Garden City: Urban Form, Colonial Domesticity, and Spaces of Play for Children in Interwar Hong Kong

Stella Meng Wang

Abstract

This paper considers how the Garden City movement in interwar Hong Kong created a new residential architecture and supervised play space for middle-class Chinese children in suburban districts in Kowloon and Hong Kong Island. Pioneered by Ebenezer Howard in his 1899 publication *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, the original garden city idea advocated the establishment of self-sustained communities that integrated country and town life. When transplanted to Hong Kong, the garden city idea responded simultaneously to a wide stream of cultural currents. For the colonial state, it was an effective means to enact new town planning culture – creating a healthy domestic form on the one hand, and transforming suburban housing form on the other. For the Chinese bourgeoisies, it allowed this class sector to consume the expanding material culture of respectability. Garden city estates, in turn, functioned as an expression of a class, namely, the colonial polite society.

The principle of wholesome community life advocated by the garden city idea subsequently gave rise to residents' associations that campaigned for the expansion of play architecture for children. As city-based bourgeoisie – comprising both European and Chinese mercantile and professional classes – offloaded their concern and frustration for urban health, particularly that of children, onto the newly developed garden city neighbourhoods, they helped to define an architecture and landscape of play that was distinctly counter-urban. Play architecture thus functioned as an expression of class anxiety, a shared outlook of the urban elite on childhood, and beneath it, lies the frustration about and hope for the future of the British empire.

Keywords: colonial Hong Kong, town planning, garden city, childhood, playground

In 1923, the five-year-old Catherine Joyce Symons (b. 1918), a Eurasian child (born of mixed parentage), moved with her family to their new home in Kai Tak Bund (a Garden City estate in Kowloon, named after its chief promoters: Ho Kai – a Chinese member on the Legislative Council, and Au Tak – a Chinese businessman). At the time of their relocation, Catherine suggested,

> very little of Kowloon Peninsula had been developed [...] Two and three storey houses stretched along Nathan Road for a couple of miles, becoming more and more scattered, and disappearing altogether before the tiny settlement of Kai Tak. From there a 10-minute walk brought us to our new home 23 Kai Tak Bund, in a small terrace of 17 houses. Across the wide road, we could actually see the sea. In marked contrast to our tiny flat in Hong Kong, the house was huge, with bright, spacious rooms, and a front garden. [1]

The garden style house depicted here in Catherine's childhood story captured a significant moment in the diversification of dwelling typology in Hong Kong over the interwar period. This new architectural design constituted a new spatial form of suburban built environment that emerged over the phase of northward provincial urbanisation[2] in the Kowloon Peninsula in the 1920s and 1930s. The resulting domestic architecture not only engaged new building practices and technologies to promote the health function of the dwelling site, it also enacted new domestic lifestyle that came to signify middle-class respectability. Here the spatial design of home simultaneously entered the imperial discourses on public health

[1] Joyce Symons, *Looking at Stars: Memoirs of Catherine Joyce Symons* (Hong Kong: Pegasus Books, 1996), 8. Cited in Cecilia Louise Chu, "Speculative Modern: Urban Forms and the Politics of Property in Colonial Hong Kong" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2012), 134.

[2] The term of 'provincial urbanisation' was proposed by Tania Sengupta, see Tania Sengupta, "Living in the periphery: provinciality and domestic space in colonial Bengal," *The Journal of Architecture* 18, no. 6 (2013): 905-943.

and domesticity. This, in turn, engendered new domestic and play experience for the middle-class child.

This paper considers the development of new residential forms in interwar Hong Kong (to distinguish, Hong Kong as appears in this paper refers to the wider geography of Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and the New Territories) and how this change in everyday residential architecture produced new spatial experience of play – both in the domestic and public domain – for children from varied racial backgrounds but belonged collectively to the colonial middle-class sector. In particular, the paper examines a transnational town planning practice – the Garden City movement, as it shaped suburban domestic structure and neighbourhood planning in this period. In contrast with the nineteenth century where colonial residential planning concentrated on the separation of European and Chinese style houses, and with it, the spatial segregation of European and Chinese residential quarters, by the early twentieth century, separate residential planning gave way to modern planning practices that advocated for a functional and spatially specialised townscape.[3] Enacted chiefly in the provincial and rural hinterland of Kowloon, this planning reform denoted the formation of residential districts away from industrial and commercial functions. The garden cities established here over the interwar period, in turn, underpinned the reimagining of the rural space in colonial discourse and the emergence of suburban culture. For the Chinese mercantile and professional classes, the garden city estates became 'a highly specialised instrument for realising many aspects of bourgeois selfhood'.[4] As the countryside was

[3] For a discussion on the shifting planning priorities in Hong Kong prior to 1941, see Pui-yin Ho, *Making Hong Kong: A History of Its Urban Development* (Northampton, Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018).
[4] John Archer, Architecture and Suburbia: From English Villa to American Dream House, 1690-2000 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xv; Mark E. Reinberger and Elizabeth McLean,

reinvented as the ideal home for the colonial polite society, residence in garden city houses became a means for Chinese elites and the middle classes to claim their social status. Living among European neighbours – many of whom were of similar professional standing – in the garden houses, the Chinese bourgeois later found their way into residents' associations that in part contributed to their rising social and political significance.

More than merely frustrating the colony's racial and class geography, the garden city estates and landscape were part of the interwar period cultural pattern that permeated to areas of urban planning, education, and leisure. This culture pattern, namely, the middle-class and urban culture proliferated with the middle-class residential mobility out of the crowded city areas to more healthy suburban districts. And with it, new lifestyles and values emerged that collectively defined the colonial middle classes. As the census officer J. D. Lloyd suggested in 1921, the increase of the population in the upper levels in Hong Kong Island – where houses were built in European style – was 'due largely to the replacement of Europeans by wealthy Chinese'. Lloyd also expected that in the future, this residential district may be populated by a large number of middle-class Chinese, while the 'wealthier Chinese now in occupation may be expected to build themselves country homes on the south side of the Island, now rendered accessible by good motor roads'.[5] This shifting racial geography – defined through residential mobility – was in part shaped by the transient character of the European society in Hong Kong. As the census report suggested, 'except for new professional men, employees of the Dock Companies and Civil servants, the European

The Philadelphia Country House: Architecture and Landscape in Colonial America (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 2.

[5] 'Report on the Census of the Colony for 1921', *Hong Kong Sessional Papers*, Hong Kong Government, no. 15/ 1921, 153.

population almost completely change every 5 years. Most of the employees of the various firms only complete one tour of duty here, and then after the expiration of their home leave are transferred elsewhere'.[6] The 'mobile' nature of the European society in Hong Kong also contributed toward the multiracial make-up of Garden City neighbourhoods. As a method for suburban development, garden city estates attracted the Chinese bourgeois in that it supported the 'the creation of a stable home and family life', and 'the consumption of the expanding material culture of respectability'.[7] Ultimately, the garden city movement helped create a social and cultural space in the suburban districts of Hong Kong where the European and Chinese professional classes – through their shared ideals, values, and lifestyles[8] – formed associations that advocated for the provision of regulated play spaces for its residents.

