

China Bound and Unbound

History in the Making —
An Early Returnee's Account

Frances Wong



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Chapter 1



Introduction

In 1949, shortly after the Communists took over the reins of mainland China, I went back to Guangzhou (or Canton), the capital of south China, from the British colony of Hong Kong. At that time, communications between Guangzhou and Hong Kong were disrupted because the Kowloon-Canton Railway was jointly owned by the Hong Kong and Chinese governments, and with the taking over of Guangzhou by the Communists, it took some time before new rules and regulations of the railway were ironed out by the authorities. So I walked all the way for seven days. Why did I go back to China at a time when millions were fleeing the country? Would I do it again if I could relive my life once more? Those were questions many friends have asked me. I suppose when I was in my twenties, I was naïve, adventurous, romantic, a little patriotic and also primarily, because my husband decided to go and I thought it was my duty to go with him. To answer the above questions in detail, I have to go back to my childhood and trace how my thoughts and character developed.

My Childhood

In the spring of 1922 my mother was pregnant with her second child. My father took her from Hong Kong to Macau, a Portuguese colony only three hours from Hong Kong by steamboat. My mother went to the well-known Portuguese obstetrician Dr. Barros for a pregnancy check-up. When it was over, with a solemn face, Dr. Barros told my parents that my mother was not pregnant but had a tumour in her abdomen.

My parents were shocked at the news. They had entered the doctor's office in such a blissful state of mind expecting to welcome a second child only to be

told such dreadful news. Instantly, both my parents wept bitterly in front of the doctor. Back in Hong Kong my father took my mother to Dr. Allen, our family doctor, for a second pregnancy test, and at the end Dr. Allen confirmed that my mother was pregnant, and told her that in the early spring of the next year her second baby would be born and she should take the baby to see Dr. Barros in Macau and show him that the baby was the “tumour” in my mother’s abdomen. I was this baby.

I was born in 1923 to a well-to-do family in Hong Kong. I was the second child of seven children. The third daughter died at the age of one and according to my horoscope my family believed that my feet were too “heavy” and stepped on the sister below me, killing her. My mother made me wear a golden band around my right ankle to prevent me from stepping on other siblings. I hated this band because it made me different from other children who often laughed at me. One day while alone in the street I secretly kicked off the gold band and freed myself. When my mother found out, instead of reprimanding me she was happy about it and said whoever found the gold band would take on the curse from our family.

My paternal grandfather, Huang Jianhou, came to Hong Kong at the age of fifteen from a nearby village in south China and worked his way up. He had three wives, or rather, one wife and two concubines. They bore him five sons and eleven daughters, and my father, Huang Rui, was the second son. Eight daughters left home upon marrying, but all five sons and their families together with the three unmarried daughters lived with my grandfather, in a three-storey building.

Upon arrival in Hong Kong, my grandfather was an errand boy in a herbal shop in the North-South Herbal Market, then a salesman, later an accountant, then the manager, until finally with some savings he bought the shop from its owner. He was thrifty, careful in business and blessed by fortune, and his life was a success story. He had a thriving business in the North South Herbal Market in Hong Kong and he expanded his business to Macau.

When my grandfather was alive, he lived in a big house with his five sons and family, together with his unmarried daughters. This was indeed a house of great excitement and turmoil. As far back as I could recall, a day rarely passed by without something new happening — fights among the children; servants’ brawls; a son coming home dead drunk past midnight; while another son brought

home a prostitute in broad daylight; concubines eloping with street vendors; men smoking opium and women gambling at mahjong tables and race courses. We children watched it all with bewildered eyes. Our greatest attractions were the constant ancestral worships in the Hall of Ceremony, when all the candles were lit and delicacies were offered to the gods. We would wait patiently for the ceremony to be over, with eyes glued on our favourite dishes which we would grab once worship was over, or when the servants were unaware we would steal something before the end.

When my grandfather died, his sons closed the house and took their families to live separately elsewhere. His five sons and three unmarried daughters each inherited five houses spread over the territories of Hong Kong, Macau and Haiphong in Vietnam. My grandfather's idea was never to have one's property concentrated in one place.

With his inheritance my father opened up an import and export firm in Hong Kong. We lived quite comfortably and my 11th Uncle, 12th and 13th Aunts came to live with us as they were not of age and Father was their trustee and guardian.

Father was not a good businessman, and failed in every venture he laid hands on. He closed his import and export firm soon when he found it was not making money. He tried setting up a bakery shop, and supplied bread and pastries to the naval ships in Hong Kong's harbour. But suddenly the price of flour rose and it became unprofitable to run the bakery. After the bakery Father turned his hands to a fireworks factory in Macau and it was mismanaged and the manager absconded with a lot of money. Finally my mother said he had been losing money all along and with the money lost they could take a very good tour of the country. Father took her advice, and in about 1930 Father decided to take a trip to Shanghai to visit Auntie Frances and from there visited Suzhou, Nanking and other places in China. Father and Mother also took my uncles and aunts living with us at that time. Their group of five consisted of Father and Mother, 11th Uncle who was Father's young brother, Mother's 13th Sister and 14th Brother. We six children were left at home under the care of nannies and Mother's 5th elder sister came to live with us to look after the household and teach us Chinese. We were too young to protest for not taking us with them, and when my parents, after a two-month tour of China, brought back loads of presents it made up for their neglecting us.

My parents brought back a big toy motor car for my brother Gia Yuan who would ride it in the streets to the envy of his neighbouring friends. To us four girls they gave each a beautiful doll and sewing kits. After the tour, Father sat down to plan for the future. He admitted he was not good in business and did not want to risk another venture. He thought he could become a broker in the stock exchange market which did not require him to invest money. From then on, until his death in the 1960s Father was a stockbroker and supported his family with whatever he made. Father's inheritance dwindled through the years and he sold one house after another until we had to live in a rented house. In the space of twenty years, we moved from larger to smaller flats in Hong Kong. The last house we lived in before we left after the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong in 1941 was 2nd Floor, 776 Nathan Road in Kowloon.

