

A Chinese Melting Pot

Original People and Immigrants in Hong Kong's First 'New Town'

Elizabeth Lominska Johnson and Graham E. Johnson

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Preface

Why Tsuen Wan?

When we explain our long-term fascination with Tsuen Wan, we are sometimes met with expressions of surprise, ignorance, or polite indifference, even on the part of people who are otherwise familiar with contemporary Hong Kong. Some may remember it as a place from which they went on hill walks or visited monasteries, but others wonder why we are excited about, and loyal to, a place that superficially appears to be simply another urban development, and the terminus of one branch of the Mass Transit Railway. Furthermore, it is not just the general public that often has been indifferent. Despite its important contributions to the economic and political development of Hong Kong, and its value for the comparative study of social organization and change in south China, Tsuen Wan has attracted minimal attention from anthropologists and sociologists like ourselves.

Tsuen Wan now looks and feels like many other parts of urban Hong Kong, with its shopping malls, public housing, and high-rise middle-class housing complexes. Judging by outward appearances, few could imagine the distinctive phases of its development, or believe that when we first saw it, in the late 1960s, Tsuen Wan was a burgeoning, but chaotic, industrial city.

Until the early twentieth century, Tsuen Wan was a separate district within the area that became the Southern District of the New Territories after British rule was established in 1898, located in a spectacular and rugged setting on the foothills of Tai Mo Shan and land reclaimed from the sea. It was unique in that all of its more than 20 villages were inhabited by Hakka people, a sub-ethnic group within the Han Chinese population, speaking a distinct variant of Chinese, although using the common written language. Its many small lineages lived together in relative peace, managing their own affairs and wresting a difficult livelihood from the land and sea by farming the limited amount of land that was available and doing in-shore fishing. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many men resorted to temporary emigration in the hope of economic betterment. Those with some means engaged in business, both in its coastal daily market town and on Hong Kong Island, which was readily accessible by water. After 1917, Castle Peak Road provided a land link to Kowloon. The district's location made possible the development of some small industries and a major oil depot even before the Japanese occupation of 1941–1945. These developments, together with government dam-building projects, offered wage labour opportunities.

In the early post-war period, Tsuen Wan began to industrialize at a remarkable rate. Its development was made possible by its proximity and relatively easy access to Hong Kong and Kowloon, its abundance of fresh water, and the availability of land and labour. These attracted industrialists from the Shanghai region, who were relocating in advance of the establishment of the People's Republic of China, bringing capital investments, machinery, and skilled workers. Its development followed an entirely different trajectory from those of other districts of Hong Kong's New Territories, making Tsuen Wan special, and in its own way, exciting. In much of the New Territories in the 1950s, the indigenous people, the descendants of those who were resident property owners when the British assumed control, were giving up rice agriculture. The response of many of working age was to emigrate

from Hong Kong to Britain, to which they had free access, where they could make a living in Chinese restaurants. They often rented out their land to immigrant vegetable farmers from China.

In Tsuen Wan, the indigenous population, by contrast, rapidly became engaged in the new economy. They no longer needed to emigrate. Waves of newcomers, who rapidly came to outnumber the original inhabitants, developed their own ways of coping with the stress of change and the unfamiliar environment, forming associations based on various commonalities that offered mutual support. By the late 1960s, Tsuen Wan was a booming industrial town with a population of over 250,000, primarily immigrants. The principal industries were those producing textiles, with related treatments, such as dyeing, resulting in pollution of both air and water. The whole town had a grimy, makeshift appearance, with tenements and squatter housing crammed in wherever space permitted. Grey concrete predominated and there were few green areas.

This was Tsuen Wan when we first saw it in 1968, as two young students hoping to conduct our doctoral research in a place characterized by rapid change. It was a very different place than it is now. The initial result of Tsuen Wan's economic transformation was, frankly speaking, a mess. The industrial township that, largely uncontrolled, had grown up in the early post-war years of massive immigration was expanding rapidly, but under a government that was overwhelmed, and needed resources and time to engage in adequate planning. In 1961, government officials realized that something must be done to bring some order to the near-chaos that existed, and in 1961 designated Tsuen Wan the first 'satellite city', a 'new town', following the British model, and began to implement urban planning, albeit somewhat retroactively, with an anticipated eventual population of one million. Scattered through and around the town were the original villages that had been guaranteed their land rights by the terms of the Peking Convention of 1898, thus complicating any planning that was to be undertaken.

Once we had learned enough about this situation to define our projects, we plunged into our research. Graham, the sociologist, concentrated on the town as a whole, and the immigrants from other parts of China who lived and worked there, although he also interviewed indigenous leaders, while Elizabeth, an anthropologist, focussed primarily on Kwan Mun Hau, one of the villages that had been part of the territory when it came under British rule in 1898. As our work progressed, we became more and more fascinated by what we were learning; and now, almost 50 years later, armed with considerable additional information gained over the intervening years, we continue to be excited by the insights we gain as we pore over our material.

The industrial world of the 1960s has now passed. Tsuen Wan is now fully integrated with the modern and affluent territory that Hong Kong has become, no longer colonial, and a special administrative entity of the People's Republic of China. The descendants of the original inhabitants, now only a tiny fragment of the population, remain, as do their villages, although many have moved to new locations. Their cultural distinctiveness has faded but still remains.

Our observations of the changes in Tsuen Wan deepen our commitment to creating a record of social relations in this distinctive area of the New Territories before it is too late, fulfilling our obligation to preserve the knowledge that its people entrusted to us, in the hope that others will come to appreciate its special characteristics.

A Note on Romanization

Chinese terms are, in general, romanized according to the Hanyu Pinyin system. The most prevalent version of spoken Chinese in Hong Kong is Cantonese, and we have chosen to romanize distinctive terms into Cantonese using the Yale system. Chinese characters are included in the first occurrence. We worked almost entirely in Cantonese, although we provide a few Hakka terms, and one in Hokkien.

We have used the British colonial government romanization system for place names, following *A Gazetteer of Place Names in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories* (Hong Kong: Government Printer, 1960). We romanize place names and personal names in China using Hanyu Pinyin. The names of Hong Kong-based individuals are romanized according to local practice. Some terms also reflect historical usage; thus, the Cantonese groupings in the New Territories are designated ‘Punti’ (Pinyin: *bendi*), the other indigenous land-based speech group as ‘Hakka’ (Pinyin: *kejia*), and people from northeast Guangdong as ‘Teochiu’ (Pinyin: *Chaozhou*). Deities worshipped throughout the Chinese culture area are romanized into Pinyin, while those which are highly localized are romanized into Cantonese. This is especially significant for village gods, whose names may also reflect Hakka cultural influence.

Getting Started

On 19 April 1968, we approached Hong Kong by air carrying our four-month-old son. The clouds suddenly parted, we glimpsed Hong Kong, and experienced the drama of the tight approach to Kai Tak Airport. Our plane banked sharply, just over a densely packed area of tenements, and landed. We were graduate students from an American university, bound for Asia for the first time, hoping to complete our research projects, write book-length theses, and receive our degrees. We had research funding for two years and some general ideas of what we hoped to accomplish. We were blissfully ignorant of how much work lay ahead, and how exciting and full our lives would be.

Our Hopes and Plans

It was customary that after taking course work and discussing our disciplinary interests with our teachers and fellow doctoral students, we should define research topics and strategies. Ideally, in anthropology (Elizabeth's field) or sociology (Graham's), students should conduct 'field work'. This meant choosing a setting (a 'culture', a 'society') and becoming immersed in a part of it (a 'village', a 'town'), as a way to comprehend it and carry out research on agreed-on themes (i.e., 'developing and writing a thesis'). The two disciplines had slightly different approaches, which we were to follow, but overall these differences were not crucial.