Garden City Movement and Colonial Domesticity in Hong Kong: A Background

Carried out chiefly by private enterprises – run either by European or Chinese businessmen – and with the support of the colonial Public Works Department to provide the necessary infrastructure such as sewage, electricity, and water supply, the Garden City estates planned and developed in Hong Kong in the early twentieth century illustrated the close collaboration between planning professionals,[9] colonial state departments, and local elites

[6] Ibid., 159.
[7] Colin G. Pooley and Sian Pooley, "Constructing A Suburban Identity: Youth, Femininity and Modernity in Late-Victorian Merseyside," *Journal of Historical Geography,* 36 (2010): 402–410.
[8] Christof Dejung, David Motadel, and Jürgen Osterhammel, "Worlds of the Bourgeoisie," in *The Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise of The Middle Classes in The Age of Empire,* eds. Christof Dejung, David Motadel, and Jürgen Osterhammel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 1-41.
[9] For a specific discussion on how British planning professionals shaped the townscape of Hong Kong between 1841 and 1941, see Charlie Q. L. Xue, Han Zou, Baihao Li and Ka Chuen Hui, "The Shaping of Early Hong Kong: Transplantation and Adaption by the British Professionals," Planning Perspective 27, no. 4 (2012): 549-568.

in shaping the suburban domestic landscape. This new residential form – a single family house with its own garden – emerged in the context of a saturated urban metropolis of Victoria upon which the urban settlements in Hong Kong Island sprawled, and a vast underdeveloped rural hinterland across the Victoria Harbour on the Kowloon Peninsula. In between these two extreme forms of settlement, lay the swampy, barren, and hilly landscapes uncultivated for civic construction. This geographic feature of Hong Kong was depicted by the Medical and Sanitary Department where it suggested,

> topographically, the Island of Hong Kong and the Peninsula of Kowloon may be described as a series of granite ridges separated by narrow valleys and having here and there flat areas facing the sea […] In the Island the only flat level of any size was that on which the City of Victoria stood and this did not cover more than one square mile. With regard to Kowloon, not more than one half was flat and convenient for street formation. [10]

It was against this backdrop that the garden city model was deployed as a method for provincial urban development in Kowloon. In the early phases, housing schemes planned on garden city lines emphasised horticulture – that in part to contribute to rural development. In 1918, for example, after three years of work in levelling a paddy field, a group of 'energetic Chinese' developed a Garden City in the New Territories in the district of Fanling. The project was carried out by a local firm Kui Yip Land Investment and Farming Co., Ltd. It planned a Model Village that grew a wide range of fruit trees.[11] By the interwar period, garden cities developed in Kowloon shifted the focus to wholesome communal planning

[10] This review account on the geographic feature of Hong Kong was presented in 'Medical and Sanitary Report for the Year 1929', *Hong Kong Government Administrative Reports*, Hong Kong Government, 5.
[11] 'A Garden City in the New Territories, How Chinese Are Solving Housing Problem', *The Hong Kong Telegraph,* Dec. 23, 1918, 23.

that advocated for the provision of educational facilities, open spaces, and playgrounds for its residents.

The reason that the garden city idea was successfully transplanted to Hong Kong, and was deployed as a method for suburban and provincial development in the interwar period, was that at the time the colonial authority was struggling with similar housing issues that gave rise to the Garden City in Britain. The Garden City idea as pioneered by Ebenezer Howard in his 1899 publication *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform (*reprinted as *Garden Cities of To-morrow* in 1902) was an intervention in industrial urbanisation that produced myriad health concerns for urban residents, particularly for the working-class. The first garden city Letchworth – located on an estate of 4500 acres, thirty-five miles from London – was established in 1905 in accordance with Howard's plan to organise 'in rural surroundings a workman's city', and 'to achieve a healthy, natural, and economic combination of town and country life'. It was a model to 'revive the small town under twentieth-century industrial conditions'. The developed estate was a self-sustained community that had 'its own parks and open spaces, its own agricultural belt, its own schools, theatres, and public facilities'.[12] It thus provided an alternative housing development model that actively combatted overcrowding in industrial cities and simultaneously supported the growth of small towns. This integrative model of town and country life afforded by the Garden City is also pointed out by Graham Livesey where he argues, the Garden City 'was a direct response to what

[12] 'The First Garden City, Interesting Facts Concerning Letchworth', *The Hong Kong Telegraph*, Mar. 6, 1914, 3.

were perceived to be the evils of large industrial cities and attempted to reunite the country and town, particularly through the residential garden and the act of gardening'.[13]

While the original garden city idea was proposed as a solution to crowded industrial urban living, historians have argued that its transference to colonial contexts often served quite different purposes. For example, Liora Bigon shows that the French colonial administration in West Africa used the garden city concept selectively, 'diverting and adapting it to its needs in order to create a prestigious image of the quarters designated for its employees'. This then enforced 'unofficial class segregation within the expatriate society', and fostered 'informal racial segregation between white and indigenous residential sectors'.[14] Bigon further argues that the colonial garden cities in Africa – built either by the British or the French colonial authority – shared a common characteristic in that they contributed toward the creation of 'racially polarised colonial urban environments'.[15] In British Hong Kong, however, the garden cities completed in the interwar period served a very different end. It functioned as a means through which the Chinese mercantile and professional classes gained access to a domestic lifestyle previously enjoyed by the European expatriate society. The houses built in garden cities in Kowloon were in European style and shared a very similar spatial design with the residence built for colonial officials. Public spaces such as dining room, living room, drawing room were separated from the more private spaces of bedroom and bathroom, where the former tended to be located on the ground floor, and

[13] Graham Livesey, "Assemblage theory, Gardens and the Legacy of the Early Garden City Movement," *Urbanism* 15, no. 3(2011): 271-278.
[14] Liora Bigon, "'Garden City' in the Tropics? French Dakar in Comparative Perspective," *Journal of Historical Geography* 38 (2012): 35-44.
[15] Liora Bigon, "Garden Cities in Colonial Africa: A Note on Historiography," *Planning Perspectives* 28, no. 3 (2013), 477-485.

the latter on the upper floors. Servants quarters were also strictly separated from the main living areas, [16] creating a highly regulated domestic space where the interaction between household occupants were carefully controlled.

