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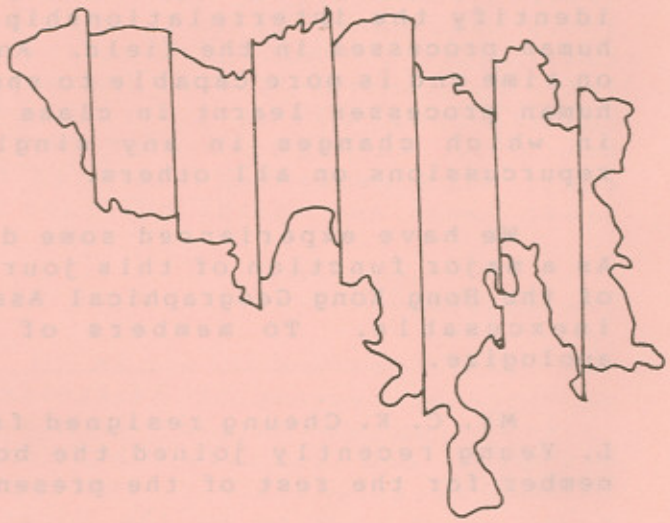

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WORDS FROM THE CHIEF EDITOR

This issue of the Hong Kong Geographer features three articles. The paper by C. S. Chow describe the effects of rent control on an inner city neighbourhood, New York's Chinatown. While the paper was primarily written for geographers and others working in tertiary education institutes and in the planning profession, it should be of interest also to those teaching at the secondary level. The findings could be used as a case to illustrate the changing dynamics of an inner-city neighbourhood, an important topic in the sixth form geography curriculum. Although the setting was New York City, there is much to be learnt from this experience as Hong Kong has been practising rent control for several decades and is now facing problems not dissimilar from those of New York's Chinatown.

The papers by Mr. K. M. Yeung and P. M. Yeung are both on field techniques. The former demonstrate show roadside trees can be used to help teach plant geography; the latter argues for the utility of using the slope as an unit for an integrated treatment of soil, vegetation and micro-climate. Both papers are of interest not only to those teaching at the higher forms but also to those at the tertiary level. Although it is generally recognized that fieldworks are indispensible to the study of geography, most secondary school geography teachers, and occassionally those at the tertiary level as well, are confronted with the dual problems of lack of proper equipments and time to do fieldworks. K. M. Yeung's paper clearly shows that with minimal equipments, meaningful fieldworks including refined field measurements can be carried out in the student's neighbourhood. P. M. Yeung's paper argues that it is important for students to identify the interrelationships between various physical and human processes in the field. An integrated fieldwork economizes on time and is more capable to show that the various physical and human processes learnt in class are but part of a complex system in which changes in any single component can have serious repurcussions on all others.

We have experienced some delay in getting this issue out. As a major function of this journal is to serve as a newsletter of the Hong Kong Geographical Association, such a delay is rather inexcusable. To members of the Association we can only apologize.

Mr. C. K. Cheung resigned from the editorial board. Mr. C. L. Yeung recently joined the board and will serve as a board member for the rest of the present term.

Once again, the chief editor would like to thank all contributors to this journal and members of the editorial board. Without their dedicated effort, the publication of this issue would not be possible.

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ARTICLE

RENT CONTROL AND HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN NEW YORK CHINATOWN

by
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Introduction

This paper is concerned with the impact of rent control o housing development in New York's Chinatown. Rental housing i New York City has been subject to rent control for a long peric of time, ever since the early 1940's. As a shelter is fundamental need for human survival, any policy that influence building value will affect housing supply and demand and in tu touches upon the livelihood of large number of people. For th matter, rent control has remained a controversial issue. On th one hand, it has been defended on the ground of "public interest because it is meant to protect renters (who often make up th majority of urban dwellers) from unscrupulous and exploitati landlords. On the other hand, it has been criticized for i tends to have the effect of suppressing the incentive to provi rental housing, and inhibiting the construction of new buildin as well as the reconstruction of old buildings (Cheung, 197 Knox, 1987, pp. 215-17; Olsen, 1984).

It may be cautioned, however, that not all communities und the same rent control policy may exhibit the same effect Local economies, including the supply and demand of housing, differ from one locality to another. Before a general stateme about the impact of rent control can be made, it is benficial assess its consequences in the context of local situations individual communities. The purpose of this paper is to exam how the people in an inner city neighbourhood, the Chinatown New York, have reacted to rent control laws and to draw fr their experience implications for an understanding of housi development and rental policies in urban areas.

The Setting

New York's Chinatown is located in the oldest and southermost section of Manhattan (Figure 1). The neighbourh is known as "Chinatown" because Chinese immmigrants and th economic and cultural activities have traditionally b concentrated there. To the east of Chinatown is the Lower E Side, which used to be the largest Jewish ghetto in the City is now predominately occupied by blacks and Puerto Ricans.. the north of Chinatown is Little Italy, which has remained, un recently, a major Italian neighbourhood in New York. Chinatown's south is Downtown New York, where commercial institutional buildings dominate the landscape. The area to west of Chinatown contains the offshoot of commercial and gar manufacturing activities from Downtown.

Chinatown can be considered as part of the transitional

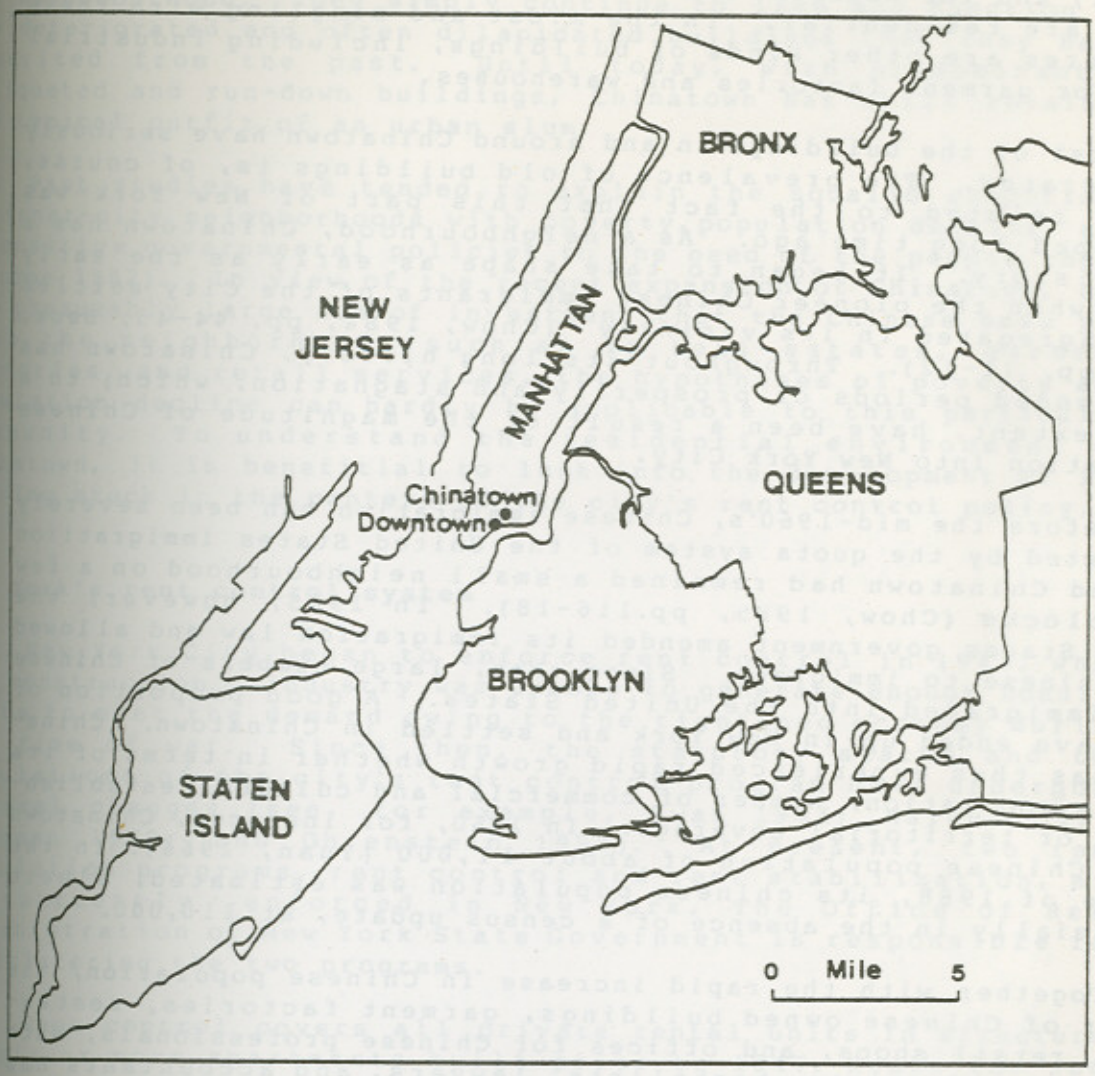

Fig. 1. General Location of New York's Chinatown

as described in the classical ecological model of the American City. Of such a zone transition, old buildings and mixed land use patterns are the usual features (Preston, 1966). The majority of the buildings in Chinatown and its vicinity are four- to six-storey walk-up tenements built in the late 19th. century (New York City Department of City Planning, 1979, p.41). Most of them are for both commercial and residential use. In a typical building of such, the first floor (occasionally the second floor as well) and the basement are for commercial use, while the upper floors are residential. In the midst and mingling with these structures are other kinds of buildings, including industrial lofts for garment factories and warehouses.