We had met during our studies at Cornell University, in the United States. Elizabeth's interests included social organization and change, and population studies. Graham had previously done his undergraduate studies in sociology and economics in England, where his tutor had suggested China as his area of future specialty. Once we had married, Elizabeth followed suit. Graham had been introduced to Maurice Freedman, professor of anthropology at the London School of Economics, who was ushering in 'a Chinese phase in social anthropology',¹ and had recently published an important volume on Chinese kinship,² building on his earlier studies of Chinese families in Singapore. Graham was also fortunate enough to meet Barbara Ward who, in the 1950s, had begun her important field research with fishing people, which over time had extended to other aspects of social and cultural life in Hong Kong.³

Hong Kong had gradually emerged as the location of our field research. Fortunately, Cornell offered superb instruction in Chinese languages, and we both had the opportunity to study Cantonese

1. Maurice Freedman, 'A Chinese Phase in Social Anthropology', *The British Journal of Sociology* 14, no. 1 (March 1963): 1–19.

2. Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China* (London: Athlone Press, 1958).

3. Barbara E. Ward, *Through Other Eyes: Essays in Understanding 'Conscious Models'* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1985), includes some, but not all, of her important contributions.



Plate 1: View of Tsuen Wan with Tai Mo Shan behind, as seen across the bay near Tsing Yi Island, c. 1968. Oil tank of Texaco depot on right, Fuk Loi Tsuen low-cost housing estate on left.

to the extent that we could carry out basic conversations when we arrived in Hong Kong, where we continued language study.

Why did we choose Hong Kong, and more specifically Tsuen Wan, as our research site? Until the 1970s, China was closed to foreign researchers, which meant that social scientists went either to do research in Taiwan; to do ‘China watching’ from Hong Kong, for those interested in the People’s Republic of China; or to do research on Hong Kong itself. Hong Kong as a British colony was accessible, it was affordable, and the colonial government in general supported foreign researchers. There had been considerable political conflict in the year immediately preceding our arrival and while this conflict continued, although less violently, Hong Kong still offered relative stability.

Our choice of Tsuen Wan as a research site resulted from our interest in studying the social effects of economic transformation, albeit from our somewhat different disciplinary perspectives. In retrospect, we believe that our complementary disciplines led to a much richer understanding of Tsuen Wan. Hong Kong government reports indicated that this rapidly growing town seemed to be a prime example of intense economic and social change, although it was otherwise questionable that we, a couple with a small baby, should choose what appeared to be a most unattractive and disorganized place to do our kinds of social science research. These include actually living in the research site, learning by observing and taking part in ongoing social activities, and conducting more formal interviews.

From the moment we arrived in Tsuen Wan, only two weeks after our arrival in Hong Kong, it was sink or swim. To the best of our knowledge, we were the only Western family living there immersed in a wholly Chinese context. We had to speak Cantonese, the Chinese language most commonly spoken, if we were to manage and form social relationships. There were some British families among the police, who led a very separate existence, and a few missionaries dedicated to their work. However, they were

not particularly visible. We were conspicuous, and even suspect in the volatile political climate of the time.

Orientation

During our first two weeks, we stayed in Kowloon and attempted to become oriented to the vibrancy and complexity of Hong Kong. On our first day, a fellow anthropologist gave us a tour of the New Territories.⁴ We were impressed by the rural villages and the extent of cultivation that we saw, the rice paddies and plots of vegetables and flowers, a great contrast to the intense urban environment of crowded Kowloon.

This period included a series of conversations. We met with government officials, who were open and frank, and generous with their time. They included James Hayes, who had served as district officer in the Southern District, and who was developing a significant reputation as a local historian. He had been instrumental in the resiting of the Shek Pik villagers, many of whom had moved from Lantau Island to Tsuen Wan, making way for reservoir construction.

We also interacted with the other social scientists who were in Hong Kong at the time, benefitting from their experience and advice. We had discussions with the most knowledgeable anthropologists working in Hong Kong, Marjorie Topley and Barbara Ward, who suggested studying one of the Tsuen Wan villages. Maurice Berkowitz, a visiting scholar at the Chinese University, who was studying the social impact of moving villagers to flats in Tai Po because of reservoir construction,⁵ thought that if we were to consider Tsuen Wan, we should include a study of a village or villages, factories, power relations, and religious practices.

Ten days after our arrival, we made our first trip to Tsuen Wan to see Graham Barnes, the district officer. It was a cordial visit in his office, located in a factory area, facing a hillside covered with squatter structures. We first discussed housing. We learned that there were the original villages, some bearing the brunt of urban and industrial development, including several that had been resited to locations outside the central development area. In contrast, others had been resited to flats in Tsuen Wan, because of reservoir development. There were low-rise tenements, some dating from the late 1930s, and others on land reclaimed from the foreshore in the 1950s and 1960s. Government resettlement estates had first been constructed in 1957 to rehouse squatters, although many squatters remained. A Housing Authority estate, Fuk Loi Tsuen, rehoused people whose income levels met authority requirements.

We discussed how the government saw its role in the process of development in the rural and agricultural New Territories, where industrial Tsuen Wan was the exception. Our conversation turned to land and in particular the Crown Land Resumption Ordinance. Under it, land could be resumed for public purposes such as roads, bridges, reservoirs, or, as in Tsuen Wan, for resiting entire villages that lay within the growing urban centre and whose houses and lands stood in the way of planned development of the industrial town that had grown haphazardly. Resumption was not outright seizure. Rather, compensation was arrived at through a process of negotiation. Indigenous ownership of land and property was enshrined in the governance of the New Territories shortly after the British lease in 1898. It was established after a thorough cadastral survey, in which land uses, for housing or agriculture, for example, had different values for tax purposes. In negotiations concerning compensation for resumed land and property, government policy provided for no increases in the value of land classified

4. The British colony of Hong Kong grew in stages. Hong Kong island was ceded 'in perpetuity' to the British Crown in 1841, as was much of the Kowloon peninsula in 1859. A much larger area, the 'New Territories', was leased to Britain for 99 years in 1898 through the Peking Convention. The area north of the Kowloon peninsula and bounded by the Kowloon hills became known as New Kowloon. Its villagers did not enjoy the rights accorded to others in the leased area.

5. Morris L. Berkowitz, 'Plover Cove Village to Taipo Market: A Study in Forced Migration', *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch Royal Asiatic Society* 8 (1968): 96–108.

as agricultural, regardless of current use. Further transactions in resumed land were part of a planned series of development steps, which should not, therefore, involve the original owner directly.

The solution was land exchange. Land was surrendered, and the former owner obtained new land and building rights within Tsuen Wan at a fixed premium. This was a policy specific to the New Territories. Elsewhere, building land could be obtained only by attending an auction of Crown land. Land in Hong Kong was deemed to be owned by the Crown, and even the ancestral holdings of New Territories inhabitants were considered to be Crown leases. Indigenous villagers hardly saw it that way and granting them building rights was an indirect way of recognizing actual land values. Even so, there was not enough building land available for all claimants to use. Instead, the government issued 'Letters of Exchange', titles to develop land as it became available. These became part of a market of negotiable instruments which developers could use and, as their values increased, from which villagers benefitted. The benefits could be realized in several different ways. A typical arrangement was partnership with a building company, which would provide the capital to develop land, with the completed project split between the building company and owners of the Letters of Exchange.⁶

The biggest challenge, from Graham Barnes' perspective, was the appreciation in value of agricultural land which lay within the layout plan that had been formulated for central Tsuen Wan. Of the older villages, three had been resited in 1964 and moved from high density locations to an area on the outskirts of the growing town, receiving agreed-on compensation for houses and their lots, and for agricultural land.

In the wake of various political problems, spillovers from the Cultural Revolution in China, the stock market and real estate values had crashed. In 1968, villagers opposed agreements that had been painstakingly negotiated over several years, although conditions were becoming intolerable because of crowding and summer floods. The political situation in Tsuen Wan was complex. Some people were sympathetic to the left-wing politics of China, and they were hedging in dealing with the government through their village representatives, who, as members of the Tsuen Wan Rural Committee, were part of the consultative process whereby the district officer interacted with the indigenous population.