These garden city residences enacted a vision of domesticity that helped define middle-class culture in the British context.[17] In the Victorian period, as work was gradually separated from home, the domestic space emerged as a prime 'physical and spatial location for people's social and emotional lives',[18] and a space where feminine accomplishments were on display.[19] Properly brought up children were an integral part of the imperial discourses on domesticity and femininity where women were tasked with the management of home life and the education of children.[20] In this context, childhood became a cultural signifier of social receptibility. The discursive significance of domesticity to imperial culture helped the transplantation of European style residential architecture in British colonial centres, and was furfure encoded in the garden city idea developed in Hong Kong. By deploying the garden city model as a method for provincial development, this colonial domestic imaginary

[16] For a detailed discussion on house forms in Kowloon Garden City, see Leung Kwok Prudence Lau, "Adaptive Modern and Speculative Urbanism: The Architecture of the Crédit Foncier d'Extrême-Orient (C.F.E.O.) in Hong Kong and China's Treaty Ports, 1907-1959" (PhD Diss., The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2013), 168, where it suggests, 'the garage and servants quarters, store rooms, kitchen and laundry in the basement, the residence proper starting with the first floor, the servants' entrance to which is from the rear. This style of building gives more elevation and a better view as well and greatly improves the ventilation of the house. The entrance leads to a small hall at the end of which there is a special cupboard for hats and cloaks. Each floor is provided with living room, drawing room from which entrance is made through a large archway which can be curtained, two bedrooms, two bathrooms and adequate cupboard room space. The front of the first and second floors is set back so as to form a spacious verandah facing the main roadway. At the rear of each floor is a separate stairway leading to the basement'.

[17] For a discussion on the interaction of gender, class, and domesticity in the British context, see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[18] Christensen and O'Brien, eds. *Children in the City*, 3.

[19] Andrea Kaston Tange, *Architectural Identities: Domesticity, Literature and the Victorian Middle Class* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 63.

[20] Duff, *Changing Childhoods in the Cape Colony,* 47.

permeated to wider social echelons, particularly the expanding sectors of middle-and upper-class Chinese that comprised merchants and Western-educated professionals including accountants, lawyers, educators, public health workers, surveyors and builders, specialists on shipping, and banking.[21] As the historian Tania Sengupta argues, colonial provincial urbanisation 'signified a new type of territorialisation of domestic spaces with respect to social structures at different scales'.[22] Situated in between the rural and urban landscape of Hong Kong, the garden cities built in Kowloon in the interwar period captured the process by which colonial domesticity took hold in a new geography. This new residential architecture also brings to light the everyday domestic life of middle-class Chinese men, women, and children.

Home with a Garden: Domestic Architecture and Play Space for Children

The first residential estate developed in Hong Kong that resonated with the garden city idea was the European residential reserve on the Peak. It emerged in the context of a gradual and deliberate effort to move the home of colonial elites to the higher altitude of the colony. As a result, it created a racially encoded spatial order through domestic architecture. The European District Reservation Ordinance of 1888 – the first legislative measure to create a European reserve – explicitly required that houses in the reserved area were to be built in European models and prohibited the building of any Chinese-style tenements within

[21] Helen Siu, "Hong Kong: Cultural Kaleidoscope on a World Landscape," in *Tracing China: A Forty-year Ethnographic Journey* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016), 387-400.
[22] Tania Sengupta, "Living in the Periphery: Provinciality and Domestic Space in Colonial Bengal," *The Journal of Architecture* 18, no. 6 (2013): 938.

the 'European district'[23] (which referred to 'the most hilly residential areas on the Island of Hong Kong including the Mid-Levels and the Victoria Peak'[24]). This contributed to a uniformity of dwelling design within the European district. As the historian John Carroll shows, by the late nineteenth century, the Peak was a full-time residence for colonial elites full of villas erected by merchants and others to escape from the heat during the summer mouths and enjoy a night's sleep in the pure and cooler air of the mountains.[25] In the following decades, the colonial state passed two more bills, the Hill District Reservation Ordinance of 1904,[26] and the Peak District (Residence) Ordinance of 1918,[27] aiming to protect the exclusive use of this residential reserve by colonial elites. By then, the formation of European residential district engaged a specific vision of childhood. The Hill District Reservation Ordinance of 1904, in particular, utilised the discourse of the physical vulnerability of the child's body,[28] stating that the Peak District was to be a place where the 'rising generation' of Europeans could spend their childhood in the 'healthiest obtainable surroundings'.[29] Definition of childhood as a phase of physical vulnerability thus entwined

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[23] 'Report on the Condition and Prospects of Hong Kong, By His Excellency Sir G. William Des Voeux, Governor, & c, 1888', *Hong Kong Sessional Papers*, Hong Kong Government, no. 20/89, 293.
[24] Lawrence WC Lai, Valerius WC Kwong, and Jason WY Kwong, "Segregation Legal and Natural: An Empirical Study of the Legally Protected and Free Market Housing Ownership on The Peak," *Habitat International* 35, no. 3 (2011): 501-507.
[25] John M. Carroll, "The Peak: Residential Segregation in Colonial Hong Kong," in *Twentieth Century Colonialism and China: Localities, the Everyday, and the World*, eds. Bryna Goodman and David S G Goodman (New York: Routledge, 2012), 81.
[26] 'An Ordinance for the Reservation of a Residential Area in the Hill District, no. 4 of 1904', *The Hong Kong Government Gazette*, Hong Kong Government, April. 29, 1904, 752. The Ordinance specified that 'it shall not be lawful for any owner, lessee, tenant or occupier of any land or building within the Hill District to let such land or building or any part thereof for the purpose of resident by any but non-Chinese or to permit any but non-Chinese to reside on or in such land or building'.
[27] 'Peak District (Residence) Ordinance, 1918', *Hong Kong Hansard*, Hong Kong Government, May. 30, 1918, 29. The Ordinance specified that 'no person shall reside within the Peak District without the consent of the Governor-in-Council'.
[28] For a discussion on the argument of childhood as a phase of physical vulnerability, see Mona Gleason, *Small Matters: Canadian Children in Sickness and Health* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013).
[29] CO129/322, 4 May 1904, May to Lyttleton, 638. Cited in John M. Carroll, "The Peak: Residential Segregation in Colonial Hong Kong," in *Twentieth Century Colonialism and China: Localities, the Everyday, and the World*, eds. Bryna Goodman and David S G Goodman (New York: Routledge, 2012), 86.

with colonial racial imperatives, contributing to the creation a racially stratified urban landscape in the name of the child.

The spatial boundary the colonial state tried to maintain with the Chinese community through the creation of racially exclusive residential reserve also informed the construction of residences for colonial officials. The colonial homes built for government employees reflected a deliberate effort by the colonial authority to construct a particular domestic model for the European expatriate society and to keep them in place – a fixity in space that would sustain colonial racial order. In 1920, for example, eight European-style houses designed by the architects Messrs. Dension, Ram and Gibbs[30] for European officers at Leighton Hill (located in Happy Valley, Hong Kong Island) were completed by the firm Messrs. Lam Dore (contracted by the Public Works Department).[31] The buildings were uniform two-storey structures. On the ground floor, there were an entrance hall, drawing room, dining room together with kitchen, pantry, and servants' quarters. On the first floor were three bedrooms, with bathrooms attached (fitted with European baths). One water flushed closet was provided in each house. There was also a basement under the front verandah.[32] This two-storey house-form represented the standard prototype of residence for colonial officials. For example, in 1921, three houses for senior colonial officers located below 'Tanderagee' (on the Eastern Slope of Mount Gough, Hill District, Hong Kong Island) were completed by Messrs. Kien On. These houses were of uniform design where the