On the whole, our family was fairly well provided for. Mother was a loving mother but she spent a lot of her time at mahjong like most housewives in Hong Kong. Father worked hard and gave his family whatever he could make as a broker. Sometimes it was enough to cover our daily necessities, and when we were in want Father would sell one of his houses until he had nothing left to sell. We children often envied the clothes and things our friends of richer families had but we never complained. Time passed very quickly, and soon we found ourselves under the Japanese occupation, and we had to plan to leave Hong Kong where we had lived for three generations.

My maternal grandmother had scores of grandchildren but I was her favourite. While our family lived in Hong Kong, she lived in Guangzhou, in a big four-storey building that housed her six sons and families. Every summer holiday my mother would send me to live with my grandmother for a month or two and I liked it, for there was a change of playmates with new excitements and adventures.

Grandma went to the United States as a child bride. According to her horoscope, it was believed that she should be a concubine, for being a first regular wife, she would bring calamities to her husband and herself. So her mother married her off to my grandfather, a successful businessman in San Francisco, twenty years her senior and who had a wife in the countryside of Taishan. Grandma became a "pintou," that is, not a concubine but one who had the same status as the first wife. Grandma lived in San Francisco for twelve years; during this time she bore eight children, the youngest being my mother

who was brought back to Hong Kong with the rest of the family just before the earthquake and great fire in San Francisco. We children loved to hear Grandma talk about her life in America, or the “Golden Mountain” as was known to the Chinese. She told us she never saw a “Golden Mountain” in America but the foreigners were all big and burly and very curious about the Chinese. They were particularly interested in her little bound feet, and frequently asked to have her embroidered coloured shoes. Grandma had to make her own shoes, as she could not buy them in shops. Then Grandma would pause, look down at her feet and sigh before continuing to tell us how her mother bound her feet when she was only five years old. The agony was tremendous; after all these years she could still remember the pain. She cried every night until her pillow was soaked with tears. That was why, she told us, she never bound my mother’s feet nor the feet of any of her other daughters. In the evening, when Grandpa came home, he would ask her whether she had bound the feet of the girls, and she always put it off, saying she would do it tomorrow. “You had better do it soon,” Grandpa would say, “otherwise it would be difficult to get good husbands for the girls.” Grandma kept putting it off until the girls were too big to have their feet bound. “But why did you have your feet bound, Grandma?” I asked. “Well,” Grandma replied, “bound feet were supposed to make a woman physically and artistically appealing, for when we walked, our bodies would sway seductively. Also it showed we came from rich families and that we would not have to do hard labour. And of course, it was easy for men to control women with bound feet, who could not run away from their servitude. My parents were very proud of my small feet which people called ‘three-inch golden lilies.’ At one time they were so small that I could stand on a matchbox. My mother thought she had done a good job. She used a very long strip of white cloth to bind my feet when I was but five years old. She bent the four smaller toes and bound them down very tightly, leaving the first big toe outside. As time passed this stayed in shape, and the feet were not allowed to grow. But times have changed, and it is fortunate people have different ideas now and you girls can now gallop around like wild horses.”

I liked spending my summer holidays at Grandma’s big house which had a winding staircase running from the fourth floor to the ground floor. Tomboy as I was, I never walked down the stairs but would slide down the banister. Often

when I reached the bottom of the stairs my eyes would catch Grandma's black skirt and tiny feet before I saw her whole person waiting for me with a feather duster in her hand. She would demand that I bend over the bench there and then, and with all her might hit both sides of the bench, missing me in between. My screams made my cousins think that Grandma was giving me a severe beating. But Grandma had the softest heart and would never touch a hair of mine.

In all the twelve years that Grandma had lived in San Francisco, she only learned one English sentence. She often clapped her hands and shouted at the servants, saying, "Shut up. Chop, chop" when she wanted them to hurry on with their work. The servants looked on her with awe and thought their mistress could speak a foreign language. As I was studying in an English school at that time, I knew that was the only sentence she knew in English, so I asked her why she did not know more English. "During the twelve years in Jin Shan (the Golden Mountain)," she said, "I never had the opportunity to go outside the house. When our ship arrived from Hong Kong, a sedan chair carried me into the sitting room of our house. I went upstairs, and my eight children were born there. Your mother was the youngest. When we left Jin Shan, a sedan chair again came into the sitting room, and I was carried to the ship. I never talked to a foreigner there but often heard your Grandfather clapping his hands and calling to the servants, "Shut up! Chop! Chop!"

Grandma's house was full of excitement and chaos. After Grandpa passed away, she lived in a big house with her six sons and families and one unmarried daughter. I loved to go into the servants' quarters in the basement and listen to the conversation, for the servants seemed to know all the happenings of each individual and the latest news. Ah Ma was the housekeeper who kept everyone in place and who summed up what the others had to say. She was the law and authority among the servants. "See that all of you clean up the house tomorrow," Ah Ma ordered after dinner one evening. "Tomorrow, Third Master will bring his concubine home." "I hear she is from a nearby village and has loosened feet," added Lai Hou, the slave girl, who prided herself in knowing that the new concubine's feet had been bound once but was loosened later. Often this was a sign of declining fortune in the family and the prospect that the girl might have to do hard labour in the future. Ah Ma added, "There will be a ceremony and she will kow-tow to Number One and the Old Lady. Ah Er, be sure that you have the