Most of the buildings in and around Chinatown have seriously deteriorated. The prevalence of old buildings is, of course, partly related to the fact that this part of New York was developed long time ago. As a neighbourhood, Chinatown has a long history. It began to take shape as early as the early 1870's when the pioneer Chinese immigrants of the City settled and congregated in its vicinity (Chow, 1984, pp. 44-45; Beck, 1898, pp. 11-12). Throughout its long history, Chinatown has experienced periods of prosperity and stagnation, which, to a large extent, have been a result of the magnitude of Chinese immigration into New York City.

Before the mid-1960's, Chinese immigration han been severely restricted by the quota system of the United States immigratiion law and Chinatown had remained a small neighbourhood on a few city blocks (Chow, 1985, pp.116-18). In 1965, however, the United States government amended its immigration law and allowed more Chinese to immigrate. Since then, large numbers of Chinese have immigrated into the United States. A good proportion of them have ended up in New York and settled in Chinatown. Chinatown has thus experienced rapid growth whether in terms of its Chinese population, number of commercial and cultural establishments, or territorial coverage. In 1960, for instance, Chinatown had a Chinese population of about 11,000 (Yuan, 1966). In the middle of 1988, its chinese population was estimated, albeit unofficially in the absence of a census update, at 110,000.

Together with the rapid increase in Chinese population, the number of Chinese owned buildings, garment factories, restaurants, retail shops, and offices for Chinese professionals, such as doctors, dentists, herbalists, lawyers, and accountants has multiplied in Chinatown into adjacent areas, particularly Little Italy and the Lower East Side, resulting in rapid expansion in the territorial coverage of the neighborhood.

The encroachment of Chinese establishments into Little Italy and the Lower East Side has been facilitated by the active participation of Chinese developers and real-estate agents in the housing market in the area. Having acquired additional buildings from the non-Chinese, such as Italian and the Jew, the Chinese tent to rent or resell their premises to fellow Chinese (Chow 19[illegible] 104-106). By the late 1970s, the Chinese had owned vi[illegible]ally all the buildings in Chinatown (Chow 1984: 102-104).

They are now still actively purchasing buildings in areas surrounding the community. The demand for buildings in Chinatown and its vicinity is, therefore, tremendous, and the price for real property there is always on the rise (How 1984; Lum 1985; Scardinao 1986).

Nonetheless, in spite of the phenomenal growth in Chinatown's population and territorial size, and in spite of the seemingly high speculative value of buildings there, the Chinese have achieved little in rejuvenating the aged housing stocks of the neighbourhood. They simply continue to live and function in the deteriorated and often dilapidated buildings that they have inherited from the past. Until today, with predominantly antiquated and run-down buildings, Chinatown has still retained the typical outfit of an urban slum.

Past studies have tended to explain the squalid conditions of inner-city neighborhoods with poverty, population decline, and insensitive governmental policies to the need of the people there (Bourne 1982). In view of the recent expansion of Chinatown, and the presumably large sum of investment that the Chinese have put into the neighborhood, such as in real estates, garment factories, and retail services, the hypotheses of poverty and population decline can hardly be applicable to this particular community. To understand the residential environment of Chinatown, it is benefitial to look into the development of its housing stock in the context of the city's rent control policy.

New York's rent control system

New York City began to enforce rent control in 1943, when the construction industry was unable to generate enough hosuing units to meet the demand owing to the tightened economy during the time of war. Since then, the statutory status and the regulations of the city's rent control program have undergone several changes (see, for example, Swan 1944; Marcus 1979; Stegman 1982; and Ohrenstein 1984). At present, two rent regulation programs, rent control and rent stabilization, are concurrrently enforced in New York. The Office of Rent Administration of New York State Government is responsible for administering the two programs.

Rent control covers all private rental units in structures of six or more apartments built prior to 1947. Rents for such units are allowed to increase by 7.5 percent per year if the buildings are free of building code violations. Nevertheless, if a rent-controlled unit is voluntarily vacated by the tenant, it is automatically "decontrolled" and is permitted to be rented at a "free market rent" to a new tenant. After a free market rent is negotiated between the landlord and the new tenant, the unit is then put under the rent stabilization program.

Rent stabilization covers all private rental buildings of six or more units built between 1947 and 1974, and the decontrolled units in pre-1947 buildings. Under this program,

rates of rent increases for renewal and new leases are determined annually by the Rent Guidelines Board, an agency whose members are appointed by the Mayor of the city. Besides these two rates of rent increases, the Rent Guidelines Board also permits landlords to charge new tenants a "vacancy allowance" in rent-stabilized units upon turnovers in tenancies.

To safeguard the stipulations of the rent control and stabilization programs. New York State and City governments have enacted a series of laws to codify the rights of tenants and landlords, such as those in relation to rental charges, provision of facilities in buildings, and eviction of tenants. The system requires landlords of rent regulated (including controlled and stabilized) units to register the rent of every year at the Office of Rent Administration. This registered rent forms the legal base for future rent increases or adjustments. The tenant, however, has the right to challenge the registered rent should it exceed the legally allowed amount. The Office of Rent Administration and Housing Court shall intervene in case of such or related disputes.

Under the two rent regulation programs, landlords can charge new tenants higher rent if the existing tenants have moved out. The programs will become meaningless if landlords are allowed to evict tencants at will. The law, therefore, guarantees the right of tenants to stay in rent regulated units. Under the housing law, it is a must for the landlord to provide the tenant the option to extend the lease when it is due to expire. The ammount of rent incresase at the juncture of lease renewal must comply with the requirements issued by the Rent Guidelines Board. For rent controlled apartments, even if tenants may not have leases, they are considered "statutory tenants" and "have the right to remain in their apartments for as long as they choose" (Ohrenstein 1984:6).

Besides tenants' right to stay in rent regulated apartments, the law also guarantees their right to have additional occupants to share their units, and in the case of rent stabilized tenants, the right to sublet. Rent controlled tenants are, however, not allowed by law to sublet their apartments unless the landlords have agreed to that in writing (Ohrenstein 1984:10-11).

The law, therefore, leaves little room for landlords of rent regulated units to recover their premises once such units are occupied by tenants. Unless the rent regulated tenant chooses to leave the apartment voluntarily, a landlord cannot revoke a lease without applying to the authority for permission and without a hearing in Housing Court. The legal ground for the landlord to apply for tenant eviction is, however, limited. The landlord can, for example, seek a rent stabilized apartment for the use of a member of his immediate family, or to evict a tenant because the tenant has failed to pay rent. But the law, of course, allows the tenant to contend in Housing Court and to challenge the landlord's application.

If the landlord seeks to recover a rent stabilized apartment

for his own or the use of his family member, he has to prove to Housing Court that he intends to use the apartment as his primary residence for a minimum period of three years. Should the apartment be re-rented during that period of time, the landlords is liable to penalties. In a building which is owned by several persons, only one owner can apply for recovering rent stabilized apartments for personal use. Moreover, if the tenant or spouse is 62 years of age or older, or disabled, the law prohibits the landlord from seeking the apartment for personal use, unless "the tenant has been offered an equivalent or superior apartment at the same or lower rent in the surrounding area" (Ohrenstein 1984:14). Failures to comply with such restrictions or to prove the geniuneness of the landlord's needs to the satisfaction of Housing Court will render a loss in the legality for the landlord to recover a rent stabilized apartment for his or his family member's personal use.

Moreover, for safety and health reasons, the housing law requires landlords to provide reasonably adequate services, such as hot water, heat, and measures to keep the premised free of rouches and mice. The law also protects the tenant's right to withhold rent or to demand rent reduction if the landlord fails to furnish the required facilities. Thus, even if a landlord applies to the authority to evict a tenant because of failures in collecting rent, the tenant can contend in Housing Court that he has withheld the rent owing to insufficient facilities in the building. When disputes of such nature do occur, both landlords and tenants will have to go through lengthy, time-consuming, and often frustrating legal processes in court before final resolutions can be derived.

In short, the housing law has been enacted with the good intention of protecting the interest of tenants at large. Nevertheless, the law itself is subject to people's manipulation because landlords, tenants, and even developers will take various action to ajust not only to the stipulations of the housing law but also to their personal economies and individual needs. Owing to people's manipulative and adaptive behavior, when the housing law is enforced, it induces as will numerous kinds of unintended consequences. In the case of New York's Chinatown, where the demand for housing is great and buildings are old, the housing law has the unintended effect of increasing people's initial and search cost for accommodations, and virtually prohibiting the redevelopment of the aged housing stock.