Much of our conversation focussed on this indigenous population, with whom the consultative process was firmly established. However, Tsuen Wan was unique within the New Territories, as it was highly industrial and had a largely immigrant population. The textile industry, the core of Tsuen Wan's economy, was dominated by entrepreneurs from the Shanghai region. There were also business leaders from Huizhou and the Chaozhou area, both situated in Guangdong but speaking different versions of Chinese. The complex array of speech groups apparently formed discrete communities, about which we had much to learn. Oddly, there were no company offices, although much manufacturing, and no automatic telephone service. Tsuen Wan seemed isolated from Hong Kong's business district.

Our Move to Tsuen Wan

We concluded that Tsuen Wan would be appropriate for our research, and the more we learned, the more intrigued we became. We were given free access to the District Office and provided desk space in a corner of the land registry, with its volumes of records of land ownership and use from the 1904 survey. Graham Barnes was also kind enough to locate a flat that we rented, following our decision to make Tsuen Wan our home for the duration of our research. This would enable us to learn about the place through direct observation and participation in social life.

Our arrival, two weeks after we landed in Hong Kong, must have been highly entertaining to any of the inhabitants who happened to see it. Our spacious flat was on the eighth floor of Waldorf

6. For a detailed scholarly account, see Roger Nissim, *Land Administration and Practice in Hong Kong*, 3rd ed. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012).

Mansions, a new building just outside central Tsuen Wan. We hired a lorry to collect the second-hand furniture we had purchased, then rode from Kowloon to Tsuen Wan sitting in the back on a rattan couch, holding our baby amidst the furniture we had bought—a most unusual way to travel to such an unlikely destination for a Western family.

From the vantage point of our new accommodation, we could look down on the disorder of the town, with its factories, tenements, early resettlement blocks, its first low-cost housing estate, and, if one knew where to look, some of the original villages. We faced the challenge of formulating specific research proposals, then planning strategies to implement them. This was daunting. We could not just remain in our flat overlooking the town, we needed to find ways to get down to street level and carry out the research that would help us make sense of a place that was undergoing such extraordinary change.

For seven months we lived in Waldorf Mansions, improving our Cantonese, exploring the town and its surroundings, and entering into relationships with local people, such as vendors in the market where we made our daily purchases, and restaurant staff. Life in our flat seemed increasingly rarefied. We worked desperately to find a research location and to delineate research proposals that would be appropriate to Tsuen Wan and acceptable to our advisers.

Early Decision-Making

Elizabeth had determined that her research would focus primarily on kinship and the demographic aspect of her training, particularly with respect to family formation and structure. She hoped to learn about people's attitudes regarding the size and structure of their families and the number of children they had or hoped to have. It seemed likely that Tsuen Wan in the late 1960s was undergoing what is called 'the demographic transition', which is associated with the processes of urbanization and industrialization.⁷ During the demographic transition, mortality rates fall due to improved medical care, public health measures, and food quality and supply. In response to lower childhood mortality, birth rates decline if couples wish to limit the number of children they have and have the means to do so. Information available in the late 1960s indicated that in Hong Kong birth rates were falling, in part because of the work of the Hong Kong Family Planning Association. Estimates were that 42% of all married women aged 25 to 45 were practicing some form of contraception in 1967.⁸ Furthermore, the age at marriage was rising, which would contribute to a declining birth rate. As a result, one would predict that family size was decreasing. The literature also suggested that complex households composed of several generations or families of several brothers living together would be unlikely to continue to exist.⁹

In 1968, the process of urbanization in Tsuen Wan was in full force, and medical and family planning services were readily available. It seemed to offer an ideal setting for study. The question, however, was where within this complex and apparently unstructured town could such research be conducted.

Graham Barnes discussed various possibilities with Elizabeth, as did other knowledgeable people. One that we seriously considered was that we live in a room in a resettlement block. We decided against this, however, because it would be obvious that we did not meet the eligibility requirements, and because household structure within them was controlled. Elizabeth's research would be meaningless.

7. J. C. Caldwell, 'Toward a Restatement of Demographic Transition Theory', *Population and Development Review* 2, no. 3/4 (September–December, 1976): 321–66.

8. D. Podmore, 'The Population of Hong Kong', in *Hong Kong: The Industrial Colony: A Political, Social and Economic Survey*, ed. Keith Hopkins (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1971), 35.

9. This literal biological basis of kinship studies now has been expanded to include socially created kinship. Likewise, the theory that complex kin relationships might not survive in contemporary urban contexts is being reconsidered. See Linda Stone, *Kinship and Gender: An Introduction* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014), 22–24, 292–95.

Interviewing clients at family planning clinics or social work offices was another possibility, but she had used this method previously and had learned that it did not provide sufficient depth of information. There were also ethical concerns because such clients could not refuse to cooperate without fearing that they might risk losing the services they had come to obtain. What was needed was a residential unit where she could learn both by living among its members and observing daily life, and by doing interviews.

Living in a middle-class residential building in Tsuen Wan was far from what we had in mind, although determining what we had in mind took time to work out. Nonetheless, we were in Tsuen Wan and began to appreciate both its complexity and its unexpected charm, as we explored it to the full. Our explorations helped us determine where we might live and where Elizabeth might do her research.

Exploring Tsuen Wan

From our flat we had good views of our surroundings. Across from us was the Far East Bank Building, then the tallest building in Tsuen Wan, although largely devoid of tenants. Behind it was the entrance to the crowded and cluttered village of Upper Hoi Pa. To the left was an amusement park at the junction of Texaco Road, which led out to a peninsula on which the Texaco Oil Depot was located. To the east were the stark and crowded six-storey blocks of Tai Wo Hau, Tsuen Wan's first resettlement estate. In the distance were the harbour and Tsing Yi Island, and a view of the typhoon shelter. Typhoons were dramatic when viewed from the eighth floor and heightened further by weather reports on the radio. It was impressive seeing fishing boats come in for shelter, and equally so as they left in a long



Plate 2: One block of the Tai Wo Hau resettlement estate with 'park' in foreground. Tai Wo Hau Kaifong Welfare Association can be seen on the ground floor, c. 1969.



Plate 3: The upper market and shophouses that were built in the 1930s, as seen in the late 1960s.

line after the winds had died down. From the rear, we were able to look down onto Sam Tung Uk, an original Hakka compound village, with its ancestral hall facing our building.

We explored the town and found much of interest at ground level. It was a veritable hotchpotch. Chung On Street was the major thoroughfare, and between the Castle Peak Road junction and the original waterfront, just beyond Castle Peak Road, there was a series of shophouses from the 1930s. Ground-level business activity was diverse, and much was unfamiliar to us. On the higher floors there were different kinds of activities, among which seemed to be clubhouses for people from different parts of China, athletic associations, practitioners of Chinese medicine, business associations and trade unions, and the offices of the Tsuen Wan Rural Committee and the Tsuen Wan Sports Association.

The market included butchers' stalls, selling largely beef and pork, and others selling live fish, live chickens, bean curd, vegetables, and fruit. Beyond Market Street there were butchers selling roast pork, barbecued pork, roast chicken, and roast goose. We found shops selling tea, condiments, gold, cloth of all kinds, electrical goods, and cakes. There were rice shops with big wooden bins of different kinds of rice from China, Southeast Asia, and the very best, and most expensive, from Hong Kong itself—the paddy fields around Yuen Long. On the east side of the street there was a bazaar selling bamboo products, brushes, soap, washboards, dust pans and tin boxes made from beer cans, all kinds of kitchen utensils, knives, and with a photographer's studio crammed in. There were also several cinemas, with enormous hand-painted posters depicting current attractions. On the side streets were small restaurants featuring different regional cuisines. Prominent were Hakka and Shanghai-style restaurants, which gave clues to the ethnic composition of the population, as did the sometimes-pungent odours of street-side snacks such as freshly fried Shanghai fermented bean curd.