tea at hand for her to serve Number One (the first wife) and the Old Lady.” “But last time, when Second Master brought home his concubine, his Number One declined her kow-tow,” said Lai Hou. “You silly ass,” Ah Ma retorted, “Second Master’s Number One is a stepmother, not his first wife, so she should show modesty because of her humble position in the family.” Lai Hou showed much curiosity and interest in the family affairs and continued, “I can never forget the commotion we had when Fifth Master brought home his concubine.” “She was a Pipa Girl. That meant she was not allowed to serve any other men other than our Fifth Master,” Ah Ma added. “Poor girl, she was sold to the brothel at the age of five. She started out by being a servant girl taking care of the needs of the other girls. When she became of age at fifteen she became a Pipa Girl serving Fifth Master exclusively. Fifth Master would do anything for her and spent money lavishly to make her happy. When her baby girl was born, the baby room was decorated like the bed chamber of a princess. I’ve never seen the likes. But then she was never satisfied. One day when Fifth Master was on a business trip she left with her baby. Months afterwards we heard she was in Shanghai living with a rich businessman. After some time Fifth Master found a stepmother for the three children his first wife left behind after her death. One evening, when Fifth Master came home after work, he threw a newspaper on the table, and his newly married wife read on the first page news on the suicide of Fifth Master’s concubine. Before she drank the bottle of lysol poison she telephoned to her lover and said that as he refused to divorce his wife and marry her, she would take her own life, leaving all her money to her little daughter. She also asked that her daughter be taken back to Hong Kong and put under the care of her former girlfriend living in Happy Valley. Now, that’s enough!” Ah Ma stopped abruptly. “Back to work all of you,” she ordered.

After Grandpa’s death, Grandma became a young widow who inherited a large fortune. Grandma was addicted to mahjong gambling, and surrounded by swindlers she became their victim and soon lost all that she inherited. She even spent the inheritance of my young aunt and uncle who were not of age at the time of Grandpa’s death. My 13th Aunt and 14th Uncle had to come and live with us, supported by my parents. 13th Aunt or Aunt Dulcie shared my room and for many years we were very close friends. I loved to hear Aunt Dulcie telling me things about my mother as a girl and how my father met her. Mother used to

attend a teachers' training school which my father's younger seventh sister was also attending. Mother and 7th Aunt were in the same class. At an open school meeting, my father went as his sister's guardian and saw on the wall an essay entitled, "Give us back our Three Northern Provinces!" written by my mother. The Japanese had just overrun Manchuria and occupied the three northern provinces in China. The calligraphy was excellent. My father was very impressed. When he went home he told his parents that this was the girl he wanted to marry and that he would wed no other than her. So matchmakers were summoned and the wedding took place. My mother's "Give us back our Three Northern Provinces" essay aroused a sense of patriotism in me and I started to think of other Chinese territories occupied by foreign powers, particularly Hong Kong which was then a British colony. In school we never learnt about the history of Hong Kong and how it was occupied by the British. Once I asked our history teacher and she evaded my question.

About my schooling, at the age of four, I was sent to a neighbouring Chinese school run by an erstwhile scholar of the Imperial Court. Master Zhang was known for his knowledge of the classics and the discipline he demanded from his students. My parents' ideas of good education consisted of strict discipline.

My first day in school was unforgettable. I was only four. We started the day off by memorizing classics from Mencius and Confucius. It was boring and immensely difficult. All the passages were read by Master Zhang in his singsong tone, sounding like a totally different language. The hours crept by and finally we came to the last class, which was calligraphy. The Chinese brush seemed to be a heavy pole weighing in my hand, and I just could not keep it straight. Master Zhang walked up and down the aisle to inspect each of us, and the slightest inclination of the brush other than a ninety degrees perpendicular would bring his rod on our young knuckles. Oh! Would this torture ever end? Then lo and behold, the boy next to me had his head on the desk facing me. He was fast asleep. The temptation was greater than I could bear. Dipping my brush in the ink pad, I started to draw on his face. First I drew a moustache, which suited him, I thought. Then I put rings round his eyes to form spectacles. I was just pondering as to what I should do next when the bell rang and up sat the boy. The whole class was roaring with laughter when they saw him, but Master Zhang was not amused. He asked me to stand in the corner of the room while the other children went home. Master

Zhang sent a note home with me. The chiding and punishment continued. My mother decided that Master Zhang's school might not be the ideal place for me to get my preliminary education after all, and to my relief that was my first and last day with Master Zhang.

A few days later, my mother's sister, Auntie Frances, enrolled me in Diocesan Girls' School, where she was studying. Auntie Frances was planning to leave school to get married, so the principal Miss Sawyer called me Frances, after my Aunt Frances. I am grateful to my parents for sending me to the best school in the colony when I was only four years old.

Diocesan Girls' School was affiliated with the Church of England. It was opened in 1860 as the Diocesan Native Female Training School for Chinese girls. The school was established with funds collected mainly from the European community by Mrs. Smith, wife of the first bishop of Hong Kong. In 1878, the school was placed under the new grant-in-aid scheme and later boys were also admitted. In 1883 the Chinese revolutionary leader Dr. Sun Yat-sen was a day boy in the school. The School Curriculum stated that, "We are interested less that students should acquire a mass of formal knowledge than that they should learn to behave intelligently in the kind of situation they are likely to meet, less in what they know than in what they can do."

In Diocesan Girls' School, not only did I obtain a good foundation in reading, writing and arithmetic, but I also learnt Christian morals as well. The motto of our school was "Daily Giving Service." Taking the first letter of each word would be D.G.S., which is the shortened form for Diocesan Girls' School. At an early age, I picked up some simple ideas of serving others less fortunate than us, and that it was more blessed to give than to take.

I accepted the Christian faith and its doctrines. Most of the teachers there were school "ma'ms" sent from England. They were strict and demanding, but with a heart of gold. A lot of extra-curricular activities were organized outside class. Our school established a "Boys' Club," which took in many newspaper boys in Kowloon, a small peninsular just north of Hong Kong island. They came to us every evening for an hour of Chinese lessons, after which they were given a light meal. We also opened an orphanage, taking in the unwanted babies in town. After class we went there to knit and sew, and look after the babies. On Saturdays and Sundays we would sell flowers for buttonholes, to raise money for

the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Doing good deeds became an enjoyment and part of our daily life.

