

HONG KONG

1862-1919

GEOFFREY ROBLEY SAYER

*Edited and with additional notes by
D. M. Emrys Evans*



HONG KONG UNIVERSITY PRESS

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1862-1919

YEARS OF DISCRETION

A sequel to

HONG KONG: BIRTH, ADOLESCENCE
AND COMING OF AGE

GEOFFREY ROBLEY SAYER

Edited and with additional notes by
D. M. Emrys Evans



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FOREWORD

When my father died in 1962 he left me the manuscript of a follow-up to his book *Hong Kong: birth, adolescence, and coming of age*. The manuscript was entitled 'Hong Kong 1862-1919: years of discretion' and had never been published.

The work is not of great historical importance; indeed little of significance occurred during the period to excite the interest of anyone outside Hong Kong. And it is only in comparatively recent years that the people of Hong Kong have shown much concern or appreciation of how this unique outpost evolved.

It was because little, if anything, has been written of the period that I felt it worthwhile to pursue the idea of arranging the publication of a limited issue. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance given me by Professor Dafydd Evans who so willingly undertook to edit the manuscript and to give valuable advice on how to proceed. I am indebted to the Hong Kong University Press for their help in the preparatory work and for agreeing to publish, at their risk!

G. M. SAYER

Hong Kong 1974

EDITOR'S PREFACE

There are few original works of history written by persons who lived and worked in Hong Kong. The names of Eitel, Norton-Kyshe and Endacott spring to mind since their works have all been re-published recently. Perhaps not so well known is Geoffrey Robley Sayer whose *Hong Kong : birth, adolescence, and coming of age* was published by the Oxford University Press in 1937. This work has been difficult to come by for some years and many may be unaware of it. It is, however, a fascinating, if not always historically accurate, account of the first and, in some ways, most interesting years of Hong Kong's existence as a British Crown Colony. But until recently, the existence of a successor volume was unknown. It is this work, entitled *Hong Kong 1862-1919 : years of discretion*, which is now published for the first time.

Hong Kong 1862-1919 was completed in 1939 but the advent of the Second World War prevented its publication. The manuscript lay untouched until 1952 when the author clearly intended that it should go forward for publication, but it was still unpublished at his death in 1962. I learnt of its existence from the author's son, Mr G. M. Sayer, who very generously let me read it. I then suggested that he should make a proposal for its publication by the Hong Kong University Press. That proposal was accepted.

G. R. Sayer's personal history is a fascinating reflection of a chapter of Hong Kong's colonial history. He was born in 1887 and was educated at Highgate School, London, and at Oxford University, where he won a Blue at football. He sat the Civil Service Examinations and, though his results enabled him to choose a position with the 'plum' service, the Indian Civil Service, he was attracted by the orient and opted happily for Hong Kong.

He arrived in Hong Kong as a cadet officer in 1910 and, following the government requirement of the time, was immediately dispatched to Canton to learn Chinese. There he was closeted with a teacher and rapidly proceeded past the point of competence towards true scholarship in the language. This scholarship he was to cultivate further not only during the remainder of his official career but also in retirement in England.

His career was interrupted by the Great War in which he reached the rank of Major in the Rifle Brigade. He returned to Hong Kong, married, in 1919. Before the War, he had already had the invaluable and rewarding task of serving as Secretary to the Governor, Sir Henry May, and, after his return, he filled a number of important posts and was Director of Education at the time of his retirement in 1938. He saw Hong Kong pass through a number of crises in the 1920s and 1930s and, as is the frequent fate of the British civil servant, played his part in them largely unsung. His sporting interests also drew on his time and energies: he was a great promoter of the game of cricket in Hong Kong schools and within the civil service, as well as being no mean performer himself with the bat. On a number of occasions he captained the Hong Kong side in interport matches.

In the midst of all this activity, he managed to publish in 1922 a volume of Horace's Odes in translation. His next published work, *Hong Kong: birth, adolescence, and coming of age*, the predecessor to the present volume, appeared in 1937. Then in 1951, some years after his retirement from Hong Kong, he published with notes and an introduction a translation of a well-known Chinese work by Lan Pin-nan, *Ching-te-chen T'ao-Lu*, on Chinese pottery. This was followed in 1959 and shortly before his death, by a translation of Ch'en Liu's *T'ao Ya; or pottery refinements*, again with notes and an introduction.

