



'All my petty schemes': The Hong Kong diaries of Chaloner Alabaster, 1855-56

Date: Thursday 31 October
Time: 11am-12.30pm

In person:
Seminar room 6.71, level 6
RSSS Building, 146 Ellery Crescent, ANU
Turn right from the lifts

On Zoom:
bit.ly/BioWorkshop2022
Meeting ID: 849 0058 9945
Password: 630803



Botanical Gardens, Hong Kong, 1868. Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution.

Chaloner Alabaster (later, Sir) became a Student Interpreter in the China Consular Service in 1855, aged 16. The Consular Service was established under the Treaty of Nanjing after the British victory in the First Opium War in 1843. Student Interpreters were the lowest rung on the ladder, but Alabaster was to climb nearly to the top in his career, ending as Consul-General in Canton. He kept diaries all his working life. Those that I used for *A Young Englishman in Victorian Hong Kong* were the first four describing his first encounter with China and his life in the new colony. Hand-written in plain exercise books, they cover sixteen months but amount to more than 50,000 words. In this talk I will consider Alabaster's diary writing, his social circles, his education in the Chinese language, and the nature of his records of Hong Kong life.



Benjamin Penny is professor of Chinese History and Religion in the School of Culture, History and Language in the College of Asia and the Pacific, ANU. Educated at the universities of Sydney, Cambridge, Beijing, and the ANU, he works on medieval Daoism, new religions in the contemporary Chinese world, the history of sinology, Bible translation, and scholarship on China among expatriate society in the nineteenth century. He is currently Convenor of the ANU Taiwan Studies program.