[30] 'Report of the Director of Public Works for the Year 1918', *Hong Kong Government Administrative Reports*, Hong Kong Government, 52.
[31] 'Report of the Director of Public Works for the Year 1919', *Hong Kong Government Administrative Reports*, Hong Kong Government, 32.
[32] 'Report of the Director of Public Works for the Year 1920', *Hong Kong Government Administrative Reports*, Hong Kong Government, 37.

ground floor contained ‘dining, drawing and sitting rooms and a large hall with kitchen, laundry and servants’ rooms at the back’. On the first floor, there were ‘four bedrooms, bath rooms, and two dressing rooms’. There were also verandahs on both floors and a drying room was provided over the kitchen.[33]

These government quarters were designed to house a European family unit, rather than a European bachelor. In them, an idyllic image of middle-class childhood was integral to the making of colonial homes, even if in practice many European expatriate families lived constantly on the move. Barbara Anslow, for example, was born in 1919 in Scotland and travelled to Hong Kong with her parents and two sisters, Mable (aged 4) and Olive (aged 11) in 1927, and stayed for the duration of her father’s work assignment until 1929. Her father was an electrical engineer working in the Naval Dockyard. Upon arriving in Hong Kong, the family stayed in a small boarding house ‘Homeville’ in Happy Valley in Hong Kong Island where they occupied two ground floor rooms. In those days, the Naval Dockyard used to ship an employee’s household furniture to Hong Kong for a 3-year tour. It came by cargo ships. When the furniture arrived from Scotland, the family took a first-floor flat in Cameron Road, Kowloon. Barbara’s mother was able to play her piano again, and ‘at last began to settle’, especially as the household now had a lived-in *amah* (Chinese female domestic help), Ah Ng, who did all the cooking, washing and housework. Soon after, the family moved to a smaller flat nearby Carnarvon Road, Kowloon, where Barbara shared a bed with her sister. Before long, the family moved back to Hong Kong Island, and lived in a ground floor flat at 98 Kennedy Road.

[33] ‘Report of the Director of Public Works for the Year 1921’, *Hong Kong Government Administrative Reports*, Hong Kong Government, 45.

> It was a small terrace reached by many flights of steps beside which ran a large nallah. There was a sliding concertina iron gate which could be locked across the main entrances at night. A little yard behind linked the flat with the *amah*'s quarter.

On the only floor above Barbara's family lived a dockyard family, so was the flat next door. The rest of the flats in the terrace were occupied by Portuguese and Chinese, with whom Barbara 'had no contact with'. [34]

What was captured here was a contradictory image of the colonial effort trying to keep the expatriate families in place and the everyday realities a European family faced struggling to settle and establish a stable domestic life. Barbara depicted the ease of her mother upon the arrival of furniture from Scotland and the employment of a domestic servant. Being able to play the piano again helped her mother settle, which reflected how everyday home-making practices sustained the colonial domestic imaginary. As Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling argue, home is 'both a place and a spatial imaginary',[35] and that 'the spaces and imaginaries of home are central to the construction of people's identities and are materially manifested in a wide range of home-making practices'.[36] The colonial home of Barbara's family – though varied in scale compared with the residence designed and built for colonial officials – nonetheless supported the image of the domestic space as performative of middle-class domesticity and refined femininity. This further resonates with A. K. Tange's argument that the Victorian middle-class home 'not only helped identify their [each room's]

[34] Barbara Anslow, *Childhood Memories of 1920s Hong Kong*. https://gwulo.com/node/17419. Accessed on June. 6, 2022.
[35] Blunt and Dowling, *Hom*e, 2.
[36] Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, Preface.

occupations; occupants of those spaces also used cultural norms attached to those spaces as a means of creating an identity for themselves or locating themselves within a family, a social network, or domestic ideology more broadly'.[37] Here the performance of feminine accomplishment (as simple as playing the piano), to a certain extent, restored the image of middle-class home as a site of emotional comfort. As well, separate bedrooms for Barbara and her sisters (distinct from that of the living space for adult) marked a specified space for children in the household, while the separate quarter for *amah* signified a spatial boundary between domestic employees and family members. This spatial specialisation helped to construct the middle-class identity of this expatriate family that, in turn, reflected how the use and meaning of the domestic space was articulated differently for different members of the family.

In addition to specifying the spatial use within the household, ideals of colonial domesticity also extended to other aspects of frontier lifestyle that had particular impact on the play experience of children. For example, Barbara suggested the Naval Dockyard tennis courts in Hong Kong Island were available for employees' families and Barbara's mother played there regularly and sometimes took Barbara, Mabel, and Olive with her. As well, some evenings the family went to see films (silent) on HMS 'Tamar', an old wooden-topped Naval vessel permanently tied up in the Dockyard and used as Fleet Accommodation Barracks. When the family lived in Kowloon, Barbara and her sister Olive also had weekly music lessons from Jean Braga, one of a large well-known Portuguese family living in Kimberley Road near their flat. Later, when Olive mastered elementary violin, she was invited to play at a children's

[37] Tange, *Architectural Identities*, 177.

party hosted at Government House, and the younger members of the family also went along. Occasionally, the Dockyard also organised parties where children were invited.[38] Here the cultural geography of play of Barbara and her sisters entwined, first, with the frontier lifestyle of the European expatriate society where English sports and popular leisure constituted a European middle-class identity. Second, the emphasis on feminine accomplishments in the form of music marked an entanglement of the play experience in childhood with gendered notions of femininity. While the domestic architecture of the colonial home of Barbara's did not afford the image of 'children in the garden', the cultural practice of expatriate leisure nonetheless supported a range of gender- and class- informed play experience of Barbara and her sisters.

In contrast with the sojourn experience of Barbara's family and their maintenance of social interactions within the expatriate circle, European children born and raised in a colonial society, constantly traversed and subverted the spatial imaginary of the colonial home. The image of a distant home in the metropole was contested and unsettled by the immediate domestic site in the colony where their everyday life unfolded. Betty Steel, for example, was born in 1910 in the island of Liu Kung Tao off the coast of Shantung (Shandong) in North China (the island was part of the territory of Wei Hai Wei which had been leased to Britain in 1898 to be a summer base for the Royal Navy's China Fleet). In 1915, the family came to Hong Kong. Her father worked for the Naval Dockyard. Upon arriving in Hong Kong, the family lived in Eden Court (in Kowloon) – a large boarding house with a garden, a tennis court, and a bamboo grove. When Betty's father passed away owing to ill health, her

[38] Barbara Anslow, *Childhood memories of 1920s Hong Kong*. https://gwulo.com/node/17419. Accessed on June. 6, 2022.

mother joined the mercantile firm Shewan, Tomes & Co., as an accountant. The family soon moved to a flat on Kennedy Road (in Hong Kong Island), not far from the Union Church and the Peak tram station.