A smaller market close to the ferry pier on Yeung Uk Road had a large number of water-dwellers selling shellfish and fish. This street became an evening market, including street-side food stalls (大排檔) selling cheap but delicious foods. Chuen Lung Street, from the waterfront to Sha Tsui Road, had



Plate 4: Fishing boats in the harbour. The boat-dwellers' extremely limited living quarters and possessions can be seen, together with their fishing gear, c. 1969.

a market selling garments, many probably produced in Tsuen Wan's factories. It ended with a China products store, the town's only department store, a five-storey building selling cheap and useful, if not fashionable, goods. As one of the few air-conditioned shops, it was a place to escape the heat and humidity of Hong Kong from April until November. Some of the larger China products stores in Hong Kong and Kowloon sold luxury goods, but Tsuen Wan was a working-class town in 1968 and there was little demand for these. That said, when the cold northern winds blew at the onset of winter, it was the place to buy quilts, padded jackets, and long underwear.

The factory area was to the west of the town centre, beyond Fuk Loi Chuen, the post office, the terribly polluted *nullah* (drainage ditch), the fire station, and the District Office. Here there were modern textile factories employing the bulk of the labour force, but also factories that made Thermos bottles, enamelware, furniture, and foodstuffs. There were also many small factories, each employing only a handful of workers. Especially notable were the so-called 'flatted factories', government buildings like resettlement blocks housing diverse small enterprises which likely had been relocated from squatter areas. These remained in the hills above Castle Peak Road, extending up to Route Twisk, linking Tsuen Wan to Shek Kong, a military camp, on the other side of Tai Mo Shan. There were a few small villages on the mountainside. The most significant was Chuen Lung, half way up the mountain road, notable for some excellent teahouses.

Beyond the factory area, Castle Peak Road followed the coast, through the small village of Ting Kau, with some modern villas and a beach; Tsing Lung Tau, with a substantial water-dwelling population in the bay; and on to Sham Tseng, a large indigenous village surrounded by squatters and known for its roast goose. The settlement contained a brewery, an industrial bakery, a cotton mill, and the dock for the Ma Wan local ferry (街渡).



Plate 5: Factories in western Tsuen Wan, c. 1969. Their height suggests that they were spinning or weaving mills. The China Dyeing Works is on the left, and squatter areas behind.

The islands of Tsing Yi and Ma Wan were linked to the mainland only by ferry. There was a group of farming villages on Tsing Yi, a small market centre, a substantial water-dwelling population in the harbour, and ship repair yards on the northwest coast. Ma Wan had a major village and some small hamlets. It had been the location of the Imperial ‘Kowloon Customs’. Its Tianhou (天后) temple displayed memorial boards presented by imperial officials who had served there.

On the landward side of Castle Peak Road in central Tsuen Wan there were several villages. The upper storeys of the old houses of Muk Min Ha were level with the road. It was crowded and run-down, with many small industries, and was surrounded by squatter settlements that merged into the old villages of Sai Lau Kok and San Tsuen. Some fields remained, growing vegetables rather than rice, which were skirted by two paths that led up Lo Wai and through extensive squatter areas to several religious establishments in the foothills of Tai Mo Shan. The easterly path flanked Sam Tung Uk, to the east of which there were silk weaving mills, simple wooden sheds using Jacquard looms to produce brocades—their punched cards creating elegant patterns. To the north of the village was the Tianhou temple, a distinguished building with a wealth of historical information on stone tablets, lintels, and a bell dating to 1743. Tablets recorded a series of restorations, the most extensive occurring in 1897. There was a school in one side hall, and a shrine to a group of local martyrs in the other.

Beyond the temple there was a bean curd factory, a glass factory,¹⁰ a number of religious institutions, and a huge squatter area, the majority of the occupants of which, we were to learn, were Teochiu immigrants. It was dominated by a most remarkable squatter structure, a temple made of ferroconcrete formed into an enormous red bottle gourd in front of a mountain with a giant monkey’s head, and

10. See Barbara E. Ward, ‘A Small Factory in Hong Kong: Some Aspects of Its Internal Organization’, in *Economic Organization in Chinese Society*, ed. W. E. Willmott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 353–86.



Plate 6: Muk Min Ha village as seen from Castle Peak Road in the late 1960s, with a Shanghai tailor selling clothing and monastic robes in the centre.

depicting three-dimensional life-sized scenes from the famous Chinese novel *Journey to the West* (西遊記). When we first encountered this on one of our early walks we were dumbfounded and had no idea what it might be.

A series of valleys ran down the mountain. Shing Mun valley ran from the Shing Mun or Jubilee Reservoir and was intensively cultivated by vegetable farmers, many of whom lived in huts by their fields, running to market twice a day with freshly cut vegetables on carrying poles. Immediately to the east were the three resited villages of Kwan Mun Hau, Yeung Uk, and Ho Pui, fronted by the newly built and heavily fortified police station, overlooking Tai Wo Hau resettlement estate. Beyond the three villages was the Kwai Chung valley. Sheung Kwai Chung was tucked in a verdant hollow to the north, along with some other smaller villages. Chung Kwai Chung was close to the main road and contained a number of factories, and nearby were the villages of Lei Muk Shue and Shek Lei, whose fields were about to give way to resettlement estates. The valley dropped down to the village of Ha Kwai Chung, resited in 1964, with its pleasant little Tianhou temple on the shore of Gin Drinkers Bay. Further east, up to the boundary with New Kowloon, accessible only along Castle Peak Road, was the sizeable village of Kau Wa Keng and the post-war settlement of Kau Wa New Village.

This large and complex district was to be at the centre of our lives for the following two years. We continued to visit the outlying parts, but most of our focus was directed towards the town centre and its development.

Focusing Our Research

Tsuen Wan had a number of advantages for Graham's work. Living in the town and becoming familiar with its complexities helped to determine the kinds of questions that he might ask. Initially working in

the District Office, talking to staff responsible for creating plans to deal with the district and its issues, and having the opportunity to read files and documents, were all fundamentally important. Graham found much of interest, starting with the land records from the 1904 survey. It was fascinating to understand the emerging industrial and densely populated landscape in the context of its former agricultural character. Infrastructural improvements were urgently needed. There were major challenges, and the indigenous land owners seemed important to their resolution if town planning was to be effective and a 'new town'¹¹ created.

Yet the bulk of the rapidly expanding population was not indigenous. They were immigrants to Hong Kong. We wished to learn how migrants from diverse origins participated in Tsuen Wan's industrial development and adjusted to their new lives. The extent to which immigrants had developed support systems and a degree of social cohesion increasingly became the focus of Graham's work, in comparison with the indigenous population and its response to fundamental change. He was helped by the information he found in the District Office files. They revealed unpublished information about planning decisions, the structure of economic activity, the many organizations that had been formed as the population had grown and become more diverse, and the complex political decisions that had been made in a colonial structure that had been created to deal primarily with an agricultural population in the New Territories.

China was a society firmly based on agriculture, yet it was also highly urbanized and contained some of the world's greatest and largest cities. Such cities were characterized by immigrant populations who had coped with the disruptive effects of migration by creating associations based on the same place of origin, occupation, or surname. When Chinese people went abroad in large numbers, especially after the mid-nineteenth century, they too created such organizations for mutual support in alien and often hostile social contexts. These associations and their leaders gave them stability in their new environments, whether these were cities in China, or mines, plantations, or cities overseas.

The District Office files suggested that associations were significantly increasing in numbers as the population grew. They might well provide important clues as to how the huge numbers of newcomers were coping with the wrenching changes in their lives. Associations, their leaders, and leadership began to emerge as the central issues of Graham's research.

