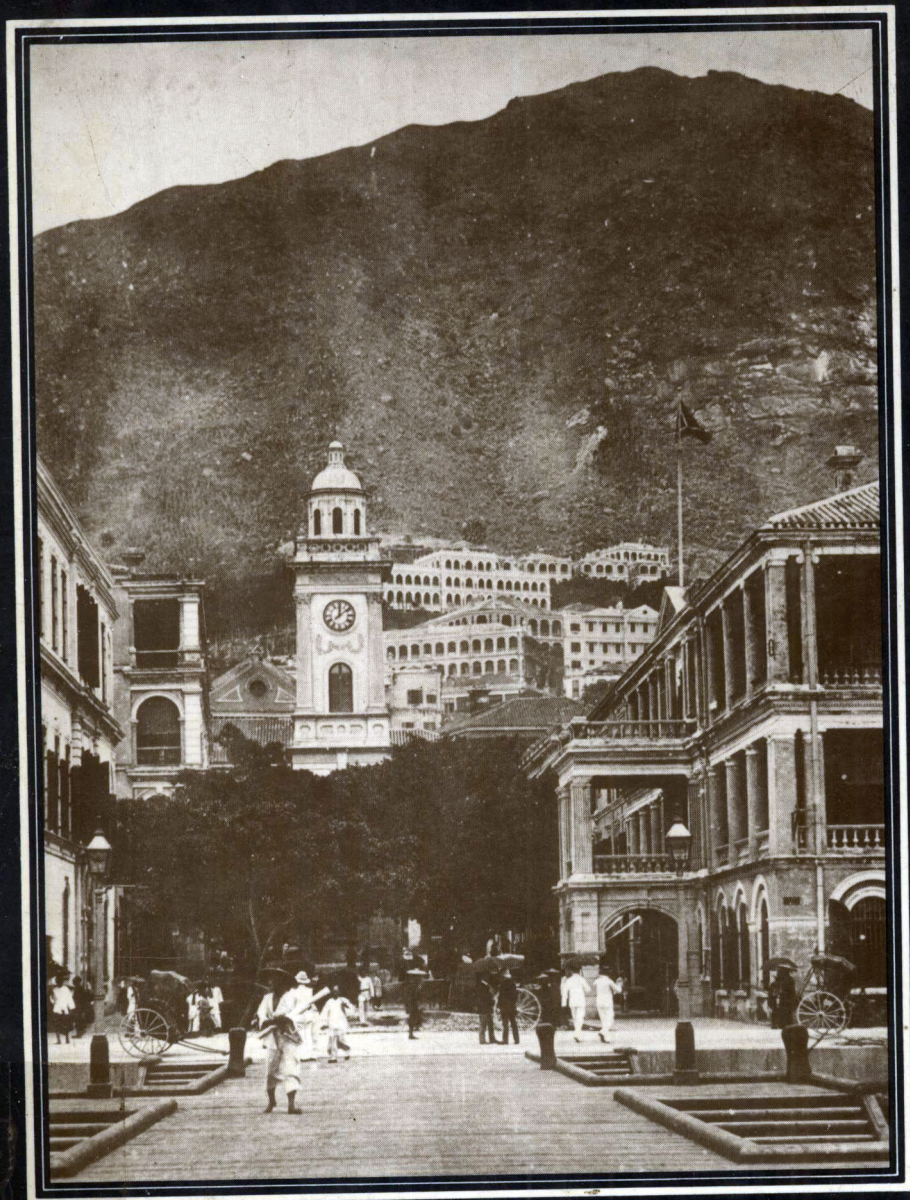


E.J. EITEL

EUROPE IN CHINA



With an Introduction by H.J. Lethbridge

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INTRODUCTION

EITEL'S *Europe in China*, first published by Kelly and Walsh in 1895, will continue to remain an indispensable source for historians of Hong Kong. G.R. Sayer (1937), Winifred Wood (1940), Sir Charles Collins (1952), and G.B. Endacott (1958), to name but a few, were all heavily indebted to the pioneering Dr Eitel, German scholar, linguist and missionary, who chronicled the events of the early Canton factory days and the development of Hong Kong as a colony from the beginning, in 1841, to the year 1882, when Sir John Pope Hennessy left and a new governor was installed. In the foreword to Winifred Wood's *A Brief History of Hong Kong*, published just prior to the Japanese invasion, we read: 'This book has been prepared from various sources, prominent among which is Dr E.J. Eitel's *Europe in Asia* [sic].' Eitel's history has remained *prominent* to this day; for a number of reasons it cannot be rejected — only supplemented.