For years, Betty shared a double bed with her sister Audrey. In summer, they slept under a mosquito net which was tucked in all around the bed. There were two more flats on Kennedy Road. Betty's mother moved the family to a new flat on the ground floor. A burglary put an end to this stay, and soon the family moved into a flat that was at the Wanchai end of Kennedy Road, near the Methodist Church. Their neighbour, Miss Pedden, a Canadian missionary used to come and play the piano. Betty mentioned her family always had a piano, her mother played and she and Andrey sang. From Kennedy Road, Betty's family moved to Happy Valley where they stayed for years. They lived in one of a long terrace of houses in Wong Nei Chong Road, and at the seaward end of the road, Betty and Andrey caught the tram to school. Betty's Chinese school friend Ruby Chue and her younger sister Lily lived next door to them on Wong Nei Chong Road. 'On special occasions, a birthday or a wedding or Chinese New Year, they invite me to their houses to eat Chinese cakes and sweets…'. At the other end of the terrace lived an Irish family, the Tollans. In 1923, Betty's family moved up to a house in Broadwood Road, on the Ridge overlooking Happy Valley. It was a 'tree-lined road of houses and gardens with wild violets and ferns growing in shady places'.[39]

[39] Betty Steel, *Impressions of an upbringing in 1920s Hong Kong*. https://gwulo.com/node/20232/view-pages. Accessed on June. 6, 2022.

Betty's home where her mother played the piano and she and her sister sang reflected the domestic space was a performative site of feminine accomplishments. It was also a site for 'creating and maintaining social ties and relationships'[40] where neighbours came to visit and invited each other on special occasions. Rather than residing in an 'insulated' boundary of the colonial home, Betty played with her Chinese school friends next door. In reflection, Betty suggested,

> …Mamma would tell us nostalgically of the beautiful English countryside with its wild flowers. But for Andrey and me, England was just a name. Hong Kong was our home. Living among the Chinese as we did, we felt an affinity with them, and admired their commonsense, patience, courtesy and humor. We seemed to laugh at the same things.[41]

Here home was depicted at varied scales. For Betty, a large scale rested on the city of Hong Kong was considered home. It was a site of everyday life, a place that located Betty's childhood memory and belonging. For Betty's mother, on the other hand, home was the 'English countryside' – a place she wanted to return to time and again. It was an idealised home, an imaginary that constituted part of her identity, her sense of self. As Georgina Gowans argues, home is both lived and imagined. For expatriate families, 'imperial discourses encouraged a sense belonging with Britain'.[42] The colonial home in Hong Kong was a culturally displaced home for Betty's mother. The constant movement of the household captured the search and longing for a comfortable and idealised home that could

[40] Gunilla Halldén, "Children's Views of Family, Home and House," in *Children in the City: Home Neighbourhood and Community*, eds. Pia Christensen and Margaret O'Brien (London: Routledge, 2003), 34.
[41] Betty Steel, *Impressions of an upbringing in 1920s Hong Kong*. https://gwulo.com/node/20232/view-pages. Accessed on June. 6, 2022.
[42] Georgina Gowans, "Imperial Geographies of Home: Memsahibs and Miss-Sahibs in India and Britain, 1915-1947," *Cultural Geographies* 10 (2013), 424-441.

in part realise the imaginary of an English home with 'wild flowers'. More than looking for a physical site, it was an imagined home Betty's mother desired to live in. Domestic architecture thus supported and sustained a cultural image of home, located distantly in the metropole.

New House-Forms for the Middle-Class: Garden Cities in the 1920s and 1930s

The cultural practice of home-making by European families in part contributed to the construction of an imagined community – the European expatriate society that functioned in a spatial distance from the Chinese society. However, the colonial racial order made through domestic architecture was by no means stable. As separate residential planning gave way to new town planning practices, particularly the development of new residential districts on garden city lines, a new neighbourhood dynamic emerged. Attracting a large number of wealthy Chinese, the garden city estates emerged as multi-racial neighbourhoods that disrupted the spatial order and boundary between the European and the Chinese community.

The formation of these multi-racial residential neighbourhoods hailed a new phase in colonial town planning that aimed to form a new method for urban development and particularly to avoid the repetition of the 'chaotic' urban layout of Victoria due to the lack of planning in the early colonial decades when town planning practices were even rare in England.[43] The garden city housing model proliferated with modern planning culture that

[43] 'Housing, 1935', *Hong Kong Government Administrative Reports*, Hong Kong Government, 13.

advocated for the functional and spatial specialisation of urban landscape.[44] The separation of residence from industrial and commercial activities and the inclusion of green spaces were all part of the principles that underlined the creation of an ordered and functional townscape. The construction of this functional urban landscape, and with it, new built forms, entered a formative phase in Hong Kong in the 1920s. In 1922, in order to 'revise, consolidate, and coordinate the schemes of development that had been prepared in the past for various sections of the colony, and to consider the directions for future development of Hong Kong and Kowloon', a Town Planning Committee was convened and schemes 'prepared for the improvement of the existing layouts and the development of new areas'.[45] This marked the systematic involvement of the colonial state in urban reforms. An integral part of these reforms was to solve urban housing tension that had long troubled the colonial authorities.[46] Faced with a saturated urban metropolis in Hong Kong Island, the colonial state turn to the Kowloon Peninsula as a strategic geography for urban expansion.

Even before the formation of the town planning committee, the colonial government had under consideration for some time to develop the Kowloon Tong area (located south of Beacon Hill and north of Boundary Street, in the west of Kowloon) into a residential district. It was decided that the best method of carrying the scheme into effect 'is for the government to do the work of levelling and draining the area and to sell the land to a

[44] For a discussion on functional zoning and modern urban planning practices, see, for example, see Gergely Baics and Leah Meisterlin, "Zoning Before Zoning: Land Use and Density in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York City," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 106, no. 5 (2016): 1152-1175.
[45] 'Report of the Director of Public Works for the Year 1922', *Hong Kong Government Administrative Reports*, Hong Kong Government, 108-9.
[46] A detailed discussion on the problems of urban housing was provided in 'Report of the Housing Commission, 1935', *Hong Kong Sessional Papers*, Hong Kong: Noronha &Co., no.12/1938, 262.

company, which under certain restrictions will arrange for the building of houses'.[47] In 1921, the General Manager of Union Insurance Society of Canton Mr. Montague Ede[48] came to the bid and proposed to convert the area into a residential site to be laid out on garden city lines.[49] The site would provide 250 residences,[50] with parks, playgrounds, and open spaces.[51] This marked the first step in the development of the Kowloon Tong Garden City (which survives to the present day). The Public Works Department carried out the filling and levelling of the site which 'formerly lay under rice cultivation'.[52] Ede subsequently acted as the General Manager of the Kowloon Tong and New Territories Development Co., a company formed to carry out the Kowloon Tong Garden City Scheme.[53] The untimely death of Ede in 1925 caused some anxiety among the subscribers. Two months following the passing of Ede, The Kowloon Tong Garden City Association (or the Association of the Subscribers to the Kowloon Tong Scheme) was formed under the leadership of Mr. S. Y. Kwan, who was temporarily elected chairman. In the first meeting, it was decided that 'one Chinese president should be elected, with two vice-presidents, one of whom should be a foreigner'. The election of a Chinese president was because 'the great majority of subscribers are Chinese'. A committee of twelve members was formed with ten Chinese and two European members.[54]