Young as I was, I soon noticed that many of our teachers wore rings on their fourth fingers on their left hands. Later I found out that our teachers wore the rings in memory of their loved ones who died during World War I. The story of Miss Clark, our form teacher, brought tears to my eyes. There were six siblings in her family. She had five brothers and she was the only girl. Her four elder brothers joined the British Army at the start of the war, and one after another her family received the heartbreaking news that they were slain in battle. Then in 1918, her younger brother was of age to join the Army. He had not gone for long when the armistice was signed and Miss Clark and her aged father were looking forward to the return of the youngest member of the family until one day they received word that he was killed in action at the war front. Miss Clark stayed in England to take care of her aging and blind father. After his death she wanted a change in environment and came to Hong Kong to teach at Diocesan Girls' School.

While I was exposed to the Christian faith in school, at home my parents, who were strong believers of Confucius, taught me the doctrines of the great sage, the world-renowned ancient thinker and educator.

Confucius (551 B.C.–478 B.C.) lived at the end of the serfdom period, just before the feudal society in China. His remarkable philosophy and teachings won him the title of Great Master Kong or Kong Fuzi. His teachings have had a strong impact on the minds of the Chinese people throughout the ages. He had hundreds of thousands of students, and he travelled widely to propagate his philosophical theories. His basic teaching was that man was born good and those who lacked education turned bad. Influenced by the Confucian philosophy, for a long period in China, parents paid great attention to the education of their children, and the state laid strong emphasis on education. Confucius was also a political reformer, who advised the emperors to consolidate their power by means of reform. He propounded many thoughts and principles which paved the way for the feudal society after him.

Confucius' idea of society was a man's world, with the subjugation of women. He placed women among rascals and bad elements, saying that they should be held aloof. As a child I was taught the Confucian doctrines of the "Three Obediences," which meant that "as a girl she must obey her father, as a wife she must obey her

husband, and as a widow in old age she must obey her sons.” In 1949, when my husband decided to go back to work in mainland China under the communist rule, I went with him without much thought. To some extent, this was under the influence of Confucian teachings.

My Love for Poetry

I am always grateful to my parents for sending me to Diocesan Girls’ School which was then the best school in Hong Kong. I entered DGS in 1928 when I was four and stayed there for twelve years, matriculating in 1940. I spent twelve happy years in this school and today looking back I can see that the school shaped me and made me what I am today. Every achievement I have made belongs to DGS, just as Plato once said: “The direction which education starts a man will determine his future life.”

The one subject that interested me most was poetry and this has remained with me throughout my life. I always looked forward to our poetry class. I liked the melody and thoughts in poetry and I was able to connect them to myself. One of my favourite children’s poems was “The Doll.” When I was about five years old, my mother gave me a rag doll which I loved and which always slept with me. I was very upset when I lost it one day, but the poem “The Doll” gave me much comfort. It read:

I once had a sweet little doll, dears,
 The prettiest doll in the world.
 Her cheeks were so red and so white, dears,
 And her hair so charmingly curled.
 But I lost my poor little doll, dears,
 As I played on the heath one day,
 And I cried for her more than a week, dears,
 But could not find where she lay.

I found my sweet little doll, dears,
 As I played on the heath one day.
 Folk say she is terribly changed, dears,
 As her paint was all washed away.
 Her arms trodden off by the cows, dears,

And her hair not the least bit curled.
 But for old sake sakes, dears,
 She is still the prettiest doll in the world.

True enough, when I found my rag doll, although it was very much changed after exposure to the sun and rain on the rooftop, I was overjoyed and treasured her for many years after.

In America I often read this poem to children in schools. They have lots of toys but they do not know how to treasure them. I only hope this poem might help them to appreciate what they have.

The poem “If No One Ever Marries Me” helped me out of a difficult predicament. As a child, I was a tomboy. I loved to climb trees, slide down the banister and do the things which boys did. I often soiled and tore my clothes. My grandmother and my nurse often said to me, “You are so unlady-like, you will never get a husband.” This troubled me somewhat as I did not want to be different from other girls, until one day I found this poem by Lawrence Alma-Tadema which read:

If no one ever marries me —
 And I don't see why they should,
 For nurse says I'm not pretty,
 And I'm seldom very good —
 If no one ever marries me
 I shan't mind very much,
 I shall buy a squirrel in a cage
 And a little rabbit-hutch.

After this, what grown ups said about my being a tomboy never worried me any more. All I had to do was to rely on this poem for comfort.

A few lines by the Persian poet Omar Khyyam had a great impact on me. When I was about twelve years old, I had a quarrel with my best friend Elaine. I wrote a very strongly worded letter to Elaine. Before I gave it to her, I showed it to my teacher. The next day, my teacher returned the letter to me without saying a word but with some lines of poetry attached, which read:

The Moving Finger writes, and, having writ,
 Moves on: nor all thy piety or wit

Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

After reading these lines I tore up my letter. These lines saved our friendship which has remained to this very day.

Poetry is part of my life and gives me much inspiration. At the beginning of each year I make new year's resolutions, and I always choose one or two poems for guidance. In 2005 I chose two poems: "Ulysses" by Alfred Tennyson and "If" by Rudyard Kipling. From "Ulysses" this line stayed with me for the rest of the year:

To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.

With Kipling's "If," the inspiring lines were:

If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster,
And treat those two imposters just the same.

Also, at the age of eighty I found these lines from "Ulysses" most encouraging: "Old age has yet his honour and his toil." These lines helped me to work out a plan for another ten years, retiring at the age of ninety.

When I was four, Auntie Frances was about to get married and she brought me to DGS where she was studying and was about to leave. When Auntie Frances left, her classmate Ida Ng who was living next door took me to school every day. Auntie Ida later married Sir Y. K. Kan and became Lady Ida.

We children were very nosy and when Uncle Y. K. was in England studying, Vera Wong (with whom Auntie Ida was staying), my elder sister Annie and I would go through the mail whenever the postman arrived and see if there were any letters bearing the English stamps from Uncle Y. K. for Auntie Ida. When Uncle Y. K. graduated and came back to Hong Kong, sometimes when he came to visit Auntie Ida he would wait for her downstairs and when she came down we would giggle watching them go out arm in arm. This would be the subject of our conversation for the day. After graduating from DGS Auntie Ida became a teacher at Mei Fang Middle School. She was very patient and kind with her students and was a good teacher.