The question still remained as to where Elizabeth should do her research and where, therefore, we should live. Finally, Graham Barnes, in discussions with us, came to the conclusion that the only suitable location would be one of the original villages. These were, and are, meaningful social units, composed of people with kinship relations of long standing. As villages and lineages that had resided in the New Territories prior to the British lease of 1898, they had special rights guaranteed by the Peking Convention. These rights included access to the government through representative bodies, the right to bury their dead on the mountainsides, and special land rights that they held as descendants of the original owners, which allowed them to remain together in their villages despite the fact that they might have to be relocated for urban development or government infrastructure projects. They came to be called 'original inhabitants' (原居民).¹²

In Tsuen Wan, resiting of villages had begun as plans for the town proceeded. Graham Barnes suggested Kwan Mun Hau village as a possible location for Elizabeth's research, because the District

11. These challenges had been discussed in a 1959 study group. See Gerald Moore, ed., *Tsuen Wan Township: Study Group Report on Its Development* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1959).

12. When we first lived in Tsuen Wan, this term was not in common use. Instead, the local people, who were Hakka, called themselves 'original people' (本土人), to distinguish themselves from Punti (本地人), the term used for Cantonese people. They spoke mutually unintelligible Chinese languages. The Hakka, generally, were later arrivals. The 'painstaking Hong Kong Colony Census' of 1911 found 47,990 Cantonese and 36,070 Hakka people. See James Hayes, 'A Mixed Community of Cantonese and Hakka on Lantau Island', in *Aspects of Social Organization in the New Territories* (Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch Weekend Symposium 9th–10th May, 1964), 21.

Office had been in frequent communication with its leaders in recent years. Kwan Mun Hau was the first of the Tsuen Wan villages to negotiate an agreement to move to a new site after requesting this in 1959 because of intolerable conditions in their old village.¹³ The move had been successful, and they had been resited for four years when the District Officer put forward our request to them in 1968.

We will never know why the leaders of Kwan Mun Hau agreed to having us live among them, given that the reasons must have been very hard for them to understand. Research on their community conducted by adults who were still students was not part of their experience. Furthermore, even then, relations between Western expatriates and the local Chinese people were quite distant, with many differences of lifestyle, residence, and wealth.¹⁴ In addition, our connection to the colonial government was commonly known, as we had been introduced by the district officer. Despite their satisfaction with the new village, relations between their leaders and the colonial government were tense. Political divisions in Tsuen Wan, and elsewhere in Hong Kong, were deep, with tension between the pro-China left-wing and those with right-wing views. Those who were left-wing were critical of the colonial government. Although the indigenous people had special access to the government through the system of village representatives who participated in a rural committee, and, above this, a New Territories-wide body, the Heung Yee Kuk (鄉議局), two of the three village representatives of Kwan Mun Hau were left-wing in the 1960s (the third had died), and one had been obliged to step down from his positions as village representative and chair of the Tsuen Wan Rural Committee after he had spoken against the government in the Heung Yee Kuk. The villagers had not yet agreed on how to fill his position, and many still referred to him as 'our village head'. To this day we do not know why we were able to rent a floor of a village house belonging to an ancestral trust of one of the lineages, when our motives must have been suspect.

In general, we believe we were made more acceptable to the people of Tsuen Wan by our small son. The fact that we were a family made us appear normal, and this blond, blue-eyed, mischievous boy was both a curiosity and a source of amusement—and someone to be indulged. Furthermore, our lifestyle was different from many of the expatriates we observed, in that we spoke Cantonese to the best of our ability and tried to dress modestly, eventually, for Elizabeth, in Chinese-style clothes. She carried our baby on her back in the cloth square with four straps (預帶) used by local Chinese women, a method that was extremely convenient when walking in the crowded streets of the town.

Settling In

Kwan Mun Hau village became our home for eighteen months, where we were happy and worked hard. That we were both carrying out virtually full-time research, whether formal or informal, and trying to give adequate care to a small and very active child made for a busy life. Furthermore, living in Tsuen Wan was very demanding due to the air pollution, the deficiencies in infrastructure, and the climate, which at that time was unmitigated by air-conditioning. It was wet in the spring, so the laundry would not dry, shoes grew mouldy, and the walls ran with moisture; very hot and humid in summer; then clear and cold in the winter when the north wind blew, allowing villagers to make special wind-dried pork (風肉).

Still, we were very fortunate that air-conditioning had only just arrived, and people made do instead with electric fans in their homes. In the evenings, while people sat outdoors and conversed, we could walk around with our baby and talk with them. Although the indigenous people of Kwan Mun Hau were Hakka, all except the oldest women also spoke Cantonese, often quite accented, which they had learned either in school or through their interaction with Cantonese-speaking immigrants.

13. James Hayes, *Tsuen Wan: Growth of a 'New Town' and Its People* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1993), 67.

14. James Hayes, *Friends and Teachers: Hong Kong and Its People 1953–87* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1996), 11–13.



Plate 7: This fruit vendor came through the village every evening with his heavy load and, like so many other local people, was very kind to our child. His missing tooth suggests poverty.

We were fortunate, also, that television had only just become available, although by the end of our stay many more families owned a television, which increasingly became an impediment to research. Furthermore, women often did putting-out work from factories, assembling plastic flowers and ornaments, or finishing mops by rolling the threads on their thighs. This work was generally done outdoors, sometimes in groups. In addition, there were the happy sounds of children playing games after school, as they were less burdened by homework than they are now.

At that time, immigrants were desperate to find ways to earn a living, and some used their skills to become hawkers. Many, both men and women, came through the village in the course of a day, all with their distinctive calls. They sold prepared foods such as rice with salt pork wrapped in bamboo leaves (粽), a bean curd dessert (豆腐花), other popular snacks, and cooked meats such as sausage and chicken feet. A kindly older man sold fruit in the evenings, with his heavy baskets on a carrying pole. Others had special skills and trades, such as castrating cats and chickens, dyeing cloth, or sharpening knives. Their calls added to the liveliness of the village and attracted villagers who wanted their products and services.

Another set of distinctive sounds came from directly below our second-floor home. We lived above the Country Village Store (鄉村商店), which sold bread and biscuits, some canned goods, soft drinks, and beer—but it was primarily a mah-jong parlour, catering to the indigenous men of the village. Living there, we quickly became accustomed to the sound of clattering tiles. The store also served as a gathering place for village men, and we sometimes heard animated discussions. When carrying out these discussions they normally spoke Hakka, which meant they could be conducted in privacy. At that time, even the younger and middle-aged villagers could speak or at least understand Hakka, so this was comfortable for them and reinforced their unity.

One of our special memories is of an evening during the winter of 1968–1969, when a large group of native men gathered around the tables in the shop to enjoy a special winter treat, stewed dog meat. To our great surprise, one of them came upstairs to our home and brought a bowl of it for us. We have to think that this was a sign of their growing acceptance of us, because the consumption of dog meat was illegal in this British colony.¹⁵

Research Themes

Having moved into the village in November 1968, Elizabeth began to adapt her research proposal to this setting. We learned that Kwan Mun Hau was comprised of indigenous people of three surnames: Yau, Chan, and Fan. While the Fan lineage included only a few households who no longer had an ancestral hall, the presence of the larger Yau and Chan lineages was apparent in their ancestral halls, rebuilt when the village moved. The Yau hall is located on the third terrace and includes important elements from its predecessor in old Kwan Mun Hau: granite door frames and sills, and stone paving. The Chan hall is on the highest terrace of the village. Their original hall, and some members' homes, had been located in an adjacent village, Ham Tin, evidence that the lineages had not been confined to Kwan Mun Hau.

The fact that the original population of Kwan Mun Hau was organized into lineages added potential richness to Elizabeth's research, because she could now hope to learn about the impact of rapid urbanization and industrialization upon lineages as well as their constituent households. Based on research that had been done on urbanization, one would anticipate that lineages would not be able to maintain their traditional structures and functions in this new context, but she needed to investigate this.

There was another social feature of Kwan Mun Hau which made it an especially significant place for her to do research. This was the fact that its indigenous people, like all of those in Tsuen Wan, were Hakka. At that time, most of the anthropological studies being done in the New Territories of Hong Kong concerned Cantonese people, primarily those in large single-lineage villages.¹⁶ Jean Pratt had conducted one study of a Hakka village in the New Territories.¹⁷ In 1968 it was the only source.¹⁸ Important research on Hakka people was being done in Taiwan by Myron Cohen,¹⁹ but was not available to us until later.