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[47] 'Our Finances Reviewed, Governor's Budget Speech, Next Year's Programme Outlined', *The China Mail*, Oct. 27, 1921, 5.
[48] 'Kowloon's Garden City, Slow progress of Mr. Ede's PET Scheme', *The China Mail*, May. 24, 1924, 5.
[49] 'Another Garden City, Big Scheme at Kowloon Tong', *The Hong Kong Telegraph*, Aug. 5, 1921, 1.
[50] 'Kowloon's Garden City, Slow progress of Mr. Ede's PET Scheme', *The China Mail*, May. 24, 1924, 5.
[51] 'Wanted Houses, Hong Kong's Most Urgent Problem', *The China Mail*, Jan. 28, 1924, 9.
[52] 'Another Garden City, Big Scheme at Kowloon Tong', *The Hong Kong Telegraph*, Aug. 5, 1921, 1.
[53] 'The Colony's Loss, Death of Mr. Montague Ede', *The China Mail*, May. 22, 1925, 1.
[54] 'The Kowloon Tong Scheme, Association of Subscribers Formed', *The Hong Kong Telegraph*, Aug. 24, 1925, 7.

While originally planned that 56 European houses would be completed by 1925,[55] owing to the extensive amount of infrastructural work, accompanied by significant delays and other difficulties in the construction process, substantial building work only commenced by 1926.[56] In 1927, for example, the Director of Public Works Harold T. Creasy suggested, 60 European Houses were completed and certified in Kowloon Tong Estate, while another 70 European houses were in the course of construction.[57] In 1928, another 42 European houses were completed and certified in the Kowloon Tong Estate, with 39 in the building process.[58] The successful experiment of the Kowloon Tong Garden City stimulated the subsequent housing development in the Kowloon Peninsula on garden city lines. For example, in 1931, Mr. J. P. Braga, Managing Director of the Hong Kong Engineering and Construction Co., Ltd., purchased a large inland lot between the Kowloon Hospital and the Diocesan Boys' School. The site (with three road frontages, namely Waterloo Road, Argyle Street, and Prince Edward Road) was to be built into a garden city with detached or semi-detached houses and of European style.[59] Each house would have a 'small garden, a tennis court, and a garage'.[60]

Here the architecture of the home was carefully considered to support new forms of suburban living. The inclusion of garden and tennis court captured new patterns in domestic

[55] 'Kowloon's Garden City, Slow progress of Mr. Ede's PET Scheme', *The China Mail*, May. 24, 1924, 5.
[56] 'Company Meeting, Excavation Pile Driving and Construction', *The Hong Kong Telegraph*, July. 1, 1926, 3.
[57] 'Report of the Director of Public Works for the Year 1927', *Hong Kong Government Administrative Reports*, Hong Kong Government, 13, 20.
[58] 'Report of the Director of Public Works for the Year 1928', *Hong Kong Government Administrative Reports*, Hong Kong Government, 14, 18.
[59] 'Huge Residential Scheme, Big Land Purchase by Construction Co, Another Garden City in Kowloon', *Hong Kong Daily Press*, Nov. 17, 1931, 9.
[60] 'Garden Suburban Scheme, Ceremony of Turning Sod Performed, Scheme Outlined', *The Hong Kong Telegraph*, Jan. 21, 1932, 2.

building design that annotated an image of English middle-class country life.[61] This form of domestic architecture signified a departure from previous dwelling design that lacked provision for sports and outdoor spaces within the residential compound. It marked the creation of a suburban lifestyle that emphasised a connection between health, architecture, and class status. The garden in the home provided the single family in residence with a 'pristine yard, a managed landscape, and defined boundaries'.[62]

Garden residence thus served myriad purposes. For the colonial state, it was an effective means to enact new planning culture – creating a healthy domestic form on the one hand, and transforming suburban housing form on the other. It also redefined the suburban space as a residential precinct for the middle-class, annotating a new cultural meaning of the burgeoning garden city estates. Lastly, it opened up spaces for the Chinese middle- and upper-class to challenge an established colonial social order made through domestic architecture.

While the garden city estates were chiefly built in the Kowloon Peninsula, the garden city idea nonetheless inspired many new housing developments across the harbour. Annie Lee (born in 1919 in a wealthy Chinese family), for example, suggested her first childhood home was in Moreton Terrace (in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong Island). It was a residential

[61] The cultural image of the English middle-class country home with garden and tennis courts was depicted by Georgina Gowans, see Georgina Gowans, "A Passage from India: Geographies and Experiences of Repatriation, 1858-1939," *Social & Cultural Geography* 3, no. 4 (2002): 403-423.
[62] This cultural image of the domestic garden was depicted by Virginia Scott Jenkins, in *The Lawn: A History of an American Obsession* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2015). Cited in LeeAnn Lands, *Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 43.

neighbourhood 'with just few houses. Each house had a garden in front of it'. When Annie was about 7, the family moved to Tin Hau (an area in Wanchai District, on the north side of Hong Kong Island, close to Moreton Terrace). The new house was 'a big block, in a big terrace', in front of the terrace 'was a large lawn where all the children played'. Annie's family lived next to Oswald Cheung (born in 1922, later Sir Oswald Cheung. He was the first Chinese to become a Queen's Council in Hong Kong and the first Chinese chairman of the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club)'s family in this terrace. Annie added it was a small community, 'their children also come over to play with us, and we know each other well'. [63]

Here the residential garden allowed the offloading of domestic play activities into the outdoor area, and within safe walls. It illustrated the everyday life and play practice of children within a particular form of residence. The domestic garden was rearticulated as a space for children, in that their private and social experience of play gave new meaning to this place.[64] This idyllic image of the 'child in the garden' coincided with the invention of a new vision of childhood as a 'symbolic counterweight' to the dangers and stresses of urbanised modern life.[65] As colonial urban expansion took hold in new geographies, the protection of children in Hong Kong reached a new height. The emergence of new play architecture captured the anxieties and struggles of the professional middle classes as they responded to a fast-changing suburban landscape. The construction of supervised play

[63] Annie Lee, born in 1919, Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Oral History Archives: Collective Memories*, Hong Kong University Libraries Special Collection, access no. 51.
[64] Yi-Fu Tuan argues that it is the experiential aspect of place that gives it a personal, social, and cultural meaning. He argues 'place is a construct of experience'. See Yi-Fu Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective," *Geographical Review* 65, no. 2 (1975): 151-165.
[65] Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries, "Worlds Enough and Time: The Cult of Childhood in Edwardian Fiction," in *Childhood in Edwardian Fiction: Worlds Enough and Time*, eds. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2.

spaces in Kowloon and Hong Kong Island was in part their deliberate effort to inscribe order, and more importantly, an ideal image of childhood, into the suburban and urban landscape.