Needless to say, it is not an immaculate history. No published history ever is, for the historian is always constrained by his own temperament and ideology and by his time, the ethos in which he writes for a particular public. He has his social audience: he does not write for shadowy posterity or dim eternity. But Eitel's strength is that he witnessed many of the events described or had first-hand knowledge of them. As a long-time Hong Kong resident and official he was always close enough to the colonial administration to understand what was happening.

He also had access to material that has since disappeared, probably permanently. During the Japanese occupation (1941–5) many documents and much official correspondence vanished as a result of warfare, looting, negligence, or wilful destruction. Providentially, some of this missing archival material is preserved, so to say, in Eitel's pages, embedded in his text, although never foot-noted as to source. We should be grateful nowadays for this copious detail, much of it culled from contemporary newspapers

or from ephemeral literature, and no doubt from gossip conversations with those who knew, or thought they knew. Even Hong Kong's excellent Public Records Office has gaps in its holdings; hence it is impossible to trace all the sources utilized by this indefatigable German.

Ernst Johann Eitel was born at Esslingen, Württemberg, in 1838. He attended school there and at the Theological Seminary of Schontal. In 1856, aged 18, he entered Tübingen University, graduating with the degree of MA in 1860. Soon after, he accepted appointment as Vicar of Mossingen. This post he held only for a year. He then obtained leave of absence to join the Basel Mission in China.

Eitel arrived in Hong Kong in 1862 and remained in the Far East until 1897. At first he laboured for the Lutheran Mission Station at Li-long, near Canton, which had a Hakka-speaking community. Then, in 1865, he joined the London Missionary Society. This transfer of allegiance was caused by his desire to marry Miss Mary Eaton, an English lady. The Basel Mission would not give him permission to do so (they objected, it is said, that his proposed bride was English, not German); however, the London Missionary Society made no difficulties about his nuptials. Mary Eaton's background was unusual: she had been born into a devout English Catholic family but, as a young woman, had become a convert to Evangelicalism. In Victorian days, the trend of conversion was mostly from Low to High Church, to Catholicism, as exemplified in the Tractarian or Oxford Movement: not vice versa. When the two first met she was 'Lady Superintendent' of the Diocesan Native Training School (known today as the Diocesan Girls' School, one of Hong Kong's leading educational establishments). Eitel married in 1866 and moved with his bride to Poklo, in the Canton region. In 1870, for domestic reasons — Eitel now had several children — he requested a transfer, which was granted, to Hong Kong, where he stayed until he retired in 1897, settling in Australia. It does not seem that after that date he ever visited Hong Kong or China.

The reader curious about the early phase of Eitel's career will find more details in G.B. Endacott's article in *The Journal of Oriental Studies*. From 1870 to 1879 he was mainly engaged in

missionary or church enterprises; but he was also active writing various monographs and articles. These established his reputation as a sound orientalist and sinologist, particularly the first volume of his *Chinese Dictionary in the Cantonese Dialect* (1877). The fourth and final volume was issued in 1883, and a supplement in 1887. Eitel was now accepted in Hong Kong as a competent scholar and linguist, an authority on the Hakka and Cantonese dialects, those dialects most commonly spoken in Hong Kong at that time. He also wrote on a variety of other subjects, especially on Buddhism. The most original of his works is probably *Feng-shui: or the Rudiments of Natural Science in China* (1873). This book was greatly admired by the late Professor Maurice Freedman. In Freedman's *Chinese Lineage and Society* (1966) we read in a footnote:

See especially the fascinating study by Ernest J. Eitel ... Although my own observations were necessarily very much more restricted than Eitel's, I was greatly impressed by the close correspondence between what I saw in 1963 and what he found nearly a hundred years ago, a correspondence made the more significant by my not having read Eitel's monograph until I had written the first draft of my account.

With the arrival in Hong Kong of Sir John Pope Hennessy (1834–91) in April 1877, Eitel approached the climactic period of his life and was to endure several years of *Sturm und Drang*, as he would say. Hennessy — a small, slim, slight Irish Catholic — would have been analysed by Adler as suffering from an inferiority complex, as someone who 'over-compensated' for physical miniaturization by a dogmatic, assertive, aggressive manner. He was an egomaniac who imposed his will irrespective of cost or consequences. His career in the colonial service has been related in his grandson's fine biography — *Verandah: Some Episodes in the Crown Colonies 1867–1889*. Wherever Hennessy was employed he sowed the seeds of altercation, faction, and division. He would set one part of the community against another. *The Dictionary of National Biography* sums up his character, rather too politely, in these words: 'His failure as a colonial governor was due to his want of tact and judgement, and the faculty of irritating where he

might conciliate ... His mind worked tortuously.' In Hong Kong, he soon took sides with the Chinese against the European community; as an Irish Catholic he congratulated himself on always supporting 'oppressed nationalities'. His attempt to promote Chinese interests was admirable; the methods used were often deplorable. Hennessy was manipulative, crafty, and prepared at all times to sacrifice anyone who had worked to advance his schemes. Thus it was to be with Eitel, whose career was almost ruined by too close a collaboration with the atrabilious Governor.