Impact of the housing law on Chinatown

The majority of the buildings in New York's Chinatown were built beforde 1901 (NYC Dept. of City Planning 1979:41). They are, therefore, under the rent control. Turnovers in tenancies in such buildings involve a process whereby the apartments change from rent-controlled to decontrolled, and then to rent-stablized. A new tenant has to pay a free market rent for an apartment in an old building before his rent is subject to rent stabilization. This initial free market rent could be exorbitant. Besides, the amount of his initial rent depends more on when he moves into the

apartment, rather than on how good the quality of the dwelling unit is. In Chinatown, apartments with identical size and facilities within the same building are rented for different amounts. This is because whenever a new tenant moves in, he has to pay a free market rent, whereas his next-door neighbors continue to pay the controlled or stabilized rent. Thus, under rent regulation, the later a Chinese moves into Chinatown, the higher the rent he has to pay. Yet, housing in Chinatown remains unimproved, despite the higher rents that newcomers have to pay for apartments there.

In areas where demands for housing are great, free market rents are always higher than controlled rents. Under rent regulation, landlords cannot charge more than the regulated rent. To compensate for their potential losses in revenues, landlords often demand "key money" from new tenants (Ault 1981:59; Hazlett 1982:291; Salins 1980:62). Other people, such as previous tenants, superintendents, or real-estate brokers, who play a role in controlling the access to available but highly demanded rent-regulated apartments may also request for similar kinds of money from new tenants. Although it is basically illegal, "key money" can be paid in many forms, e.g., as a broker's fee, or a payment for purchasing the furniture in an apartment. In Chinatown, "key money" is generally known as "fong dai" ( ), literally meaning "the basis of a room". Without paying it, a Chinese can hardly rent an apartment in the neighborhood. In mid-1988, "key money" for an apartment in Chinatown ranged from U.S.$5,000 to U.S.$15,000, with the subsequent rent from U.S.$500 to U.S.$1,000 per month (Tom X988). For the average family, the amount for "key money" is sizable. To cover "key money", the initial expenses for renting apartments in Chinatown are high.

Nonetheless, even if people are willing and able to pay "key money", vacant apartments are not easy to come by in Chinatown. Under the housing law, a tenant saves more in rent if he occupies a rent-regulated apartment for a long period of time, that is, without moving out and without a turnover in tenancies. Existing residents are, therefore, reluctant to move and few vacant apartments are available for the newcomers.

Moreover, since the housing law protects the tenant's right to sublet, even when a tenant is moving out from a rent-regulated unit in Chinatown, he tends to sublease or assign his apartment to a new tenant without turning it over to the landlord. Or, he may continue to pay the rent to the landlord under the terms of the original lease and have his "successor" or subtenant pay him. If his apartment is a rent-controlled one, the savings in rent for the subtenant are considerable. The subtenant does not have to pay the potentially sky-high free market rent because no turnover in tenancies is involved and the landlord cannot decontrol the initial rent.

In Chinatown, Chinese tenants try at all cost to hold on to their rent-controlled units and not to let them be decontrolled. If they have moved out from Chinatown, they still keep on paying rent to landlords and reserve their apartments for relatives or

friends. Often, they would pay the rent even though their apartments might have to remain vacant for months because their relatives are, for example, still in China and in the process of applying for emigration to New York. Such apartments, of course, never go to the open market and are not available to other people who are unrelated to the previous occupants (for similar practice in other parts of New York City, see Kristof 1970:317).

Thus, the common practice of charging new tenants "key money" and the tendency for the Chinese to reseve vacated apartments for relatives and friendstend to heighten Chinese newcomers' monetary and search costs for housing in Chinatown. Despite the high cost for housing in Chinatown, however, the quality of the dwellings there remains substandard. This is unfortunate but the housing conditions in Chinatown cannot be substantially improved unless the old buildings there are rehabilitated or replaced by new construction.

Yet the tenant's right to stay in the rent controlled or stabilized apartment is so well protected by the housing law that landlords often find it difficult to evict tenants even if they want to rebuild or rehabilitate the buildings (see also Kristof 1970:313; Newman 1982; Oser 1980). When tenants refuse to vacate their apartments, virtually no redevelopment of existing buildings can occur in Chinatown.

In sum, by marking it a right for tenants to stay in rent controlled and stabilized apartments at costs lower than the market rent, the housing law in New York has, in practice, the effect of lowering the incentive of existing tenants to move and retaining people in rent regulated dwelling units. The reluctance of tenants to move has, in turn, further implications for housing conditions. First, since few tenants would move, the occupancy rate of existing, but often old, buildings is high. When buildings are intensively occupied for unceasingly long period of time, their quality tends to decline. Large scale renovation or rehabilitation is difficult because such projects can hardly proceed without having the buildings vacated. The rent law in New York does, in effect, predestine the continuation and even intensification of poor quality of old buildings in the city.

Second, a higher occupancy rate of existing apartments often means fewer vacant apartments available for renters in the market. Even when certain apartments are vacant, information about them is often channelled within closed networks of friends or relatives of previous tenants or landlords. Landlords, after all, are prepared to rent apartments only to those who would pay "key money" willingly and who would not report such payment to the housing authority. To them, keeping vacant apartments and rental transactions to tenants within private circles is a safety device when the housing law has to be circumvented.

Due to people's adaptive and manipulative action in response to the situations of the housing market and the stipulations of the housing law, tenants are not benefitted as much as what the

rent control and stabilization programs have originally intended. In areas where the buildings are old but in great demand, such as Chinatown, the rent regulation programs have induced unintended situations, such as the obstruction of housing redevelopment, and the escalation of both information and initial monetary costs of rental accommodations.

Being an ethnic neighborhood, Chinatown may be uniquely different from other inner city communities. Its phenomenal expansion and increase in population have resulted from unceasing immigration of the Chinese. Instead of being the magnet of in-migrants, many other inner city neighborhoods are, however, places from which people have wanted to flee. Numerous neighborhoods in the older parts of New York City, such as Bedford, Stuyvesant, East New York, Brownsville, Harlem, and the South Bronx, do suffer severe degrees of poverty, population decline, and urban decay (Clark 1967; Connolly 1977; Roberts 1975; Rogin 1975). In such areas, buildings are as old as those in Chinatown and are equally under rent control or stabilization. But the demand for housing there is relatively low and the way that people have responded to the housing law is different, whereby the unintended consequences of rent control and stabilization are different.

Housing situations in other inner city neighborhoods

Unlike the situation in Chinatown, the stipulations of the housing law has resulted in widespread house abandonment, economic "disinvestment", and even arsonism in low-income inner city neighborhoods. Given that landlords are not allowed by law to overcharge tenants in rent, landlords in Chinatown try to supplement their profits by charging new tenants "key money". Vacant apartments there are marketable enough to induce landlords to keep their buildings at least functional. In poor neighborhoods, however, "key money" rarely exists because buildings are not in great demand and because few low-income residents are willing or able to pay it. To compensate for the loss in profits under the rent law, landlords tend to provide tenants less facilities in buildings.

Tenants, however, often find it hard to negotiate with landlords for better services and facilities. When landlords have violated the housing law by refusing to provide the mandated facilities, tenants can at best file complaints to the Office of Rent Administration, and then wait for governmental intervention, and possibly hearings in Housing Court. The legal process involved is too lengthy and costly for the majority of low-income tenants to bear. In July, 1988, for example, as officials of the Office of Rent Administration admitted, the Office was still trying to clear up the backlog of rent related complaints that it had accumulated since 1984. At its rate of processing, there was little hope to have all the outstanding complaints handled before 1993 (Oser 1988). In other words, having filed complaints to the authority, tenants may have to wait for years for officials to process their cases and to decide what remedial action should be taken. In this long interim, conditions in their apartments or

buildings would hardly improve, but more likely, deteriate further.

At the same time, landlords also find it difficult to discipline abusive tenants who might, for example, deliberately refuse to pay rents, or vandalize the buildings in bad faith. Under the housing law, landlords can hardly evict tenants. Their intention to evict tenants can always be challenged and may require a final decision in Housing Court. Most landlords are reluctant to go through such legal processes (Kristof 1970:327; Salins 1980:45-46). Consequently, some buildings in low-income areas would reach the stage in which neither landlords nor tenants feel responsible for the maintenance work. Such buildings would eventually become unliveable, be abandoned, or even be burnt down by arsonists.

Conclusion

By controlling and stabilizing rent to levels below the market rent, and by making it difficult for landlords to vacate tenants from buildings even for the purpose of housing redevelopment, the rent law in New York has in effect heightened the degree of neglect of the housing conditions in the older parts of the city. In reality, no matter how well buildings were constructed in the past, when they get old, they have eventually to be demolished and rebuilt. Unfortunately, New York's rent control laws seem to grant no recognition to this hard reality. Instead, the housing law has directed public attention almost entirely to the visible cost of housing in the form of increases in rental charges. Consequently, the need to allow for opportunities for people to demolish and reconstruct aging buildings has been neglected.