The motto of DGS has always been Daily Giving Service. It was taught to the students in their daily practice. The school was affiliated to the Church of

England and students were taught the Christian faith and the first lesson every day would be Scripture where students studied the Bible. The school took in disabled children and we were taught to be kind to them and take care of them. We had a blind girl called Joy and we would lead her in and out of the school whenever we met her. Mona Swanson was a hunchback, and whenever we had drill display she would be placed at the head to lead us into the field. We were all kind to Mona. After school we had a lot of activities. We visited the School of the Blind and the School of the Deaf and Mute. Near the school there was an orphanage which picked up the unwanted babies in Kowloon. After school we went to the orphanage to knit garments for the babies and to take care of them.

The teachers were mostly sent out from England. Miss Sawyer was the headmistress during the eleven years I was there, and in the last year when I was in the matriculation class, Miss Sawyer retired and Miss Gibbins took over. Miss Sawyer was very strict and stern and we all were very much afraid of her. When she was angry she would grow red in the face and she would roll her round blue eyes. She would then take off her pince-nez which she usually clipped on the bridge of her nose. We were not allowed to speak Chinese in school, only English could be spoken. If Miss Sawyer found out anyone was speaking Chinese she would be very angry and punish the student by having her write a hundred lines. The English standard of the DGS girls was the best in Hong Kong. This was achieved at the expense of Chinese. Today this shortcoming is made up as both English and Chinese are now emphasized.

Miss Walters taught us singing in the kindergarten. She was petite and had dark hair. The older students called her “Chick” as she walked quickly like a little chick and talked with a clipped accent. I loved singing and Miss Walters would often stop playing the piano in the middle of our lesson and turn to me, peering above her glasses on her nose and say, “Sing it my dear, don’t say it.” I took her hint and knew there and then that I was not good at singing. After kindergarten Mr. Baldwin taught us singing, and we noticed that Miss Walters liked Mr. Baldwin for during our singing class we often saw Miss Walters walking outside our classroom and when class was over very often we saw her waiting for Mr. Baldwin outside the door. One year Mr. Baldwin went to England on furlough and when he came back he was married and brought his newly married wife. We felt sorry for Miss Walters.

In the first year at kindergarten, I sat next to Victor Wong, the boy who lived next door. We played together a lot, and one day he asked me to marry him. I did not know what marrying meant and I said I would ask my mother about that. When I asked my mother, she was very surprised and in a harsh tone said children should not think or talk of such things. I told Victor this and he never mentioned it again. Victor left DGS after completing two more years in the kindergarten and went to a boys' school. As we were neighbours we saw each other often and played together. At Auntie Frances's wedding Victor was the page boy and ring bearer and I was the flower girl. Miss Clark, the DGS drawing teacher, designed our costumes. Mine was a beautiful pink satin gown and Victor had a white suit which fitted him well. We held hands and with the other free hand each of us held the trailing veil. When we were walking to the altar Victor held my hand so tightly that it became uncomfortable and I tried to free myself but he would not let go and a fight between us started and was put to an end by our mothers. At the age of twelve Victor contracted tuberculosis and sadly died a year later. Our family grieved over him with the Wong family. In the 1930s TB was an incurable disease.

Miss White taught us in Class Six and she lived at Nathan Road near Jordan Road where DGS was located. The two Wynyard sisters lived in Hillwood Road and walked to school, often passing where Miss White lived. One morning the Wynyard sisters told us that on the previous day in passing Miss White's house they saw a handsome blond gentleman carrying Miss White from the car and take her upstairs. This piece of news was the talk of our class for the day. Soon afterwards Miss White told us in class that she was getting married soon. We all cheered "Hurrah!" to congratulate her.

Today, girl schools do not pay much attention to sewing, but the sewing and knitting I learnt at DGS helped me to set up my hobby of making my own garments which I often boast about to my friends. Singing class was also a joy. Mr. Baldwin taught us famous folk songs and classical songs which now I often hum to myself even though I do not have a good voice or talent for music.

Miss Mason taught us when we were in Class Seven. We all admired her. She was pretty and kind and wore a beautiful diamond ring on her fourth finger. Most of the teachers lived in school. One morning Miss Mason did not come down for breakfast which was unusual and when Miss Sawyer saw her missing

from her place she sent for her. She was found sobbing violently. When Miss Mason came to class for the first lesson, her eyes were swollen and we noticed that her engagement ring was no longer on her fourth finger. We girls seemed to know and notice everything. Poor Miss Mason had received a letter from her fiancé the night before who called their engagement off unilaterally. No wonder Miss Mason wept so bitterly. We were all sorry for her. A few years later Miss Mason met the right man and became Mrs. Rathmall. After World War II Mrs. Rathmall resided in Australia and visited Hong Kong occasionally. Sometimes when she came she would live at Elaine Ho's flat and we visited her. Elaine organized parties for her and when we attended we would give her "li shi" (red package with money) to buy gifts to take back to Australia.

When I was in Class Seven, my sister Annie was in Class Four as she was three years older than me. One day Annie was ill and asked me to tell her form mistress Miss Bedford that she would be absent from class that day. I did as she asked me and when I saw Miss Bedford I told her Annie was ill and would stay at home for a day. Miss Bedford asked what was the matter with Annie and, thinking of a newly learnt word, I wanted to try it on Miss Bedford and I said, "Annie has syphilis." Miss Bedford asked me to say it again, and loud and clear I repeated "syphilis," to which Miss Bedford smiled and dismissed me. When I went home I repeated to Annie what I had told Miss Bedford she became very mad and slapped me in the face. I was surprised that she should be so mean to me after I helped her. It was much later that I found out why Annie was so mad with me that day.

Most of our teachers were women, although in Class Two Dr. Baldwin Lee taught us English literature. He was from the United States and got his doctor's degree at Columbia University. In the 1920s and 30s the teachers at DGS were not required to be university graduates, so we were glad to have Dr. Lee with a PhD Degree to teach us. Miss Steele who taught us composition in Class Three got her MA at Edinburgh University, and we all liked her too.