Garden City and Urban Form: Neighbourhood Playground for Children

The original garden city idea advocated for the creation of a self-sustained community. It did not specify, however, a particular form of domestic architecture. Its goal was always aimed at the broader scope of community life, rather than domestic life. Most of the garden cities built by private developers in Kowloon over the interwar period were initially housing estates, the provision of schools, hospitals, green belts, open spaces, and playgrounds was achieved in a later phase and engaged a particular political body – the residents' associations. Led by groups of European professionals, these voluntary associations captured the effort of the European middle-class to intervene in the matters of town planning and district land use. Their desire to create an ordered and functional suburban landscape also engaged a particular vision of childhood. Faced with the rapid transition from suburban to urban forms of living, European middle classes advocated for specialised leisure facilities for residents from different age groups. The play spaces for children, in particular, were not only to safeguard the health and physical development of children, but also to sustain an idealised image of childhood as a phase of protected innocence.[66] Within the fences of neighbourhood playgrounds, children were to be protected, supervised, and guided. While initially campaigned by the residents' associations, in the 1930s, voluntary

[66] This image of innocent childhood was discussed by Sarah L. Holloway and Gill Valentine, "Children's Geographies and The New Social Studies of Childhood," In *Children's Geographies: Playing, Living, Learning*, eds. Sarah L. Holloway and Gill Valentine (New York: Routledge, 2005), 3.

association such as the Children's Playground Association was also formed that pushed for more playgrounds in working-class neighbourhoods. The upshot of these voluntary efforts was that they engendered a new architecture of play for children, and they helped to spread this new play space in middle-class and working-class districts alike.

A New Architecture of Play

One residents' association that was instrumental in transforming the new garden cities in Kowloon into self-sustained communities was the Kowloon Residents' Association (K.R.A.), formed in 1920. Mr. B. L. Frost, the first president of the K.R.A., suggested one of the objects of the association was 'to consider and if thought desirable, to make representations to the Government with regard to the annual financial estimates affecting Kowloon and its adjacent territories'.[67] Its areas of interest concerned 'the proposed Kowloon Hospital, housing problem, the lighting and policing of Kowloon, the regulation of traffic, drainage, motor roads, athletic grounds, a public hall, education […] and agricultural development'.[68] With regard to the play spaces for children in Kowloon, ever since the K.R.A. had been in existence, it had a special playground sub-committee (under the convenorship of Mr. R. Packham[69]) to whom 'care of the playground had largely been entrusted'.[70] Similar residents' association also existed in Hong Kong Island. For example, the Peak Residents' Association was formed in 1922.[71] It functioned as a voluntary body advocating for the

[67] 'Kowloon Residents' Association, Year's Work Reviewed', *The China Mail*, Oct. 5, 1920, 8.
[68] 'Kowloon Residents' Association, the Presidents' Speech', *Hong Kong Daily Press*, Oct. 5, 1920, 2.
[69] 'Kowloon Residents' Association, Report of the General Committee', *Hong Kong Daily Press*, Feb. 2, 1924, 5.
[70] 'Children's playground', *Hong Kong Daily Press*, Oct. 5, 1922, 3.
[71] 'Peak Residents' Association Formed', *Hong Kong Daily Press*, Mar. 29, 1922, 5.

provision and maintenance of public facilities in the Peak District, including the play space for children.[72] As well, the Mid-Levels Residents' Association was founded in 1925 under the leadership of Mr. J. S. Gillingham, and supported by a provisional committee of nine members consisting of 'Mrs. Harman, Mr. Brister, Mr. Hackling […] and Mr. Brooks'.[73] Its immediate initiatives concerned, for example, 'the provision of a children's playground near May Road Station, the unsatisfactory chair service at the Robinson chair stand and the questions of traffic control'.[74]

The persistent efforts of residents' associations brought into being two neighbourhood playgrounds. The first playground in Kowloon, and also in the colony of Hong Kong: The Chatham Road Playground, was opened in August, 1914. Subsequent expansions such as the addition of modern play apparatus of swings took place in 1915.[75] By 1932, the second playground in Kowloon: The Middle Road Playground was brought into use.[76] The new playground included an area where children could take exercises on 'roller-skates, scooters and bicycles'. Also enclosed in the ground was a shelter with seating accommodation, and a row of seats under Signal Hill facing the harbor. Maypoles, see-saws, swings, and separate lavatories for boys and girls were the additional features.[77] In 1933, the government approved four additional playgrounds to be built in working-class neighbourhoods. Two in Hong Kong Island at Wanchai and Blake Garden, and two in Kowloon on Shantung Street

[72] 'Peak Residents' Association, Children's Gardens', *The Hong Kong Telegraph*, April. 13, 1923, 2.
[73] 'Mid-Level Residents, Formation of Residents' Association Discussed', *The Hong Kong Telegraph*, July. 16, 1925, 5.
[74] 'The Mid-Levels, Report of Residents' Association', *The Hong Kong Telegraph*, March. 8, 1926, 12.
[75] 'Kowloon Playground to be Extended', *Hong Kong Daily Press*, Sep. 12, 1925, 7.
[76] 'Kowloon Residents' Association, Children's Playground', *The China Mail*, Feb. 15, 1932, 7.
[77] 'P.W.D. Plans for Kowloon, Schemes for Open Spaces, Better Roads and Lighting: The Children's Playground Begun at Last', *Hong Kong Daily Press*, Oct. 26, 1929, 4.

and Tong Mi Street.[78] By then, the Children's Playground Association was established that advocated for the timely maintenance of urban and suburban playgrounds. [79] By means of proposing playground site to the government,[80] raising funds through public subscription,[81] and collaborating with various state departments on the maintenance of playgrounds,[82] urban reformers – led by European professionals – helped create a highly regulated suburban and urban play landscape for children.

Involvement of Chinese Elites

However, how had the Chinese elites supported the provision of public play spaces for children? In other words, how did they collaborate with the European professionals in entrenching a specially designed urban and suburban play architecture for children? As part of a class of Western-educated professionals, a few Chinese elites were members of the residents' association committee. For example, Dr. S. W. Ts'o (1868-1953, a distinguished Hong Kong lawyer and educationalist, who was one of the founders of St. Stephen's Boys' College and St. Stephen's Girls' College, and a member of the Board of Education, amongst his other educational activities) was on the committee of the K.R.A.[83] As well, Mr. F. C. Mow

[78] 'New Amenities for the Colony, $21,960 for 4 Children's Playgrounds', *The China Mail*, Sep. 26, 1933, 1.
[79] 'Children's Playground Association, Satisfactory Progress Made Last Year', *Hong Kong Daily Press*, Mar. 12, 1935, 7.
[80] For example, in 1921, the Kowloon Residents' Association corresponded with the colonial government on converting three plots of land in Kowloon into recreation grounds. In 'Kowloon Residents' Association, Review of a Year's Work', *The Hong Kong Telegraph*, Feb. 15, 1921, 2.
[81] 'Children's playground, Appeal for More Funds', *The Hong Kong Telegraph*, Mar. 20, 1934, 17.
[82] For example, in 1922, the Kowloon Residents' Association approached the Public Works Department on the safety issue of the equipment at Chatham Road playground. In 'Kowloon Residents' Association', *Hong Kong Daily Press*, Aug. 19, 1922, 3.
[83] 'Kowloon Residents' Association, Interesting Matters Discussed', *The Hong Kong Telegraphy*, Mar. 19, 1926, 2.