To help provide people with better living environment, the neglect of building conditions in inner city areas has to be corrected. In localities where housing abandonment is widespread, action must be taken to prevent further deterioration of the existing housing stock, to retain or expand the existing public and private investment, and to attract new capital to move in so as to help restore the housing and economic market. To achieve this, the rent control and stabilization programs must be abolished. Under the current housing policy, the provision of rental housing in New York can hardly be profitable, and few developers would be willing to invest into such a market.

In areas such as Chinatown, where buildings are old, housing is in great demand, and people are willing and able to bear high cost of accommodations (as reflected by the prevalence of "key money"), the housing law has in fact failed to fulfill its original intent of helping tenants save money in rent. Tenants' savings in rent are translated into other kinds of cost, such as "key money", and high search cost of seeking for vacant apartments. Considering the quality of the buildings in Chinatown, the price that tenants have to pay in order to rent apartments there is exceedingly high.

In such areas, the rent control and stabilization programs should be relaxed so that relocation of existing residents with compensation from developers or landlords can be allowed and urban redevelopment can proceed. In the long run, the current policy of not allowing tenant relocation from buildings would become, as Downs (1981:149) pointed out, the policy of "slum preservation".

Moreover, by inhibiting revitalization in older neighborhoods, New York's housing policy has the effect of inducing investors to invest in newer neighborhoods, such as in the suburb, where opportunities for investment are more readily available. The out-movement of private capital from inner city neighborhoods will make it more difficult to sustain and redevelop the economies of the older parts of the city. To help revitalize old neighborhoods in the inner city and to make them competitive with newer communities in the suburb, people must be given opportunities to regenerate outdated facilities to meet need demands. Rigid rent control laws tend to retain people in old buildings and obstruct urban redevelopment. To provide opportunities for the improvement of living conditions in the inner city, such laws should be replaced.

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THE USE OF ROADSIDE TREES IN THE STUDY OF PLANT GEOGRAPHY

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Hong Kong Baptist College

INTRODUCTION

Direct observation in the field is indispensable to the study of Geography and it is conceived as a required exercise in all levels of Geography Education. Perhaps, many have mentioned the usefulness of field exercises and useful examples were suggested (Gregory, 1980; Knapp, 1987; McPartland et al, 1987). Yet, field works on physical geography have been confined to the countryside and relatively little has been mentioned about field works in the overwhelmingly artificial urbanised areas (Arnold et al, 1979). At the same time, as the natural or semi-natural plant communities are often diverse and complex, it appears comparatively little has been touched on the field study of plant geography particularly at the secondary school level (Williamson, 1982). In many cases, biogeographical studies in the field pose many problems for the geography teachers and students, the less botanical geography teachers and students would find great difficulties in vegetation identification and are often threatened by the scientific names. All too often, the study of plant geography in the field usually becomes an uninteresting exercise for teachers and students to look up species names from identification guides. As a result, many teachers and students are forced to depend on crude vegetation classfication based on growth forms for their studies. This approach is much easier to handle but it tends to direct to an over-simplified and biased conclusion which has many limitations.

Indeed, the urban tree communities which are often less diverse and readily accessible are excellent natural objects for biogeographical studies in the field. When tighted teaching schedules (time!) and financial resources are both likely to be obstacles (Nordstrom, 1979), roadside trees near the schools are ideal objects for field studies. In this paper, the use of city roadside trees for field studies will be discussed.

APPLICATION OF ROADSIDE TREE STUDIES IN PLANT GEOGRAPHY

In the summer of 1985, a comprehensive urban tree survey was conducted in Hong Kong by the joint effort of about thirty secondary schools, the Education Department, the Urban Services Department, the Geography and Geology Department of the University of Hong Kong and the Conservancy Association. The objectives of the survey were to protray the species

composition, site conditions, growing conditions and growth problems of the urban trees (Jim,1986). The survey has provided useful information for the urban foresters. However, to the geography teachers, much can be borrowed from this survey; many questions asked in the urban tree surveys are of direct relevance to the study of plant geography. To list some of these, namely:

1. What is the spatial pattern of the distribution of roadside trees?

2. How are spatial pattern and species composition affected by urban land uses?

3. What are the major biotic and abiotic factors determining the quality of the urban forest?

4. In what ways the biotic and abiotic factors affect the establishment and development of the urban vegetation?

In the light of the above questions, a simple survey was designed for a class of fifteen A Level Geography students. In the survey, a simplified field record form, each for a tree, was used (Figure 1).

In order to minimise the botanical input (species identification is not our end!), only the ten dominant species were identified with the use of a simple illustrated checklist (Appendix A) and the rest marked as 'others'.

Direct measurement and estimation were taken in the field. The growth parameters such as tree girth diameter and crown width were measured or estimated (Figure 2). The similar triangle method was used to estimate the height of trees by using only a 30 cm ruler and a 2 m measuring tape (Figure 3). Two students will co-operate in making the measurement. The first will stand next to the trunk and measure 2 m vertically from the ground surface. The second will stand at a distance, if possible, about twice that of the tree's height or more. He will hold the 30-cm ruler, so that the bottom (point a) and the top (point c) of the ruler coincide visually with that of the tree (points A and C respectively) (Figure 4). Next he will read point b on his ruler which coincide visually with the 2 m height on the trunk (point B) indicated by flat palm of his partner as shown in the diagram. The tree's height can then be calculated by the formula. In addition, the tree growth conditions and problems were recorded and estimated.

After the completion of fieldwork (in half day's time, slightly over 200 trees were surveyed), simple statistical and graphical techniques such as histogram and scattergram were used to analyse the data collected.

Examples of the type of work the students produced are shown in Figure 4 to Figure 6. From these figures, it can be easily seen that the urban forest is dominated by only

a limited range of species (Figure 4). They are unevenly distributed and are confined to open spaces (Figure 5). Besides, abiotic factors such as vehicle damages, growth confinement and vandalism are more significant than the biotic factors such as pest and diseases in affecting the growth of urban trees (Figure 6).

DISCUSSION

In the roadside tree survey, students should learn much more than the names of the dominant species and biogeographical concepts (Jim, 1968). They should acquire transferrable skills such as collecting data in the field, know the use of simple equipments to how to process and analyse data, test hypotheses and use simple statistical techniques.

At the same time, they should be able to identify the various biotic and abiotic factors in the environment relevant to their studies. The tree survey helps to instil the idea that man is the maker of the landscape; all our activities have significant influences on our natural environment. On one hand, students can identify endeavour to upgrade the living environment by planting trees; on the other hand, destructions such as vehicular damages and vandalism can also be easily identified.

In fact, tree survey is a kind of participation which arouses environmental awareness; through conducting nature studies in a familiar setting, the students know more of their immediate environment and understand more of their natural environment which is often inadequate in the highly urbanized areas. Today, the ideas of environmental conservation and improvement have caught extensive debates both in the schools and in our daily lives because of the rapid degradation of our living environment, Yet, the 'panacea' of environmental restoration and conservation often come with little elements of participation and appreciation and it seems as if people will love and protect an environment which they do not have sympathy.

In the 1987 Geographical Association (U.K.) Conference, Jonathon Pottitt put it this way:

> Getting children down to earth with their hands literally on the marvel and mystery of creation, would seen to be a prerequisite for any kind of ecological sanitory emerging from today's young people.

After all, sympathy, participation and appreciation come before any efforts of restoration or conservation to produce the expected results.

