

FRIENDS & TEACHERS

HONG KONG AND ITS PEOPLE 1953-87

三人行必有我師

James Hayes



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Chapter One

Starting Out: Hong Kong in the 1950s

It used to be said of Macau, Hong Kong's neighbour on the South China Coast, that it was 'a Chinese city, badly governed by the Portuguese' Hong Kong is an equally Chinese city, well and unemotionally governed by the British.¹

The British, on the whole, have been temporary members of the community, often spending many years here but tending to centre their lives upon England, to send their children there to be educated and retire there after their years of service in Hong Kong.²

'There you are, Hayes; those are the files, there's the girl, what are you waiting for? Get on with it, man!'

My military service with the British Commonwealth Division in Korea in 1953 was the true source of my life-long interest in East Asia, then known to me by the more magical-sounding name, 'the Far East'. Six months of soldiering among the Korean hills north of the Imjin River and a short local leave spent in Seoul and at the coast had aroused my curiosity about a land and people of which hitherto I had known almost next to nothing. On the dust-smothered drive back to the capital, there had been much to see in passing through the market towns and rural villages. The country people were still mostly in their traditional white and black garb; there were large red bulls to be seen, bearing their heavy loads as of yore; and the packmen and farmers still staggered along under the burdens lashed to their 'A' frames. Clearly, this was the old-style rural life, and I was fascinated. Our destination proved to be a war-scarred city; but a walk through the extensive grounds of one of the royal palaces with its forlorn, deserted buildings and neglected gardens fanned an interest that has never waned. When, a few years later, I returned to the Far East, it was Korea — together with present-day Malaysia, as seen on day visits

to Penang and Singapore from our troopship — that had made me retrace my steps. Hong Kong had not then seemed nearly as attractive; but it was the only posting available if I wanted to be an overseas civil servant in that part of the world.

In 1955, returned to London University and hard at work on a doctoral degree in history, I found myself becoming restive at the thought of spending my life as a university teacher. Arming myself with what I hoped were encouraging references, I applied for a post in the Administrative Grade of the Overseas Civil Service.³ After several interviews and months of waiting around, an official letter arrived, conveying acceptance and advising that I would be posted to Hong Kong as requested. It was then that I told the Colonial Office that I had been awarded a studentship to write a doctoral thesis and felt obliged to make an M.A. of it (another year's study) so as not to waste the university's time and goodwill. It was a presumptuous thing to do, but rather surprisingly a postponement was agreed. However, I was not to be sent on the usual one year's preparatory 'Devonshire Course', but would go out to Hong Kong by sea as soon as I had finished my dissertation.



Hong Kong in the early 1950s. The Royal Naval Dockyard is at the centre, with the Cricket Ground and the Hong Kong Club to the left. Courtesy, Hong Kong Museum of History.

WHEN I ARRIVED IN THE COLONY by the P and O liner *Canton* on 20 August 1956, it was not new to me. I had spent some weeks at Lo Wu and Dill's Corner Camps in the northern New Territories in early 1953, waiting to be called forward to join my regiment in Korea.⁴ However, this earlier visit at a cooler time of year was no preparation for the heat and humidity in the hottest month of the Hong Kong summer, and the stomach upsets that usually assailed the newcomer in those days made my introduction to the service something of an ordeal. Like most new 'cadets', I was attached to the Social Welfare Office of the then Secretariat for Chinese Affairs (the SCA) for initial familiarization purposes. Its lady social workers took me on their daily rounds, walking me up dark, cobwebbed stairs into stuffy crowded tenements, and visiting the premises of the 'Kaifongs' (neighbourhood associations) which provided cooked meals and other services for the needy. I staggered round feeling distinctly uncomfortable, but doing my best to be polite in English, as I knew not a word of Cantonese, the standard speech of Hong Kong and much of South China. Such visits, together with the formal calls on the Establishment Officer (to whom I had reported my arrival), the Colonial Secretary, and the Governor, as demanded by protocol, plus a few invitations to lunch, cocktails or dinner at the homes of some of my senior colleagues and their wives, rounded off this first week in the colony at the start of my new life. I was also entertained by colleagues of my own age, some married, some like me as yet single; and finding them to be a pleasant and congenial group of people, began to feel a little more reassured that joining the Hong Kong Civil Service had been the right thing to do.

Another sign that I was entering a new phase was the letter I soon received from the Establishment Branch advising me of my Chinese name. This was the usual practice and the selection was made by the SCA's Translation Office.⁵ Whilst, in Cantonese, even to my unaccustomed ear, it did not sound too much like the original, I was assured by Chinese friends that it was a very authentic and suitable one; and since (they told me) names have a lot to do with career, health, fame and fortune, I presumed that I was well-launched into my new life. It was only in 1974, after my re-marriage to Mabel Chiu-woon Wong, that I was to discover that its hononyms could have another, less satisfactory translation. How could she expect to win at mahjong or at the races when her husband's Cantonese name sounded exactly like the characters for 'can lose'?⁶

It was then the practice to send new 'cadets' on one year's language study at the University of Hong Kong, but as the course did not start for another six weeks or so, I was sent over to the District Administration, New Territories for a brief introduction to its work, and to see something of the then almost wholly rural hinterland of Hong Kong. But most of the period before the course began was spent as an Assistant Secretary in the Colonial Secretariat, standing in for a colleague who was getting married.

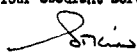
<p>CS 11 10,000-5/76-A1074</p> <p>No 1/4121/56</p>	<p>COLONIAL SECRETARIAT. LOWER ALBERT ROAD HONG KONG</p> <p>7th September, 1956.</p>
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Sir,

I am directed to inform you that
the following Chinese name has been selected
for you for official purposes:-

許	(Hui)
舒	(She)

I am, Sir,
Your obedient servant,


 (S.T. Kidd)
 for Colonial Secretary

J.V. Hayes, Esq.,
q/o D.A., N.T.,
Kowloon.

STK:ln

Official letter advising me of my Chinese name

Each of the Assistant Secretaries had a schedule of business. Mine comprised the 'policy' side of departmental work in the Royal Observatory, the Fire Brigade and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Department, among others I now forget. The 'hand-over' by the incumbent deserves to be recorded. An Old Etonian of boundless confidence (and considerable ability), he spoke to me for hours about the work, during which time I became thoroughly confused. Meantime, messengers in white drill uniforms brought in ever-increasing numbers of buff-coloured files, whose piles soon reached menacing proportions. At the end of his harangue — which was interrupted, but not extinguished, by lunch in a nearby club — he called in his personal secretary and with an expansive grin, uttered the immortal words at the head of this chapter, forever engraved on my memory.

Released from these duties, and reporting to the Language School at the university one bright autumn day, I found myself sitting down in one of the classrooms with two other 'cadets' and a probationary Assistant Superintendent of Police. We were to study Cantonese language and endeavour to gain as much knowledge of written Chinese as was possible in this limited

time: a fairly grinding experience. Our teachers were painstaking and conscientious, but given to harping on about the achievements of our seniors when end of term tests drew near. This was their way of conveying the message that we could do as well as they — that is, if we memorized what was set in front of us in pre-exam preparation tests. We all agreed this was utterly wrong in principle and were brash enough to say so, not realizing that this was the traditional method of teaching and learning Chinese and in retrospect not a bad one for aspiring foreigners either.⁷

DURING THE NEXT NINE OR TEN MONTHS, life was pleasant enough for a young bachelor. In a time of continuing housing shortage, another recently joined 'cadet' and I were lucky to obtain and share a government-rented flat in the Mid-Levels. We soon hired one of those then common, but by now well-nigh extinct, species, the amah or Chinese female servant, who was introduced to us by a friend who worked for one of our new colleagues.⁸ She cooked and looked after our household needs, chattering away to us in her own patois of Cantonese (rather different from what we were being taught at the university) and in a kind of pidgin English.

Ah Kan, as she was called, was middle-aged, and like many of her kind, a real 'character'. Hers, we soon discovered, was a world that was concentratedly Chinese. Though given a few extra dimensions by living in a European milieu, such as acquiring the capability to make delicious apple pie, and accommodating good-naturedly, but only slightly, to our various foibles, it had not otherwise been weakened or diluted. We became used to Ah Kan punctuating our daily exchanges with proverbs, sage observations and many expressions of opinion, half in Chinese and half in English, that were often incomprehensible to us at that early stage. Other traits were easier to detect. We became used to her saving all bottles and cans and stashing them away under her bed until she could dispose of them to street collectors for a small sum; and to her letting in the flower-seller at the back door to the apartment and even allowing him to take a vase and arrange the flowers on the table, when we had told him politely at the front door that we did not need any flowers that day. And in what was standard practice among the amahs working in bachelor households, we often used to see her serving at table or helping in the kitchen when we went to supper at friends' apartments, and soon became expert at spotting items from our limited stock of crockery, cutlery and glassware that like herself were being loaned out for the evening. Of course, we were also beneficiaries in return.

When, about the same time, each of us got married, Ah Kan came with me. However, she left when I went on overseas leave a year later. Our experience during that year had been one more proof of the old theorem that brides seldom hit it off with their husbands' former amahs, who were too

used to doing, and having, things their own way around the house. However, my friend and I retained an affection for Ah Kan who had been loyal and friendly, and had looked after us as best she could, providing a good deal of local colour and amusement in the process.⁹

With a regular salary and with the aid of a government car-purchase loan, I was able to buy a car, and my friend likewise. This made it easier to get around, especially to go out to the New Territories and to visit the swimming beaches when the warm weather season came around. We also went occasionally by steamer to Macau to enjoy its old-world charm and dual Chinese-Portuguese character. Before long, too, my flatmate and I became engaged in rather more strenuous exercise, on week-end training in the New Territories with the infantry regiment of the Royal Hong Kong Defence Force. Compulsory part-time service with other units of the force or with the Auxiliary Police or other civil defence bodies was then still the rule for British nationals, and unpopular with most. On the other hand, such activities enabled us to meet a far wider circle of people than we could have ever have done in the ordinary way. In keeping with its long history, the Defence Force was a microcosm of all the races and occupations that had formed part of Hong Kong's population from the start, though due to local conscription the majority now comprised locally born Chinese. My Company Commander in the Hong Kong Regiment was a Portuguese businessman, the Second-in-Command a Chinese architect employed by the War Department, and the Company Sergeant Major was a White Russian from Shanghai working for the Dairy Farm. When I took command of No. 3 Platoon of 'A' Company, it comprized mainly Portuguese and Eurasians in all walks of life, including a few clerks from the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank. The Defence Force was one of the best clubs in the colony, and with its messes and canteens an important part of its social life.

I have omitted to mention one event of my first few months in Hong Kong. On 10–12 October 1956, at the end of the period of heightened political feeling accompanying the celebration of the national days of the People's Republic of China (1st October) and of the Kuomintang government on Taiwan (10 October, styled locally the 'Double Tenth') serious rioting had occurred, with loss of life. With many of their European officers called out for auxiliary military and police service during the emergency, some key departments were short of senior staff. I was sent for a few days to the Cooperatives and Marketing Department which supervized the collection and marketing of vegetables and fish in the colony's main wholesale markets, and made a few journeys with the truck convoys to the vegetable cooperatives' collection depots in the northern New Territories to keep an eye on things and gather information.¹⁰

The trouble was soon over, and the officers concerned returned to their normal duties. However, happening so early in my career, the 1956 riots

were throughout my service a reminder of what could happen. Thereafter, I was always sensitive to internal security aspects of government, and tried my best never to create situations that could spark off trouble with Hong Kong's patient but volatile population and perhaps lead to something worse (but see pp. 153–154 below).

NO ONE, VISITOR OR RESIDENT, in the Hong Kong of that time, could fail to notice the poor living conditions of the majority of its Chinese inhabitants. To the many people living in temporary, makeshift accommodation on the hills of Hong Kong Island and mainland Kowloon, the term 'squatters' was usually applied. It was one that, around the globe, has meant different things at different times. There was a world of difference and meaning between, say, the wealthy, licence-holding, 'squatter' sheep-station owners of nineteenth century Australia and the poor, landless 'squatter' households of post-war Hong Kong, in illegal occupation of tiny portions of Crown land on steep hillsides.

By 1956, squatting had become such a problem, and the squatters' origins so diverse, that the compiler of the Hong Kong Annual Report for the year felt it necessary to define the term for his readers:

The word 'squatter' is now introduced because it is now necessary to find a rather broader term which will include three classes of deprived persons, i.e. immigrants who left China before the Communist victory, refugees who left China because of that victory, and the Hong Kong residents who sold out their homes to wealthier immigrants in one or other of the two former classes, and themselves became virtually destitute.¹¹

The common presumption of the time, especially among resident foreigners and overseas — and one that was never really shaken off — was that all squatters were 'refugees' fleeing Communist China.¹² As the writer emphasized, what really marked off the 'squatters' from the rest of the population was 'their inability to find or to afford conventional accommodation'.¹³

Far too many people in these three 'classes' were having to live in makeshift housing of one sort or another. Their homes were perched everywhere on the hill slopes adjoining the city, and on the flat roofs of old tenement buildings. On Hong Kong Island, the squatter concentrations were especially noticeable in Causeway Bay above the new Victoria Park, and in the Western District. In Kowloon, the squatter encroachment was equally marked, and even more extensive.

From my brief stay in 1953, I could recall the northern end of Kowloon's main thoroughfare, Nathan Road, where it had joined the New Territories circular route. At that point the roadway had seemed to disappear, plunging into a dark mass of squatter structures. Reading this passage, a friend who

served in the colony at that time recalled how the police had to send a landrover through the squatter area three times a day to keep the firelanes from being built over. Now, most of those huts had been replaced by seven-storey resettlement blocks, built after the squatter fire of Christmas Day 1953 had left 50,000 people without homes. This had obliged the government to make a start with its own housing programme, instead of relying on local and overseas churches and voluntary agencies, and on the squatters' own efforts through officially approved 'self-built' rehousing schemes on allocated sites.¹⁴

At the time of the big fire, there had been almost half a million people living in squatter areas in Hong Kong and Kowloon.¹⁵ However, numbers continued to increase. Despite the rehousing of well over 300,000 persons in the new resettlement estates, a survey completed in November 1959 showed that there were still around this number on the ground; and a few years earlier, an estimated 63,000 had been occupying rooftop structures on older tenements.¹⁶ A large and unspecified number of people were crammed into the buildings themselves, renting bunks or cubicles from the principal tenants on each floor and sharing totally inadequate cooking and washing facilities. Worse was to come, as more and more people arrived in the colony from the Chinese mainland, continuously swelling the number of squatter huts and adding to the general overcrowding

The conditions in which the hillside squatters lived were more in evidence than the hidden lives of those living in the tenements or on their rooftops; and being more dramatic, also attracted greater attention. The 1956 Colony Report contained a graphic description of one of these areas:

Land was scarce even for the squatters and the huts were packed like dense honeycombs or irregular warrens at different levels, with little ventilation or light and no regular access. The shacks themselves were crowded beyond endurance .