Elizabeth's research method, both then and on return visits to Tsuen Wan, was to use what are called semi-structured interviews, in addition to participant observation. These consisted of lists of questions that she hoped to discuss with individuals, both men and women. The goal was to try to ensure that the person was at ease and speaking in a conversational style, while also giving her the information and opinions she was seeking. As such, she did not ask the questions in rigid order, but rather by following the direction of the conversation.

15. Dogs and Cats Ordinance, January 1950.

16. Most of our understanding of Chinese society came from research done in pre-revolutionary China or in overseas Chinese contexts. Anthropological research was just beginning in Taiwan but was not yet published. Jarvie stated in 1969: 'Sociology and anthropology [in Hong Kong] have hardly begun'. See 'Introduction', in *Hong Kong: A Society in Transition Contributions to the Study of Hong Kong Society*, ed. Ian Jarvie and Joseph Agassi (London: Routledge, 1969), xv.

17. Jean Pratt, 'Emigration and Unilineal Descent Groups: A Study of Marriage in a Hakka Village in the New Territories of Hong Kong', *The Eastern Anthropologist* 13, no. 4 (June–August 1960): 147–58.

18. See our bibliography for later publications on Hakka people, including J. W. Hayes, 'A Chinese Village on Hong Kong Island Fifty Years Ago – Tai Tam Tuk, Village Under the Water', in *Hong Kong: A Society in Transition Contributions to the Study of Hong Kong Society*, ed. Jarvie and Agassi, 29–51, two books by Nicole Constable, and one by Allen Chun. Barbara E. Ward (1965) and C. Fred Blake (1981) wrote on inter-ethnic relations in Sai Kung.

19. Myron L. Cohen, *House United, House Divided* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976).

Down to Work

In June 1969, Elizabeth began her first interviews of women. It soon became clear that it would not be possible to interview as many as she had hoped, although 14 indigenous women did agree to be interviewed, as did 11 tenants. She conducted interviews in the afternoon, when women, at least those who were not employed full time, were more likely to have some free time after doing housework and shopping. The fact that they had a little free time did not always mean that they were available for interviews, however, as they often were playing mah-jong, watching television, or talking among themselves, as well as watching small children.

Elizabeth can only hope that the excellent rapport she had with the great majority of the women compensates in part for the small sample size. Once women came to trust her, they spoke in detail about their lives, their ideas, and their opinions. Some of them were quite emotional as they talked about themselves and their experiences. One reason for this may be that, in general, in Chinese society it is impolite to talk about oneself, and perhaps because of fear of gossip, people usually reveal little about themselves. When the women realized that she and her assistants were genuinely interested in them, they responded by talking far more freely than they would in ordinary conversation. Moreover, they appeared to find the kinds of questions we asked to be important. From what Elizabeth observed during the interviews, and because of her experience of living in the village, she has considerable confidence in the validity of the information which she obtained.

Several months after starting the women's interviews she also began to interview men. Although her approach and procedures were the same as those with women, and our assistant was a model of tact, politeness, and persuasiveness, she found it much more difficult to gain the cooperation of men. She approached only native men because of the nature of the questions she was asking, especially those on household division, inheritance, and lineage matters. There were also those whom she could not approach for political reasons. Elizabeth finally succeeded in interviewing fifteen men and completing interviews with nine of them. With those nine, rapport was excellent and the answers meaningful, but in the remaining cases they refused to allow her to come back to complete the interview, although they cooperated for the first meeting. There are a number of possible explanations for this. One is the political situation in Hong Kong and the village, for there quite certainly was a lingering distrust of our motives and affiliations. Some, including one man who worked twelve hours a day, simply did not have enough free time to talk further. Another is that the questions asked were not on subjects that men would normally converse about with comparative strangers, and some were on rather sensitive subjects. They certainly found it hard to understand why Elizabeth should want that kind of specific and personal information from them. Still, it remains to be explained why some men cooperated fully with us. Even those men who refused to talk further were invariably polite, which is some consolation.

To gain a broader comparative perspective, she also interviewed leaders from six other Tsuen Wan villages. The interviews varied in length, but some were very fruitful and they all helped her learn about and compare the central Tsuen Wan villages and their lineages.

Graham's Survey

It was here that there was considerable overlap with Graham's work. He was concerned with the town as a whole. Village life was an excellent opportunity to experience in detail a part of the larger picture. His work, however, extended beyond the boundaries of the village. Much of the information about the immigrant population, its efforts to cope with new and often socially disruptive ways of living, could not be gleaned from walking the streets or even from government records, valuable though they were. He believed it necessary to interview a group of those whom he could identify as leaders, both indigenous and newcomers, and ask a series of identical (standard) questions in order to explore Tsuen

Wan's distinctive development, which involved two very different populations caught up in economic and social change. To our knowledge, only one other scholar had conducted research in Tsuen Wan,²⁰ and Graham was the first to interview on a wide scale.

His research questions took some time to formulate, as did his methods of approach: devising a questionnaire, testing it, then locating key individuals to interview. It took him nine months not merely to ascertain important questions but also to determine the strategy whereby he could ask for lengthy interviews of busy men, and one woman. He completed his questionnaire by early January 1969, tested it in Kowloon, and began interviewing in earnest after the Lunar New Year holidays. His survey ran until October 1969. By November he had coded the data, and with the help of the computing centre at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, he completed a preliminary analysis. A feverish writing schedule resulted in a rough draft of his doctoral dissertation by May 1970, when we left Hong Kong after a rewarding two years.

Our Social Life in Kwan Mun Hau

In addition to the people we interviewed, there were many others with whom we talked in the village, and from whom we learned much that was relevant to our work. Within a short period of time, we had formed relationships that have remained strong to this day. Shortly after moving in, we noticed that a ceremony was being held in an open area just in front of the village. A young man who spoke English well began a conversation with us and explained that a funeral was in progress. He was a member of the Yau lineage and was the first of our many contacts within it. He worked as a translator for a Canadian agency and continued to talk regularly with us, rapidly coming to understand the purpose of our work. He has remained a lifelong friend and a valuable source of information. He had a successful career in banking and has been the accountant for the Yau lineage for many years. We became close to all of his family members, several of whom have been very supportive of our work.²¹

Another young person from the Yau lineage soon approached Elizabeth. She was a student at the Tsuen Wan Government Secondary School—the best in Tsuen Wan. She spoke excellent English and hoped to improve it. She, and all her family, became some of our closest friends and supporters within the village. They had and have a reputation for being intelligent and hard-working, with some members being among the best-educated in the village.

In addition, we were exceptionally fortunate in our immediate neighbours, Mr Kwok Yung-hing, his wife, his mother, and four daughters. We shared a common staircase to our second-floor homes, with facing doors. Their door was almost always open and, after we had installed a gate so that our baby would not fall down the concrete stairs, so was ours. They were ideal neighbours: intelligent, thoughtful, well-informed, observant, and open-minded. They quickly came to understand the nature of our work and why we were living there. They were not part of one of the local lineages, but Mr Kwok's father, who was Hakka, had arrived in Tsuen Wan in about 1870 and opened a shop selling miscellaneous products. Since the family had resided in Tsuen Wan while it was still under Chinese rule, and had various kinship relations there, they were widely accepted by local people and encouraged to rent a flat in Kwan Mun Hau. His wife had immigrated as a child with her family from Shunde *xian* in the Pearl River delta.

The youngest of the four girls was three months older than our son. While we were living in Kwan Mun Hau, we learned about a kind of godparenthood relationship that children sometimes

20. Baruch Boxer, a geographer, conducted research in 1964 and 1966. For his insightful summary article, see Baruch Boxer, 'Space, Change, and Fung-Shui in Tsuen Wan's Urbanization', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 3, no. 3–4 (July–October 1968): 226–40.