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FIGURE 1

A Simplified Survey Form for Tree Studies in the City
(modified from Yeung, 1988)

Record Number ---------- Date of Survey ---------- Surveyor ----------

Species Name ---------- Location ----------

Adjacent Landuse ---------- Distance from Kerb --------

Growing Conditions

Tree Height AB ---------- ab ----------

tree height ----------

Height to Lowest Branch ----------

Tree Girth (at 1.3 m) ----------

Tree Crown Diameter reading 1 ----------

reading 2 ----------

Mean Value ----------

	Good				Poor
Crown Fullness	5	4	3	2	1
Overall Structure	5	4	3	2	1

Growth Problems and Disorders

	Serious				Nil
Tree Deformation	5	4	3	2	1
Branch Breakage	5	4	3	2	1
Trunk Cracks	5	4	3	2	1
Pest and Diseases	5	4	3	2	1
Growth Confinment	5	4	3	2	1
Vandalism	5	4	3	2	1
Auto-damages	5	4	3	2	1

Figure 1 A Simplified Survey Form for Tree Studies in the City

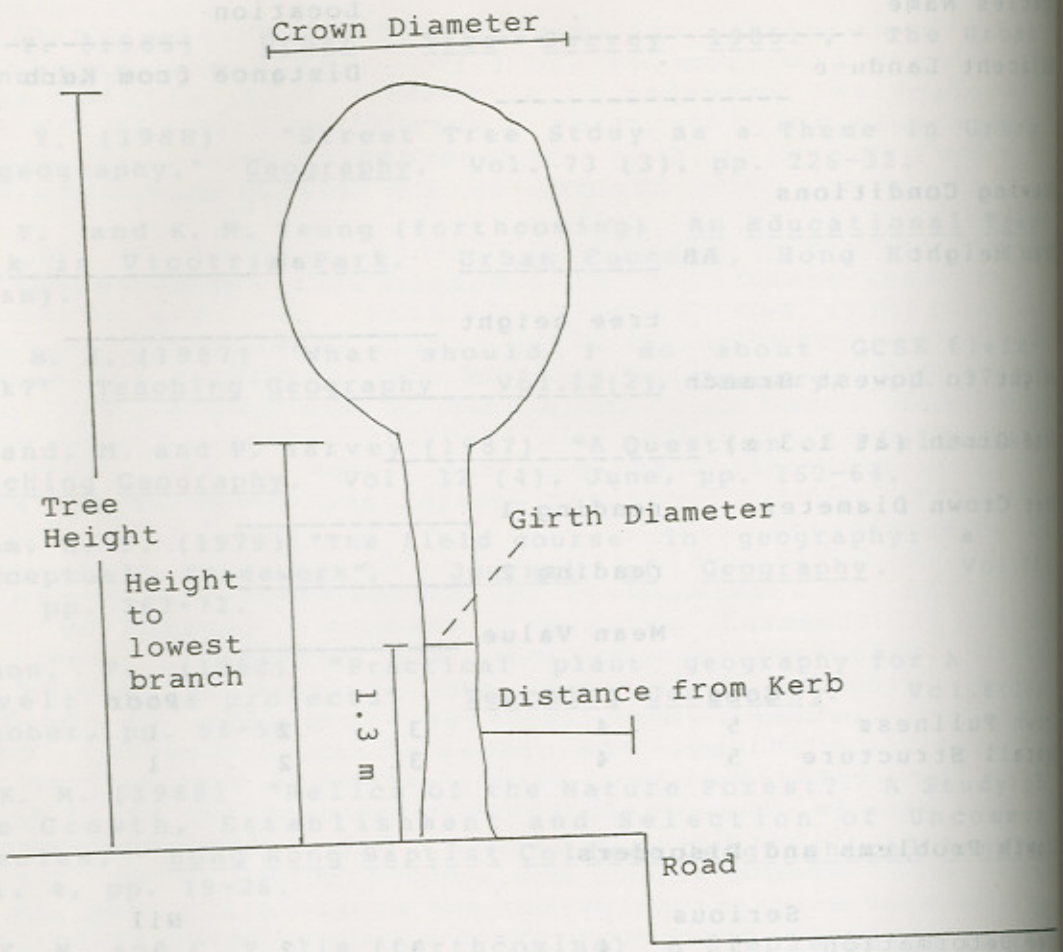
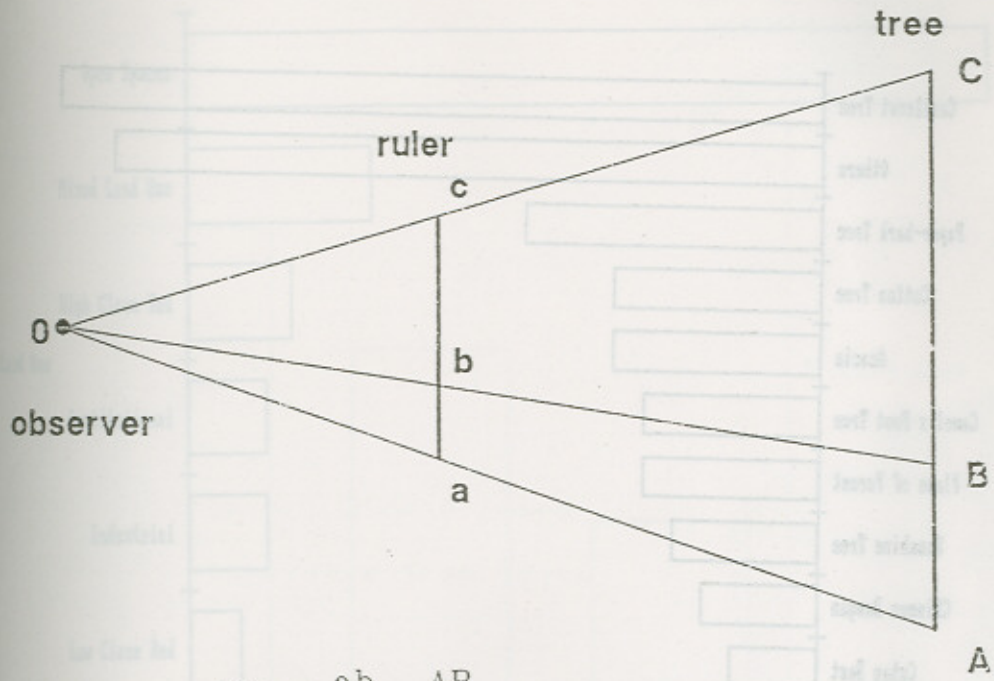


Figure 2 - Structural Attributes of Individual Tree



$$\text{Since } \frac{ab}{ac} = \frac{AB}{AC}$$

$$\text{Tree height } AC = \frac{AB \times ac}{ab}$$

Figure 3 - The Simple Triangle Method to Estimate the Height of Trees
Source : (Jim etal, 1988)