I am not an historian by profession but my work on the laws of Hong Kong has inevitably led me into frequent and intimate contact with its history. Indeed, excursions into the byways of Hong Kong's history, as my friends know probably to their cost, has become one of my most frequently sought diversions. I was extremely grateful when Mr G. M. Sayer reposed sufficient confidence in me to entrust his father's manuscript to my care. The author considered that the work was ready for publication, but, as it was completed in 1939, many of the references were to Hong Kong of that year and to people's then contemporary knowledge of the place. The modern reader needs to be reminded of the Hong Kong of which Sayer was writing and this required annotations which are given as Additional Notes at the back of the book. The text also required retyping and for this I am greatly indebted to Mrs Marjorie Rear who undertook this task with care and dedication. I had found that a considerable amount of copy editing was also required and Marjorie, as she retyped, improved considerably on the copy editing which I had done. The responsibility for the final typescript is, however, mine

and I have to confess that I took a number of liberties with the manuscript where I felt that they were desirable.

The author included a list of pictures to be inserted but he did not include the pictures themselves with his text. Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Curator, of the City Museum and Art Gallery, Mr John Warner, for help in providing the illustrations in this book. My thanks go to the University Press Committee of the University of Hong Kong for taking the far-sighted view that this hitherto unpublished part of Hong Kong's historical tapestry ought to be published by the Hong Kong University Press.

But my thanks must finally go to Mr G. M. Sayer whose encouragement and generosity made the whole idea of publication a possibility.

March 1974

DAFYDD EMRYS EVANS
University of Hong Kong

PREFACE

My narrative opens in the year 1862, twenty-one years after the foundation of the Colony. Of the events leading up to its foundation and of its early struggles I have attempted some account in a sketch entitled *Hong Kong: birth, adolescence, and coming of age* published, in 1937, by Oxford University Press; and to this I must refer the reader who wishes to begin at the beginning.

Here I make no introductions except just so much as is necessary to make a serviceable joint with that which has gone before. But for the benefit of those of my readers who are disposed to take the past as read I can at least offer them the assurance that they begin here a new chapter in Hong Kong's history.

The age-coming synchronizes with the year in which, in the sphere of Anglo-Chinese relations, the Treaty of Tientsin, and in domestic affairs, the efforts of Sir Hercules Robinson, began to bear fruit. For our purposes it is convenient to start at the beginning of Sir Hercules' term of office.

Nonetheless it is permissible to hope that those readers too may find in the present instalment enough of interest to induce them after all to look back as well as forward.

As regards my sources, I am largely dependent on unconsidered trifles in contemporary memoirs and travellers' tales, in quoting from which I have, I think, invariably named the author either in the text or in a footnote. In so far as I do not quote, I am not infrequently indebted to Dr Eitel, author of *Europe in China*, either for providing me with facts or putting me on the track of them, and I am conscious that, in accepting him as one of my authorities on this occasion, I owe some explanation to the reader; for I recall that in my account of Hong Kong's early days I wrote him off as something of a romancer. There is, however, no real inconsistency. Where Eitel conspicuously fails is to make a coherent story of the development of the city of Victoria before his own appearance on the scene. But that does not mean that he is to be rejected as an unreliable witness of facts within his own knowledge and of situations in which he himself was not the least actor.

As for his fellow chronicler Mr Norton-Kyshe, author of *The history of the laws and courts of Hong Kong*, I fear that this egregious gentleman fully maintains his reputation for strictly unconscious humour.

Besides the memoirs, I have derived no little enlightenment from a regrettably small output of contemporary prints and photographs. One does not look for a great wealth of local topographical engravings, but the lack of good photographs is surprising, and much to be deplored. For a city whose claim to fame rests so largely on the rapidity of its growth it is surely regrettable that the expansion should not be recorded by means, for example, of a photographic series taken from set points simultaneously with the periodical census. Perhaps there was not time for photographs! Anyhow I throw it out as a suggestion for the future that someone should make it his business to see that old landmarks are not allowed to disappear unrecorded.

But in one respect the period dealt with is better provided for than is our own. The sixties, seventies and eighties of the last century were the age of the semi-political pamphlet; and Hong Kong pamphlets of the period, however fly-blown, are not devoid of materials of value to the chronicler.

As for official documents I owe something both to the Sessional Papers and such-like government Blue books and also to the Statistical Abstract of the Hong Kong Government. No two sources could be less alike. The former involves a long and dry journey, with the idea not so much of finding gems in the dust, as of providing solid material upon which to build. The latter on the other hand represents tabloid history in its most concentrated form, calling for the application of a good deal of water both to revive it and to bring it to a proper consistency; and at the psychological moment the addition of a little sugar-coating to assist the process of assimilation.

G. R. SAYER

6, Ridgway Place
Wimbledon
May 1939

P.S. As the above date indicated this volume was ready for publication nearly ten years ago, but the war imposed delay. I have resisted the temptation to alter the text in any way in the light of later events.