21. We are especially grateful to his mother, Yau Tsang Yung-hei.

were entered into. This could exist between the child and a deity, a natural feature such as a special tree, or a person from another family. A relationship²² between a child and an adult or couple could be initiated by the child's parents because they believed the child to be in need of the protection and help offered by additional relationships, or it could be initiated by an adult because of affection for the child. When Kin-man, their youngest daughter, was about two years old we asked whether she might become our goddaughter (契女). Her grandmother, who acted as the final authority on important family matters, agreed, and after we had given Kin-man auspicious gifts, her grandmother carried out ceremonies to inform the gods and ancestors and create the relationship. Our families have remained relatives to this day, seeing each other frequently and exchanging help whenever it has been needed. They have been invaluable for our research, because not only are they knowledgeable about Tsuen Wan history, liked and respected by the local people, but they have been able to give us insight into situations that otherwise would have been unfathomable. They also helped us by explaining Elizabeth's work to residents of Kwan Mun Hau. Furthermore, both parents are models of decorum, and have been valuable teachers to us of appropriate and polite Chinese behaviour.

During a short return visit to North America to attend a conference in the late summer of 1969, Graham was offered a teaching position at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. This meant that when we left Hong Kong in the spring of 1970 we were fortunate enough to know where we would be in the future. At that time, though, we had no idea it would ever be possible for us to return to Tsuen Wan. Canada seemed very far away and travel was not easy.

Postscript

Life sometimes has a way of returning what we think we have lost. In 1975–1976, Graham had a sabbatical leave and for a year became a visiting scholar at Hong Kong University, where he was able to carry out archival research on the emerging situation in China. Elizabeth did not yet have a permanent position, as she had been busy writing her doctoral thesis, somewhat delayed because of the birth of a second son, then 4 years old. Given our ties to Tsuen Wan, and Kwan Mun Hau, we would not consider living anywhere else, especially as this would give Elizabeth the opportunity to do further research there. We had the good fortune to be able to rent the ground floor of a house owned by and adjacent to that of Mr Yau Shui-cheung and his wife Yau Chan Shek-ying. It was their daughter whom we had come to know so well during our first stay there.

During the intervening few years, Kwan Mun Hau had acquired a much more settled look. When we were first there it was quite stark, with a predominance of the concrete paving and facings of hill-sides that are so common in urban Hong Kong. By 1975 people had planted trees, including guavas and bananas, among others. Some were raising chickens where space permitted on the terraces in front of their houses, and pet birds, dogs, and even cats were common. An anthropologist friend who visited us commented that it seemed like a rural oasis on the edge of the city.

Graham followed events in China as best he could, under the then difficult political climate. From 1979, he began to focus on a set of rural communities in the Pearl River delta region, which were undergoing dramatic economic change and in which Hong Kong entrepreneurs had major (and familiar) roles to play. He returned to Hong Kong in 1981–1982 for a sabbatical leave, and again in 1995–1997 to teach at the City University of Hong Kong. Each time he lived in Kwan Mun Hau, and although his work focused on the transformation that was taking place in the Pearl River delta region,

22. This type of relationship has been called fictive kinship, but might better be called 'constructed kinship', given the strong lifelong bonds it creates. Stone, *Kinship and Gender*, 302.

he never lost interest in the changes that were taking place in Tsuen Wan. Elizabeth also returned regularly²³ and continued to do research there whenever possible.

What Is to Follow

As the ‘new town’ policy of social and economic planning was applied, Tsuen Wan continued to evolve, providing a model for the other new towns that were later created in the New Territories, but with its own distinctive characteristics, including its industrial base. The greatest challenges in its path to becoming a more liveable society emerged during the period James Hayes has called ‘The Battling Seventies.’²⁴ As the nature of its development has changed over time, we have found much to learn about its changing social fabric. We will present our findings in the later chapters of this book, following those derived from our original research in the late 1960s.

Our understanding of Tsuen Wan has been greatly enriched in an unanticipated way. Our initial intent had been to study the social dynamics of the contemporary society. To our great surprise, as time passed we found that we would have opportunities to gain insight into its earlier history, knowledge that was very important for our overall understanding of the town and district. These opportunities initially came to us through the testimony of elders. Elizabeth began this work in 1975–1976. She chose to focus primarily on women’s lives before and immediately after the Japanese occupation and, by interviewing older women, learned about their daily life and work histories, as well as their remarkable tradition of mountain songs and laments. After beginning her curatorial career, she returned to Tsuen Wan in late 1979 to collect tools, clothing, and domestic objects no longer needed in the urban context. Collecting and documenting these with the help of Mrs Yau Chan Shek-ying gave her important insights into their earlier way of life.

In the late 1960s we had only one historical document to study, the Yau lineage genealogy, which had been duplicated for distribution to all member households in 1966. As time passed, other important documents were made available to us, which have helped to carry our research back in time. Furthermore, in the intervening years, historians, specifically James Hayes and David Faure, have published their important research. All of these sources have provided an unexpected, and most welcome, foundation for our work, which we will present in the next two chapters, before moving into our study of Tsuen Wan in the late 1960s, and beyond.

23. Elizabeth found a career at the UBC Museum of Anthropology, which allowed her occasional research leave.

24. Hayes, *Tsuen Wan*, 108–24.

Conclusions

Tsuen Wan in Retrospect

Almost a half century ago, when we first lived in Tsuen Wan and began our investigations, it met our expectations that it would be an appropriate place to explore the complexities of rapid social and economic change. Although we imagined that after our two-year period of research we would in all likelihood never return, we were fortunate that the professions we entered supported and encouraged further research, and that improved, and cheaper, air travel made this possible. We were therefore able to return many times, expanding our knowledge of Tsuen Wan and the depth of our relationships. As a result, we have been able to recount its continued development, as seen from our perspective.

In retrospect, we realize what special opportunities we have had to learn about social relations in Tsuen Wan, past and present. Our perspective extends over more than a century, given that local people shared their memories with us as well as knowledge that they had gained from their elders. They also gave us copies of their historical documents.

Out of all that we learned, certain insights stand out, and we will present them here. These findings are especially valuable for making comparisons not only within Tsuen Wan, but also with other Chinese contexts. When we began our research, the 'Chinese phase' in anthropology and sociology, as well as local historical research, had only just begun. There were very few studies published. Since then, there has been an outpouring of studies, focussed initially on Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Chinese overseas. From the 1980s, the People's Republic of China became accessible to foreign scholars, and social science there was reborn. Initially, there was little local or comparative information available to us, but it has expanded dramatically since then. We have therefore attempted to place our findings in a wider context.

At first, we focused on the twin forces of industrialization and urbanization that had transformed a largely rural economy. The colonial government was only minimally involved until change was well underway and conditions required urgent attention. Resolution of a number of rapidly worsening problems involved the descendants of the original inhabitants, whose land rights had been acknowledged since Tsuen Wan became part of the British colony. They were key to efforts to achieve a rational and negotiated outcome. Resolution also involved the immigrants, who greatly outnumbered the local Hakka population and, given then-prevalent government assumptions, had very few rights. The nature of colonial governance, the past and continuing indigenous presence, and immigrants' adaptation to drastic change were not issues that we had contemplated before we immersed ourselves in our research, but they quickly became central, and have remained important.

Urbanization in a Chinese historical context was well documented, but industrialization was not. Ours was one of the first attempts to analyse an urban and industrial revolution in both a Chinese and a colonial context. The process was significant for both the local Hakka and the immigrant populations, but in different ways. There was little to guide us regarding its impact on the population of

original inhabitants, and only a little more for the immigrants.¹ The significance of voluntary associations, and their links to the Chinese cultural past, was both understandable and astonishing. From the broad literature on industrial and urban change, it was clear that immigrant workers in new contexts created associations to cope with the culturally and socially disruptive forces of migration and industrial employment. When Chinese people moved to cities, in China or abroad, they had a history of forming associations for mutual support. The significance and extent of associations in Tsuen Wan in the 1950s and the 1960s were beyond expectations, but newcomers could not have coped without them.