Eitel, now married and with a family, had lost a little of his missionary ardour; domestic bliss had dampened his former austere passion to convert the heathen. He now sought an official appointment; one with a salary attached sufficient to maintain a family in decent comfort. To the reading public he was recognized as Dr Eitel, at that time an un-English designation except for a physician, having received a doctorate from Tübingen in 1871. When Hennessy extended his patronage, Eitel's fortune appeared made — but it was a poisoned gift, as we shall see. He was destined to move, after the Governor departed in 1882, from a high to a much lower plateau.

Eitel had been appointed Director of Chinese Studies by Sir Arthur Kennedy in 1875 for the examination of English students of Chinese who sought entry into the local civil service. It was a purely honorary post. But Hennessy, the new Governor, made him Inspector of Schools and Chinese Secretary at a salary of £1,000 a year. When he was made Head of the Interpretation Department his salary doubled. But Hennessy's attempt to make Eitel Registrar-General (with the honorific title 'Protector of Chinese') was defeated speedily by a telegram from the Secretary of State, who simply would not have it. Cadets in the Hong Kong Civil Service, he knew, did not want an interloping German missionary — a Governor's favourite — leap-frogging over established administrators to obtain a high appointment as director of a government department. So Eitel remained Hennessy's Private Secretary and confidant, and in that role became involved in an extraordinary scandal.

Hennessy was 43 and his wife, Kitty, 26 when they arrived in Hong Kong; they had married in Labuan in 1868 when she was

barely 17. The daughter of Hugh Low (later British Resident in Perak), she had inherited Malay blood on her mother's side. It was not an especially happy marriage. Hennessy was moody and jealous; Kitty, his child-wife, did not reciprocate sufficiently, perhaps, her husband's mature passion. Not long after their arrival, the Hennessys became close friends with Thomas Child Hayllar and his wife. Hayllar was the Colony's leading QC and was known locally as a ladies' man; insinuating and amusing, he was a cultivated amorist. Hennessy enjoyed weekend excursions by steam-launch; his wife did not like marine parties and stayed behind, but Hayllar frequently accompanied the Governor. Then Hayllar began to make last-minute excuses for not going. Hennessy grew suspicious.

One September day, as the Governor's party was about to leave, a note arrived from Hayllar begging to be excused. Hennessy rushed back to Mountain Lodge, his summertime Peak residence, burst into his wife's boudoir and, he alleged, found the pair examining a book which Hayllar attempted to hide under a sofa cushion. This — a stout quarto — was a catalogue of the Museo Borbonico in Naples. It contained line illustrations of naked classical male and female figures. Hennessy averred the pictures were indecent and turned Hayllar out of his home. Relations were severed between the two families, but Hennessy continued to brood over the drama.

Thus matters rested until one day the two met by chance on a quiet Peak walk near Mountain Lodge. Hennessy claimed that Hayllar insulted him and that he responded by striking the reprobate with his light umbrella. It was a Rashomon situation: two conflicting accounts of the incident. Hayllar, in his turn, declared the attack was unprovoked: the Governor had run amuck, had attacked him unexpectedly and frenziedly. Hayllar, it appears, retrieved the discarded weapon, the umbrella, and had the handle mounted over his mantelpiece, with a silver plaque positioned above, on which was inscribed the legend: 'A Memento of the Battle of Mountain Lodge'.

Eitel, of course, was not involved in any way in these matters, but he was the Governor's Private Secretary and confidant and, as such, was drawn irresistibly into the affair. The two versions of the

confrontation arrived in Downing Street — a letter from Hayllar and a covering despatch from Hennessy. A sceptical official realized that at the centre of the mystery there must be a woman: *cherchez la femme*. Hayllar in his correspondence had not mentioned Mrs Hennessy; and the Governor, for once, had been remarkably discreet. No official action was taken.

In September 1881 the Hennessys (now Sir John and Lady Pope Hennessy) left on a six-week visit to Peking. Before the Governor departed, he instructed Eitel to show his despatches about the umbrella incident to all members of the Legislative Council who wished to read them. When this information reached the astute Hayllar, he set a trap. He sent a friend, a member of the Council, to see the Governor's Private Secretary. Eitel obligingly showed the correspondence and spent a long time demonstrating that Hayllar was a scoundrel and his master, Hennessy, a saint. Eitel's visitor reported back to the waiting Hayllar and made a sworn statement before Hayllar's lawyer. A writ was then issued against Eitel claiming HK\$25,000 damages.