ILLUSTRATIONS

between pages 82-83

1. The signing of the Treaty of Tientsin, 26 June 1858
2. Sir William Robinson (Governor of Hong Kong, 1891-1898) with the Legislative Council
3. Queen's Road Central looking west, *c.* 1865
4. Pedder Street and the Clock tower, *c.* 1865
5. Old City Hall, Supreme Court, and Mid-levels, *c.* 1910
6. Waterfront buildings on the Praya (later Des Voeux Road Central), Hong Kong, *c.* 1865
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1 THE TREATY OF TIENTSIN

For a description of the colony at its coming-of-age in 1862 we have the choice of several memoirs by military officers employed in the Second China War, and similar birds of passage who have committed their impressions to print. Some were clearly unlucky in the season of their visit and have little good to say of the place. For example, Laurence Oliphant, private secretary to Lord Elgin, thus unburdens himself from the deck of a P. and O. steamer anchored in the harbour in September:

Often for days together we remained sweltering on board, from lack of energy and sufficient inducement to leave the ship. The charms of the Club or the excitement of a game of billiards failed to tempt us. Hong-Kong boasts of only two walks for the conscientious valetudinarian—one along the sea-shore to the right, and the other to the left of the settlement: then there is a scramble to the top of Victoria Peak at the back of it, but this achievement involves an early start, and a probable attack of fever. The monotony of life is varied by this malady alternating with boils or dysentery; so that the proverbial hospitality of the merchants at Hong-Kong can only be exercised under very adverse influences. It was not difficult to account for a certain depression of spirits and tone of general irritability, which seemed to pervade the community. A large bachelor's dinner was the extreme limit of gaiety.

It was provoking that a place possessing so many scenic attractions should have been so entirely devoid of charms. Like a beautiful woman with a bad temper, Hong-Kong claimed our admiration while it repelled our advances.¹

Much the same opinion was formed by the Rev. R. J. L. M'Ghee, Chaplain of the forces and author of *How we got to Peking*:²

I would be glad to think as well as possible of Hong Kong—it has great natural beauties. (p. 34)

He contrives however to give us a useful description of the place:

As we steamed up the harbour the town of Victoria came into view, stretching along the foot of a mountain for a distance of more than four miles, if you begin at the Chinese town and measure up to Jardine's at East Point; then there are terraces rising over each other up the steep hill-side, and villa residences large and small standing in well laid out compounds, and built in the best English style.

About half way down the town, but high on the hill stands Government House, a handsome building; the bishop's residence lower down, to which is attached a Chinese college, is marked by its small round tower. The barracks are of course low down, in a most hot and unhealthy position, and the Commander-in-Chief's house above the barrack, but still not well placed. Then the great mercantile establishments are chiefly near the water, close to the main wharf; on the left is Dent's house . . . while Jardine's is far away at the extreme end of the town . . . the club-house, a convenient building, faces the Post-office in the centre of the town, in the Queen's Road; as you land at 'Pittar's wharf' [*sic*] and walk up the short distance from the water to Queen's Road, the right leads you towards the Chinese town, the left to the barrack and the English quarter: but the chief family residences are on the side of the hill which is all tastefully planted. (pp. 16-17)

Forsaking the sea-front, he rides out to the 'tumbledown barrack' built as a 'sanatory station' at 'Siwhan'⁴ and back by way of Happy Valley:

Leaving then the beauteous but deceptive 'Happy Valley' on our right . . . we arrive at the handsome house and warehouses of Jardine and Co, which lie to the left of the road, between it and the east end of the harbour. These gentlemen have their own pier and village for their workmen, and their own guard of Indian troops, all armed and drilled and walking sentry, in regular military style. . . . (pp. 31-2)

He takes us next along the road—the Shau Kei Wan Road—which winds

along the margin of the strait, for about two miles beyond this; and, if there is anything of a northern breeze here, you will meet the rank beauty and fashion of Victoria taking their evening drive or ride in carriages of all sorts, from the London britscha [*sic*] of the Governor, down to the buggy or waggon of the storekeeper. If, on the other hand, the wind is south, you must go out in the opposite direction on a new road toward 'Poke Fullom'⁵ . . . much higher, being cut in the mountain side, and from it you look down the granite cliffs upon the deep still water beneath. (pp. 32-3)

Incidentally he tells us where the troops of the expeditionary force were distributed:

. . . the Royals and a Madras regiment at Victoria. At Stanley barracks, about seven miles across the island, the second battalion of the Sixtieth Royal Rifles. At Deep Water Bay, about halfway between Victoria and Stanley, on the right, Desborough's and Govan's Batteries and the King's Dragoon Guards. At Siwan, the Military Train. And the remainder of the forces at Kowloong. (p. 18)

So much for the elevation of the place as seen from shipboard, and the personal impressions of a tourist. Viewed cadastrally⁶ the shape and extent of the town is not in doubt, for an official

survey—the Alves survey—was produced in the year 1862. I reproduce, as Appendix IX, an outline map of the city of Victoria based on Lt. Collinson's survey of 1845, the Alves survey of 1862 and showing the extent of later reclamations. This map occurs in James Orange's *The Chater collection*.⁷

The city of Victoria came of age at the close of an eventful chapter in the history of Anglo-Chinese intercourse. The second China war springing from the *Arrow* War had just completed its tortuous course.⁸ Canton had been seized by the Anglo-French forces, administered by an Allied Commission for three years, and restored to her Chinese governors. The Treaty of Tientsin had been signed. The British fleet escorting the first British Minister to Peking to exchange the ratifications had been brought up sharp by the forts at Takoo with no small loss of men and material and grave damage to prestige. Sir Harry Parkes, captor of Viceroy Yeh, had himself fallen captive into Chinese hands and been promptly held to ransom. The Imperial summer palace at Peking had by way of reprisal been razed to the ground on Lord Elgin's deliberate orders. And at long last the Treaty had been ratified and the Convention of Peking annexed as a make-weight.

The Treaty, being a treaty of amity as well as commerce, opened with a renewal of those protestations of mutual friendship and perpetual peace which had been exchanged as recently as 1842 at Nanking, and included an undertaking by China in future to avoid the expression 'barbarian' in speaking of the English in official documents—a provision from which one must infer that the contrary practice had either sprung up since Pottinger's time or having deeper roots had hitherto been overlooked.

Here, it must be confessed, is material for the cynic; nor is this all, for the matter falls into its true perspective only when it is realized that it was left to the interval between signature and ratification to provide the bitterest clashes of the war.

The commercial clauses introduced some interesting changes. While still limiting British trade to specified ports, the Treaty added to the number of those ports and extended the principle by including at any rate one river-port.* It endeavoured to simplify the imposition of *likin*, the provincial taxes levied at inland stations, by allowing transit dues to be compounded by a single payment equivalent to half the import or export duty. For the benefit of the young foreign coastal trade it provided that a vessel that had paid its tonnage dues should, on clearing from a Treaty

* Chinkiang on the Yangtze.

Port for another Treaty Port or for Hong Kong, be exempt from further tonnage dues for a period of four months, thereby tacitly acknowledging Hong Kong as a domestic port. For the benefit of merchants at the Treaty Ports it arranged for a bonding system under which goods imported into any Treaty Port could, provided they had paid duty, be re-exported and transferred to any other Treaty Port without further payment of duty, thereby ending Hong Kong's unique position as a bonded warehouse. Simultaneously it arranged a draw-back system under which duty-paid goods could, on re-exportation to a foreign port (in which category Hong Kong plainly fell), claim a duty-paid certificate which was, although not convertible into cash, acceptable in payment of duty on subsequent transactions.

The Treaty also repealed Pottinger's Supplementary Treaty of the Bogue of 1843 and, in so doing, relieved the Colony of the duty of appointing a British official to examine the passes of all native craft entering the harbour (with a view to assuring that they originated only at a Treaty Port) and exchanging periodical lists of all such entrances and clearances with the *Hoppo* (or Chinese Commissioner) of Canton.

This provision had from the first been strenuously objected to by the British merchants of Hong Kong as contrary to their free-trade principles, and some obscurity envelops the question as to how far the British authorities actually observed it. Dr Eitel,* roundly and with no apologies, declares that with a single exception no attempt was ever made to give effect to it at all. Mr H. B. Morse[†] agrees with Dr Eitel in allowing that it became a dead letter but excuses the British authorities of breach of the Treaty on the ground that the *Hoppo* had used the machinery designed for the protection of the revenues of China to throttle the trade of Hong Kong by putting unnecessary difficulties in the way of junks seeking passes. In this instance, however, he unfortunately forsook his usual practice of quoting chapter and verse. An alternative explanation is, perhaps, possible: it is clear that the arrangement presupposed a high degree of mutual trust, far higher than the facts justified, between the authorities of Hong Kong and Canton. Eitel cites an incident which occurred within one month of the promulgation of the Supplementary Treaty and which may explain the refusal of Sir John Davis to give effect to the provisions

* *Europe in China*, Hong Kong, Kelly & Walsh, 1895, p. 161.