In Class Two we took the School Leaving Examination and those who did not want to go to the university didn't need to go to Class One which was the matriculation class. They could leave school as long as they passed the School Leaving Examination.

A Jewish teacher from Germany called Miss Last became our drawing teacher this year. In 1939 ship loads of Jewish women were sent from Nazi Germany to whichever place would accept them. Hong Kong built concentration camps in the New Territories to house the Jewish women. Miss Last was a genius at drawing. She invented a paper-folding toy, which when folded up was the face of Hitler, and when opened up it became the shape of a pig. Miss Last talked with a strong German accent, and at the end of the class, she would say, "Now, disappear children," which sent us roaring with laughter.

We realized that after this year of Class Two some of us might be leaving school and we decided that we would do something memorable together before we separated. We decided we would put on the play *Robin Hood and His Merry Men*. We had great fun and Eva Churn who was tall and well built took the role of Robin Hood, and Sylvia Rainer, the prettiest girl in class became Maid Marian. I took the role of Maid Marian's nurse; maybe I was given this part because I acted somewhat like an old lady and my nickname was Profy, short for Professor. I wore spectacles and the girls said I looked learned like a professor. The performance of *Robin Hood* was a success and proved that we had chosen the right play. Besides the hero, the heroine and other acting roles, everyone who did not have a role became the merry men. The whole class was involved and the play became the highlight of the last year for those who were leaving and for those who would go on studying in Class One. This year was a time of comradeship to be remembered.

When we were in Class Two we heard that Miss Sawyer would retire soon and we girls pondered as to who our next headmistress would be. When Miss Sawyer went on furlough the acting headmistress was always Mrs. Thomas. When we were in Class Two one day, our form mistress Mrs. Thomas did not turn up, which was unusual. Normally when a teacher was absent there would be a substitute. When Mrs. Thomas turned up after the break her eyes were all red and swollen from crying. We soon found out that Mrs. Thomas had applied to be the next headmistress and was turned down by Bishop Hall who was the bishop of Hong Kong. Soon after, our new headmistress Miss Gibbins arrived and also became our form mistress of Class One and history teacher. Mrs. Thomas held a party at her home to welcome Miss Gibbins and our class was invited to meet the new headmistress. At the party Mrs. Thomas told us she had resigned from DGS and would set up a new school with her husband.

My twelve years at DGS taught me what a good school should be like. It not only trained us academically, it also taught us to be good citizens. What I know today mostly came from DGS. I remember most of the things I learnt there. As a child I learnt that “A little thing is a little thing, but faithfulness in little things is a great thing.” All my life I have wanted to do some useful things for others and doing little things brings me tremendous pleasure. The children’s poems I learnt in kindergarten stayed with me all my life. A favourite poem of mine was “Binker” which reads:

Binker is what I call him, is a secret of my own,
And Binker is the reason why I never feel alone.
Playing in the nursery, or sitting on the stairs,
Whatever I am busy at, Binker will be there.

Even now I rarely feel lonely. When alone I would recite this poem.

Every morning when I wake up I have developed the habit of reciting these lines by Robert Louis Stevenson:

The world is so full of a number of things,
I’m sure we should all be as happy as kings.

There is something special about DGS girls. The motto “Daily Giving Service” guides us throughout our lives. Take for example Auntie Ida who later became Lady Ida Kan (wife of Sir Y. K. Kan). She lived at Poshan Road and whenever she went to town and was driving uphill back to her home, she would pick up the servants she saw lugging their groceries uphill. She did this good deed quite often and so naturally all the servants in the vicinity called her the “kind good lady.”

Another example was Elaine Ho. In class she was the most mischievous. The room of Miss Cunningham, our mathematics teacher, was adjacent to our classroom. Elaine often threw cockroaches and lizards into her room but later when she left school, and Miss Cunningham retired, Elaine often visited her and took care of her in London.

After the matriculation class Elaine entered the Northcote Teachers’ Training College and upon graduation she worked at Jardine Matheson for many decades and became the indispensable secretary of three generations of Taipans. She knew

everything in the company and was much respected by the executives and all the staff members. When our classmate Cecilia Lam's husband died and Cecilia was left with her two young children going through a most difficult time, Elaine helped her to look for a job.

Elaine's eldest sister Helen did a wonderful job during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong. She worked at the concentration camp for Westerners and she secretly helped the British internees at the risk of her own life.

Elaine's sister Yvonne often helped others less fortunate than she. She often visited her classmate Vera Wong's home. When Vera's family had difficulties Yvonne would come to aid them. Vera's mother often said how grateful she was to Yvonne for her kindness. She helped Vera get a job as secretary at the police station soon after the war in 1945.

Another DGS old girl I must mention here is Helen Ho who is now ninety-three years old. She and her sister Stella were ballet dancers and whenever we had drill display at school both of them would come back and coach us dancing. Helen's youngest sister Daphne was paralyzed after her stroke, and Helen took good care of her baby sister. Grievously, Daphne passed away several years ago.

DGS has produced countless students of high academic excellence, among them, Joyce Anderson who later became Dr. Joyce Symons. She was five years my senior and she was my role model in school. She was the head prefect in her matriculation class and entered the University of Hong Kong after she won the King Edward Scholarship at the matriculation examination. In 1939 she became a geography teacher at DGS and in 1953 she was the first local girl to become the headmistress, a position she held for thirty-two years. She made many important changes to the school, which laid a firm foundation for the school in its future years.

In 1969 she was appointed as urban councillor and in 1972 was named an unofficial member of the Legislative Council on which she served for four years. She was honoured with an OBE (Order of the British Empire) for her work as an educator and in 1978, she received a CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire) in recognition of her contribution for her public service. In 1975 Dr. Symons was the first women to sit on the Executive Council in Hong Kong.

In 1984 I decided to get my Hong Kong citizenship back. When I left Hong Kong in 1949 for mainland China I never thought that birth certificates and other travelling documents were important and did not take any with me. At the immigration office I was asked to produce my birth certificate or find sponsors to prove that I had been a Hong Kong citizen. Joyce Symons kindly acted as my sponsor. My two other sponsors were Elaine Ho, secretary at the Jardine Matthesons and the late Lady Ida Kan, wife of Sir Y. K. Kan.

While in Hong Kong in 1984 I visited Joyce Symons at DGS on several occasions and we had talks on a wide range of subjects. During one visit Joyce asked for my opinion about the preparation of the school for the 1997 handover of Hong Kong. She told me the bishop had suggested that the school should switch to using Chinese to teach all subjects instead of using English. To this I did not agree. I said that among other things, one of the good traditions of DGS was that it excelled in its English level which was the best in Hong Kong. DGS girls never had trouble looking for jobs. Companies would pick DGS girls among other candidates for their good English standard, reliability and their solid all-round education. I mentioned my elder sister Annie as example. As soon as she graduated from the DGS Commercial Class after her matriculation in 1936, within a month she found work in a big trading company in Hong Kong. There were many applicants for the post but she was the first choice. In China, I said, many schools were laying emphasis on English teaching and some were adopting the English language as the media for teaching. There was an English-learning hot wave spreading throughout the country as the time was drawing near for China's entry into WTO. I added that I would like to see the teaching of Chinese being strengthened in DGS, and as Putonghua is the official language in China, Putonghua should be taught by native speakers and not by Cantonese teachers. The teaching of Chinese should start as early as possible if teachers were available. We recalled the time when we were at school in the 1920s how Miss Sawyer never allowed us to speak Chinese in school. Of course, that was all past history. In going round the school I was happy to see the science laboratories and libraries filled with volumes of books which were not seen in our days at school. Joyce agreed with my viewpoints.

At the age of eighty-six, sadly Dr. Joyce Symons died after a fatal fall in her London home. We shall always remember her dearly.

Dr. Bobby Kotewall was at DGS during Joyce Symons's time. When she graduated from the University of Hong Kong in 1939 she continued her studies in England and obtained her certificate of education at Oxford University. She did excellent work as the principal of the co-ed St. Paul's College from 1954 to 1984. In 1963 the governor of Hong Kong conferred on her the title of MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire). She was supervisor of many schools and a committee member of a number of important educational institutions. After her death she left her inheritance to set up scholarships for various schools and universities in Hong Kong.

End of Middle School

In Class Two I took the School Leaving Certificate Examination and passed it with honours. My form mistress Mrs. Thomas was particularly pleased with my achievements. As an award she gave me a ticket to attend a lecture given by Madam Sun Yat-sen, wife of the late revolutionary leader of China. This was an indelible experience. The lecture took place in the Hong Kong City Hall and was attended by an audience of two thousand including the elite in Hong Kong's society. Madam Sun spoke in fluent English in a most sophisticated style. She spoke about the current situation of the Sino-Japanese war and gave a vivid description of the Japanese invaders' atrocities. She reported in detail on the Nanking massacre where 300,000 innocent civilians were killed. The audience was moved and spellbound by her eloquence. At the end of the lecture a plate was passed around for voluntary donations. A handsome sum was collected for China's fight against Japanese aggression. Here in Hong Kong, although the Japanese invasion was right at our doorstep, people knew very little about the war, much less being concerned over it. Madam Sun's speech prompted me to think about China's destiny.

When I was a teenager I began to wonder about the lives led by my aunts and uncles in Grandma's home. The sound of mahjong was revolting to me as were the vices and corruption around me. Gradually I came to feel there was no way to run from all this. I could not control the outside world. What I could control was myself. It dawned on me that I could seek inward peace and happiness. Guided by my Christian faith, I made up my mind then to try to lead a worthwhile life.

After all, life is short. I decided to try my best to carry out the good morals of Christianity. Vaguely, this became my purpose in life.

The end of my secondary education came sooner than I expected. Before I realized it I was in Class One, the matriculation class, and the last year of school. The eighteen girls in our class had grown up together, and most of us had shared twelve years of happy school life together. It was time for us to think about our future. Some wanted to go to the university, others wanted to take a short vocational course and then work, and a few planned to become ladies of leisure.

When my elder sister Annie matriculated from DGS my parents were reluctant to send her to university. Their old-fashioned idea was that it was a waste for a girl to go to university, for marriage was her ultimate goal. They thought that the more learned a girl was, the harder it would be for her to find a husband. They believed in the old Chinese saying: "A girl without talent is virtuous." Annie took a commercial course and worked for two years as a stenographer before she went to Shanghai and entered St. John's University. I thought of my sister's example when I planned for my future. I was prepared for three options. The university was my highest goal. If that should fail I would take the entrance exam to the Northcote Teachers' Training College. The film *Florence Nightingale* had a strong influence over me. I thought that to be a nurse would also be a good calling so I applied to the Queen Mary Hospital to become a nurse and took their examination. The Northcote Teachers' Training College accepted me and I passed the matriculation with honours in Scripture. I talked with Miss Gibbins about my future and she encouraged me to go to university. When I told her my parents were reluctant to support me in a university career she told me there was money around in Hong Kong and I should hunt for it. I went to the big firms hunting for scholarships and finally found that the tycoon Eu Tong Seng's donor scholarship was not filled up yet at the University of Hong Kong. My good friend Daphne Ho accompanied me to the HKU registrar to apply for the donor scholarship and after waiting for a month it was granted to me.

Starting the university career was exciting. I worked hard in my studies, and as the donor scholarship only paid for my tuition which was \$400 at the time, I taught at St. Mary's Night School at Nathan Road to pay for my travelling expenses and food.

I was grateful to Daphne for helping me get the scholarship and spent some time hanging out with her. She had a government scholarship and she introduced me to her brother Kenny who was a second-year medical student. We dated for a month or two, and for some reason which I have forgotten, we quarrelled and stopped seeing each other.

My next date was Lo Wing Yung, in our class. I noticed that after class someone was always following me and it turned out to be Lo. It was his third year in the university. First he entered the medical faculty after his matriculation, and after the first year he changed to the science faculty. In his third year at the university he again changed to the arts faculty. After three years studying at HKU he enrolled in the Dentistry Department of the Philippines University. My parents did not want Lo to be dating me. Lo's family had monopolized the casino business in Macau for several generations. My parents thought that the casino business was unethical and they were glad that Lo was leaving Hong Kong for the Philippines. At first we corresponded for some time but later lost touch and when the war in the Pacific broke out we completely lost contact.

I spent one and a half years at HKU. I studied hard and had plans for myself. My professor said I stood a good chance of getting a scholarship to England after I got my BA degree. In my class was a young man called Yung Hsien Liang who won the King Edward Scholarship, the highest scholarship in Hong Kong. He wrote very good essays, and in class Professor Birch would ask me to read his essays to the whole class. Yung wrote the best essays and Professor Birch considered me the best reader in class. I was also asked to read during other lessons in English. This built up my confidence and self-esteem and I realized I could work to become a good teacher with a good command of speaking skills and techniques.

The Japanese occupation of Hong Kong in 1941 cut short my studies at the university. In December 1984 I returned to my alma mater for the first time after a lapse of forty-four years. I was a member of the Guangzhou Jinan University delegation visiting HKU. The editor of the University's magazine *Convocation Newsletter* asked me to write an article for the magazine. The following article was published in the 1985 Issue No. 1 of *Convocation Newsletter*:

East Meets West

by Frances Wong

It was a bright December morning. Despite the cold weather, my heart was filled with warmth and excitement as I re-visited the University of Hong Kong after a lapse of forty-four years. During this period, Hong Kong has undergone great changes and has grown into a big cosmopolitan city, taking great strides forward in the fields of finance, cargo systems, mini-computers and many others. Particularly noticeable is that it has become a bridge linking China with the rest of the world. In this Hong Kong cannot be replaced by any other city in the world.

The changes that have taken place within the confines of Hong Kong University were no less remarkable. I was glad to see the Main Building with the old clock tower still standing there. It gave me a feeling of joy and homely welcome. Chiming the hour the old clock seemed to be rephrasing a line we had learnt in our school days, "Students come and students go, but I remain forever." What a flood of memories returned with this note! No wonder this building has been earmarked as relic of government protection. It is not only a monument in architecture built in 1911, but it is also a symbol of Hong Kong's educational achievements through the years.

I was greatly impressed by my recent visit to the University of Hong Kong. In a trice it has expanded beyond recognition. I was a student of the Faculty of Arts before the Japanese Occupation in December 1941. Although it already enjoyed a fine reputation in those days, Hong Kong University was comparatively small then, with a limited number of students and only a few faculties, about four or five. The school buildings used to cluster round the Main Building where we had most of our lectures. During my visit, I was happy to see the large number of women students on campus. In my days there were no more than a hundred woman students in the whole university and the majority of them were enrolled in the Faculty of Arts. I well remember that in 1940 when I entered the H.K.U., the Faculty of Engineering only had one woman student within the walls of its premises. Today, the number of women studying natural sciences has grown immensely.

The university ground was clean and orderly. Tall buildings met my eyes as I climbed the steps up to the Library Building. My only regret was that the vast areas of trees where we had rambled between classes had disappeared, giving way to new buildings. But I was glad to see the old pond halfway up the hill, with tropical trees around it, elegant and serene.

The Information Office and other members of the University staff on behalf of the University of Hong Kong gave us a warm reception. What impressed me most during this visit was the high degree of efficiency I witnessed in all undertakings. The reception given to our ten-member delegation from Jinan University was well organized. Every minute of our visit was profitably employed. We were amazed to find that the teachers of HKU had a work load about two to three times that of ours at Jinan. In the library we saw books borrowed and returned in a remarkably short time. In the students' restaurant we saw customers in their hundreds served during lunch time with good food, at cheap prices and great speed. Here in China, when we think of our four modernizations, we tend to think in terms of advance technology and machinery, often overlooking the virtues of good management and efficiency of work.

The University of Hong Kong has kept its good tradition, training batch after batch of graduates to serve the community. The Faculty of Medicine, enjoying a long-established prestige, has been turning out competent doctors for Hong Kong and elsewhere. What is worth mentioning is the high level of English HKU has always been well known for — a feature that will continue to benefit Hong Kong as a prominent world financial centre in the years to come.

At Jinan University, we are at present making every effort to raise our English level and conduct all classes in English so that we should be able to meet the increasing demands of China's open-door policy and our growing interaction with other countries. As most of our students come from Hong Kong, it is our duty to fit them for their work in that society. Certainly, English is one of the important subjects they must learn well. We also have in mind the increasing importance of English as a world Language of Wider Communication — English as a world lingua franca. With the rapid development of science and technology today, people all over the

world are getting more closely connected giving rise to the need of a common world language. And English, with its present asset, has every chance of undertaking this important role. In the teaching of English, it stands to reason that we should turn to our next door neighbour — the University of Hong Kong — for help and advice.

A month after my first visit, the deputy dean of Jinan's English Department, Mr. Fang Hanquan and I were invited to visit the Language Centre of Hong Kong University. During our one-week visit, we attended classes, visited the sound laboratory and computer room and exchanged views with the teaching staff on matters of mutual interest. Like the first, this visit was meaningful as well as joyful, and it was quite an eye-opener to us. We had the opportunity to observe how differently the classes were run from ours, how energetically the teachers supervised the students, how great the variety of methods used, and how actively and earnestly the students responded. All this had been most inspiring and encouraging.

In view of the growing importance of Hong Kong and its unique position, I sincerely hope that the University of Hong Kong will continue to evolve by giving special emphasis to its Chinese Studies (including Chinese history, geography and language). Studies of international affairs, international relations, world economy, the English language, modern science and technology should also receive due stress.

Indeed, there is much for us to learn from the University of Hong Kong, which will act as a window to the West and a bridge linking up China with the rest of the world. If the great English poet Rudyard Kipling were living today, I would be very surprised if he still wrote his famous line thus, "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet."

Times have changed.

Jinan University
Guangzhou
February, 1985.