The huts were constructed of such material as they could lay hands on at little or no cost — flattened sheets of tin, wooden boarding, cardboard, sacking slung on frames — every variety of two dimensional material that was light enough to carry and cheap enough to beg or steal or buy for a few dollars.

There was, of course, no sanitation and there was seldom any organized system of refuse disposal. There was in most cases no mains water immediately available, and water for all purposes had to be carried long distances from communal standpipes or collected from such hillside streams as the season allowed. Cooking fuel was charcoal or wood used in open 'chatties' (small cooking stoves) and at night some of the huts were lit with kerosene lamps or candles.

Chickens, ducks and pigs shared the huts or the narrow congested areas around them. Sacking curtains over the doors gave privacy and they provided a measure of warmth in winter and or protection from torrential rains in the summer.¹⁷

This is the best account of its kind that I have seen, and I suspect that the writer must have served in the Resettlement Department (see Chapter 3), to have developed such a 'feel' for his subject.¹⁸

Living under such conditions, and with low and often uncertain incomes, life was spartan for most people. A 'spread' of eight photographs from the 1954 annual report of the Resettlement Department, showing a household of four persons at the various stages of the removal into its allocated room in one of the new housing estates, gives a good idea of the simple dress and few possessions of this average family.¹⁹ In one of the photographs the two children are barefoot. Another indication of the low incomes of the day was the persistence of the wooden clog, which half a million people still wore in 1954. Known in Cantonese as 'Mook Kek' which, as suggested in the 1954 Colony Annual Report, 'sounds like their click-clack rattle on the city streets', they were sawn in foot-shape from blocks of hard wood, and were sometimes given painted ornament.²⁰

The poor social conditions of the time were long remembered by those government officers whose work took them among the people. Chief Superintendent John Greene who served on Hong Kong Island near the large Causeway Bay squatter area in the early 1950s, recalled that 'many of the people lived in huts in great poverty and there was little support from medical and social welfare [departments]. They would come to the police station no matter what was wrong. Bay View Police Station was at times more like an out-patients' department.'²¹

THE COMFORTABLE LIVES OF MOST EUROPEANS and the better-off Chinese were far removed from this grim world of poor housing, tight family budgets and long hours of labour to make a pittance. One more than ordinarily sensitive British resident of these years has summed up the position rather well:

Because of the overwhelming majority of the have-nots, all furiously competing for a living, Hong Kong is probably one of the easiest places in the world today for the haves²²

Chinese middle-class families were well grounded in the realities of life for the poor, through their contact with less well-off relatives and fellow-countrymen (who almost always included some recent arrivals from the Mainland), but few expatriates had more contact with ordinary Chinese beyond how much or little they got to know of their amahs' families. For the men, the lives led by our Chinese colleagues of equal rank appeared much the same as our own, and those of our subordinates were mostly a closed book. On both sides of the 'divide', we were locked into our own circles

and life-styles, with few opportunities to gain detailed information about the other's mode of living or family life. Nor in many cases, it must be added, was there much inclination to know more. It was the spirit of the age.

Expatriate wives bringing up young families had even fewer chances to broaden their understanding than their husbands. They did not have to go shopping for daily needs, since neighbourhood stores or the big provision firms like the 'Asia' Company would take large or small orders by phone and make deliveries direct to customers' homes at all hours. Our corner store's invoice chits headed 'No amount be too small, no distance be too far' reflected the prevailing spirit of service, born of necessity. The amahs did most of the daily household shopping for fresh food and vegetables from stall holders in the streets or the markets; though by this time, there were fewer servants in most expatriate households than before the war. Better off Chinese families usually had more, and the wealthy still more.

Most of our friends were also young expatriates, and this particularly applied to girlfriends, for there were plenty of young Western women in the colony. Many of them were also in government service, employed as teachers or doctors, nursing sisters, occupational and physio-therapists, radiographers and the like. Others worked for the big European firms or for the Armed Services. Even with some fairly stiff competition from the Armed Services it was possible for most of us to find European girlfriends and marriage partners. This was just as well, for at that time there were not many opportunities to meet young educated Chinese women; and few people on either side wanted to embark on a 'mixed' marriage or engage in a serious relationship that might end up that way. From the Chinese side, strong parental opposition was more than likely, and experienced in at least one case known to me.

OUR OFFICE DRESS IN THOSE DAYS, before the universal installation of air-conditioning in offices, usually consisted of white shorts and open-necked shirts. Long white stockings and suede 'chukka' boots were practically *de rigueur*, with of course our briefcases or Hong Kong baskets. Some people wore safari suits, in lieu. Air-conditioning was confined to banking halls and cinemas and to the homes and offices of senior personnel in business and government. We used to swelter in the university library on hot afternoons during our Cantonese course, hardly able to keep our eyes open; and on bad days in the District Office, the perspiration flowed from our foreheads and elbows onto the file pages. We had ceiling fans and a few desk fans, but as these tended to sweep papers onto the floor unless secured they were usually a mixed blessing.

In the attempt to recall one's life in the past, it seems often to be the little things that help most to convey the daily scene and the atmosphere of

the times. The wooden clogs I have described above are a case in point. For expatriates the small rattan 'Hong Kong basket' mentioned in the last paragraph is another. We carried office papers, newspapers, sandwiches, sports gear and the like in them, little thinking that their days were numbered, nor realizing that they were a link with the past.

In the course of a description of the lives of the British residents of his day, the British banker W.H. Evans Thomas, who served in Hong Kong in 1932–35, mentions the 'Hong Kong basket' in his reminiscences, along with some of expatriate society's more fundamental characteristics:

The residents played the same games at the same times at week-ends, and each carried the same kind of small straw Hong Kong basket containing sporting kit and change of clothes, and they wore the same kind of mufflers — known as sweat rags — round their necks . . .

They appeared to revolve in little circles or cliques, and to work, as it were, by numbers. They caught the same Peak tram on the cable railway, down and up each morning and evening, reminiscent of the suburban trains to and from the City of London. ²³

These remarks intrigued me, because despite all the changes that had taken place in Hong Kong and the Far East during and since the Second World War, I had found Evans Thomas' 'little circles or cliques' still in full operation in the mid 1950s. On his visit to the colony in 1950, Harold Ingrams had also discovered that it was 'still very much a place of racial divisions and social cliques'.²⁴ But I had not at first realized that, like the 'Hong Kong basket', this was another pre-war 'carry-over'.

Composed of groups in the same firm or office, or in larger entities each of their sub-divisions, the 'circles' were both an immediate comfort and a distinct long-term disability. They made life appear friendly and sociable, but also resulted in making it narrow and restrictive — and it must be added, helped to keep it more racially exclusive. This was all the more to be regretted in a place like Hong Kong where variety in everything was so marked. Only by joining a sporting club or by sharing in an outside activity could you vary your social life and meet people of other nationalities. As already mentioned, like it or not, the Defence Force was a particular boon in this respect. There, one could meet not only people of all races but also of all conditions in its ranks. Walking around, it was good to have a wave and a shout from a cheerful taxi driver!²⁵

Hong Kong, both at that time and pre-war, was enlivened by the presence of a number of overseas Chinese. Among them (though I did not know it at the time) were several of my female Australian-born Chinese cousins, who coming from outside and being more Westernized than the local women, were able to obtain expatriate salaries when working as nurses, or as stenographers for European shipping lines. Reading Percy Chen's biography —

like his famous father Eugene Chen, sometime Foreign Minister of Republican China, he was an overseas Chinese lawyer from Trinidad — reminded me of another Australian-born Chinese lady whom he first met in the 1930s, and I in the 1950s. This was Mrs Violet Chan, ‘Auntie Vi’ to us: ‘a woman stylishly dressed in European clothes, although her friends wore the Chinese *chongsam*’, as he described her as she then was.²⁶

Another of Evans Thomas’s comments on pre-war Hong Kong still touched a familiar chord, when I came to write this chapter about the Hong Kong of my own ‘salad days’. ‘There was’, he recalled, ‘a formal, Victorian atmosphere about the place, which was not unpleasant when one got used to it.’²⁷ In the 1950s, despite its various excitements and growing cosmopolitanism, Hong Kong *did* have a lingering old-fashioned feel about it, all the recent upheavals notwithstanding. This conservatism was promoted by its older British inhabitants, who had been joined after the War by another elderly group of expatriates, former residents of China and the Treaty Ports, with their old-fashioned outlook and expectations, and a superior attitude towards the Chinese. The Australian writer Donald Horne conveys their general attitude very neatly in the following tale:

In Hong Kong the second time, over dinner, an Englishman attempted to toast Australia for keeping out Asians; he thought it was the last bastion of civilisation in the East.²⁸

However, the presence of such people apart, and for quite different reasons, some of us younger expatriates and a few resident Chinese found Hong Kong’s residual, old-fashioned quaintnesses strangely comforting.

This sense of permanency owed something to the many still-surviving buildings from a more gracious age. In the 1950s, the Central Business District was still dominated by that Edwardian quartet, the old Queen’s, Prince’s, King’s and York Buildings.²⁹ These handsome structures were in the tradition of fine building in the public and domestic architecture of the colony, that had led George Nathaniel Curzon in 1894 to write lyrically of what he styled ‘the Elysian graces of Hongkong’.³⁰ Although they have long since been replaced by modern edifices, fortunately we can still enjoy and appreciate their quality in Frank Fischbeck’s valuable photographic record of old Hong Kong.³¹

AT SOME STAGE, I SHOULD MENTION NUMBERS. After 1841, there had always been a ‘European’ segment in the Hong Kong population, but right from the start it was swamped by Chinese immigration. In 1931, for instance, there were 16,402 expatriates to around 838,000 Chinese. At the next official count, the Colony Census of 1961, although it was considered

impossible to make a precise division of the population into 'Chinese' and 'non-Chinese', there were 33,140 residents from Commonwealth countries (27,936 in the urban area) in a total population of 3,226,400.³²

The Civil Service to which I belonged was a rapidly growing body. It numbered 40,429 on 1 April 1958, compared with 15,831 on the same day ten years before, and by 1 April 1967 it had leapt to 73,190.³³ The number of 'expatriates' was small, but in the 1950s, they filled practically all the senior posts and a high proportion of the inspectorate ranks and above in the Police, Preventive Service, Fire Services, and Prisons Department.

Even so, the mainly younger age group we moved in seemed very small. In those days, it was still customary to play 'God Save the Queen' at the end of the evening performances in the colony's cinemas, which were then mostly smaller than those of today. This gave us time to look around, and on one occasion I recall thinking how odd it was that I seemed to know most of the people sitting in the upstairs seating.

THE RELATIONSHIPS OF WESTERNERS AND CHINESE had long been characterized by mutual self-sufficiency and self-esteem. We generally looked down on the Chinese, and they on us. European attitudes derived from the pronounced pride in the West and its achievements that had been so much in evidence in nineteenth century Hong Kong, Shanghai and the Treaty Ports, coupled with a contempt for Chinese 'backwardness' in scientific progress that extended to the race itself. For their part, the Chinese had long considered their own 'Middle Kingdom' infinitely superior in all respects to the outside world, such as it was.³⁴

In Hong Kong in the 1950s and 60s, whilst the days of going by chair or rickshaw were over for most Westerners,³⁵ there was still a good deal of unthinking, practically automatic, prejudice exhibited on both sides. Chinese of all classes tended to be superior in all respects to anything and anybody that was not Chinese; but contrasting with their quietly held, rarely visible opinions, Western attitudes were often extremely overt. Patronizing behaviour on the part of expatriates was common, escalating to raised voices and hectoring tones when faced with incomprehension or other difficulties with shop assistants, car mechanics, tailors and other providers of services. There was no excuse for such behaviour since the majority of civilian expatriates were well-educated. Most Chinese responded meekly or with a casual indifference. Nonetheless, though seldom accompanied by an outward show of resentment in the face of Western rudeness, there was among many Chinese a xenophobic aversion to foreigners that could sometimes, although very rarely, spill over into mindless acts of violence against them.³⁶ Westerners' awareness of this had long contributed an underlying edge to expatriate life. Echoing such fears, one of my university friends, a Scot

well-known for his public spirit and compassionate nature, once said to me, 'That I'm a friend of the Chinese people, James, is unfortunately not written on my forehead!'³⁷

Despite these undertones, the routine relationships between the two races were usually matter of fact and outwardly amicable. This was due to the friendliness, sense of humour and good manners of most Chinese, and because under the law and order that prevailed in the colony the combination of Briton and Chinese had always seemed to work well, and to practically everyone's mutual advantage.³⁸ As my contemporary, Peter Williams, has written to me, 'When one looks back at our times, there seem to be no significant examples of bad racial feeling. We "gwailos" were either tolerated in a quiet and amused way or ignored'. This did not make most of us any less 'colonial' in our outlook, which was a matter of degree, and fostered by our privileged position and lifestyle.³⁹

A faithful and instructive view of our daily life and surroundings in Hong Kong at that time is given in Martin Hürlimann's excellent descriptive study of 1962. His photographs of the place and its people help to recall that first period of my life in Hong Kong. I was happy to be there, and it did not take long for me to develop a pride in Hong Kong and its ever-growing achievements. Another of my contemporaries, Kenneth Topley, has articulated this feeling very well. Speaking with a journalist on the eve of his retirement, about what made him transfer from the Malayan Civil Service in 1956, he said:

When you saw Hong Kong, you realized it was the place of the future . . . you could see something happening, something building up, very strongly, something unstoppable. It was something new, something exciting, and I wanted to be part of it.⁴¹

However, I had now to buckle down to my first proper job. This was as a District Officer in the old Southern District of the New Territories, the part to which I had paid that fleeting familiarization visit the previous year.

AT THAT TIME, THE DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION, New Territories was still engaged in carrying out the duties for which it had been established in the opening years of this century: that is to say, land administration and rural management. Included in the former was the collection of Crown Rent for all leased land in the district. Until 1961,⁴² the District Officers were also magistrates for small debts and land below a certain value: my first case had concerned a pregnant cow, about whose colour — to my bewilderment — there was the most strenuous disagreement between the contending parties. The staff were few in number; some twenty-five to

thirty in each of its three District Offices. Together with those in the small Headquarters, they had amounted in 1957 to only 110 officers of all ranks.⁴³

Besides the land bailiffs and demarcators, each District Office had its normal complement of clerks, office assistants and messengers, and one or two interpreter-translators. There was also an important Special Class Clerical Officer. Curiously akin to the similar senior figure in the traditional Chinese *yamen*, he handled successions to property and other customary law matters, mediated in family dispute cases, liaised with the senior leaders of the rural district, and was the DO's right-hand man in regard to most dealings with them.⁴⁴ Another experienced and knowledgeable senior clerk headed the District Land Registry, that housed all the land records.

