

字
Square印

N.Z. Chinese Growers

ChineseMovableTypeCollection

1952-1972

Foot

Clean

Sort

Catalogue

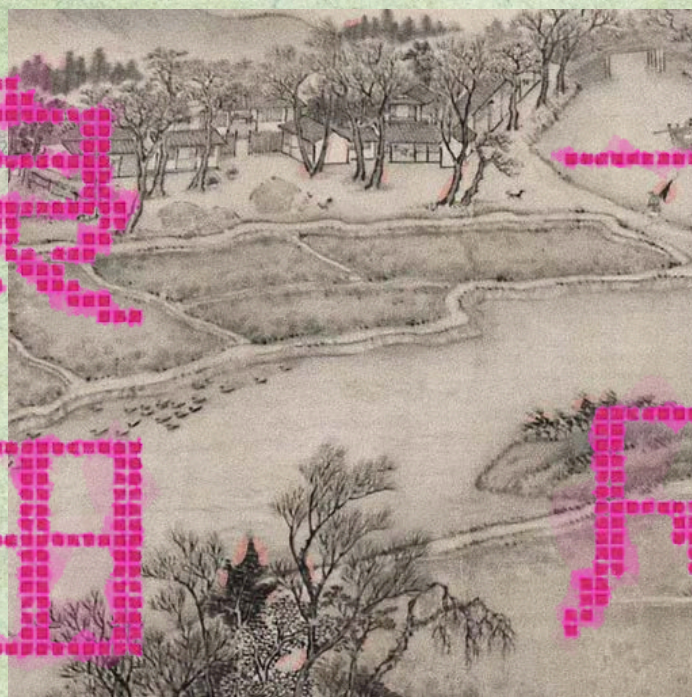
Print

Of

Land



Kaishu&Fangsong:TheFacesOfTheGrowersPress



Hengyun Mountain Villa
by Yang Jin (1644-1728)

Hanzi,
Home
Again.

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A Square Foot of Land

recalls how stories grow from small spaces:
plots, rooms, even this five-page pocket zine.

It unfolds in three parts:

memories of Wellington's

Chinese market gardeners,

adapted from Lily Lee & Ruth Lam's Sons of the Soil;

a vignette of the Growers Press

drawn from a NZJH article;

and my first-person notes on

cataloguing Chinese metal type

at Studio of the Waters of Dawn.

Thanks to earlier works and collections,

any errors are my own.

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I. Sons Of The Soil
II. The Growers Press
III. Working Bee

A

C

E



Sons

of the Soil

1. Plots

From the 1860s,
Chinese gardens grew
in central Wellington.
For decades,
housing, trams, rails
pushed plots
into suburbs and beyond.
Wholesalers carried produce
back to city markets.

2. Auction

Monday, Thursday, 2 am,
trucks roll from Levin,
boys ride with dads.
They reach Blair and Allen.
Crates piled high,
vegetables wet with dew.
Doors open at five.
Barrows rattle along,
hard vegetables pushed aside.
Quick breakfast at the Great Wall.
By 6:30, the hall roars:
"Hup! San choy! Twenty-five!"
Auctioneers cry,
deals fly.
The market hums alive.

3. Whisper

By the 1970s,
supermarkets and imports
arrived.
Market gardeners
carved niches.
Ōtaki tomatoes showed how:
paper-lined crates,
bold labels,
careful sorting.
Italiano,
Beef Steak,
Yellow Gooseberry.
Whispered to chefs,
chased by gourmet enthusiasts.

4. Wind

1865:
First gold miners
arrive.
1866:
Chinese gardens
recorded.
Exclusion leagues
and poll taxes
bite.
Floods,
slips,
quakes
strike.
And always,
Wellington's wind.
The gardens
vanished,
industrious
hands,
clever
minds
remain.



This wasn't
your ordinary grower's paper

It fed

Chinese market garden families

Sure, it gave tips and ads
on cabbages and carrots...

but also family news, quirky facts,
politics (until banned),
even Chinese lessons for kids.

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Then came the poetry—

Think Tang poetry...

but about soggy laundry
and Beatles hair.

Holding it together: Lai Hung Chan,

secretary, editor, poet, juggler.

By 1972, rising costs and fading readership closed it.

The type that printed its pages
is getting the VIP treatment
at Wai-te-ata Press...

The GROWERS PRESS





RETREAT

Wednesdays, 2–4 pm, come to 曉水齋 (xiǎo shuǐ zhāi) (opp. Wai-te-ata Press)! 曉 = dawn or knowing;

水 = water; 齋 = a scholar's retreat.

Each week we clean and catalogue rare Chinese metal type.

A slow craft social, a doorway into conservation, no Cantonese or Manderine required.



3



MIRROR

Settling in, I grab five or six types from an old case. If they match, it's faster. Small win!



I rub them together, dust lifting in little clouds. Then I brush off stubborn grime, careful not to press too hard on the face. Tiny grooves get scraped with a fine tool. Under a loupe, some shapes, like 田 (land), almost mirror-symmetric, pop at once; others, like 馬 (horse), only reveal themselves after a test print.

2



ANTIMONY

Step one: mask and gloves.

At first, I feel lazy or a little rebellious after COVID 19—but slipping them on has become a ritual. Each type may carry toxic antimony oxide, plus decades of dust and debris. Gloves and a mask keep me safe while diving in, letting me rub and dust with abandon.



4



MOVABLE

After a test print, I wipe away leftover ink. Dried residue can clog tiny grooves and blunt strokes. We clean gently to spare the next print grief. Each character has a unique ID. I check the paper or digital catalogue for tray, row and column. One hundred cases form a neat 3D spreadsheet: two trays per case, each tray 7×20 compartments, together cradling over 300,000 types.



COME

After several rounds of this routine, quirks begin to surface. Cantonese isn't just a dialect of Mandarin—it has its own characters—not entirely Classical Chinese. Some of our type is unmistakably Cantonese, like 嚟 (come to):

嚟 Vic! 嚟曉水齋!

In our paper catalogue, I spotted Suzhou phonetic symbols.



Everyone knows Taiwan's bopomofo, but even though I'm from the area, Suzhou's set was totally new to me. The Wikipedia entry remains blank; perhaps my next side project.

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