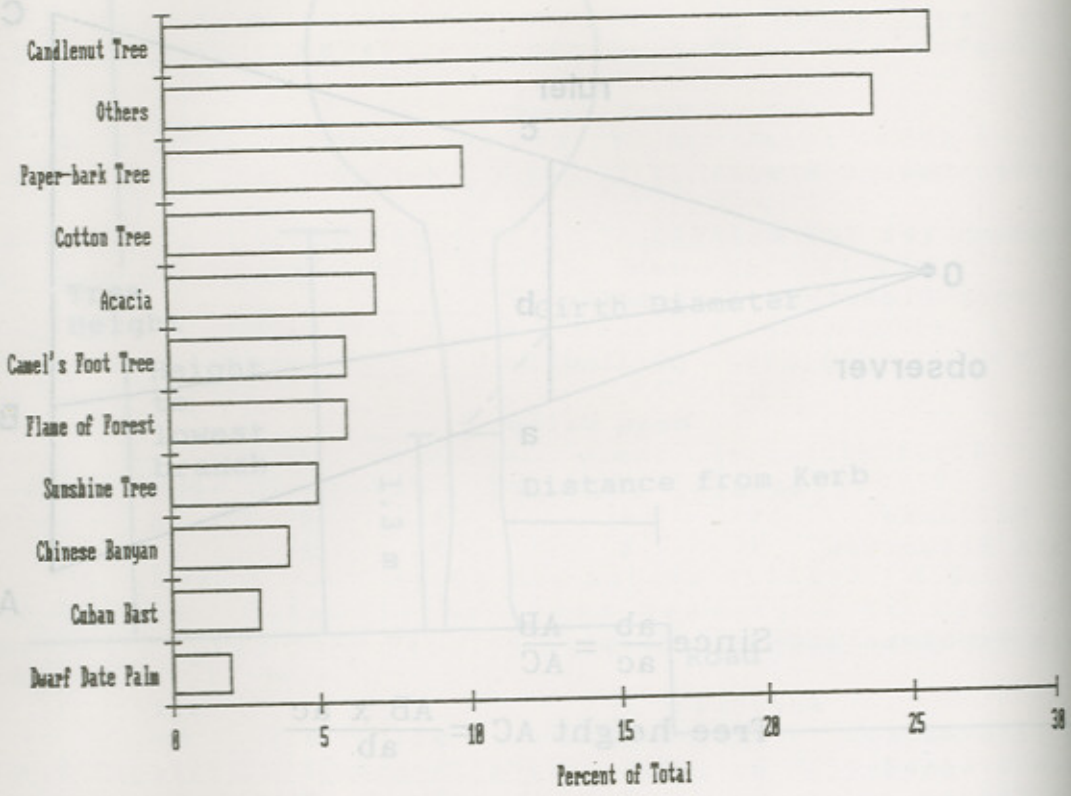


Figure 4 - Worked Example 1: Species Composition

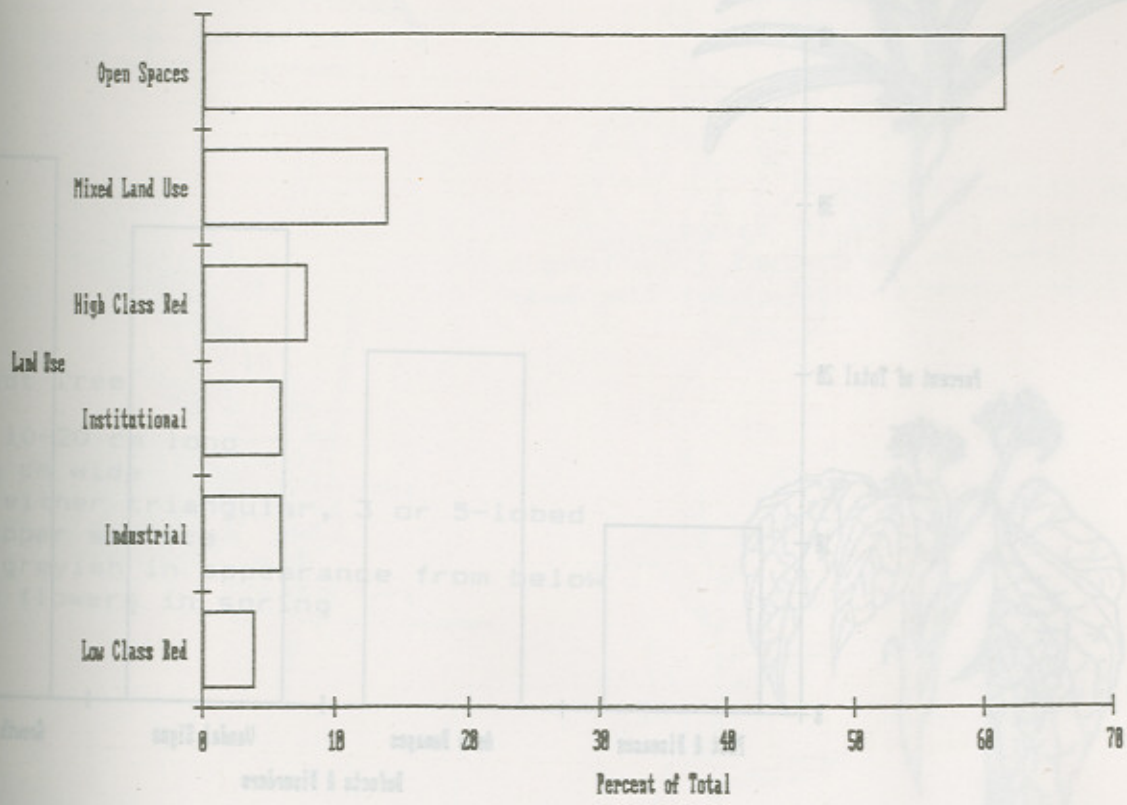


Figure 5 - Worked Example 2: Land Use by Tree Abundance

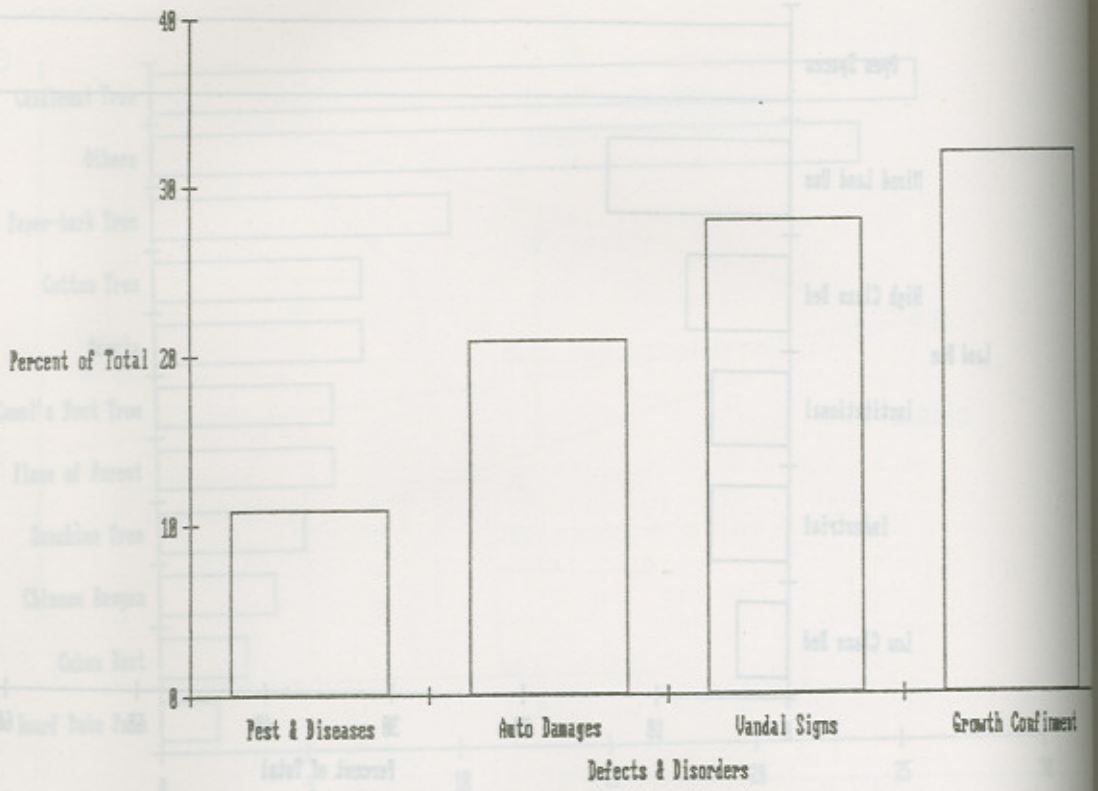


Figure 6 - Worked Example 3: Biotic and Abiotic Damages

Appendix A - Illustrated Checklist for Common Roadside Trees
Source : (Yeung et al, 1988)

Acacia

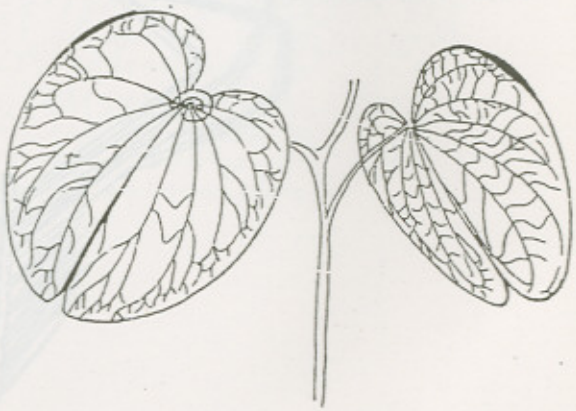
crescent leaves 7 to 10 cm long
not wider than 2 cm
no apparent midrib
3 to 5 almost longitudinal veins
yellow flowers in spring
grey and smooth stem, with crooked branches

Candlenut Tree

leaves 10-20 cm long
5 to 15 cm wide
leaves either triangular, 3 or 5-lobed
shiny upper surface
canopy greyish in appearance from below
whitish flowers in spring

Camel's Foot Tree

leaves 9 to 14 cm long
2 lobed leaves with notched apex and base
veins 11-13 radiating from leaf base
purple flowers from autumn to spring
always with leaves



Cotton Tree

Palmately compound leaves
5 to 7 leaflets
conical throns on stem
deciduous trees with red flowers in spring

Sun Shine Tree
leaflets in 4 to 10 pairs
leaflets not more than 2 cm long
yellow flowers throughout the year

Flame of Forest

over 10 pairs of pinnae, leaflets 20 to 40 pairs
leaflet 7 to 8 mm long
2 to 3 mm wide
red flowers in early summer

Chinese Banyan

Leaves usually less than 7 cm long
veins more obvious at the back
presence of aerial roots

Cuban Bast

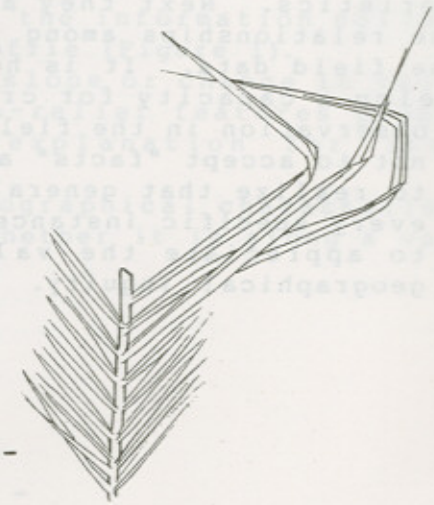
leaves cordate base
7 to 15 cm long
7 to 9 veins
surface green but bottom pale
yellow flowers in summer

Park Bark Tree

linear leaves 5 to 10 cm long
1 to 1.5 cm wide
6 to 7 longitudinal veins
leaves held vertically
narrow crown and peeling bark
white flowers in spring and summer

Dwarf Date Palm

usually 2 to 4 m tall
protruding old leaf bases on stem



USING SLOPE AS AN UNIT FOR AN INTEGRATED STUDY OF SOIL, VEGETATION AND MICRO-CLIMATIC CHARACTERISTICS

by

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INTRODUCTION

At the Advanced Level it is often the case that each field study session has to be confined to one major theme. While this narrow focus has the undeniable merit of directing students' attention to a particular group of geographical phenomena and proccesses in detail, it might create the impression that elements of the landscape are not related. The purpose of this essay is to illustrate how a single field study can integrate several closely related aspects of the Advanced Level Geography curriculum.