Hennessy, his grandson writes, informed Eitel that he would 'make the lawsuit his own'; but the case never came to court. After much negotiation, intrigue, and the intercession of Sir Hugh Low, who wished to protect his daughter, Kitty, from ill-natured gossip and public obloquy, Eitel was forced to write two abject letters of apology to Hayllar; and Hennessy himself was obliged to indite a conciliatory statement. Always a weathercock, the Governor now looked askance at his most loyal servitor and Private Secretary. Eitel offered to resign and this was granted. Eitel's official career now seemed irrevocably blighted; he had few defenders in Hong Kong. But his cause was to be championed, unbeknown to him, by fair-minded persons at the Colonial Office, who wished to get rid of the dreadfully troublesome Irishman, Hennessy, but felt considerable sympathy for the German. On 9 March 1882 the Governor left on leave but was not allowed to return to the fractious Colony. Eitel, however, was retained as Inspector of Schools, a post he was to occupy until retirement in 1897. The dust slowly settled.

The year 1882 marked, then, the climax of Eitel's career. He had had a great fall. He was no longer at the centre of the vortex, a

storm set in motion by his former patron, the restless Hennessy. Now he was forced to devote himself to his rather lowly job as Inspector of Schools. He did other things of course: he was for several years editor of the sinological journal, the *China Review*, to which he contributed many articles, notes and reviews. He was also involved, as one would expect, in various church and missionary endeavours. His friend, the Reverend T.W. Pearce, concluded in his obituary of Eitel: 'True strength of character in Dr Eitel was religious strength, work with him was a purely religious duty, and fulfilling of his life-task a sacred privilege.' He added, obliquely, 'In the highest type of worker human limitations are on occasions painfully manifest. The best men have the faults of their best qualities.'

Eitel, for reasons which are not clear, was widely distrusted by members of the small European community. Was he too Teutonic, humourless, didactic, opinionated? He stated in his own defence:

The view I took of the duties of a Private Secretary and which I now think was a wrong one, though the Governor had often confirmed my conception of it, was such as implied absolute subordination and absolute identification of interests. I felt grateful for the trustful treatment His Excellency had at all times accorded to me ... I have learned to take a different view of my duties. I see now that my German conception was indeed a wrong one.

It is remarkable, and a testimony to the better side of Eitel's character, that in *Europe in China* he gives a very balanced treatment of Sir John Pope Hennessy's administration. In his final chapter, however, he allows a little spleen to creep out when he writes:

As to Sir J.P. Hennessy, the less said the better. His acts speak powerfully enough. The centre of his world was he himself. But with all the crowd of dark and bright powers that were wrestling with him, he could not help doing some good and the Colony emerged out of the ordeal of his administration practically unscathed.

All historians are faced with the problem of the flow of time, with the question of periodization. How can history be convincing-

ly cut into segments since normally there are few disjunctions — cataclysms and revolutions are perhaps exceptions — to disturb its rhythms. There is simply unending 'process' as sociologists term it. Traditionally, the problem was side-stepped by selecting monarchs or reigns as convenient units or, in the case of China, dynasties (which makes more sense). Eitel, working on a minute time-scale (forty years), chose governorships. He gives a chapter-by-chapter account of the various administrations. This device tends, however, to distort or interrupt larger economic and social trends, for these overlap particular governors. Henry Ford's philistine comment that 'history is bunk' does contain a residuum of truth. History does not stand sentinel, at attention, whilst a governor is installed, or departs. There are no interregnums in time.

There is, one admits, more sense in this traditional approach when the subject is colonial history and the territory discussed is small in area or population. Colonial governors do wield vast powers and some leave their stamp indelibly and lastingly on a colony after their five years of office. This is also true when power is almost totally monopolized by a small governing élite as in nineteenth-century Hong Kong, with the governor symbolizing that élite. *Europe in China* is, in the above sense, old-fashioned. On the other hand, Eitel does not neglect the Chinese component, which grew more important with the passage of time. He highlights the rise of an alternative élite, a Chinese élite, and the associations and committees they founded, such as the Tung Wah, the Po Leung Kuk, and the District Watch. He is also alert to Chinese commercial enterprise and the important part it increasingly played in Hong Kong's progress. Certainly, Eitel gives prominence to the European community — that is made clear in his preface — but the Chinese are not effaced; they are given a surprising breadth of treatment. But, to repeat, the modern reader is likely to be more delighted with the 'bric-à-bric', the odd details, the careers of such people as Caldwell, Anstey, and Montgomery Martin, for example. Eitel was no philosopher of history, a Vico or Taine, developing a magniloquent theme. He is, though, a good chronicler of events.