Colonial governance initially did not seem significant to us, and the literature was generally silent on the topic, remaining so for some time.² It quickly became obvious to us that development policy in Tsuen Wan was sensitive to the local Hakka population, but slow to formulate policies concerning immigrant needs and interests. In the late 1960s there were few mechanisms for consultation with the vast majority of the population about matters that concerned them and their well-being. Part of the problem was that Tsuen Wan was in the New Territories, and the system of government had changed very little since its incorporation in 1898. The 1971 census revealed that Tsuen Wan was not only the most populous district in the New Territories, with 41% of the population; it was also the most industrial and the most urban, and contributed disproportionately to Hong Kong's economic advancement. Furthermore, only 4.9% of its population had been born in Hong Kong. The remainder had only fragmentary access to decision-making, and the administration of the district was not dramatically different in nature and scale from when it had been an area of farmers and fishing people, despite the dramatic shifts in its economic character and the composition of its population.

Our initial research was conducted at the end of an era, although in 1970 this was not apparent. The colonial system of governance began to change for a number of reasons,³ some relating to policy shifts in Britain, others to developments in Hong Kong, and worldwide, in the two decades following the formation of the People's Republic of China. Administrative reform was underway, but was sidetracked by unrest during the summer of 1967, which generated a sense of crisis in the government, a temporary loss of economic confidence, and a stock market collapse. During the early stages of recovery from the economic downturn, the City District Officer scheme was introduced into the urban areas of Hong Kong and Kowloon, in the hope of creating greater public participation in policy formulation.

The period of change under Governor MacLehose was lengthy, comprehensive, and dramatic. The Tsuen Wan experience became a major factor in transforming the role of the New Territories in Hong Kong, and brought a decentralized system of consultation and administration, in the form of District Boards (now District Councils), to all of Hong Kong. Change included advances in education policy and major commitments to new infrastructure, including mass transit and roads. Of long-lasting significance was the fact that the colonial government, in response to policy changes in China, also began to address the issue of the New Territories lease.

In the 35 years after 1980, changes in China's economic policies led to the economic transformation of Tsuen Wan, a transformation as momentous as the three decades of its development after 1950. With one important exception, post-industrial Tsuen Wan is now much like the rest of urban Hong Kong, and closely resembles the rest of the wealthy and globalized territory that has become a Special Administrative Region of China. The exception is the muted presence of the indigenous population which, although now only a tiny proportion, nonetheless remains, as it has elsewhere in the New Territories.

1. See, for example, N. J. Smelser, *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution: An Application of Theory to the British Cotton Industry, 1770–1840* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).

2. Likewise, anthropological studies on Taiwan tended to minimize its complex political history.

3. David Faure, *Colonialism and the Hong Kong Mentality* (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2003).

Tsuen Wan has been distinguished by its local people's openness to immigrants, a characteristic that helped to keep it harmonious as it began to experience profound change in the mid-twentieth century. This has proven beneficial to both original inhabitants and to newcomers as they became progressively more interdependent. They have increasingly interacted in education and employment, and, inevitably, local Hakka men have married women of non-Hakka origins. As time has passed, all have been absorbed into the dominant Cantonese language and culture of Hong Kong. In the 1990s we heard a new image used to describe the relationship between them: that the distinctive identity of the original inhabitants was diminishing and fading. They remain an identifiable group within the overall Hong Kong population, because their special rights as original inhabitants are still protected under the Basic Law. This identity becomes visible on those occasions when it is relevant and they choose to make it known, as well as through the presence of their villages, but they otherwise blend into the general population.

Within the local Hakka community, despite the enormity of change taking place in the 1960s and the 1970s, two of the lineages, the Yau of Kwan Mun Hau and Hoi Pa, and the Chan of Kwan Mun Hau and Ham Tin, made the commitment to update, expand, and print their genealogies. They somehow found the time and resources to do so at a time when challenging decisions had to be made concerning their livelihood, their property, and even the location of their villages. These commitments demonstrated loyalty to their lineages, and concern to maintain their identity, as well as the presence of dedicated leaders. It is significant that the lineages of Kwan Mun Hau and its related villages continue to this day, caring for their ancestors through traditional ceremonies, albeit with some simplifications due to the demands and distractions of contemporary life. Their valuable urban trust properties play an important role in this. Other Tsuen Wan lineages also remain, although the Yau and Chan are reputed to be the wealthiest, and the most committed to their traditions. The lineages of Lo Wai are the most distinctive in their adaptation to contemporary change.

Committed local leaders also have been present at the village and district level, helping to guide the original inhabitants through the profound challenges presented by Tsuen Wan's rapid development. Now, in much more prosperous times, such leaders continue to be chosen. In the characteristics of its historic cultural and social system, Tsuen Wan continues to resemble other multi-lineage communities, distinguished by relatively egalitarian and peaceful relations, cooperation, and considerable self-governance by respected leaders. Such communities contrast fundamentally with the powerful and highly competitive single-lineage villages of the New Territories, a fundamental insight first articulated in 1977 by James Hayes in his important comparative model of local political systems.⁴

Among our unanticipated discoveries were those that gave us awareness of types of social relations very different from those now prevailing: relations with, through, and among women. People remembered their existence, or had experienced them in the past, and they are important for comparison with the types of relationships that existed elsewhere. For example, the prevalence of various forms of marriage was a revelation to us, not only marriages made with small daughters-in-law, but also the 'replacement marriage' of a woman with a widowed man, resulting in kinship relations between her and the family of his first wife, with whom she was 'grafted'. The extent of polygyny despite the prevailing poverty, and the possibility of other forms of marriage with more than one woman, living, or in the form of a soul tablet, was also surprising, as were the relationships between bride-giving and bride-receiving lineages expressed by polite forms of address. The importance to young married women of their relationships with their natal families was reinforced in this context. These were expressed by exchanges of special foods that they carried between their natal families and those into which they married, and by their husbands' families hosting theirs for meals.

4. Hayes, *The Hong Kong Region*, 194–201.

We also learned about the strength of the relationships among women, the groups of 'sisters' who, despite the absence of maiden houses, supported each other while working and in the days before marriage. Women continued to create such groups after marriage, while working together outdoors. They shared a tradition of mountain songs and laments that allowed them creative outlets, and the opportunity to express their personal sorrows and grievances. Daughters' laments were also essential in settling the soul of the deceased, to the extent that they were adopted to fill this role if necessary. This tradition was just coming to an end when we first arrived, and we were fortunate to learn of it.

Some of these types of relationships were specifically Hakka, although we have to be careful about making generalizations, as boundaries were not absolute. The inclusiveness of souls' rights to be seated in the ancestral hall is one specific characteristic, through the rites that incorporate the souls of men and women into the single tablet, where they receive offerings and sit contented, and at peace.

Shortly before our initial sojourn in Tsuen Wan, Peter Laslett wrote an important book on the 'lost world' of pre-industrial England, in which he explored the family composition, community structure, and social class relations of that time.⁵ In the process he destroyed some myths and brought a past era alive. Likewise, we initially tried to convey something of a world that is now lost, the chaotic industrial working-class town of Tsuen Wan. As we studied the character of the emerging town, and carried the story of its growth and development on to its post-industrial form, we also became increasingly aware of the world that had preceded it. This was the rural Hakka world of pre-industrial Tsuen Wan, with its own distinctive history and social forms, which was to be increasingly subsumed under complex economic, cultural, and social forces. We were privileged to learn of the past, and are conscious of how important it is to preserve these memories, so that present and future generations, who are caught up in very different lifestyles, can be aware of and cherish the contributions of those who preceded them, as we appreciate the contributions of those people who remembered, researched, recorded, preserved, and shared with us their history and their cultural knowledge.

5. Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (London: Methuen, 1965).

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