According to the degree of teacher direction and student participation, geographical fieldworks in secondary schools can be classified into four types, namely field demonstration, field study, field testing and field discovery (Hall, 1976). Table 1 summarizes the major characteristics of each of these. For the senior form students it appears that field testing and field discovery are the more appropriate forms of fieldworks than the other two in that they are more effective in providing concrete learning experiences and promoting independent thinking. The degree of teacher direction required in these inquiry processes would obviously vary with students' academic level and stage of cognitive development. At the Advanced Level, the inquiry process can be taken one step further and students may be encouraged to identify and test hypotheses based on data gathered in the field.

The proposed field study would guide the students to conduct an inquiry into the inter-related characteristics of soil, vegetation and micro-climate as witnessed on the slope and the impact of human activities on the various physical processes. Students are first asked to measure the properties of a number of variables including slope, soil, vegetation and micro-climatic characteristics. Next they are asked to formulate hypotheses about the relationships among the above variables and test them using the field data. It is hoped that in this process students can develop a capacity for critical thinking. In particular, through observation in the field, students should learn:

(i) not to accept "facts" at their face value; but instead
(ii) to realize that generalizations may not be applicable to every specific instance; and
(iii) to appreciate the value of first-hand information in geographical inquiry.

Objectives

1. To identify and test relationships between slope characteristics and soil properties.

2. To identify and test relationships between vegetation and and micro-climate on the one hand and soil and slope properties on the other.

3. To identidify the impacts of human activities on the characteristics of soil, vegetation and micro-climate and their relationships with slope characteristics.

Equipments

Measuring tape	Orientation compass
Abney Level	Ranging poles
Graph paper	Deionized water
pH paper pack with key	Soil test kit
Quadrat	Soil thermoeter
Swirling psychrometer	Light probe
Portable anaemometer	Shovel
Beaker	Topographical base map
Plastic bottle with jet	

Procedures

Record all the data collected in Tables 3 to 6 using the following methods.

A. **Measurement of Slope Characteristics**

1. Use an orientation compass to determine the direction towards which the slope is running.
2. Describe the orientation of the slope with respect to:
   (a) the solar incidence
   (b) the prevailing rain-bearing wind
3. Set a profile station every 5 meters along the assigned slope. Use the abney level and ranging poles provided to measure slope steepness over a length of 40 meters. Set an extra profile station wherever there is an abrupt break in the slope. Use the information collected to draw a labelled slope profile (Figure 1).
4. At every major break of slope or change in vegetation type, identify the micro-relief features present and suggest a plausible explanation for its/their occurrence.
5. Describe the general topographical characteristics of the assigned slope (e.g. whether it is along a valley or spur).

B. Measurement of Soil Characteristics

Use the shovel provided to dig a pit of about 10 cm. in diameter and 10 cm. in depth at each of the profile station. Measure the following soil characteristics at the bottom of the pit.

1. Soil Texture

This refers to the relative proportion of sand, silt and clay in a soil sample. Instead of carrying out a detailed sieving of soil particles, soil texture can be determined coveniently in the field by adding water to a soil sample and rubbing the wetted soil between the thumb and fingers. Use Table 2 as an aid to classify the soil sample into its appropriate textural class.

TABLE 2

A Guide for Classifying Soil Texture in the Field

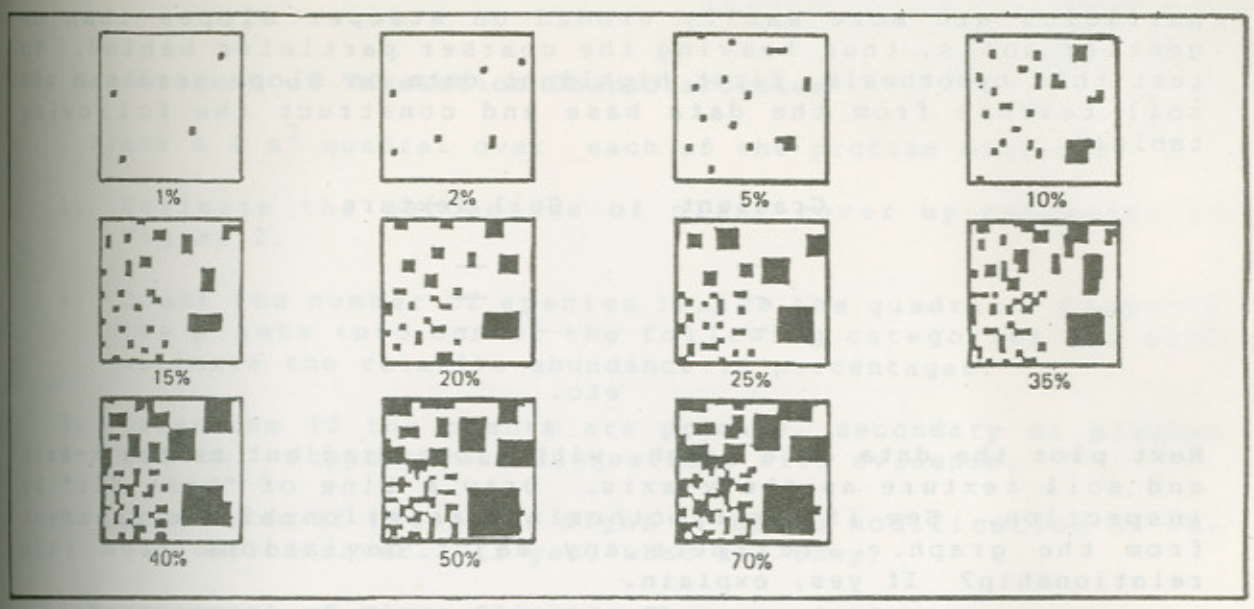
Textural Class	Description of properties
Sand	Coarse – fine sand – visible grains loose when dry – not sticky when wet
Silt	Smooth soapy texture
Clay	Plastic and sticky when moist and can be rolled into thin threads. Takes finger-prints clearly
Silty-Clay	No sand – partly sticky when moist but has a smooth soapy feel of silt fraction
Silty-Clay-Loam	Trace of sand but enough silt to be slightly soapy. Less sticky than silty-clay
Clay-Loam	Sticky when moist – presence of sand can only be detected with great care
Loam	Moulds easily when moist and sticks to fingers. Can be moulded into threads but breaks easily on bending
Silt-Loam	Moderately plastic but not sticky – characterised by soapy feel of silt
Sandy-Clay-Loam	Slightly sticky when moist but sand fraction dominates
Sandy-Clay	Plastic and sticky when moist but sand fraction still obvious. Little soapy texture of silt
Sandy-Loam	Sand fraction dominates – moulds when moist – does not stick to fingers. Difficult to form threads
Loamy-Sand	Mostly sand – slightly plastic when moist – leaves smear on fingers when rubbed

2. Stoniness

Use Figure 2 to estimate the degree of stoniess of the soil sample.

FIGURE 2

A Visual Chart for Estimating Percentage Composition or Cover



3. Soil Acidity

Place a small sample of soil line into a beaker. Add some deionised water and stir. Immerse a piece of pH paper into the soil solution and record the pH value with the help of the given key.

4. Soil nutrient status

This is important as it is an indicator of whether the soil is capable of supporting a richer vegetation cover. Follow the instructions given in the soil test kit to estimate the abundance of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium in the soil.

5. Soil Catena

The amount of water in the soil should increase downslope because of a decrease in permeability of surface soils along the slope profile. This would in turn lead to a sequence of changes in soil properties along a slope such that the soil near a slope crest would be quite different from the slope at a valley bottom nearby.

it. Students should consult their textbooks and their teachers to formulate and test other hypotheses using the rich set of data generated.

Hypothesis

Soil texture is coarser on steeper slopes than on gentler slopes.

The rationale underlying this hypothesis is that fine soil particles are more easily eroded on steeper slopes than on gentler soils, thus leaving the coarser particles behind. To test this hypothesis, first highlight data on slope gradient and soil texture from the data base and construct the following table:

Gradient	Soil Texture
--	--
--	--
--	--
--	--

etc.

Next plot the data on a graph, with slope gradient as the x-axis and soil texture as the y-axis. Draw a line of "best fit" by inspection. See if the hypothesized relationship is apparent from the graph. Are there any major deviations from this relationship? If yes, explain.

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After having completed the above measurements, try to answer the following questions.

Q.1 What soil properties might be expected to vary along a slope?

Q.2 Suggest a method, direct or otherwise, which can be used to measure the downslope variation in one of such properties?

C. Measurement of Vegetation Characteristics

Place a 1 m^2 quadrat over each of the profile stations.

1. Estimate the percentage of plant cover by referring to Figure 2.

2. Count the number of species inside the quadrat. Classify the plants into one of the following categories and also estimate the relative abundance in percentages.

