings in areas A and B was widened to increase air mobility. The channel was re-paved, five more public toilets were added to accommodate 30 to 40 people, and the traditional dry toilets were replaced with water toilets, so that the hygiene habits of the Chinese people were improved. At the same time, the bacteriology Institute, the staff quarters of the Cleaning Bureau and the TungWah Hospital were built here to ensure the health of the Chinese residential area.



Figure 9. Tai Ping Shan pre-resumption map (1895) “Insanitary Properties Resumptions”. Hong Kong Sessional Papers 1905.

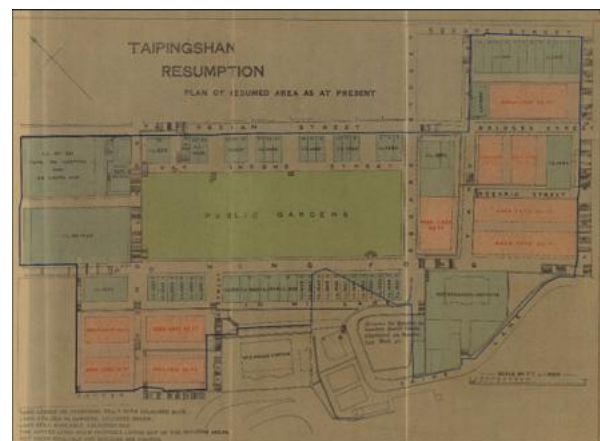


Figure 10. Tai Ping Shan resumption plan (1905) “Insanitary Properties Resumptions”. Hong Kong Sessional Papers 1905.

In the Upper Lascar Row area, we can clearly observe from Figure 11 that part of the private property that was originally located in the middle has been rezoned and demolished. These demolished buildings were partially integrated to form Lower Lascar Row, which was extended through the north-south Staircase Street to provide more space for pedestrians and improve air circulation. This transformation not only optimizes the layout of the street, but also improves the efficiency and comfort of

citizens, and plays a positive role in improving the quality of the urban environment and the use value of public space.

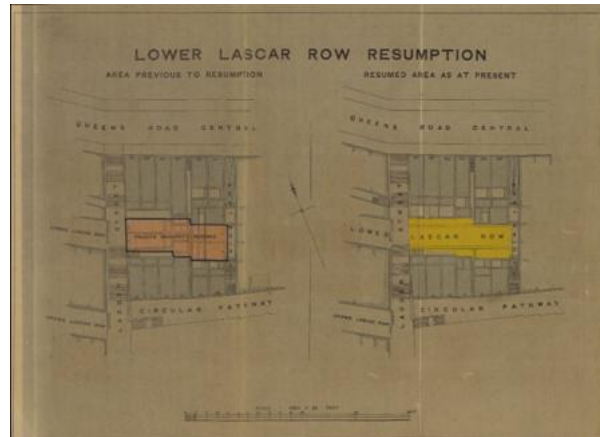


Figure 11. Lower Lascar Row resumption map (1905) “Insanitary Properties Resumptions”.
Hong Kong Sessional Papers 1905.

4.4 Impacts of infrastructure and transportation modes

In the second half of the 19th century, the modes of transportation and infrastructure of the Central district of Hong Kong underwent major changes as shown in Figure 12. This change has had a profound impact on the formation and evolution of walking Spaces. During this period, walking was still one of the most important modes of transportation, but as the city grew, streets and infrastructure were gradually improved.

During this period, the streets of Central were gradually widened and improved. These streets are not only more spacious, but also paved with hard and flagstone paths, making walking more comfortable and safe. In addition, the buildings on both sides of the street have gradually been renovated and updated, providing more opportunities and convenience for commercial activities.

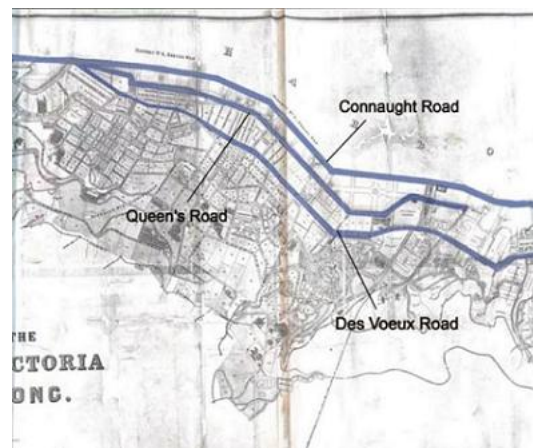


Figure 12. Schematic of the main road 1899. Based on data from the Hong Kong Public Records Department.

