



Had it really snowed in Hong Kong?

Linus YEUNG

Since the Second World War, the Observatory has received four reports of snow – on 2 February and 13 December 1967, 29 January 1971 and 14 December 1975. All of these incidents happened many years ago when instruments and observations were not as sophisticated and comprehensive as today's. Apart from surface air temperature, little was known about the meteorological conditions that could trigger such rare phenomena or the

timing and location of their occurrence. The snow reports in those days were based mainly on eye witness accounts and weather data around the times of the reports. The three cases from 1967 and 1971 were all reported when air temperatures were above freezing, but under 8 degrees Celsius. Were they bona fide cases of snowfall? Could some of them be melting snowflakes, or light sleet, or other types of precipitation?



In purely physical terms, snow cannot stay in a solid state for long if the ambient temperature is well above freezing. But when the air temperature is just slightly above zero and the ambient air is sufficiently dry, snowflakes may still occur in a partially melted or even unmelted state. The upper air sounding taken on 13 December 1967 reflected this dry condition. For the two cases on 2 February 1967 and 29 January 1971, the ambient conditions were not so dry and were thus less favourable for preserving snowflakes in a solid state. So the possibility that the precipitation observed is related to melting snowflakes or slight sleet cannot be dismissed. But the only way we can know for sure is if there were time machines that could send today's advanced equipment back to the days when the snow was reported.

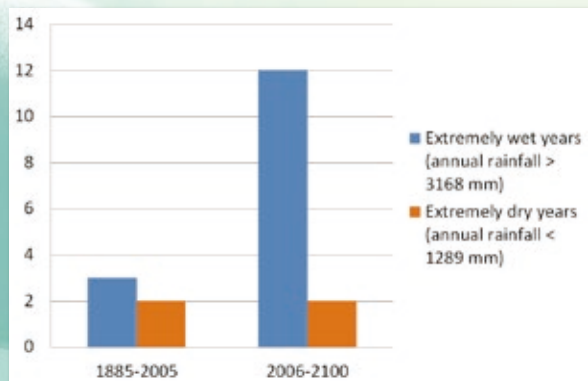
Talk on Climate Change

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Climate change has become a major challenge of our time. Over the years, the Observatory has conducted ongoing research into the effects of climate change on Hong Kong and organised public education programmes on the topic. Following the release of the Fifth Assessment Report by Working Group I of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in September 2013, the Observatory held a series



Mr LEE Sai-ming, Senior Scientific Officer of the Observatory, introduces the Fifth Assessment Report of IPCC Working Group I to government officials.



of talks for government officials and the public to present the latest scientific findings from the report as well as climate projections for Hong Kong and the world (see chart to the left). The talks helped to enhance public awareness of climate change, and also gave policy-makers an insight into the latest development.

The Observatory has updated the climate projection for Hong Kong in the 21st century based on the latest data from IPCC. It is predicted that Hong Kong will see a rise in the number of extremely wet years, but drought remains a possibility. For details, please see http://www.hko.gov.hk/climate_change/ClimProj20140317-e.pdf.