† *International relations of the Chinese Empire*, Hong Kong, Kelly & Walsh, 1910-1918.

of the Treaty: in scrupulous observation of the Treaty, Davis detained a junk in Hong Kong harbour on the grounds of its failure to produce a pass. The junk turned out to be one of the *Hoppo's* own revenue fleet, an unwarrantable intrusion in Sir John's eyes.

One striking exception emerged from the provisions allowing the compounding of internal transit dues. Like the Treaty of Nanking the Treaty of Tientsin was strictly silent on the subject of opium. Lord Elgin felt (as he himself stated*) that, backed as he was by a powerful military force, he might lay himself open to misinterpretation if he raised the delicate question of legalizing the import of the drug. But, at the critical moment, luck or good judgement placed him in a more favourable position to grasp the nettle than that which had presented itself to Pottinger.

The new situation arose largely through the appearance on the scene of two fresh characters. The first was Mr W. B. Reed, the new United States minister to China. Mr Reed had not been many weeks on the China coast before becoming a keen convert to legalization, and in a striking letter to Lord Elgin,† he had announced his conversion in plain terms. Thus was removed one obstacle, at any rate, in so far as it absolved the logically-minded Chinese of the necessity of arguing that, while they had formally agreed with the United States to treat opium as contraband (as they had done in the Treaty with the States of 1844),‡ they could hardly in the same breath legalize its importation by Englishmen.

Secondly, there was Mr Horatio Nelson Lay. In 1854 the T'ai P'ing rebellion reached Shanghai and the Chinese Customs House there had fallen into insurgent hands. The flight of the Imperial Customs officials left neither men nor machinery for the collection of customs dues in accordance with the treaties and, with commendable unanimity, the three chief foreign powers at Shanghai—Great Britain, France and the United States—had thereupon offered to establish an *ad hoc* customs office. The Shanghai *tao tai*,¹⁰ though doubtless bewildered at such self-denial, had eagerly accepted.

Of the commission of three foreigners duly appointed, the British representative, Mr T. F. Wade, was the only one acquainted with the Chinese language and became the dominant figure. Upon Mr Wade's resignation a year later, Mr H. N. Lay, another student

* L. Oliphant, *Narrative of the Earl of Elgin's mission to China and Japan in the years 1857, '58, '59*, London, Blackwood, 1859, p. 280.

† Oliphant, *Elgin's mission*, p. 276.

interpreter and a son of Mr G. Tradescant Lay, the first consul at Amoy, had succeeded to the post.

It was not long before results became manifest. Revenue, sorely needed by the Imperial Government, began to pour in a regular and increasing stream into the Imperial coffers at Shanghai, while the other Treaty Ports continued to muster a fitful and meagre tribute.

The contrast, ruefully regarded by a few of the foreign merchants in Shanghai, was noted also by the Chinese with the result that Mr Lay was invited to assume the title of 'Inspector General' and reproduce at the 'out-ports' those methods which were bearing such timely and delectable fruit at Shanghai.

For this purpose he was promptly seconded by the British authorities. But, Anglo-Chinese interpreters being few and far between, it was tacitly understood that the British Minister must be free to call upon him for interpretation should occasion demand.

Mr Lay accordingly became a Chinese official, and being in due course requisitioned to assist Lord Elgin in negotiating the Treaty of Tientsin, secured a footing in both camps and, as such, became the ideal medium for confidential suggestion and delicate missions. Thus it came about that, with a minimum loss of face on either side, opium (together with a number of other articles much less controversial) was quietly removed from the contraband to the tariff list. This was, of course, effected not in the Treaty itself but in the regulations governing the 'petty affairs of commerce' which it sanctioned, and it may be noted in passing that these regulations included also one under which 'the high officer appointed by the Chinese Government to superintend the foreign trade'—at that time of course Mr Lay—was to be at liberty to select other foreign gentlemen to assist him at the several ports. From this small beginning the great structure of the Imperial Maritime Customs rose.

The importation of opium was thus legalized upon payment of thirty taels a chest.¹¹ But it was apparently felt that, while it might be permissible to allow its entry to the ports, it was going rather too far to stipulate for its easy transit into the interior and it was singled out for exclusion from the new provisions relating to transit dues—a conclusion with which the reader may or may not concur while noting the inexorable dilemma which it creates.

The Treaty thus provided a new set of rules for the conduct of foreign trade, thereby incidentally allowing the Colony to enter upon years of discretion with a clean sheet if not a clear conscience. It remained for the Convention of Peking to furnish a more personal and tangible gift in the shape of the Kowloon peninsula,