Fung (1882-1950, an Australia-born Chinese merchant) was the elected president of K.R.A. in 1931.[84] The K.R.A. elected another Chinese president Mr. Li Chor-chi (1888-1940, accountant of the Oversea Chinese Banking Corporation and secretary of the Ho Hong Company[85]) in 1935.[86] Children's Playground Association also had a few prominent Chinese members. For example, Dr. S. W. Ts'o served as the Vice-President of the association in 1933 and 1934.[87] As well, Mr. Li Hoi Tung (1888-1973, managing director of Messrs. Bankers and Co., importers and exporters[88]) served in the Executive Committee of the association in 1933. And Mr. Tang Shiu-kin (1901-1986, entrepreneur and philanthropist) was elected a member of the Executive Committee in 1934.[89]

In addition to these Chinese elites forming the executive committee of the Children's Playground Association, play directors of the neighbourhood playgrounds were also staffed by Chinese members. For example, in 1935, Mr. Chung Tse Keung was assigned as the play director for the children's playground at Blake Gardens (in Sheung Wan, Hong Kong Island). Mr. Cheung Yan Shing was in charge of the two playgrounds at Wan Chai (next to Central, Hong Kong Island). Mr. Tam Hok Nin took care of the playgrounds at King's Park and Kowloon City. And Mr. Kwok Mok Hoi looked after the playgrounds at Shantung Street (in Mong Kok, Kowloon) and Tong Mei Road (in Mong Kok, Kowloon). All of these playgrounds were situated in densely populated working-class neighbourhoods.[90] Designed and

[84] 'Kowloon Residents' Association, Policy Outlined by Rev. J. Horace Johnston', *Hong Kong Daily Press*, Mar. 10, 1931, 6.
[85] 'Death of Mr. Li Chor-chi', *The China Mail*, Mar. 20, 1940, 15.
[86] 'Kowloon Residents' Association, Mr. Li Chor Chi Elected President', *Hong Kong Daily Press*, Mar. 16, 1935, 7.
[87] 'The Children's Playgrounds, Appeal for More Funds', *The Hong Kong Telegraph*, Mar. 20, 1934, 17.
[88] 'The International Club Idea, Views of Prominent Chinese Residents', *Hong Kong Daily Press*, Dec. 2, 1925, 5.
[89] 'The Children's Playgrounds, Appeal for More Funds', *The Hong Kong Telegraph*, Mar. 20, 1934, 17.
[90] 'Children's Playground Association, Satisfactory Progress Made Last Year', *Hong Kong Daily Press*, Mar. 12, 1935, 7.

supervised by urban professionals, the neighbourhood play spaces were thus simultaneously discursive and physical that connected with the gradual move of children and childhood to the centre stage of public concern in interwar Hong Kong.

Subversive Act of Play

While the proliferation of neighbourhood playgrounds constituted a key change in the urban and suburban landscape and childhood architecture in interwar Hong Kong, in practice, children's play practices were hardly confined within the fences of the domestic and public gardens. Born and raised in the countryside of Kowloon, Ng Chuen Kung (b.1924), for example, suggested he liked to stroll about when small. His pastimes in those years included swimming, ball games, kites, marble games, and fishing. Ng recalled Kowloon had a small population but vast open grounds. He never had to worry about the lack of recreational spots. He bought himself a monthly bus pass on 3 dollars, and sometimes went to Lai Chi Kok (a neighbourhood in western Kowloon) for swimming or some ball games. He also used to go fishing mottled spinefoot at Kowloon City Pier. Ng added he was never into books when small. His parents never controlled him, and there were hardly any interactions between the two generations. In contrast with urban-based merchants, businessmen, and professionals 'migrating' to provincial and rural areas, Ng's father belonged to the gentry class that owned large farmland in the countryside. The family lived in a large house of a couple storeys in Lai Chi Yuen (located in north Kowloon). Typical of the country home built at the time, the residence was a tiled house with a small courtyard. 'It faced a big garden of

tens of thousands square feet. There was an orchard full of fruit trees on the uplands nearby'.[91]

As the city-based bourgeoisie – comprising both European and Chinese mercantile and professional classes– offloaded their concern and frustration for urban health, particularly that of children, onto the newly developed garden city neighbourhoods, they helped to define an architecture and landscape of play that was distinctly counter-urban. Play architecture thus functioned as an expression of class anxiety, a shared outlook of the urban elite on childhood, and beneath it, lies the frustration about and hope for the future of the British empire.

Conclusion

This paper has examined how the garden city idea moved apace with the proliferation of colonial domestic imaginaries in a phase of northward provincial expansion in interwar Hong Kong. Previously serving as cultural signifier of European middle-class respectability, the colonial ideals of domesticity – as expressed through European-style residential design – has been deployed by the bourgeoning Chinese mercantile and professional classes as a means to contest and subvert racial boundaries in the 1920s and 1930s. As the majority of the residents in Kowloon Garden City estates were elite and middle-class Chinese, residing in European-style residence opened up spaces for this sub-group of the Chinese community

[91] Ng Chuen Kung, male, born in 1924, Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Memory Project: Oral History Archives*, https://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/oral_history/All_Items_OH/oha_107/records/index.html. Accessed on April. 7, 2022.

to redefine their social and cultural status. The Garden City movement thus simultaneously responded to a wide stream of cultural currents. For the colonial state, it was an effective means to enact new planning culture – creating a healthy domestic form on the one hand, and transforming suburban housing form on the other. It also redefined the suburban space as a residential precinct for the middle-class, annotating a new cultural meaning of the burgeoning garden city estates. Lastly, it allowed the Chinese middle- and upper-class to challenge an established colonial social order made through domestic architecture.

This cultural function of the garden city estates notwithstanding, the original garden city idea advocated for the creation of a self-sustained community. It did not specify, however, a particular form of domestic architecture. Its goal was always aimed at the broader scope of community life, rather than domestic life. Most of the garden cities built by private developers in Kowloon over the interwar period were initially housing estates, the provision of schools, hospitals, green belts, open spaces, and playgrounds was achieved in a later phase and engaged a particular political body – the residents' associations. Led by groups of European professionals, these voluntary associations captured the effort of the European middle-class to intervene in the matters of town planning and district land use. Their desire to create an ordered and functional suburban landscape also enacted a particular vision of childhood. Faced with the rapid transition from suburban to urban forms of living, European middle classes advocated for specialised leisure facilities for residents from different age groups. Children, as it was seen by the European professional class, were to be protected against the dangers of urban living. Play architecture for children, in turn, functioned as an expression of class anxiety and a shared outlook of the urban elite on childhood.