3. Determine if the plants are primary, secondary or planted growth. Support your suggestions with evidence.

4. Determine if there are signs of human modification of the vegetation cover. If yes, what are they?

D. Measurement of Micro-Climatic Characteristics

1. At each profile station use the soil therometer to measure the soil temperature at a depth of
   (a) 2 cm and
   (b) 10 cm
   below the ground surface.

2. At the ground level, in the middle of the canopy and at the top of the canopy of each of the profile stations,

   (a) Write down the height above ground level in Table 5.
   (b) Measure air temperature with the dry bulb thermometer inside the given swirling psychometer.
   (c) Measure the relative humidity of air with the swirling psychrometer.
   (d) Measure wind speed with the aneamometer.
   (e) Record the light intensity with the light probe provided.

Hypothesis Formulation and Testing

A host of hypotheses may be formulated about the interrelationships among soil, slope, vegetation and micro-climate and the impact of human activities on the physical processes. Below is one such hypothesis and the method to test

APPENDIX

SLOPE PROFILE RECORDING FORM

ation and Altitude: from GR _____ (m) to GR _____
(m)

eral Topographical Characteristics _____

_____

_____

TABLE 3

Characteristics of the Assigned Slope

ile tion	Direction of the Slope (°)	Orientation of the slope with respect to		Slope Charac-teristics	Micro-Relief Features Possible Reasons
		solar incidence	prevailing rain-bearing wind		
to B					
to C					
to D					
to E					
to F					
to G					
to H					
to I					
to J					

FIGURE 1

The Slope Profile

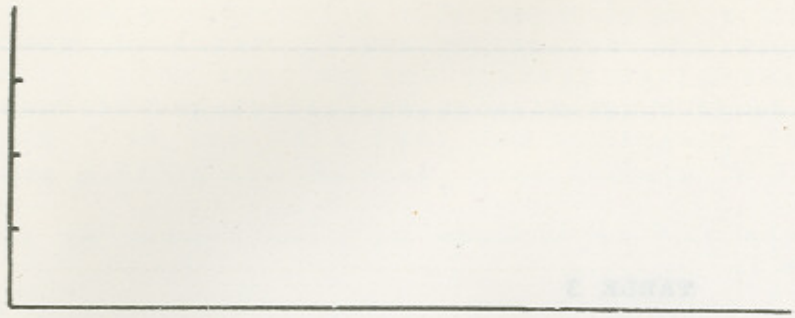

TABLE 4

Soil characteristics on the Slope

Profile Section	Soil Texture	Degree of Stoniness	Soil Acidity (pH value)	Soil Nutrient Status (%)		
				Nitrogen	Phosphorus	Potassi
A to B						
B to C						
C to D						
D to E						
E to F						
F to G						
G to H						
H to I						
I to J						

TABLE 5

Vegetation Characteristics on the Slope

Profile Station	Percentage Plant Cover	No. of Species GR SC SH TR Total	Status of Growth	Human Modification of Vegetation Cover		
				Present/ Absent	Nature of Change	Field Evidence
A to B						
B to C						
C to D						
D to E						
E to F						
F to G						
G to H						
H to I						
I to J						

TABLE 6

Micro-Climatic Characteristics on the Slope

Profile Section	Soil Temperature		Air Temperature			Relative Humidity			Wind Speed			Light Intensity		
	2 cm deep	10 cm deep	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
A to B														
B to C														
D to E														
G to F														
F to G														
G to H														
H to I														
I to J														

A -- at the ground level
B -- in the middle of the canopy
C -- at the top of the canopy
(Record the heights of B and C above the ground surface)

NEWS

NEWS OF THE HONG KONG GEOGRAPHICAL ASSOCIATION

EXCO

Dr. C. Y. Wong has resigned from the Chinese University of Hong Kong to take up a teaching post at the Taiwan Normal University. Mr. Y. T. Ng will replace Dr. Wong as the representative of the University in the HKGA. Also Mr. C. C. Lam, who is now in the United Kingdom to do graduate studies, has resigned from the executive committee. In his place, the committee has co-opted Mr. C. L. Yeung to be a committee member.

Hong Kong Teacher's Centre

The Education Department of the Hong Kong Government is planning to set up a Teacher's Centre and has asked the Association to send a respresentative to the Provicional Council for this Centre. The Executive Committee nominated Mr. Edward Koo, vice chairman of the Association to sit in the Provicional Council. In a recent letter to the Director of Education, Mr. Koo expressed the Association view's on this matter. Below is an excert of the letter.

> We are in full support of the aims and objectives laid down in Section 2 [of the proposal].
>
> Concerning the structure and composition of the Advisory Management Committee, we feel that subject-related organizations should be given more representation. The professional development of teachers in Hong Kong is often strongly subject-based. The inclusion of more representatives from these organizations may allow the fulfilment of the aims and objectives of the Centre more effectively. However, if difficulties of full representation do exist, priority should be given to organizations whose subject area has a greater number of teachers and/or students. We also find that many of the subject-related organizations are constantly contributing more significantly to accomplish the objectives of the Centre..... Therefore, they should be given a higher ratio of representation rather than as stated in paragraph 3.4.5. [of the proposal].
>
> Referring to the number of centres, we welcome the idea of regional dispersion. However, we feel that a central headquarter of some kind is need to coordinate the operations of the Centre.
>
> We are also in favour of Section 5.4 [of the proposal]. Representatives from subject-related organizations may already have a double-role of being a teacher and a committee member of the organization concerned. Representation on the Advisory Management Committee will triple their load.

Activities Held

1. The International Conference on Environment and Spatial Development, jointly sponsored by the Guangdong Geographical Society and the Hong Kong Geographical Association, was successfully held on August 2 - 4, 1988 at Zhongshan University, Guangzhou. Some 150 scholars, mostly associated with tertiary education institutes in Guangdong Province but quite a few from other parts of the Country and from overseas, including Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia and from the industry, took part in the three-day conference. A total of thirty papers covering almost every aspect of the physical environment and spatial development of the Pearl River Delta Region, were delivered in ten consecutive sections. A post conference field trip to the Delta was conducted. Proceedings of the papers will be published by the Guangdong Geographical Association. Selected papers will be published as a special issue of the Asian Geographer.

2. An "interflow seminar" with Chinese scholars was hled on September 13, X988.

3. A visit to the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (Daya Bay) was organized on September 24, 1988.

4. An extra-mural course on the teaching of Geography in secondary schools, jointly organized by the Hong Kong University Extra-Mural Division and HKGA, commenced on October 10, 1988.

Up-coming Activities

The following activies, organized by the Secondary Education Committee, will be held in the 1988/89 academic year.

	ACIVITY	DATE
1.	Field Camp (Kadoorie Agricultural Research Centre)	Jan. 1988
2.	Guangdong Fieldtrip (3 days)	Dec. 28, 1988
3.	Geography Field Day (Island House, Yuen Chau Tsai. Environmental Issues)	Jan. 1989
4.	Coach Tours to New Towns	Feb. 6, 1989
5.	Course on Mapwork for Secondary School -- Extra-Mural Course, Chinese Univerity	Mar. 14, 1989
6.	Field Trip -- Countryside Conservation	Mar. 18, 1989
7.	Instep Course	Apr. 2, 1989

8. Course on Geography in China -- held in Guangzhou — Easter, 1989

9. Field Trip on Hong Kong Farming — May, 1989

NEWS OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

1. Hong Kong University

Professor C. J. Grant recently retired from the University and Professor C. K. Leung is now the Chair of the Department of Geography at HKU.

2. The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Drs. B. Taylor and C.Y. Wong resigned from the University. Dr. T. Fung joint the University to teach computer graphics and geographical information systems. Dr. S. I. Hsu came back from his sabbatical in Taiwan.

3. Hong Kong Baptist College

Dr. R. O. Cutler completed his contract at HKBC and has since gone back to the United States. Dr. D. P. Fitzgerald replaced Dr. Cutler as the head of the Department of Geography at Baptist. Dr. Fitzgerald, orginally from Canada, had been with the World Bank for a number of years and taught at the University of Papua New Guinea before he came to Hong Kong.

Mr. W. S. Tang came back from Cambridge to resume his teaching duties at Baptist. Also, Dr. W. Collins of California State University at Chico joint the College as a visiting scholar for one year.

NOTES TO CONTRIBUTOR

The Hong Kong Geographer is published on a tri-annual bas by the Hong Kong Geographical Association. The Journal welcom full-length articles, research notess, and comments and opinio on current development of Geography both in Hong Kong and abro and the teaching of Geography at the secondary level. It al welcomes book reviews and field trip guides and publishes news schools, colleges, universities and reserach institutes which m be of interest to Hong Kong's geographers. Articles may written in English or Chinese. In the latter case, the editori board reserves the right to ask the author to submit typewritten copy of the paper of to bear the typesetting cos Very tight financial restraints render this necessary.

All articles are to be submitted to:

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