At the end of the 19th century, the HongKong began to adopt the way of laying bricks and stone, replaced the gravel and clay of the road before. Roads made of this material have a higher carrying capacity and durability, and can better withstand the repeated crushing of pedestrians and vehicles. At the same time, the texture of bricks

and slabs is also harder and less prone to wear and damage, thus extending the service life of the road.

In addition, the material of the road also has a more beautiful appearance, adding a quaint and elegant atmosphere to the Central and Western area. This aesthetic not only enhances the image of the city, but also provides a more pleasant walking environment for citizens and visitors. Pottinger Street, for example, was paved with flagstones because of its steep terrain to make it easier for pedestrians to walk up and down and not to slip. Pottinger Street is an existing old street, the ground is paved with granite rocks from the beginning of the construction of the urban area of Hong Kong Island, and it is still intact, which is a testament to the history of Hong Kong for more than 100 years. In 1843 Queen Victoria appointed Sir Pottinger as the first Governor of Hong Kong and the street was named after him [15]. Because the street is built of stone, it is also commonly known as “Rocky Road”. This unique paving adds comfort to walking on the high-slope ramp, according to Figure 13, we can see it still surviving and is one of the oldest walking spaces in Hong Kong.

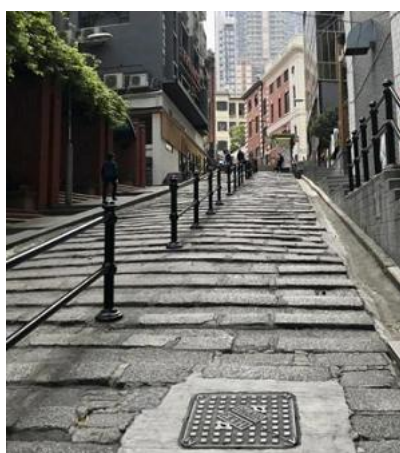


Figure 13. current situation of Pottinger Street

In addition to the optimization of streets, there have been significant developments in transportation. The end of the 19th century, trams and buses started in operating, provides people with more convenient and efficient travel choice. From Figure 14, we can see that tram tracks have been laid on the main road. The emergence of these vehicles not only improves the travel conditions of citizens, but also has a profound impact on the transportation layout of the region.

With the popularization of trams and buses, the road surface gradually widened, providing more spacious space for other vehicles and pedestrians. This has led to major changes in the layout and design of pedestrian Spaces, and the walkways have gradually been planned to be more humane and improve the walking experience of citizens.

The emergence of trams and buses has brought new opportunities for business activities in Central. Businesses can use the convenience of these means of transportation to attract more customers, thus promoting the prosperity of business activities. At the same time, the emergence of these means of transportation has also driven the economic development of the surrounding areas, attracting more investment and talent inflow.

It can be said that the area has achieved remarkable results in street improvement and transportation system construction. These efforts have not only improved the

quality of life of citizens, but also provided strong support for the commercial development of the region, which has played a positive role in promoting the economic and social development of this district.



*Figure 14. Tram tracks in Des Voeux Road Central, Central. Hong Kong Memory
www.hkmemory.hk*

5. Conclusions

To sum up, we can deeply understand that the core purpose of the measures taken by the British Hong Kong Government in the area from Central to Victoria Peak was to maximize the status of Hong Kong as a Far Eastern trading centre within the limited land resources in Hong Kong, and the development strategy at that time gave priority to the well-being of Europeans to a certain extent. As a result, various facilities needed for the daily life of Europeans and related to trade were prioritized for construction, followed by the livelihood of the Chinese. In this way, Hong Kong has not only successfully adapted to the needs of trade development in the Far East, but also provided relatively balanced living facilities for different ethnic groups. Future studies will focus more on the design of pedestrian Spaces and buildings along the nodes.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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