WHEN I REPORTED FOR DUTY to the District Office, South, I found that I was to be one of the two District Officers for the Southern District. Two 'cadets' had been sent to replace one man, as it had been agreed with the Secretariat that the burden had become too much for the single incumbent. I was given charge of most of the country districts, which comprised the islands to the west — notably Lantau, twice the size of Hong Kong Island but with a very much smaller but very long-settled population; the mainland and islands to the east; and the main coastal market centres with their boat people's anchorages. It was indeed a wide and far-flung bailiwick. One of my predecessors had styled the post, 'Lord of the Isles', which was not a bad description.⁴⁵ Apart from the usual duties of the District Office, my special responsibility was to facilitate the various tests and investigations being made for a projected large new reservoir at Shek Pik at the western end of Lantau and keep a weather eye on the situation there. The other DO's principal task was to restore administrative control over the large and fast-growing township of Tsuen Wan, which had got well beyond the capabilities of the District Office.⁴⁶

Although there were now two District Officers, nothing else had been duplicated. We occupied the one District Office, divided up the field staff (one of the land bailiffs found himself with two widely separated areas and two bosses) and shared the indoor clerical staff, including those who manned the land registry. The District Office itself was located in Kowloon, in a temporary building situated within the precincts of the South Kowloon Magistracy.⁴⁷ This was a location that suited neither the staff nor the public, being only convenient for people living in mainland areas linked by road to Kowloon. But as it was practically equidistant from the extremities of the district on east and west, and their residents would take equally long to reach the office, rationalization was no doubt complete. However, a building at ground level did have advantages. All that one of our elderly rural leaders had to do when he wanted to expectorate (from his boots up), or

blow his nose, during the regular three-monthly meetings with all the Rural Committee Chairmen, was to get up, remove his Homberg hat and spectacles, and open the window!

MY COLLEAGUE AND I SOON FOUND ourselves very busy. Besides becoming acquainted with the staff and the work of the office, we had to get to know the district and the people living there. In my case, with a much wider area to manage, local visits were high on the agenda and would involve me in spending much of my first six months out of the office, travelling by boat and more often on foot.⁴⁸

The visits would bring me face to face with the leaders of all the communities in the district, large and small alike. These comprised Village Representatives and, at the sub-district level, the Rural Committee Chairmen and their leading committeemen.⁴⁹ Protocol required me to make early courtesy calls on the eight rural committee chairmen and their main office-bearers at their office premises in various parts of the district. Accompanied by my senior staff I visited each committee in turn, to be introduced to those present and, after discussing current concerns, to eat a banquet in their company in the best local eating house. At Silvermine Bay on Lantau, I remember nearly jumping out of my skin when one of the committeemen let off a bunch of firecrackers just as I was passing through an entrance, deep in conversation with the old Chairman. Though intended to mark the importance of the occasion, it had not been expected.

The New Territories had long been part of a former Chinese county, and the requirements of local administration could not have been very much different from former times. The Chinese District Magistrate's title (*Chih Hsien*) meant 'Knower of the *Hsien*' or County, implying that he was an official who 'knew' both the land and the people under his jurisdiction.⁵⁰ If anything went wrong with either, he had had to answer for it. This tended to be the Hong Kong government's attitude too: we were expected to know what was going on and to preempt trouble, or at least deal with it effectively when it occurred.

Becoming a 'Knower' seemed pretty essential, and I made every effort to get out, and my first round of visits took me into some 180 settlements, large and small. Accompanied by the land staff, I walked into and around them, taking down the details of each community from the village representatives, and discussing any problems with them and the other older men. These jottings have remained in two small notebooks since that time. Their interest lies in the picture they present of a very conservative rural society; one which no longer exists in the very changed conditions of today's Hong Kong. An extract from one of these inspection reports, with the accompanying rural photograph, is typical of the rest:



A village tour, winter 1957–58: a boar going to stud. Private photograph.

[At Wong Mo Ying, a farming hamlet in the hills beyond Sai Kung Market] there are a reported 61 persons, all named Tang from Lung Kong, Tam Shui. They have been here for 5 generations. One of the village men is working in Singapore.

The villagers farm 70 *dau chung* of padi fields and some dry hill land [a local measure, roughly equivalent to one-sixth acre]. They do not rent from others.⁵¹ There are 18 cows and, interestingly, 3 water buffaloes on account of heavier soil.

Seven children go to school in nearby Tai Po Tsai and some study in Sai Kung Market, staying there during week-days with relatives or friends.

There is a Roman Catholic Church here, quite a large one. They say it was built a hundred years ago and was given a major repair 20 years back. The villagers have always believed in Jesus and an Italian priest whose Chinese name is 'Kong Chi-kui' comes to hold services once a month. People from other villages in the area also attend here.⁵²

Some young men want to go to work overseas, for which passports or certificates of identity are required. A birth certificate or what is called a 'post-registration of birth' is needed when making the application. This sparked off a long recital of the delays and difficulties being experienced on this, for them, very important subject, and some cases were brought to my attention.⁵³

DURING SUCH VISITS, IT WAS VERY NOTICEABLE that the people's dress was still largely traditional. Most men wore the two-piece trouser and high-buttoned tunic suit, women likewise; and not all had shoes. Black or

blue was the favoured colour, especially among the older women.⁵⁴ However, these drab externals were offset by the vivid character of the people, which was warm and lively, cheerful and humorous, save where disease had sapped a person's vitality.

There was, at all times, great courtesy and friendliness, without any sense of awkwardness or reserve. The innate good manners of ordinary rural Chinese was (and had long been) a marked feature of their character.⁵⁵ Invariably, I would be given a cup of Chinese tea, sometimes locally grown, or occasionally hot water, when a family preferred this or was badly off. The local police officers had a similar experience. Chief Superintendent John Greene recalled with pleasure his early days in the New Territories in the 1950s 'because the people were always pleased to see us'.⁵⁶ And despite a general poverty, and the often adverse conditions of their lives, the rural people had a great deal of spirit. They and their leaders inspired affection and respect among those officials who, like me, came to know them well in the course of their duties in the countryside.

The old ways of life, and what they entailed for the indigenous people of the New Territories, could be seen every day during this, my first tour of duty there between 1957-62. Most of the villages were yet completely rural, and their inhabitants were still farmers relying on the land for a livelihood. They lived amid scenes of great natural beauty, majestically wild in mountain areas, enhanced by the toil of human hands and by the figures at work in the landscape. At times of planting out the rice and during the growing period, the fields were under water, their surface reflecting the bright sun and the movement of cumulous clouds. The appearance of the countryside must have been largely unchanged from the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ Contributing to this impression of unchanging antiquity were the old-style rural industries, described in contemporary annual reports as being 'truly typical of the New Territories', and including:

. the operation of salt pans, the preparation of salt-fish, fish-paste, beancurd, soya sauce and preserved fruits, the burning of coral and sea-shells for lime, brick manufacture, shipbuilding and repairing, stone quarrying and leather manufacture.

most of which fitted naturally into the landscape.⁵⁸

Though undeniably beautiful in the eye of the beholder, rural life was far from idyllic. As one of my contemporaries, Michael Illingworth, then Divisional Superintendent, Marine Police, observed at the time of his retirement:

People look at the old way of life in the villages through rose-tinted glasses. They remember the tranquility and peace and close family ties, but they tend to forget the poverty, disease and backwardness of the New

Territories thirty-five years ago . . . Policemen went out on patrol armed with medical kits as well as rifles. . . . treating village youngsters with penicillin paste, cough medicine and other basic health care' ⁵⁹

This was indeed so. The villagers were not all healthy. In particular, the poor condition of many of the village children, so often smothered in gentian violet for recurrent skin diseases, was evident on my visits. Malaria was still prevalent in some areas, especially in the Sai Kung Peninsula. In 1958 there had been 659 notified cases; and also, one suspects, a good many unnotified ones owing to its having been so common.⁶⁰ The urban areas of Hong Kong and Kowloon were protected by anti-malarial spraying programmes, together with parts of the New Territories, including the sites of the large new reservoirs under construction. However, no overall anti-malarial programme was undertaken in the rest of the New Territories, where chemoprophylaxis was still advisable.⁶¹ In unprotected areas the boat people were even more at risk than the villagers; and in pre-war days, this disease had been little short of a scourge.⁶²

Health was in part related to housing. Village homes were not at all comfortable, even when they did not leak. The following description comes from an unpublished report on the village of Ham Tin, on South Lantau, compiled in June 1950:

The houses are all of one-room structures with the rear portion partitioned into a small dark sleeping chamber. A cockloft usually forms the upper ceiling of the sleeping chamber. Entrance to the sleeping chamber is always on your right as you go in, and the furniture in the main living-room is simple and of varied items. The family shrine (red papers with Chinese characters written on) occupies the centre of the partitioning wall, a few benches or stools would serve as seats for all occasions. Odds and ends are seen lying round all over the room — on the floor as well as on benches and stools. Very few have their floors within surfaced by lime or by cement.⁶³

I was to enter and sit for a while in many such houses in my five years as District Officer.

WE DID WHAT WE COULD TO ALLEVIATE individual hardship during our visits to the villages, through arranging referrals and assistance for sick or needy persons. It was also an important part of my official duties to help improve the quality of rural life. This was one of the goals set by the District Administration at that time, given effect by the provision of materials from the Local Public Works Vote. Improvements to village water supplies through the construction of wells and the installation of piped water from the hill streams; and to agriculture by the construction of irri-

gation dams and channels; and general improvements like the surfacing of lanes within the villages and building all-weather footpaths between settlements, were all being routinely undertaken. The work was mostly carried out on a 'self-help' basis by village labour, with technical advice from the District Offices. It is also necessary to mention in this connection the generous assistance given by the Kadoorie brothers to rural people at that time, through the many grants and loans given to communities and individuals, in their case channelled through the Agricultural, Fisheries and Forestry Department and the District Administration.⁶⁴

*The Chairman, Vice Chairman & Members
of the
Lamma Island (North) Rural Committee
request the pleasure of the company of
Mrs. J.W. Hayes
....
at the "Switch-on" Ceremony of the Yung Shu Wan
Drinking Water Supply
to be held at Yung Shu Wan, Lamma Island (North)
on Wednesday, 5th December, 1962, at 3.30 p.m.
D. W. Hayes, Esq.,
District Officer, Islands,
has kindly consented to officiate at the ceremony*

R S V P Special launch leaves
Secretary Kowloon Public Pier at 2.15 p.m.
Lamma Island (North) Rural Committee Queen's Pier, Hongkong, at 2.30 p.m.
Lamma Island, New Territories

光臨
恭候

離島理民府許舒長官主持本區林茂樹蓄水池落成暨供應
榕樹灣自來水啓用典禮屆時敬備茶會

謹定於一九六二年十二月初五日(星期三)下午三時半敦請

南丫島北段鄉事委員會
主席周陳有暨父代表
榕樹灣食水籌備委員會敬約
主任吳容喜暨全體委員

(本輪開行時間)
下午二時十五分由
沙咀公眾碼頭開出
下午二時三十分由
香港皇后大道中開出

The Rural Committee's invitation to the 'Switch On' Ceremony of the North Lamma Water supply a self-help project with assistance from the District Office's local public works vote Courtesy, North Lamma Rural Committee

Likewise, to improve the general health of the village population, the Medical and Health Department opened new clinics and provided two medical launches for the territory. A 'flying doctor' service by helicopter attended to the needs of people living in outlying places, which, as was observed at the time, 'saves a long walk over the mountains'.⁶⁵ By these means the general standard of health in the rural New Territories was gradually raised.

Another major goal of the time was the extension of primary education, by building modern rural schools in those parts of the District as yet without them, and running them through a subsidy code.⁶⁶



Hakka women in an outlying village receiving inoculations from a visiting Medical and Health Department team in the 1960s. Courtesy, Hong Kong Government.

THERE WERE ALREADY SIGNS OF CHANGE in the district, and I have chosen to illustrate it here through something that occurred early in my tour of duty. There had been a rash of unauthorized building along a rough vehicular track leading uphill from the Kowloon Road on the outskirts of Sai Kung, the market town in the east of the district. New stone and wooden cottages, some with pigsties attached, had been built and others were under construction, with little or no attention to site formation or sanitation. There was a file full of applications in the District Office, but owing to delays in processing them, some of the writers had already ‘jumped the gun’ and others had not bothered to write in. Some members of the Sai Kung Rural Committee were supporting some of the applications, including its Chairman, and one of the local Village Representatives, a building contractor in the township, was probably involved. I decided to make a visit, and one day went out to Sai Kung and visited every new structure, taking down particulars from those people present. I also interviewed other applicants, summoned for the purpose, and must have quizzed about fifty people on their reasons for wanting to build in this locality.

It soon transpired that the persons concerned were a mixed bunch. Some were local men and women, born in Sai Kung Market or in the villages, but living away from their native settlements. Others were 'outsiders', born in China: male and female, some had local spouses, and most claimed to have lived in Sai Kung for some time. Among the men, a number of husbands and sons worked as seamen on ocean shipping lines, others were restaurant workers in England or in Kowloon, and one was a soldier with the British Army. Reasons given for wanting new homes varied. Some had been victims of a recent flood that had destroyed their flimsy homes, but the majority of applicants reported having to live in rented rooms or small huts and expressed a wish to have the security of their own premises, however modest. One old lady had a deranged son, and explained how they were never permitted to stay very long in one place. A young couple, from Swatow, occupied a small hut that their fellow-countrymen had built for them a few years before, but the site was now required for some government purpose. A few applicants were suspect, admitting to being in possession of other structures on permit. It was this sort of application that I wanted to detect and reject.

What came out most strongly in the particulars I took down was the generally low level of monthly or daily wages that was reported by the applicants; or, more often in their absence at work, by their wives. Most men earned between 100 to 200 Hong Kong dollars a month, sometimes with food supplied by the employer. The rentals for their existing accommodation usually ranged from about 15 to 40 dollars a month. Some, especially the elderly, were very poor, but in their old age had to find a means of livelihood through casual work, or by raising pigs and growing vegetables.

What can one make of the replies received that day? Reviewing the information taken down from anxious or apprehensive folk, with the Rural Committee Chairman and other office-bearers looking on, I found a mixture of need and opportunism, obligation and speculation. Some of the applications were being supported by the local committeemen out of family obligation or expectation — one being from the chairman's neice, and others from his fellow villagers. Those from virtual outsiders may have been endorsed only after money had passed hands, though on the whole, most applicants had some connection with the area.

The applications held up a mirror to changing times. They indicated there was now a number of post-war immigrants in the township, some of them already married to local people, and also showed that in growing numbers, daughters-in-law from the villages were no longer content to stay at home and look after their husbands' parents. A growing demand for casual labour, some new factories, and burgeoning cottage industries, were providing opportunities for married (and soon, unmarried) women to break

free from the village. Applicants from all backgrounds wanted to have better homes, closer to their employment, or near bus routes and other public transport that could take them to daily work elsewhere. The outbreak of unauthorized building was teaching me a few things about people as human beings in changing times.

The District Office provided me with other opportunities to observe the human side of the influx of people into Hong Kong in those years, and the great diversity that now characterized the colony. In my tours round the villages of Lantau Island, I came across several new settlements of vegetable farmers. One of twelve families in a remote, long abandoned place at San Shek Wan, in the north of the island, was remarkable in two respects. Firstly, each of the household heads (save for one man from Yunnan Province in Southwest China) had come from a different locality in Kwangtung. Secondly, this small community had included Cantonese, Hakka, Hoklo and even Mandarin-speakers, many of them single men without their families, left behind in China. Immediately to the west, at the adjoining old hamlet of Sham Wat, three families of different names had occupied the area and opened Crown Land without authority. They were also vegetable growers, and had taken advantage of the motor-junk owned by the San Shek Wan people to send their own produce to West Point on Hong Kong Island. Before long, these two settlements would decide to join their efforts under the combined name 'Sham Shek Tsuen' — providing evidence of leadership and common sense among a very disparate group of newcomers to Hong Kong.⁶⁷

LEAVING ASIDE THE SETTLED LAND POPULATION of Hakkas and Cantonese villagers, and the trickle of newcomers into the district, there were also the boat people, of whom the Tanka and Hoklo were the two principal groups. They were numerous and to be found everywhere in its waters, including some of the major anchorages like Tai O, Cheung Chau, and Sai Kung. In outlying places like Tung Chung and Shek Pik, there were small, permanent groups of boat families, whose craft were moored off the sand beaches or drawn up in the tidal creeks. In the traditional way, they lived on their craft throughout the year, using them as floating homes as well as a means of making a livelihood. Others had been living on land for a long time, but in their own special fashion. There were several thousand of them living in huts on stilts in the several creeks of the main anchorage at Tai O, and in a further variation — there and elsewhere — some boats were drawn up permanently on land, and then built around and upon.

Living in these various ways, they maintained a completely separate life from the local villagers. Though I was not fully aware of this, they had been for centuries a despised and almost outcast group, as my later conversations

with elderly villagers made very clear. At Shek Pik, for instance, the Village Representative told me that in his youth there was very little connection between his fellow villagers and local boat people, and that no boat children had ever attended school there. The villagers did not like them, he said. They were not allowed to walk at will in the villages, and in another place I was told that if seen there, 'they would be pushed back into the water'. In one of the Tsuen Wan villages in pre-war days, boat people who dared wear shoes on land would even be beaten.⁶⁸ These were the general attitudes of the time, reflected in the uncertainty and apprehension still to be met with among boat people in the 1950s. No wonder the British anthropologist Barbara Ward related how the Sai Kung boat people had regarded land away from the shore almost as an alien element.⁶⁹

Obviously reflecting this dichotomy, and the old prejudices, my connection with the boat people in those days, as an official, was slight. Given their large numbers in places like Cheung Chau, Tai O and Sai Kung, and the economic importance of the fishing industry, it seems strange that I was never asked, or prompted, to pay a courtesy visit to their leaders. There were usually one or two of them on the Kaifong (later the Rural) Committees of these places; but they were never singled out for my attention or any special courtesy. I imagine this was how it had always been, and yet another manifestation of their separate and subordinate position. My links came mainly through attending some of their functions in places where they had a special connection with a local temple, such as the old Tin Hau Temple at Sai Wan, Cheung Chau, where I used to be invited to let off the lucky rockets once a year.⁷⁰ I also remember being asked by the Fish Marketing Organization to provide sites at Tai O and Hang Hau (Clearwater Bay) on which it could build more schools for children from the boat population; and to allocate land to a Better Living Society being formed among forty-one houseboat dwellers rendered homeless by Typhoon 'Mary' in June 1960, in connection with the first Fishermen's Village on Cheung Chau.⁷¹ I believe we also arranged for the installation of water standpipes on the shore at the major anchorages.

MY ALREADY AWAKENED INTEREST in local history was greatly stimulated by my first year in the District Office. However, my preoccupation with the Chinese people and their history was mostly due to that remarkable man, Professor F.S. Drake, head of the Chinese Department at the University of Hong Kong. His introductory lectures and hand-outs during my year at the Language School focused my interest on China. What he had recently described as 'the spaciousness of the closing years of Imperial China . . . an experience that leaves its mark upon all that have had it',⁷² had been marvellously recreated for me during those early familiari-

zation tours in the Southern District, where the places and people seemed to be so little changed. Though not spelled-out, what he had had in mind was the 'spaciousness' of mind and spirit, the glorious independence and easy self-confidence that could yet be glimpsed among New Territories villagers, when I first went to work among them. Not derived from rank or income, but from the past, and combined with an innate good humour and natural courtesy, they impressed themselves very strongly upon my consciousness and attracted me to the Chinese people as a whole.

My duties as District Officer took me to many places, each with its own history and historical associations; and some particular events hastened my desire to take up local studies.⁷³ One was an invitation from Professor Drake for me to accompany a group of scholars to inspect the celebrated rock inscription behind the Tin Hau Temple in Joss House Bay on the eastern approaches to Hong Kong Harbour. Dated in 1274, and still today the oldest relic of its kind in the territory, this recorded the history of two temples in the area, and the work done by the Kowloon salt-field administrator of the day and the local worthy who paid for the engraving to be made on the rock.⁷⁴ It was a memorable visit on which the past came vividly to mind; and it was equally fascinating to learn that, almost seven hundred years later, the local man's descendants were still living in one of the old Kowloon villages, and that their family record contained a mention of these events.

My own boss, the late K.M.A. Barnett, was another influence. A man of quite extraordinary mental attainments, he took a keen interest in anything to do with local settlement, wrote and lectured on the subject, and was a linguistic genius. My introduction to this side of his character came through a question I had asked him early on, about some apparent differences in pronunciation in current Cantonese from those given in Dr Eitel's nineteenth century Chinese-English dictionary. 'There are 99 distinct variations of the Cantonese language', he had declaimed, and proceeded to give me a thumbnail summary, most of which (sad to say) went right over my head. Like his writings on local history, his minutes on the office files were a joy to read, and as well as being informative, were frequently amusing. I consider myself fortunate to have had Kenneth Barnett as my first head of department in the Civil Service — and for long after, as mentor and friend.⁷⁵

The third of these fortuitous happenings was the formation of the University Archaeological Team in 1956, and an invitation to join it the following year after I became District Officer.⁷⁶ Its purpose was to continue the archaeological enquiries that had begun in the pre-war years but had largely lapsed after the war.⁷⁷ As it happened, the Southern District, particularly in its western half bordering on the Pearl River Estuary, was home to much of Hong Kong's prehistory.⁷⁸ Although not trained as an archaeologist, I found that archaeology and history — and my official duties — came

happily together thereafter. The use of an old Marine Department tug-boat went with my post and it was always available at week-ends. With the ready consent of the District Commissioner, we were able to spend many cheerful Saturdays and Sundays on archaeological scrutiny and excavation in remote and beautiful places.⁷⁹

Shek Pik, where I was often on duty, had been, and would always remain, one of the most rewarding of the archaeological sites in the district, and for that matter in the whole territory of Hong Kong.⁸⁰ I took part in our excavations there, and at one time recovered for the Museum many old coins and fragments of fine Sung porcelain unearthed by bulldozers during the earth-moving work for the dam.⁸¹ On another occasion, walking along a hill path on my way to the new resite village in the adjoining bay, I picked up two fine bronze weapons, clearly not long dug up and tied together with string, but then discarded or forgotten by their finder.⁸² Such incidents added zest to my work.

I found that many of the local leaders took a real interest in my historical enquiries. On Cheung Chau in particular, the leading Kaifongs — who it seemed to me, knew everything about everybody and anything on their island — did their best to help. They arranged visits to old people, sat with me during the conversations; took me to see an old Chinese scholar-official from pre-1911 times living on the island;⁸³ and even turned out with their shovels and crowbars to dig up the earth outside a local temple where one of their number had recalled having seen, in his youth, rows of slate tablets commemorating bygone repairs — albeit without success. They were good friends to me and to my family, and our small children loved to go there over the Lunar New Year holidays, during and after my tour of duty with the District Office. Little wonder I loved my first job!

Notes

1. Gene Gleason, *Tales of Hong Kong* (New York, Roy Publishers, Inc., nd but 1967), p. 34
2. G.B. Endacott and A. Hinton, *Fragrant Harbour, A Short History of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 69
3. Upon its reorganization in 1954, the former Colonial Service had become Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service, by Parliamentary Command Paper Colonial No. 306
4. The 1st Battalion, The Duke of Wellington's Regiment
5. See e.g. ADRSCA 1966–67, para. 73.
6. The Chinese names of Governors were keenly scrutinized by some members of the public. In 1987, Sir David Wilson's name, given decades earlier when he was studying Chinese language, came under critical scrutiny because the pundits thought it sounded 'pretty ghostly' and was depressing in Cantonese: see Sa Ni Harte in SCMP 27 January 1987, 'Sir David Wilson: right man, wrong name'

7. Archdeacon Moule was a fervent advocate of memorization, calling it 'this great art and gift' at p. 262 of his *The Chinese People, A Handbook on China* (London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1914)
8. See Kenneth Kaw, *Superior Servants* (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1988)
9. F.D. Ommanney gives an affectionate picture of his amah and her family in *Fragrant Harbour, a Private View of Hong Kong* (London, Hutchinson, 1962), and so, for pre-war days, does George Arnold in his *Chopsticks* (Melbourne, The National Press Pty Ltd., 1946)
10. ADRRCSDM 1956–57, para. 81. describes the department's activities during the disturbances.
11. HK 1956, p. 12
12. See especially pp. 54–55 of Lloyd A. Smith's *Hong Kong* (London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1962). It also has an excellent photo-spread of the conditions of 'refugee' (squatter) housing at pp. 56–65.
13. HK 1956, p. 12.
14. See ADRCR 1954–55, and the informative 'Review Chapter — A Problem of People' in HK 1956.
15. Calculated from p. 156 in HK 1956.
16. ADRCR 1959–60, para. 21 and Appendix 1.
17. HKAR 1956, p. 13, with the photographs between pp. 106–107 of HK 1954.
18. In those days the Colony Annual Reports were compiled by one of the junior 'cadets' in the Secretariat, as one of the chores of his Assistant Secretary schedule At the start of my service, upon learning of my M A. degree the Governor had said to me, 'Good, you'll be able to write our Annual Report': but I never did
19. ADRCR 1954–55, between pp. 38–39.
20. See the photographs in HK 1954 between pp. 58–59
21. From *Off Beat*, the magazine of the RHKP, 16–29 March 1988 See also Chief Superintendent Gwyn Lloyd, *Off Beat*, 18–31 May 1988.
22. F.D. Ommanney, *Eastern Windows* (London, Readers Union, Longmans, 1962), p. 206 See the informative *Report on 'Making Ends Meet'*, 'a short study carried out during June and July 1963 into the problem of how some of the poor people of Hong Kong live, and budget for their daily existence', published in 1965 as Vol. 1 of the *Journal of the Hong Kong Institute of Social Research*, under the auspices of the Anglican Bishop of Hong Kong
23. W.H. Evans Thomas, *Vanished China, Far Eastern Banking Memories* (Published by the author and distributed by Thorsons Publishers of London, 1952), pp. 167–168
24. *Hong Kong* (London, HMSO, 1952), p. 114
25. On this subject, see my 'East and West in Hong Kong. Vignettes from History and Personal Experience' in Elizabeth Sinn (Ed.), *Between East and West, Aspects of Social and Political Development in Hong Kong* (Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1990), pp. 7–24.
26. Adding that 'the Hong Kong ladies were still cloistered in their homes and [were then] rarely were seen out in the central part of Victoria' Percy Chen, *China Called Me, My Life Inside the Chinese Revolution* (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1979), p. 277
27. Evans Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
28. Donald Horne, *The Lucky Country, Australia in the Sixties* (Penguin Books, 1964), p. 8
29. *Riviera of the Orient, Hong Kong*, The Travel Association's Handbook to the Colony, published about 1936, map opposite p. 125
30. 'The national love for neatness and decorum appears in the private grounds, the *bunds*,

- and public gardens of the cities where the English are in the ascendant, and, were every other mark of British influence erased tomorrow, it would always remain a marvel how from a scorching rock had been evolved the Elysian graces of Hongkong' Hon. George N. Curzon, *Problems of The Far East* (London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1894), p. 428
- 31 *Great Cities of the World, Old Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, Formasia, 1987) at pp. 116, 125, 146–151 and especially pp. 168–169. See also pp. 42–46 of Anthony Walker and Stephen M. Rowlinson, *The Building of Hong Kong, Constructing Hong Kong Through the Ages* (Hong Kong University Press for The Hong Kong Construction Association, 1990)
 - 32 See *Rural Communities*, p. 128, and HK 1961, pp. 33–34
 - 33 By 1981, the number of Civil Service posts had risen to 153,500: HK 1982, p. 246
 - 34 For detail, see my 'East and West in Hong Kong', *op. cit.*, pp. 12–13, with accompanying notes
 - 35 Visiting Hong Kong and Canton in the early part of this century, Lord Frederic Hamilton had found that 'it would be [considered] derogatory to the dignity of a European to be seen walking on foot in a Chinese town'. *Here, There and Everywhere* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1921, twentieth edition 1937), p. 84. But in 1950s Hong Kong, the rickshaw was still a convenience used by Chinese.
 36. In the 1956 riots, a Swiss consular official and his wife chanced upon a crowd of rioters in central Kowloon. Their car was overturned and burned, and she died in the course of this very unpleasant but unpremeditated incident
 - 37 Dr. Robin Maneely. see ADRDCNT 1960–61, para. 284.
 - 38 See Gleason's apt summary, *op. cit.* p. 34.
 - 39 Kenneth Topley, our brother 'Cadet', in conversation with Kevin Sinclair (SMP 13 July 1986), recalled the prevailing expatriate attitudes of the 1950s. See also Chapter 11 of Ommanney, *Eastern Windows*, *op. cit.* For French colonial attitudes in Indo-China, see pp. 438–9 of Virginia Thompson's *French Indo-China* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1937); and for Japanese colonial life in Korea see Teresa Morris-Suzuki, *Showa, An Inside History of Hirohito's Japan* (Sydney, Methuen Australia, 1984), pp. 42–65
 - 40 Martin Hurlimann, *Hong Kong* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1962)
 41. See note 39.
 42. HK 1961, p. 355.
 43. ADRDCNT 1957–58, para. 12
 44. The villagers usually addressed him as *shih-ye*, the same title used under Chinese rule. This was Mr. George Lo Cho-chi, MBE who told me he had worked for 17 District Officers in his time. See photograph on p. 193
 45. Walter Schofield, 'Memories of the District Office South . . .', JHKBRAS 17 (1977), p. 145
 46. See *Tsuen Wan*, Chapter IV.
 47. See *Tsuen Wan*, p. 183n4.
 48. For the organization and duties of the New Territories Administration, as it became known in the 1960s, see e.g. HK 1956, pp. 295–6 and HK 1963, pp. 377–8; together with my article, 'The New Territories Twenty Years Ago: From the Notebooks of a District Officer' in *Hong Kong Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 2, No. 1, June 1980
 49. See Norman Miners, *The Government and Politics of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, Third Edition, 1981), p. 197. This system of rural management under the government's aegis has not yet been described in any detail, and I have therefore provided a short account in the Appendix.

- 50 For good descriptions, see Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Trade and Administration of China* (New York, Longmans, Green & Co., Third revised edition, 1921), pp. 53, 57–60; and the West China missionary, George Cockburn's *John Chinaman, His Ways and Notions* (Edinburgh, J. Gardner Hitt, 1896), pp. 98–9.
51. *A Gazetteer of Place Names in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories* (Government Printer, 1960), p. 184. All local place names cited herein can be found in this official publication; hereafter *Gazetteer*
52. Roman Catholic churches and chapels had been built in the Sai Kung area from the 1860s on: see Father T.F. Ryan's *The Story of A Hundred Years: The Pontefical Institute of Foreign Missions (PIME) in Hong Kong, 1858–1958* (Hong Kong, Catholic Truth Society, 1959).
53. The Hong Kong Births and Deaths Ordinance of 1873 was not extended to the NT until 1932. Many villagers did not bother to register births, and this continued through the Japanese Occupation and into the postwar period. This will explain why one of my first memoranda from the District Commissioner, after a visit paid to part of my District, contained the whimsical query: 'DO South may care to explain why the Clear Water Bay villages are teeming with children, none of whom have ever been born'.
54. See Valery M. Garrett, *Chinese Clothing, An Illustrated Guide* (Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 1994), Chapter 10
55. See Cockburn, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
56. *Off Beat*, 16–29 March 1988.
57. See John and Veronica Stericker's *Hong Kong In Picture and Story, Chapter VII, and The Hong Kong Gift Book*, especially at pp. 8, 27, 29 and 45 (Hong Kong, Published by the Authors, 1953 and 1954 respectively)
58. HK 1956, p. 57.
59. SCMP early Jan. 1984. The 'Village Penetration Patrols' are featured in the photo-section between pp. 268–269 of HK 1965
60. HK 1958, p. 132.
61. During the Hong Kong Regiment's annual camp there, palludrin (anti-malarial) tablets were always issued at breakfast, one tablet being distributed daily.
62. See HK 1958, pp. 132–133; also *Tsuen Wan*, pp. 7, 186
63. Copied from an old file in District Office South.
64. See, e.g. HK 1958, pp. 90–91, and W J Blackie, *The Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Association* (Hong Kong, published by the Association, 1972)
65. See HK 1958, p. 138 and photograph between pp. 186–7, ADRDCNT 1960–61, photograph opposite p. 90; and HK 1961, photograph opposite p. 161 for these various services. See also the interesting photo-spread on the work of health visitors, travelling by fast jet-boat to remote communities, in HK 1965, between pp. 100–101
66. See my 'The New Territories twenty years ago', *op. cit.*, p. 65
67. See *Gazetteer*, p. 72.
68. ELJ, p. 52.
69. Barbara E. Ward, *Through Other Eyes, Essays in Understanding Conscious Models — Mostly Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, The Chinese University Press, 1985), pp. 3 and especially 20–21, from an article first published in JOS in 1954.
70. See pp. 35–36 of *Heritage of the Islands District* (Hong Kong, Islands District Board, 2nd edition, 1994).
71. ADRRCSDM 1958–59, paras. 71, 73; ADRCCDF 1960–61, paras. 30–32; with *Ibid* 1961–62, para. 49. For FMO schools, see T A. Acton in JHKBRAS 21 (1981) pp. 120–143.

- 72 In writing an obituary for his friend the great naturalist Arthur De Carle Sowerby (1885–1954) JOS Vol. II, No 1 (January 1955), p. 145.
- 73 There was plenty of scope, too, since comparatively little had then been written about the rural side of Hong Kong in either Chinese or English. See *Hong Kong Region*, pp 16–18 and JHKBRAS 27 (1987), pp 254–7
- 74 Jen Yu-wen, ‘The Southern Sung Stone Engraving at North Fu-t’ang’ in JHKBRAS 5 (1965), pp. 65–68. A translation is given at note 6, p. 37 of his ‘The Travelling Palace of Southern Sung in Kowloon’ in JHKBRAS 7 (1967)
75. See note 53 above, and the obituary notices in JHKBRAS 27 (1987), pp. 1–10. The dictionary in question was E J. Eitel’s *A Chinese Dictionary in the Cantonese Dialect* (London, Trubner and Co., and Hong Kong, Lane, Crawford & Co., 2 vols., 1877), with a second edition, revised and enlarged by Immanuel Gottlieb Genähr, entitled *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language* and published in 2 vols. by Kelly & Walsh, Hong Kong, etc. Barnett had used the term ‘Cantonese language’ by intent.

One point not covered elsewhere in the book may usefully be recorded here. Neither in the Secretariat nor in my initial posting to the NT, was I enlightened on our grand purpose. Even Ken Barnett never indicated what I should be doing, or expounded the philosophy behind our work. I just followed in the tracks and it seemed natural to be striving for good administration and to ameliorate conditions. Peter Williams has confirmed that the aims and objects of the Service were not explained to newcomers. ‘We were Cadets, and therefore knew what to do instinctively: the carry-over from Victorian confidence (or arrogance?)’. Language training, yes, but at that time nothing else. The intrusion of Intention, Aim or Mission came, he said, from his military training, and in mine too.
- 76 There was still only one University in Hong Kong at that time.
- 77 See S. G. Davis, ‘Archaeological Discovery In and Around Hong Kong’ in JHKBRAS 5 (1965), pp 9–19, and S.M. Bard’s ‘Archaeology in Hong Kong: A Review of Achievement’ at pp 383–396 of *Conference Papers on Archaeology in Southeast Asia* (Hong Kong, University Museum and Art Gallery, University of Hong Kong, 1995)
78. See, for instance, the bilingual publication *A Journey into Hong Kong’s Archaeological Past* (Hong Kong, Regional Council and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1991); and the Hong Kong Urban Council’s bilingual *Collected Essays on the Culture of the Ancient Yue People in South China* (1993), with its look at the wider scene.
- 79 The Team’s successor, the Hong Kong Archaeological Society formed in 1967, has continued its work; now greatly extended by the excavations conducted by the Chinese University, the Museum of History and the Antiquities and Monuments Office of the Hong Kong Government, latterly in association with scholars from Mainland China. See S. M. Bard, *op. cit.*, with other contents
- 80 The latest and very striking 6,000 year old discoveries made there at the Tung Wan site in 1988–89 are described in ‘Journey’, *op. cit.*, pp 84–85.
81. With J. C. Y. Watt, ‘Finds of Sung Coins and Porcelain at Shek Pik, Lantau Island, 1962’ in *Journal of the Hong Kong Archaeological Society*, 1 (1968), pp 19–23
- 82 Also with Museum of History. For the dagger, see Tang Chung’s illustrated article in ‘Culture of the Ancient Yue People’, *op. cit.*, pp. 86–101, with Plate 192
83. See *Rural Communities*, Plate 8

Chapter Seven

Tsuen Wan: The District Office and Its Involvement With Festivals and Religion

One day in 1977, I received from the managers of the Holy Mother Yiu Temple the customary red invitation card, brushed in black ink. It invited me 'to lend my presence and bestow instruction' on the occasion of the goddess' birthday, and the inauguration of the next term of the 'fire-cracker' or worshipping association linked to the temple.

Not the least fascinating aspect of my long service in Tsuen Wan District was the involvement of the District Office with what may be called the popular religion. The senior staff were invited to attend the local celebrations for the major festivals of the lunar year, especially those arranged by the indigenous village communities. As the local official responsible for land and people, the District Officer's presence was expected as a matter of course; and as we shall see, he was on some occasions considered to be an essential player. Through such friendly involvement in the lives of the people, we were made to feel at home in our surroundings, and part of the community.

At the same time, in the course of our duties as the land authority, there were sometimes confrontations at festival times with religious committees which would ignore official directives on the permitted use (or denial) of sites for opera performances. Then again, owing to the District Office's leading role in land recovery and clearances for development, our involvement with the religious community was sometimes unpleasant for either side, as quite a number of the local religious houses and their inmates were caught up in them. However, as with our participation in the festivals, these duties were another means for us to get to know more about local people and their character.

GENERALLY SPEAKING, THE FESTIVALS celebrated in Tsuen Wan town and district were common to the Chinese-speaking world.¹ Punctuating at intervals the length of the lunar calendar and recurrent in every successive year, they had always brought colour and gaiety into lives that were otherwise drab and monotonous. There were the principal lunar festivals to celebrate in the joyful, time-honoured way, such as New Year, Dragon Boat Day and Mid-Autumn. The annual celebrations at each of the local temples on its major deity's birthday were also important events, when the organizing committees provided opera or puppet shows for the customary four days and five nights, and sometimes for longer periods. Other occasions included the Yu Lan or 'Hungry Ghost' Festival, and the Spring and Autumn Festivals devoted to paying respects to ancestors. Large numbers of people took part at many of these events, as spectators or participants. The clientele was mainly local, but some of the festivals attracted outsiders on account of their special features, or because a particular deity had become renowned for performing miracles and making accurate predictions.

We had plenty of opportunity to watch our local leaders at work in running these events, which often involved quite considerable powers of organization and control. They were a reminder of the long tradition of self-management in these former rural communities, and of the importance of festivals and the rituals associated with them in the lives of the people, especially those intended to ward off trouble and bring happiness and prosperity.



A calligrapher hard at work on the pavement just before the lunar new year, brushing auspicious scrolls and couplets for use in the home. Courtesy, SCMP.

So far as we were concerned, the festivals fitted in neatly with our own government-imposed tasks. Bringing together common interests and providing frequent opportunities for shared activity, they made a major contribution to local community life, and complemented the government's community building work and its efforts to encourage public spirit and foster a sense of local identity (p. 154 and chart at p. 160 above).²

THE LUNAR NEW YEAR PERIOD is so well-known to Chinese and foreigners alike that it needs no introduction here. Suffice it to say that it was a time for relaxation and enjoyment, in the company of family and friends. In the 1970s, it was for many the only break from work in the year, giving it an added importance.

The local temples and religious houses were well-attended over the long holiday period. Many Tsuen Wan people would go to seek counsel from popular deities or to thank the gods for a good year as well as to solicit their protection and assistance during the next. Even before the New Year began, the end of year period was a busy time in some temples. The post-war Kwan Tai Temple in Kwai Chung was full of worshippers, and it had become customary to hold performances of Chiu Chau opera then. I was told that some three thousand people had attended at year's end 1980. Many others would go to one or other of the district's many religious houses, which ranged in size from the larger monasteries and nunneries to small establishments with only a few regular inmates. These, too, were the scene of much worshipping, since most held and cared for the ancestral tablets of hundreds, sometimes thousands of deceased persons from the urban areas, placed there by their descendants. Family members would return there at regular intervals for commemorative services and to maintain the connection with their inmates. Since most people had more leisure then, the new year was a specially favoured period for this duty; the religious observances over, they could enjoy the food and amenities provided in these places.

In the Tsuen Wan villages, as in all the older settlements of the NT, there were both special amusements and serious obligations. The men and boys always looked forward to gambling sessions during the New Year period. A local village elder once told me that much gambling used to take place at his lineage's ancestral hall in his father's and grandfather's generations. Concentrated and prolonged sessions of various games of chance were usual at this time; and though prohibited by law, gambling was regarded as 'traditional village business', sanctioned by old custom. As such, any interference with it by the police was much resented, always complained of, and sometimes even opposed.³ I was to receive various complaints on this score from both police and villagers during my years in Tsuen Wan, and sometimes had to smooth over indignation and ruffled feelings.

In the early years of the Tsuen Wan District Office, in the 1960s, it had been usual for senior staff to make new year calls on all the villages of the district over the festival period, but this had been discontinued as the town grew in size. However, such visits would have revealed the more serious side of the festival in the yearly round of village life, for this was also a time for worshipping in the ancestral temples and at the earth-god shrines.

IN LIEU OF THE NEW YEAR VISITS TO THE VILLAGES, the District Officer and senior officials made ceremonial calls on each of the three rural committees at its office premises, and always attended the combined yearly celebratory dinner arranged by them for the village communities. The practice had also grown up of accompanying the Tsuen Wan Rural Committee and district leaders to two important local religious institutions, the Western Monastery and the Yuen Yuen Institute, at this season, to pay a new year call and eat a vegetarian lunch with their leading personnel.⁴

The District Office had a particularly close connection with the Yuen Yuen Institute. Founded in 1950 near Lo Wai Village, and situated amidst beautiful scenery above the town, it was a favoured place for visits over the long holiday. Its religious character and facilities apart, it had extensive grounds and gardens and an excellent vegetarian restaurant. People in family groups and young people loved to go there to eat, saunter in the grounds and take photographs. The institute was also the scene of a well-attended auction of decorated lanterns on the fifteenth day of the year. Our senior staff were always invited to make the presentations to the successful bidders, when Buddhist verses were chanted by priests and copies of them were distributed to all present. Thereby, funds would be raised for the institute's many charitable and religious causes, and the successful purchaser and his family could count on happiness, good fortune and the gods' blessings during the year ahead.⁵

Despite the fact that the lunar new year was a general holiday, the local officials still had ceremonial duties to perform. District Office staff, together with other government officers and many local leaders were expected to attend the opening and closing ceremonies of the community activities arranged over the period. On such occasions, it was our duty to make speeches of recognition or exhortation and to present tokens of appreciation for financial and other contributions or services rendered, on behalf of the organizers. It was the practice for various local bodies to join together to provide colourful entertainment and recreational programmes for residents in the various parts of the district. The three Rural Committees, with many other organizations and agencies, worked together with the District Office and other government departments to provide better programmes every year; and our staff, in particular, helped to coordinate the arrangements.

THE TIN HAU FESTIVAL falls on the twenty-third day of the third lunar month every year.⁶ In Tsuen Wan District, as elsewhere, most of the older temples are dedicated to Tin Hau. The main temple is in Tsuen Wan proper and has long been the community temple for the central group of villages. There are five others elsewhere in the district, some of them in new locations, after being resited to make way for development. In addition, a few other small Tin Hau temples are, and were, to be found among old and new squatter areas in the district, in temporary structures and some scarcely recognizable as such. This female deity was credited with being able to save sailors from storm and shipwreck, and to protect all who live or have business on or near the oceans — which helps to explain her popularity in sea-girt Hong Kong.

At the larger temples, there were always opera or puppet shows. As on other occasions of this kind, donating to the cost of the festival brought blessings, and lists of donors' names could always be seen posted at the temple or in some public place for all to see, including the gods. The local worshipping groups known as 'firecracker associations' (*fā pau wui*) were always much in evidence.⁷ Together with fellow-countrymen's associations and some martial arts gymnasias, they were mainly responsible for the temporary altars and decorated archways erected in the town and district during the festival, and for the floral tributes placed over the front of restaurants where devotees had gathered for a celebratory dinner.

The Tin Hau Temple on Tsing Yi Island was the most popular venue over this period. Besides the usual opera performances, its main feature was the yearly competition for the best floral shrine. Over one hundred worshipping groups regularly took part, placing their altars in the school playground after worshipping in the temple. The organizers told me on several occasions that they could have had many more entries, but had been obliged to limit numbers owing to the restricted space available. The participating bodies came from all over the colony, and included many of the 'firecracker associations' mentioned above. Their floral altars were elaborate and expensive works of art in their own right. However, they were rarely the work of the entering group, but had been made by shops specializing in this type of traditional decorative art, mostly from Reclamation Street in Kowloon.

The judging of the entries was done by local and New Territories' community leaders together with invited senior government officials, among them (as a permanent fixture) the District Officer, Tsuen Wan and some of his staff. The weather on this occasion was usually hot and humid. We assembled in the school playground, and exchanged courtesies. The committeemen placed millboards in our hands, on which the necessary judging forms were placed ready for us to fill out. We then walked slowly around, scrutinizing each altar in turn and entering marks for the different qualities that would, when aggregated, produce the winners. The design,

subject, materials, colour, workmanship, originality of treatment, all counted. Besides judging, we had the usual speeches and presentations to make, shared out (as was usual on all such occasions) among the principal guests.



Judging the Floral Shrines at the Tin Hau Festival, Tsing Yi, late 1970s. To my right Stephen Wong Yuen-cheung, Chairman of the Heung Yee Kuk; to my left, Willy N.P. Wong, Senior Liaison Officer, District Office, Tsuen Wan. Courtesy, Tsing Yi Rural Committee.

This particular festival was always a highly popular and colourful event. The floral altars and the opera performances both attracted large crowds. As at other festival times, lion and unicorn dancers also took part. They were conveyed to the site by lorries, from which rhythmic drumming and gonging could be heard as they whirled along the city streets to their destinations, adding to the excitement of the day.

ALSO CELEBRATED ON TSING YI ISLAND, the Chun Kwan Temple Festival was (and still is) another 'crowd-puller' and like the Tin Hau Festival there, is patronized by many 'firecracker associations' from outside. This deity's birthday is celebrated with the traditional opera performances and prayers early in the fourth lunar month. The senior staff of the District Office are always invited to the opening ceremony and dinner, and have the usual presentations to make to sponsors and helpers on behalf of the organizers.⁸

The temple seems to have originated with immigrant workers who came to Tsing Yi early in this century to work in the lime-kilns and other rural industries established there at that time. In their home district along the East River of northeast Kwangtung, there were many temples and shrines dedicated to the man-become-god, Chun Kwan. Originally a soldier, in the first half of the thirteenth century he had achieved fame locally by suppressing pirates and robbers; and being also credited with supernatural powers and accurate forecasting, he was subsequently deified. The workers had brought incense ashes from the main temple in Lung Kong and set up a shrine which in time became a small temple.

Owing to the several 'miracles' attributed to the power of the deity during the war and Occupation and thereafter, the temple acquired a good following. This was enhanced by a later episode which must have appealed dearly to its already impressed devotees. The temple brochure recounts the marvellous tale about a year when the scheduled opera performance was threatened by a typhoon. Chun Kwan was consulted by using the divining blocks and wanted the show to proceed on time, but the typhoon gathered force and struck the island. The festival site was flooded and the matshed damaged. The directors 'sat up all night, keeping watch and secretly blaming the god for not agreeing to the postponement'. Miraculously, at 2 a.m., the wind dropped and the night sky became clear, with shining stars. After hectic repairs and much effort, the show could proceed.⁹

From 1961 onwards, the deity's enhanced standing with local residents as well as with outsiders made it possible, by mutual agreement, for the directors to make use of the matshed erected for celebration of the Tin Hau festival, which falls only a few weeks before. Also, the building was able to be enlarged in 1970. When the area had to be cleared for development in the mid-1980s, the Chun Kwan Temple was reprovisioned on another site, like the Tin Hau Temple a decade earlier. Both festivals continue to be held. The authorities had taken special note of their importance in the lives of residents, and during the island's redevelopment, open ground was provided within the new urban layout on which these celebrations could be staged, as in the past.

THE NEXT FESTIVAL OF LOCAL IMPORTANCE in which district office staff took part was the Dragon Boat Festival. This commemorates the suicide of Ch'u Yuan (Wat Yuen in Cantonese), a virtuous official of the third century BC who ended his life by drowning himself in the Milo River in protest against an imperfect ruler. The dragon boat races are said to represent the search for his body.¹⁰ The races are always most exciting competitions, made more so by the continuous drumming which pushes each boat's straining crew to a hoped-for victory.



Dragon boats at the Tsuen Wan District Races, held on Tsing Yi Island, late 1970s. Courtesy, Tsing Yi Rural Committee.

In Tsuen Wan District, the three rural committees combined to organize races to which teams from other places were invited. However, they were essentially local events, small in scale compared to the major races held elsewhere. There were never the crowds that thronged to Tai Po in the NT or to Yaumati, Aberdeen and Shaukeiwan in the old urban area, where it was the tradition for the Governor, the Commander British Forces or some other high official to be the guest of honour and to present the main prizes and banners to the winning teams. However, in like fashion, these duties were carried out by the local officials from the different government departments, and by community leaders from Tsuen Wan and other places. Every year, I spent several hours watching the races and then helped to present banners to the winning crews.

The Tsuen Wan races had been plagued by the redevelopment programme. Obligated to remove from the Tsuen Wan waterfront in 1977 on account of encroaching development works, the organizers selected another location on Tsing Yi, but as new reclamation works in turn affected all suitable off-shore locations in the District, by the late 1980s the long-term future of dragon boat racing was in some doubt.

THE CHING MING AND CHUNG YEUNG FESTIVALS, at which Chinese visit the tombs of their forbears to tidy the graves, and make offerings

to their spiritual beings of food and paper money and other ritual goods, are also well-known. In Tsuen Wan District, with the division of the population into local people and newcomers, the obligations and practices of the villagers at these times, after centuries of settlement, differed from those of the latecomers. The Village Representative of Sham Tseng told me in 1977 that at Ching Ming, in the spring, his lineage members performed the worship in the ancestral hall; whereas at Chung Yeung in the Autumn there was a full-scale visit to the tombs by some three hundred people coming from the four locations in which the lineage now lived, who split into parties and visited all its ancestral graves. In contrast, the newcomers' parents or grandparents' remains would be in a cemetery or its columbarium, or else their soul tablets might be kept in one of the local religious houses.

Normally, I would have no part in these worshipping ceremonies which related to family only. However, as an individual visiting with friends — and not necessarily only on the two grave-worshipping festivals — I might be invited to pay respects to the ancestors at the tombs or in the ancestral halls. One particular friend always invited me to do so when we made visits to any of the important graves of his clan, addressing the ancestor concerned to advise him (or her) of our visit, and introducing me with a few words.



With Yeung Pak-shing, Village Representative of Yau Kam Tau New Village, Tsuen Wan, and clansmen at one of their resited ancestral graves, overlooking the sea between Tsuen Wan and Tsing Yi Island. Courtesy, Mr Yeung Pak-shing.

However, in my capacity as the local official, I was expected to take part in some of the regular commemorative ceremonies performed by the Tsuen Wan Rural Committee at these times. Early post-war, like others in the district, the Rural Committee had gathered up the bones of people buried in unmarked shallow earth graves during the Japanese Occupation and placed them in a formal tomb. This was a customary practice, with other and earlier examples from the district. The committee's leading office-bearers used to visit several such communal graves at one or other of the two festivals in spring and autumn to pay their respects to the departed but unidentified and uncared-for souls, and they always asked me to accompany them.

ANOTHER SPECIAL LOCAL EVENT was held every year in the Tin Hau Temple at Tsuen Wan. Taking its origin in the turbulent history of the place, and unconnected in any way with the worship of the goddess, it has (and continues to have) meaning only for the long-settled Hakka villagers of the sub-district.¹¹ As District Officer, I was expected to attend the rituals observed there with their organizers, the Tsuen Wan Rural Committee.

These take place at a shrine located in one of the temple's side halls. It commemorates seventeen of their fellow-villagers, killed in the mid-nineteenth century in the course of three long years of sporadic inter-village fighting with the Shing Mun people, also Hakkas and their fellow natives of the Tsuen Wan District. Acting on behalf of its own community, the Tsuen Wan Rural Committee goes there in a body to pay its respects to the dead at the time of the spring and autumn sacrifices. Performed continuously for well over a century, these rites gave me a peculiar sense of historical continuity as I joined the leaders in raising lighted joss-sticks and making the customary three bows from the waist, in a show of respect to the dead heroes. It was indeed a very special, entirely local event; and as the territorial official, I felt greatly privileged to be invited to take part.¹²

THE HOLY MOTHER YIU'S BIRTHDAY falls on the sixteenth day in the tenth lunar month, when many people climb the hill to worship at her shrine. Invitation cards from all kinds of associations used to flow into the District Office throughout the year, and especially on the occasion of major festivals and local occasions.¹³ One day in 1977 I received from this temple management committee the customary red invitation card, brushed in black ink. Worded in the polite terms usual on such occasions, this invited me 'to lend my presence and bestow instruction' on the occasion of the goddess' birthday and the inauguration of the next term of the 'firecracker association' linked to the temple. I decided to accept the invitation.

The Lady Yiu, a Kwangtung worthy, lived in the first century BC.¹⁴ She had found a continuous place in the hearts and affections of the people of her home county for nearly two thousand years. Her presence in a temple in Tsuen Wan was due to the fervour of immigrants who decided that they must continue to have the benefit of her guidance and protection in their new home. One of the lesser known, but most interesting temples of the popular religion in Tsuen Wan, it is located at Fu Yung Shan, in a squatter area high above the town.

On the day of the festival, just before the appointed time, I joined the throng of worshippers, many of them in gaily dressed family groups, making their way up the hillside to the temple. From the highest road level, we took a footpath that wound uphill between wooden huts, telephone poles and scattered pine trees until we reached a high terrace where, among a



The annual celebration of the Holy Mother Yiu's birthday at the squatter temple above Fu Yung Shan, Tsuen Wan, in 1976. Private photograph.

number of other structures, was (and is) the Temple of the Holy Mother Yiu. I was greeted by the directors, and in due course had to share in the programme of activities marking the deity's birthday. This included the inauguration of the new term of office bearers for the 'firecracker association', making various presentations and paying respects to the deity, and sharing in the banquet prepared on site and eaten under the pine trees that shaded the terrace.

THE CELEBRATION OF LOCAL FESTIVALS could sometimes involve us in confrontations with their organizers and followers. We now come to two festivals, one following the other, in which, because of their nature, there was no direct official participation. However, owing to our duties and responsibilities as the land authority, District Office staff were involved in other less pleasing ways. Some background is necessary to bring out the compulsive forces that could lead to trouble.

The Hungry Ghosts Festival takes place in the middle of the seventh lunar month. This is a time devoted to the care of the dead, especially those without living male descendants to perform the yearly sacrifices to the departed. According to Buddhist beliefs, their spirits are released from hell once a year, and unless they can find sustenance and solace through these special ceremonies, will wander the earth, angry and dissatisfied, and bring disaster upon all the living beings they encounter. Regarded as a time of great danger for humans, it has long been the practice of Chinese people to make special arrangements to ward off their harmful actions. The protective rituals have been performed in urban Hong Kong from the very beginning of British rule, and its organization in the various localities has long been a major annual preoccupation for local leaders.¹⁵ In Tsuen Wan, the festival was observed by organizations in several parts of the district, and it was up to the District Office to assist in finding sites for the matsheds erected for the priests who perform the religious rituals, and for the accompanying opera performances.

This festival was particularly favoured by the Chiu Chau and Hoklo people living in the large public housing estates and squatter areas. Arranged and financed by the Tsuen Wan Chiu Chau community, the biggest and best-attended celebrations took place each year at the large Sha Tsui Street recreation ground near the Princess Alexandra Community Centre in the central area. Another smaller-scale celebration that I remember particularly well took place near my office in the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank Building on Castle Peak Road. Until cleared for the Mass Transit Railway project in 1978–79, every year in the seventh lunar month, a matshed was erected on waste ground next to the Nullah, and the customary prayers and offerings were made there for the benefit of the people living in the area.

Also connected with the dead, another local temple festival was especially favoured by the same groups of post-war immigrants. This was associated with Tei Chong Wong, the King of Hell and Ruler of Hades.¹⁶ According to a major authority, the purpose of worshippers before Tei Tsong Wong is 'to intercede for their ancestors in Hades and endeavour to avert a like fate for themselves'.¹⁷ However, notwithstanding his obvious relevance for one and all, there had been no temple in the Tsuen Wan District to this deity until the Hoklo and Chiu Chau people from northeast Kwangtung settled there in considerable numbers post-war. Thereafter, this festival became an annual event.

The temple is located in Kwai Chung, and as with the Hungry Ghosts Festival celebrations during my time in the district, the rituals and accompanying opera performances were performed in the eighth and ninth lunar months at the Shek Pai Street Public Playground in North Kwai Chung, attracting large audiences. These arrangements were made by a committee from the three 'squatter' temples of the area, and the organizing body for each year's celebrations was selected by drawing lots in front of the gods.

Various deities were invited to the ground, and their *hang kung* or portable images were brought there from different local temples.¹⁸ The *hang kung* of Tei Chong Wong himself was fetched from the Tung Po To monastery at Lo Wai. In the past, the images had been carried to the site in state, as part of the colourful procession that toured all around the home area. However, by the late 1960s, the processions had been largely discontinued on the instructions of the local police, due to continuing urban development and increasing traffic density.

SITES FOR LARGE THEATRICAL MATSHEDS were often very hard to find in the fast developing town. Due to the civil engineering schedules, land allocated for several years might not be available the next time round, and there was always keen competition between the several groups which needed to find a site for their matsheds. If one group received approval to use a particular spot, this could lead to harassment or even attacks by the other party, whose members might occupy the site regardless. Even government staff, seeking to recover the disputed ground and hand it over to the successful applicants, might find themselves opposed. This, I have been told by local leaders, was more often the case in the 1960s than later.

Nor were the public playgrounds always made available. The staff of the Urban Services Department became increasingly reluctant to alienate a ground for theatricals. If, as could happen, two festivals were closely spaced and there were overlapping users, the amenity might be put out of commission for a month or more, and there would be a lot of cleaning up to do. Some local residents might also object to the noise and crowds. Yet, viewed

from their side, the organizers of these events had no option but to continue to provide these essential rituals and operas, or risk the angry criticism of their clients, who would feel anxious and dissatisfied if they were not performed.

Apart from the District Office, various other government departments were involved with regulating these religious activities in the public interest; including the Police, Fire Services Department and Urban Services Department (later the New Territories Services Department). In our combined experience, the local Chiu Chau and Hoklo communities were more difficult to deal with over these matters than others.¹⁹ Acting on the advice received from their gods through divination, their leaders usually made up their own minds about when, where, and how they should be celebrated. The managers could become so locked into their obligations to their own groups, that they had not bothered to ask for permission before occupying ground or deciding on the routes to be taken by their processions, despite traffic problems and the distinct possibility of meeting (and clashing) with rival groups on the way. Consequently, refusal of applications, or any alterations to their plans, by the officials might sometimes be ignored or else followed with further variations.

UNAUTHORIZED SHRINES AND TEMPLES were another cause of confrontation. In keeping with their sometimes aggressive behaviour over processions or the temporary use of land for opera maisheds, these people were also prone to build without authority, at the dictate of their deities, and to pay little heed to government regulations in general. Then, too, they would sometimes oppose the periodic demolitions of unauthorized structures carried out by the staff of the Squatter Control Division of the Housing Department, or during a clearance for redevelopment. One of the more disagreeable tasks facing me at the start of my Tsuen Wan service was the need to remove an unauthorized temple structure in a clearance area in the Tsing Yi development zone. The temple was solid and well-built, and had been in existence for some time. The land was urgently required, but the temple-keeper, an elderly man, had announced his intention of 'perishing with the houses'. Fierce opposition from him and his supporters was anticipated, but in the event he went quietly. There was no drama after all, but we were well aware that they were all Chiu Chau and Hoklo people.²⁰

My experience in dealing with these groups over an unauthorized earth-god (Fuk Tak) shrine in the Shek Lei Estate in North Kwai Chung was particularly instructive. The large community of these people living in this estate was centred on this shrine-cum-temple. Since it seemed to meet their religious and social needs, I had wanted to regularize the position and (as I rather naively hoped) save us all a lot of trouble in the process. However,

after a permit had been issued for the land and buildings, it proved difficult to get the leaders to comply with the various conditions attached, as they would promise one thing and do another. This happened repeatedly, trying the patience of the land staff. As it turned out, there were underlying reasons for this behaviour; it was not until I was able to read Douglas Sparks' doctoral dissertation on this particular community that I began to have any real inkling of them. His account also helped to explain our occasional difficulties with opera matsheds during festivals and in the past, with the processions associated with them.²¹

Dr Sparks was (as he put it) 'part-observer, part-participant' in the protracted and sometimes dramatic sequence of events connected with regularization of the temple, and its further unauthorized expansion thereafter, even to the extent of pushing a wheelbarrow loaded with building materials up the steep hillside to the site. From his account, we get an impression of the tumultuous manner in which these groups conducted their affairs; also of the way in which such temples came into being through what he styled a combination of unauthorized 'construction, confrontation and negotiation'.²² This, in fact, was a 'self-perpetuating' process. The chairman was on a knife edge and *had* to keep on building, because — as Sparks had explained — 'the power, prestige and influence of a temple organization is perceived in terms of the size and grandeur of its temple', and the leader's position rested on his ability, or good fortune, to contrive results, all along the line.²³

The larger size and grandeur of the temple today is proof of the soundness of Dr Sparks' analysis. As with many others of the kind, the temple has been extended several times since those difficult times. During a recent visit to the area, I chanced to see it in its latest guise. The main building is now resplendent with a yellow roof, and there has been a generous addition of green tiles on the ancillary buildings. Several flights of brick steps with painted red metal railings have replaced the uneven, precipitous path up which Sparks had toiled with his barrow. They now led steeply uphill to the several terraces on which the buildings stand, amid small gardens. It is clear that a lot of money has been raised and spent on the complex. Like their devotees, the gods have also been doing well out of Hong Kong's increasing wealth and individual prosperity.

IT IS WELL-KNOWN AMONG CHINESE that, as in the West, religion can sometimes be a cloak for fraud. Squatter temples were objects of particular suspicion to some people, including some of my staff. Writing to me on file about another of the kind that we were also considering regularizing, one of the senior land executives had made no secret of his distaste for them and their operators:

I have no further comments on this case, other than to record my strong personal dislike to these so-called 'temples' being allowed to be tolerated

Warming to his theme, he had continued:

From past experience, such squatter temples are invariably sources of trouble and criminal activities. The majority (I don't say all) of the operators, usually Chiu Chau people, are no more than monsters in disguise trying to make money out of innocent worshippers, under the beautiful banner of religion.²⁴

Leaders of the pre-war Hong Kong Chinese community had had similar reservations about some of the people who ran the urban temples, and in 1928 they had prevailed upon the Hong Kong government to enact a Chinese Temples Ordinance.²⁵ Nonetheless, as the Tsuen Wan squatter temples had already existed for many years despite the periodic attentions of the Housing Department's Squatter Control Division, it seemed better to think in more positive terms. Secure tenure brought registration and more formal organization, and generally better management.

A MORE PAINFUL CONNECTION with local religious life arose from the programme of resumptions and clearance for development, as stated in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. In particular, the extension of the Mass Transit Railway to Tsuen Wan in 1978–80 affected a number of religious institutions; as ill-fortune would have it, there were many of them in the development zone, both large and small. Although otherwise predominantly squatter in nature, the area included two very large permanent religious houses, each standing on its own private land: the Yan Cheung Villa and the Luk Year Yuen.²⁶ We would have a good deal to do with these places and with some of their inmates, the dead as well as the living, during those few years.

The history of Yan Cheung Villa is of considerable interest, because it indicates the religious forces that were at work in the Canton and Hong Kong community in the earlier part of this century. According to information obtained from its surviving elderly inmates, the villa had been built by a religious society established in Kwangtung about 1920, known as the Tung Sin She. Syncretic in kind, its members studied and worshipped all 'Three Religions of China', Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. It had followers in various parts of Kwangtung, but no major centre. Mindful of the long-disturbed state of their native province, its leaders decided to look for a site in British Hong Kong, with its enviable reputation for law and order. Tsuen Wan was selected on account of its quiet hinterland and its

excellent sea links. A site with good *fung shui* in a locality with a propitious name was chosen, and agents bought up sufficient land from local villagers. The villa was completed in 1935, and the formal opening took place on the twenty-sixth day of the first lunar month of 1936 (18 February 1936).

After such an auspicious start, it is sad to think that its fate was bitter and not a little curious. The organizers' hopes were soon to be dashed by war with Japan, the Occupation that followed and by the civil war in China. These momentous events disrupted the lives and fortunes of patrons in Kwangtung and the society's finances, curtailing the recruitment of replacements for the many inmates who had died in the interim. The wartime confusion and deaths among the pre-war managers led to a dispute over ownership and control among their descendants and hangers-on, and soon stripped the villa of its religious character. Save for the few remaining elderly lay-women left to occupy an upper corridor of rooms at the rear of the building, the rest of the premises was soon filled up with squatters, many of whom had arrived in the years of the great influx of people into Hong Kong in 1948–50.

When I went to Tsuen Wan in 1975, the villa's many rooms were packed with poor families, and its great wooden doors had long stood open and were never closed. The curious passer-by could look from the outside lane into a courtyard largely taken up with delapidated wooden and tin structures and the usual odds and ends like old bicycles, grimy delapidated handcarts, rattan pig-carrying baskets and piles of wood from building sites. Only the great hall with its high walls and lofty ceiling, had (by being kept locked) escaped the general havoc created by the prolonged squatter occupation. Still in place were its fine furniture and fittings, and its altar tables bearing wooden memorial tablets to deceased members of the Tung Sin She.²⁷

When, a few years later, the villa was cleared for development, and after arrangements had been made for all its elderly religious inmates to be rehoused, I had the ancestral tablets and fittings sent to the District Office Store pending settlement of the dispute over control of the valuable land-exchange entitlements for the villa then before the courts. I took care to inform the solicitor acting for the inmates that I had done so.

The sequel was instructive, but left me more than a little puzzled and concerned. To my surprise, all these items were still in the store when I became Regional Secretary, New Territories in 1985. Before my retirement in late 1987, I tried to interest various parties connected with the former Tung Sin She to take them in, especially the ancestral tablets, for it was inconceivable to me that they should remain neglected in packing cases in a dusty store. I regret to say that despite my efforts they are still there, and can only conclude that there must have been difficulties in the way of retrieving and caring for them beyond my knowledge.²⁸

In an unexpected way, I had another direct involvement with the other large institution affected by the clearance programme, the Luk Year Yuen. This was an offshoot of a famous monastery in Nanking, and had been established in Tsuen Wan in the 1920s. Standing in its own grounds in a well-favoured spot, it had escaped Yan Cheung Villa's melancholy fate during the post-war squatter influx, and continued to function as a religious house to the end. However, it had not been placed sufficiently high on the hillside to avoid what could not have been foreseen some fifty years before — the threat posed by redevelopment. Fortunately, its abbot was a well-known Buddhist monk, noted for his organizational and fund-raising capabilities that often took him to North America and elsewhere. Following the removal of its inmates and the demolition of the buildings, he was able to ensure Luk Year Yuen's continuity and later re-established it elsewhere.

The District Office had been involved in the land resumption and clearance, and as recounted below (p. 181) I had tried to keep Luk Year Yuen in Tsuen Wan by offering the abbot another site. This he declined, but our involvement was not yet over. Whilst we were busily engaged elsewhere, extensive site formation was being carried out in the area of the Yuen. However, unbeknown to any of us, the founding abbot's remains had long been buried in its grounds, quietly resting there for decades. During the excavations, the grave was disturbed and unearthed in an unceremonious fashion by a bulldozer making some preliminary turns in the garden area. It then transpired that the abbot had been waiting for an auspicious date on which to remove them into a new grave — though he was certainly cutting it rather fine. In the ensuing commotion, I became personally involved, and negotiated various restorative arrangements with the Housing Department and the Yuen. A memorial to its founder now stands in a small garden within the large housing estate that now occupies the site, marking the Yuen's former existence in this place.

Another casualty of the redevelopment programme was the 'Monkey Temple' or (to give it its proper name) Tsuen Wan Yuk Ha Kok. Like the temple of the Lady Yiu, it owed its existence to the devotion of followers determined to reestablish their gods in their new homes. In its case, the Monkey Temple was built initially by Hoklo people from eastern Kwangtung. Located just below the hills that rise steeply from the town area of Tsuen Wan, it was, before its removal for the Mass Transit Railway Extension in 1978, one of the most picturesque and unusual temples in the New Territories. With its grottos and the exuberant statuary that its founders had created among the fields, it had come to rival the famed Tiger Balm Gardens of Causeway Bay, Hong Kong Island, and was well-known to people all over Hong Kong. And besides providing the funds for its construction and gradual extension, its managers and their followers carried out many charitable works, as noted in its historical record.²⁹

In view of its importance, the temple was reprovisioned on another site, below Lo Wai Village. Hitherto, it had not been on a permanent land grant, and I therefore decided to allocate land on permit to the managers, with certain restrictions on the size and height of the buildings to be constructed there. Suffice it to say that my staff, however willing to help, found themselves having to report repeated infringements of the permit conditions. Once again, as in the case of the Shek Lei temple, consulted by sand-tray and planchette, the gods had indicated their wishes in the matter of redevelopment. However, we remained on good terms with the managers, and eventually a longer-term arrangement was approved.

My attempts to keep the Luk Year Yuen in Tsuen Wan led me to another discovery. Wishing to renew contact with the abbot for this purpose, I found that the Yuen's inmates were occupying temporary quarters on the penthouse of the high-rise Far East Bank Building on Castle Peak Road, prior to removing into a new permanent home in Kowloon Tong. Intrigued, I began to wonder what other religious houses might be occupying our urban tenements and multi-storey buildings. The Tsuen Wan Land Registry (part of the District Office) provided me with information about properties owned and occupied by religious houses. These turned out to be mostly of the *chai tong* type, which reminded me that some of the smaller religious houses in the old urban area had long been housed in city tenements.³⁰ The Registry's preliminary search also revealed that there were at least three Christian chapels owning accommodation on the first to third floors of various multi-storey buildings in central Tsuen Wan alone.

Because of the noise associated with the rituals provided for clients, it was perhaps just as well that the great majority of Tsuen Wan's religious houses were tucked away in the foothills behind the town. The continuous chanting of prayers, the 'tok tok' sound of beating an accompaniment on the 'wooden fish' instrument, together with periodic gonging, must — when carried out for hours on end — have created a considerable nuisance for the occupants of neighbouring apartments. In their most solemn (and most expensive) form, some of the services performed in connection with death and the easing of the soul of the departed in its passage through purgatory, would not only last for many days but would continue through the twenty-four hours in each day. Yet no complaints from their neighbours ever came to my attention.

THE EXISTENCE OF CHRISTIAN CONVERTS, and later Christian congregations, among the villages of Tsuen Wan has been described in my earlier book.³¹ Within the North Tsuen Wan development area, there was quite a flourishing Catholic community, and at least one of its premises, a large red-brick pre-war church, had to be surrendered and reprovisioned.

Various Protestant churches and chapels were also affected, as well as a sectarian hall in a squatter area on the hillside above the town.

In 1978, when the District Office was taking back land in North Tsuen Wan for redevelopment we discovered a small cemetery for deceased members of the Chuen Yuen Church, established in Tsuen Wan at the beginning of the century, and were obliged to request its pastor to take up all the graves and re-inter the remains elsewhere. Among the gravestones was one to a husband and wife, with a longer inscription than the rest. The man had been one of the first elders of the fledgling congregation, a Hakka like the local villagers, but not a native of Tsuen Wan. The inscription describes him as a man of character and worth, whose life and works were ever deemed an inspiration to others, in death as in life.

The Chinese sectarian Christian chapel came to light about the same time as the Chuen Yuen Tong's cemetery, when a temporary structure at San Tsuen Pai above the town was due to be cleared. Upon investigation, this proved to be a meeting hall for the Chun Hung Kau, a wholly native offshoot of Christianity. According to its record, the Chun Hung Kau originated with a famous teacher in Kiangsi in 1862, a former Buddhist who had learned the Truth when in a trance and established the new religion. The movement had spread to Hong Kong in 1901, and also to various overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. Up to 1937, a total of no less than 205 churches was recorded, and in post-war Hong Kong the sect had continued to grow. Hitherto completely unknown to me, it was strange to come across this religious body on a secluded hillside in Tsuen Wan.³² Yet this congregation was a good indication of the number and diversity of Christians among the large number of post-war newcomers to the town.

BESIDES THE DISTRICT OFFICE INVOLVEMENT through festivals, unauthorized shrine and temple building, and clearances for development, our routine duties in land administration brought us into contact with other religious institutions, of which there were a great many in the district, especially on the leafy hillsides behind the built-up area. Sometimes, this would be through their applications for additions or modifications to additional buildings; at other times, it might be for extra land on permit. In this way, we further widened our knowledge of, and acquaintance with, the local religious communities.

There were many Buddhist establishments, large and small in the Lo Wai area above the town. It was for this reason that a Buddhist laywoman once described it to me as a 'Buddha Land'. An energetic English-speaking Tsuen Wan monk very kindly made a census of the local Buddhist institutions for me in April-May 1977. Twenty-three were listed, variously described in English as 'monasteries' (5), 'pagoda' (1) and 'retreat' (17), with rather

more variation in their Chinese names. These were all institutions with resident monks (63) and nuns (43), and together with associated laymen (24) and laywomen (339), numbered around 470 persons in all.

An account of one of the smaller among their number, the Chu Kong Sim Yuen at Lo Wai Village, will give an idea of the sort of Buddhist institutions and their personnel to be found in Tsuen Wan at that time. I came to hear of it through its head's application to the District Office in 1976 for permission to construct a 'pagoda' in which to store human ashes. The Yuen, I found, consisted of two premises: the original hall established pre-war in a village house in Lo Wai, and another on Crown land permit at nearby Sheung Kok Shan, built in 1960. The monk-in-charge, who was born around 1908, told me that he began to follow a teacher in religion when he was fifteen years old. Fourteen years later, he came to Hong Kong on account of the Japanese occupation of Canton in 1938, and for the next three years occupied a mat-hut on a hillside behind the Tin Hau Temple at Causeway Bay on Hong Kong Island. In 1940, he rented a tenement floor in the Central District where he established a religious house, also called Chu Kong Sim Yuen. This name was chosen for the successive Hong Kong houses because his parent temple, that of his teacher, was the Chu Kong Chi in Ko Tong, Pun Yue County, Canton. Three of the residents of the Yuen had lived there pre-war, himself and two women, all now elderly, and previously part of the much bigger following in residence before the Japanese occupied the city.

The old monk stated that the Yuen's functions were 'taking care of aged and distressed people, and offering funeral services for deceased persons and other rituals for the dead'. He qualified this by explaining that he was not providing a general 'out' service for the public, but was conducting them on the premises for friends and disciples in the main. The Yuen also stored urns with human ashes for its clientele, and his 1976 application was for a pagoda to house the forty urns kept in the main building and more than twenty in the other. At the Buddhist census mentioned above, there were said to be seven monks in residence, including the abbot. The women seem all to have been lay persons.

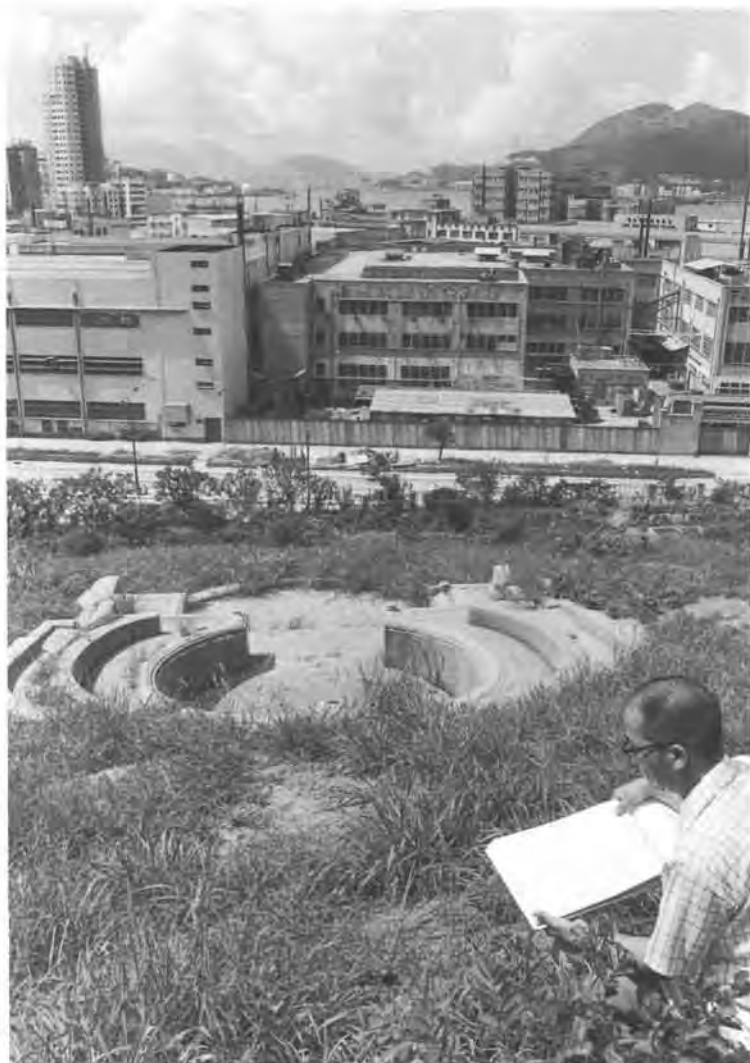
Confined to Buddhist institutions, the Ven. Yuen Quing's census did not include the many Taoist houses in and around Lo Wai village, most of which were *chai tong* ('vegetarian halls'), with both resident and 'not-yet-resident' members. Commonly found in the New Territories, these were places where many elderly lay women — often retired domestic servants — came together to lead a communal life close to religion and the deities.³³ Institutions of this type were all financially self-sufficient. They provided a home for their inmates in their later years by means of the traditional arrangement whereby each newcomer had bought her way into the house. This was achieved by paying a lump sum to its head, and making regular

instalment payments thereafter. These began when the would be inmates were still working outside, and they did not enter their halls full-time until they had retired from employment. The recurrent income of these places came from the provision of religious services for departed souls after death, and on commemorative dates thereafter, which brought many clients and their families to the halls. The future inmates would return at major festivals, for rest and recreation and to help with receiving and looking after the many visitors who went there at such times. In these and other ways the vegetarian halls and their inmates augmented the amenities and religious services provided at the Buddhist institutions of the place.

IT WILL BE CLEAR, EVEN FROM THIS BRIEF ACCOUNT, that the District Office had a wide working acquaintance with what may be styled the religious life of residents in the Tsuen Wan District. Our involvement was at times close: assisting our integration into the community, adding to our knowledge of its people, and earning us both gratitude and opprobrium in the process. But before closing, I want to recount an experience that involved me with the oldest and most important grave in the district, and indeed in Hong Kong.

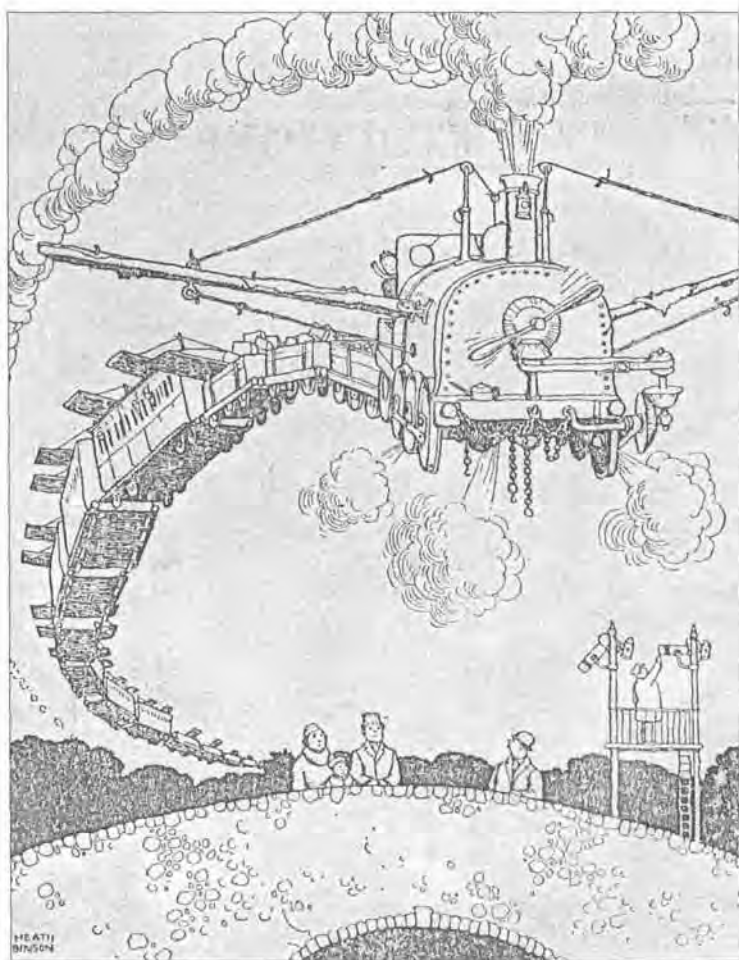
The 'Tang Grave', as we called it, was located on a small hill near my office where it had remained undisturbed since the year 1100.³⁴ It belonged to the ancient and by now very numerous Tang lineage, settled at Kam Tin and elsewhere in the New Territories and in neighbouring parts of Kwangtung. Now, unfortunately for us, the grave lay in the path of the Mass Transit Railway Extension to Tsuen Wan; and since our work in recovering land needed for development had already alerted me to the great importance attached to ancestral graves in the popular mind (owing to the connection made between them and the well-being of later generations) I was not at all sanguine as to the outcome of this particular case, especially as the clan owned the hill on which it was sited.³⁵ One way of avoiding it was suggested by a wag in the Tsuen Wan Development Office who forwarded the humorous drawing shown on p. 186; but it was up to me to find a more prosaic solution.³⁶

Realizing that I could not possibly summon the Tang clan's leaders to attend at my office — that is, if I wanted to have any chance of success — I arranged to go to the Nixon Library in Yuen Long to discuss the matter with them. The grave was of such universal importance to the clan that the managers of the Tang To Hing Tong, the lineage trust administering the property, had been joined on this occasion by other venerable Tang elders; I have all their names in my notebook still. Our meeting was amicable once they realized my concern for their interests, but I could still scarcely credit my good fortune when we were able to find a solution to the problem.



The Tang Grave at Tsuen Wan, dating from the year 1100. Courtesy, Hong Kong Government.

Contrary to my expectation, the railway could pass across the frontage of the grave on a raised structure above Castle Peak Road, provided that the level of the track did not block the line of sight from its inscribed tablet. And though, in the event, the Mass Transit Railway Corporation later decided against building this section of the railway, and our joint efforts were thus rendered superfluous, I rate reaching this agreement as one of the highlights of my career. It had been altogether a most interesting episode, and constituted yet one more encounter with the popular religion in the course of my official duties.



A fanciful rendering of how the Mass Transit Railway might avoid the Tang Grave, October 1977. Courtesy, Tsuen Wan New Town Development Office (which advised that the location of the drawing was unknown).

Notes

1. See Joan Law and Barbara E. Ward, *Chinese Festivals* (Hong Kong, SCMP, 1982), and C.S. Wong, *An Illustrated Cycle of Chinese Festivities in Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore, Jack Chia-MPH Ltd., 1987).
2. See also *Tsuen Wan*, chapter 9.
3. SCMP, 22 February 1989 has an account of a stoning of plain-clothes police by about 150 people at a Yuen Long village during a gambling raid around the New Year period.
4. Although founded by outsiders, the Yuen Yuen Institute was well-supported by the leaders of the Tsuen Wan village community many of whom became directors and shared in its fund-raising and other activities.

5. A copy of the Institute's brochure has been placed in SCHKUL
6. For this and other deities mentioned in this chapter, see E T C. Werner, *A Dictionary of Chinese Mythology* (Shanghai, Kelly and Walsh, 1932); and with more local application, V.R. Burkhardt, *Chinese Creeds and Customs* (Hong Kong, SCMP Ltd, 3 vols, 1954, seq.).
7. Law and Ward, *Chinese Festivals*, pp 34, 39–40, 59; and the useful account at pp 94–97 of C. Fred Blake's *Ethnic Groups and Social Change in a Chinese Market Town* (Honolulu, The University Press of Hawaii, 1981).
8. Issei Tanaka, *Chukoku Saito Yengeki Kenkyu* (Ritual Theatres in China), (Tokyo, University of Tokyo, Institute of Oriental Culture, 1981), pp 742–747, has a description of the festival. See Wang Sung-hsing's review of this impressive book in JHKBRAS 22 (1982), pp. 336–338.
9. This account is taken from the leaflet issued for the 1983–84 lunar year celebration.
10. See Law and Ward, *Chinese Festivals*, pp. 53–54. They query the origin Werner, too, *op. cit.*, p. 126 has a different explanation.
11. See Tsuen Wan, pp. 10–11
12. The shrine is featured in Plate 42 of JHKBRAS 17 (1977) The Shing Mun people had a similar shrine to their dead. For other altars, see Faure *Structure of Chinese Rural Society*, p. 22n43.
13. A specimen collection of these valuable 'ephemera' is with SCHKUL
14. See JHKBRAS 19 (1979), 'More Notes on Tsuen Wan' at pp. 208–209.
15. The missionary W Lobscheid describes one such event in his *China in Statistischer, Ethnographischer, Sprachlicher und Religioer Beziehung, Mit Besonderer Berücksichtigung Des Ta Tsu, Der Grossen Herbst-Seelenmesse* (Hongkong, Druck von Noronha & Sons, 1871). A hundred years later, the Yu Lan festival at Chaiwan on Hong Kong Island was featured in the coloured photo-section between pp. 118–119 of HK 1970.
16. See under 'Ti-tsang Wang' in Werner, *op. cit.*, pp 497–499
17. *Ibid.*, p. 498.
18. See the description of the festival there given by Tanaka at *op. cit.*, pp. 736–742
19. See Tsuen Wan, p. 126 and 210n7.
20. See SCMP 24 March 1984, for another temple demolition.
21. DWS.
22. 'Leadership, Conflict and Ritual', DWS between pp 153–226
23. DWS, p. 219.
24. L/M 200–202 in Tsuen Wan file CL 477/9/79
25. See David Faure, 'Folk Religion in Hong Kong and the New Territories Today' in Julian F. Pas (ed) *The Turning of the Tide, Religion in China Today* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong Branch, Royal Asiatic Society, in association with Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 265–267.
26. Fortunately, brochures were published about them pre and post-war, and copies have been placed in SCUHKL.
27. For a fuller account, see JHKBRAS 19 (1979), pp. 212–213.
28. On my latest visit to Hong Kong, I was told that the store will be demolished for development in 1995, which will force some kind of decision.
29. A copy of the brochure giving its origins and history is in SCHKUL
30. See e.g. JHKBRAS 8 (1968), p. 144.
31. See Tsuen Wan, pp. 27–28.
32. See the note in JHKBRAS 19 (1979), pp. 209–212

33. For the Hsien T'ien Tao sect of Taoism to which many of the vegetarian halls in Hong Kong belong, see notes by Marjorie Topley and the writer in JHKBRAS 8 (1968), pp 140–147.
34. See my 'Ancestral Graves and the Popular Culture of China, Some Examples from Hong Kong's New Territories', in International Association of Orientalist Librarians' Bulletin, No 39 (1992) pp 10–12.
35. See the Note by David Liu and myself in JHKBRAS 17 (1977), pp 179–185.
36. I had looked for this sketch in vain when I was writing my Tsuen Wan book, and only found it again recently whilst leafing through an old photograph album.

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'p' after a page number indicates a photograph or illustration

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