We do not have Eitel's views on historiography but it is highly probable that, as a German, he was aware of the work of Leopold

von Ranke (1795–1886), the celebrated scholar who revolutionized the writing of history, in the 1830s, by arguing that the historian's task was 'simply to show how it really was (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*).' Ranke transformed history into 'science' by the cult of facts. First ascertain the facts, Ranke insisted, and then draw conclusions; sweep away moralization. Apart from a lyrical and visionary preface, Eitel sticks closely to the facts. He does not indulge in much moralization, speculation, or even generalization (although he does, grandly so, in his preface).

His book is crammed with facts. But the history of any small community is inclined to take that form. In late 1841, Hong Kong had a population of 24,000; 160,000 in 1881; that is to say, about the size of a small English municipality. As with any English county history, a record of nineteenth-century Hong Kong is likely to be factual, anecdotal, and parochial. Song Ong Siang's *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* (1923) is, for example, similar to *Europe in China* in content and form. When Eitel wrote, social and economic history was not as influential as it has since become. At that time, serious history for Englishmen was principally diplomatic history, about those presumed to make history, not about the *hoi polloi*.

Europe in China contains some minor errors, some mistakes in dates and names, a number of misprints. Endacott's article lists many of them, but they are not of great importance and do not seriously flaw the text. As Endacott comments: 'In a book packed with detail — dates, figures, statistics and names — the surprising thing is not that there are errors, but there are so few.' Eitel's interpretation of historical events is another matter. He had access to much official correspondence, but not all, for despatches marked confidential were not seen by him. But some empathy with Eitel is needed. He lived in the Victorian era; he worked in a British colony; and it is clear from the aims expressed in his preface that he was influenced by the idea of Imperialism, by the theme of Christianity as a world religion and, one concludes, by German notions, to which he must have been exposed as a student at Tübingen, of the importance of race and nationalism, by the historical role of the Northern European peoples in world history, and by, in particular, the German racialist tradition that

runs from Fichte through Treitschke and, after Eitel's time, to National Socialism. He was influenced by the *Zeitgeist* of late Victorian England and Continental Europe. It is understandable, then, that he justified colonialism (there is certainly no criticism of it as a system imposed upon non-Europeans) and believed that Anglo-Saxon domination was immanent in history.

The preface to *Europe in China* reveals Eitel at his most transcendental, most Germanic. It contains the insight, sophisticated for its time, that 'the fulcrum of the World's balance of power has shifted from the West to the East, from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. Hong Kong will yet have a prominent place,' he asserts, 'in the future history of the British Empire.' That empire is no more; but Hong Kong as a foreign-controlled enclave on the China coast continues to remain important despite much speculation about its terminal date. On the other hand, there will be much disagreement about Eitel's eccentric prevision that: 'For the last two thousand years, the march of civilization has been directed from the East to the West: Europe has been tutored by Asia. Ennobled by Christianity, civilization returns to the East: Europe's destiny is to govern Asia.' Eitel was writing history at a time when it was believed that nations or states had a history coded beforehand, as it were, by some vague demiurge, or directed by an evolutionary, Social Darwinist, or Hegelian-type abstract force. It was easy for Eitel, a former theological student, to believe in such secular absurdities: had he not been trained to believe in a divine plan, one that pre-dated man himself? Providentially for his readers, these vague historicist themes do not intrude unduly into the text, which is a sensible record of about forty years of Hong Kong's development.

Eitel retired on pension — \$1,620 per annum — in 1897 and settled with his wife and four children in Adelaide, Australia, where he returned to his original profession and became minister of St Stephen's Lutheran Church. He was also appointed Lecturer in German Language and Literature at the University of Adelaide. Sir John Pope Hennessy had died of heart failure in 1891. Eitel died in Adelaide on 10 November 1908. His epitaph might well have been the psalmist's lament; 'Put not your trust in princes.'

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EUROPE IN CHINA

THE HISTORY OF HONGKONG

FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE YEAR 1882

BY

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INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS, HONGKONG

The actual well seen is the ideal.—Carlyle.

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1895

TO
MY WIFE
WINEFRED NEE EATON
IN MEMORY OF
THIRTY YEARS OF WEDDED LIGHTS AND SHADOWS
SPENT IN CANTON AND HONGKONG
THIS BOOK
WHICH OWES EVERYTHING TO HER
IS
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED