

Hong Kong Metamorphosis

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Growing up in China

A few years ago, I was asked to speak to the Royal Asiatic Society in Hong Kong about growing up in Hong Kong. I said I did not grow up in Hong Kong but in China. The change of title did not seem to bother them. To compose a talk on the first thirteen years of your life, when there are practically no books to consult and friends from those days are scattered or gone, was a challenge. To the challenge was added an audience much more knowledgeable than I on the history of the area. I hoped I could get away with it because nobody could check on much that I had to say. This challenge started me on writing about past recollections. It turned out to be quite fun.

I was born

I did not start life in China but in Hong Kong — at the Matilda Hospital in Hong Kong. My father was working in the Methodist Mission in Foshan at the time, running Wah Ying School. This school was founded in 1903 near to a hospital, also run by the mission, which was founded in 1881. The hospital, now known officially as the Number One People's Hospital, but spoken of as the *Chun Do Yi Yuen*, or Methodist Hospital, celebrated its hundredth anniversary in 1982. The school, now known as the Number One Middle School but spoken of still as *Wah Ying*, celebrated its ninetieth anniversary in December 1993.

January 1926 was towards the end of the General Strike, when all Chinese were urged to boycott any form of service for foreigners, and was accompanied by incidents of unrest in China and in Hong Kong itself. It was no time for a pregnant woman to remain in China unless it was essential. So my mother had come to the comparative safety of Hong Kong for the birth.

I cannot recall the event though by a curious coincidence my first memories are of the Matilda Hospital. I was four at the time and had developed a roaring appendix. It had to come out.

Now a journey up the Peak by the Peak Tram was no great novelty, but to go up by a Peak Car was a great adventure. We went to the hospital, and there I went through the traumatic experience of being gassed by having ether poured on a mask while I was held down against my protesting hands. No doubt a more modern anaesthetic would have been less traumatic but it would also have been less memorable.

The events surrounding this experience allow me to take you to Cheung Chau for it was to Cheung Chau that I was taken for convalescence.

Cheung Chau and summer holidays

Cheung Chau lies a few miles to the west of Hong Kong and throughout the 1930s, was a rest resort for missionaries from South China. In these days of universal air-conditioning, it is difficult to appreciate the trials of the summer in Hong Kong, let alone the hotter and more humid conditions in South China. The typical tour for a missionary was five years followed by a furlough in England during which the missionary toured the country speaking about his experiences. During the hot summers, missionaries' families would descend on the resorts of Hong Kong. Two were particularly popular — Cheung Chau and Sunset Peak high on Lantau, a much larger, mountainous island west of Hong Kong.

On Lantau, a number of bungalows had been built and are still there. They are at the top of the mountain to enjoy the lower temperatures which the wealthy sought on the Peak on Hong Kong Island. We slept in our bungalows but had our meals in the common dining-room which was also used for meetings and services. As children, we spent the whole time out of doors swimming in pools in the streams. My most vivid memory of Lantau was being there in a typhoon. We must have had some warning of the approach of the typhoon as the shutters were closed, so that the

lamps had to be lit — there was no electricity of course. We did not have long to wait before the storm hit. The noise was terrific and the wind blew quantities of water under the door into the bungalow. It seemed to go on for a long time. The next day the shutters were opened, the lamps put out and we emerged into a battered but recognizable environment.

On the whole we preferred Cheung Chau, and it was to Cheung Chau that I was taken after my appendix operation. During my stay in hospital when I had to stay in bed for some time, I had forgotten how to walk or even stand up! I protested that I could not possibly walk up to the bungalow on Cheung Chau so a sedan chair was sent for. I had not seen one on Cheung Chau before, though they were a common sight in Hong Kong and were used to carry children up Lantau Peak. I was lured out of my invalid bed by the present of some stunning bathing shoes. These were brightly coloured rubber shoes that were meant to protect your feet from stones on the beach. I do not remember ever actually using such shoes but, with the sound of the waves lapping on the beach, they were enough to remind me of the delights of swimming, and messing about in the sand, and playing with model boats — the largest of which had been made specially by the building contractor in Foshan.

Swimming played a central part in our lives on Cheung Chau. I can remember my first unaided swim which was rewarded by the present of a trumpet — much regretted by my parents in subsequent days. The beach was the highlight of our lives. We would walk through the thick pine woods across the island from our bungalows, down through the screw pine to the beach. The smells of the pine trees, of the screw pine and of the beach and the sea still evoke the thrill of arriving at the beach and dashing into the sea.

Some of the grown-ups were able to swim out to a large rock off the Evening Beach (Kwun Yam Wan) to which the Residents' Association had fixed some iron rungs for climbing out. I was only able to achieve such an exploit when I had come back to work in 1950, but by then the iron rungs had rusted away. The association also arranged with some fishermen, who fished at night, to anchor their boat in the bay and fix steps and a diving-board for us to use by day. This did come in reach and I can still recall the thrill of climbing up the steps after the swim-out. The boat had a delicious smell of fish and sea water and was swarming with little black creatures with lots of legs. It was a great place to play as well as being an excellent diving-platform.

The Morning Beach (Nam Tam Wan) was much smaller but it too had a large rock equipped with rungs to climb out on. We did not go

often to the Police Beach (Tung Wan), which adjoined the Evening Beach, though I do remember seeing their diving-boat there washed up high and dry after a typhoon.

The village had not changed much when I first visited it after the war. The walk up to the bungalows was past the market and through the narrow lanes with their shops selling fishing tackle, torches, salt fish, groceries and other odds and ends. We passed the power station of the Cheung Chau Electric Company which thumped away at night. We never had electricity in our bungalows because it was too expensive. Once out of the village, the scene was one of devastation for all the pine trees, which had covered the island before the war, had been felled for fuel.

The village was confined to the narrow isthmus so that once you left this behind and climbed up, you found yourself among small hills and scattered bungalows. I can remember the building of the community hall which was used as a chapel and meeting place. The only sounds round the bungalows were the wind in the trees and the waves on the beaches and rocks. From the bungalow that we used most often there was a magnificent view over towards Ling Ting Island. On our last visit in 1938, we were able to see the Royal Navy's motor torpedo-boats travelling at fantastic speeds with a most impressive roar.

The mission compound at Foshan

Cheung Chau was for holidays but our real life was in Foshan. We lived in a spacious house, known still as the White House, on the edge of the compound and adjoining a small creek and paddy-fields. When I saw the house again in 1987, it had shrunk! The mission contained a hospital and nurses training school, a primary and secondary school with workshops for the boys, an innovation which was years ahead of its time. Nearly all the staff were Cantonese but a doctor, Dr Philip Early, the head nursing sister, Kathleen Banks, and a few of the teachers were from England. Only the English knew English and they were all taught Cantonese full-time for two years on arrival. I often regret that I was unable to enjoy this period of study. This time was sufficient for students to learn not only to speak but also to read the classics, or the Bible, and write speeches or sermons depending on your calling — missionary or Hong Kong Government Cadet.

As children, our first language was Cantonese and we always used

this among ourselves. We spoke to our parents in English. When we were on furlough in 1933, my sister and I slept in the same bedroom. After the lights were out, we used to chatter away in Cantonese, much to the amusement of the relatives listening outside the door.

All our social contacts were with Chinese associated with the school or hospital. Agnes Chan was a jolly nursing sister; Dr Mary Chan was one of the first Western-trained doctors who was still alive at the age of eighty-three when my brother and I visited in 1987. She was as sprightly as ever, crying out, as we climbed the stairs to her room, 'Denis, you look like your father and Jeremy like your mother!'

The Foshan household was quite large with an amah to look after us children (who many years later also looked after my own children), a cook, who was husband of the amah, and one or two others to help with the washing and housework. When the time came, I went to the primary school with all the other children of my age — a single very fair head among a sea of black. I can visualize the classroom in which we had our lessons and the playground outside. The textbooks were very thin and had paper covers so that it was possible for the history master to roll one up and give us a good clip over the head if we were being particularly stupid. English was not taught in the primary school, only to the senior students in the secondary school. I was sent to sit among the senior girls to learn my English grammar from my mother who taught the subject.

We had school uniforms of a sort still seen in Hong Kong, but the school only supplied the material to ensure that everybody had the same colour. Ours was a beautiful pale blue only slightly darker than the Cambridge blue. Quantities of the new material would arrive and then be made up into the smartest of outfits.

Paddy-fields and dragon boats

We would walk to school through paddy-fields which for most of the year were flooded for the rice. Small fish abounded in these fields though I never caught any. The cycle of the rice crops was familiar to everybody. First, a scattering of seeds in a small patch, then, when the seedlings were about six inches above the water, the planting out of the seedlings. Then nothing much until harvest — and there were two harvests a year. Water was supplied to the paddy-fields by a complicated irrigation system that involved pumping water up from the creeks. These pumps were an

endless chain of paddles which were pulled up a trough, whose lower end was in the creek, and which discharged into the fields. Some pumps were small and driven by a man using his arms as extensions of long wooden handles attached to extended spokes of the upper wheel round which the chain of paddles rotated. Others were driven by three or four men treading spokes protruding from the axle of the driving wheel. For the winter harvest, the water was drained out so that the rice could be cut and threshed into large tubs on the spot. Where there had been acres of water, now there were dry fields of stubble and stacks of rice straw drying out. As the fields dried, we would take short cuts across them. We also found that the mud was soft enough to make into the mud equivalent of snowballs. This led to splendid games in which factions would build forts with the straw and bombard the enemies with mud balls.

As children, we did not go often into the town except to walk to church. This we did along streets paved with enormous stone slabs laid five at a time along the road and then five across. The roads were elevated above the fields and along the creeks with which the whole delta is riddled. In times of flood, these dykes protected the fields. Occasionally they would be breached. A general alarm would then be raised, as the whole population rushed to repair the damage before the countryside was flooded.

The creeks, one of which passed at the foot of our garden, carried the commerce of the villages and, in the fifth month, the dragon boats. The festival of the fifth moon is of equal importance to the Mid-Autumn Festival and only slightly less than that of the New Year. It commemorates the life of a righteous official (*Wat Yuen* in Cantonese) who, in 314 BC, drowned himself in despair at the iniquity of the authorities. Dragon boats are the descendants of the boats of the villagers seeking to comfort the spirit of their fallen hero. For weeks before the actual festival, dragon boats would be paddled along the creeks of the delta and, from time to time, one would pass our garden. These were magnificent vessels bearing only superficial resemblance to those used today for racing in Hong Kong. The largest had over 100 paddlers. In the centre was an enormous drum with two drummers. Gongs were placed at other points. Large ornamental, cylindrical umbrellas were beautifully embroidered and with little mirrors as added decoration. They had a frightful time negotiating the bend in the creek outside our house, a feat which was only accomplished with tremendous shouting that added to the cacophony already supplied by the percussion. As the fifth month approached, we were on the lookout for the dragon boats which we could hear long before we could see them. With the first sounds of the drums and gongs, we would drop everything

and rush down to the gap in the bamboo hedge from which we had a grandstand view.

Last visit to Foshan

All these events occurred in the period from about 1928 to 1933. After that, we went on leave from which I returned to school in North China. I did, however, make one last journey to Foshan in the spring of 1938. Normally our long school holidays were in the winter but, with the Japanese war starting in 1937, we had a short holiday that winter — when we nearly all stayed at school — and a long holiday in the following spring. It was wonderful to return to the old house and try and pick up a bit of Cantonese again. Canton was under attack by the Japanese who would fly over and bomb the city from time to time. We were close enough to hear the bombs but not to suffer from them. Nevertheless, we had a sandbagged air raid shelter in the garden. Out of curiosity, I went into this gloomy recess one day only to scurry out as soon as I was able to make out my surroundings. I have never seen such a dense cloud of mosquitoes. Thank goodness we never had to use this shelter.

Our departure for Hong Kong that spring was dramatic. From the hospital, we took the ancient hospital motor boat down the creeks to Canton. We found the river steamer for Hong Kong moored in the fast-flowing stream. It was surrounded by an impenetrable mob of sampans carrying people fleeing from the Japanese attack on Canton which was expected any day. Our motor boat could not get to the gangway so we transferred to a sampan. We approached the ladder from downstream as most of the boats were tied to the steamer upstream. We soon found out why because as each sampan cast off from the ladder, another — aided by the stream — pushed its way in from upstream. We could make no headway. The only possible approach was from the bows. As we worked our way slowly down, we saw that the captain was getting worried by the crowds swarming on board. He had to sail or be swamped. Our luggage was manhandled across the intervening sampans, but my father would not allow us to be passed along in the same way, which I thought was a pity. The captain saw us and waited only until our sampan at last made the steps. He then gave the order for his crew to chop through the mooring ropes of all the sampans still tied on. Once freed of these, he weighed anchor and set off for Hong Kong — an overnight journey.

P&O to England: Canadian Pacific to China

In 1933 my father was due for leave, so the whole family, now comprising four children and parents, set off on the P&O *Rawalpindi*, a ship which was later converted to be an armed merchantman during the war and was sunk by a U-boat after a gallant action. Travel by sea was the most commonly used way to reach Europe. From about 1933, one could go faster by taking the Trans-Siberian railway. Fast mail was marked 'Via Siberia' on the envelopes. The sea journey took five weeks. Going by sea, we started with four days at sea to Singapore and trips to the Botanical Gardens there. Then on to Penang, Colombo, Aden, through the Suez Canal perhaps with a stop at Marseilles, where some in a hurry got on the train through France to England, a stop at Gibraltar and thence to Plymouth where we got off for a train to Herefordshire. Most passengers went on to Tilbury in London.

There was a leisurely routine about the trip. Beef tea was served on the deck mid-morning and tea in the afternoon. An enterprising steward rounded up a number of children to help him gather up the cups and plates and rewarded us with magnificent Orders of Chivalry. We usually found some acquaintance in the ports or fellow missionaries. Aden was a coaling port where a ceaseless stream of labourers carried basket after basket of coal on board. We had to keep portholes shut to keep the coal dust out — and the heat in, for there was no air-conditioning. At sea, we had a good deal of freedom and were taken on exploratory trips to such places as the bridge and the engine-room. On the bridge, we were shown the compass that a sailor was steering by. This mystified me because there was no compass needle, just a card with the points of the compass. It was many years before I understood that the magnets were suspended below the card and the trick was to keep a black line at the front of the compass lined up with a mark on the card, indicating the course to be steered. In the engine-room, we saw the huge pistons of the steam engine driving the propeller shaft and walked down to the very end of the tunnel in which it turned. The heat was terrific.

In 1934, leave was up. My father and I returned early to get me into school in September. The two of us travelled by the scenic route, first on the Canadian Pacific ship, the *Duchess of Bedford* which we boarded at Liverpool and which took us across the Atlantic to Montreal, passing, but not hitting an iceberg off Newfoundland, shaped like the headdress

of a Native American. Then by Canadian Pacific Railway for three days and four nights across Canada to Vancouver. That was a glorious journey. The first day was through pine forests and by lakes. The second was across endless prairie country and the third through the Rocky Mountains. At the back of the train, there was an observation coach from which we had an excellent view of the scenery. Each evening, beds were made up and each morning they were folded up.

From Vancouver we sailed on another Canadian Pacific ship, the *Empress of Asia*, to Shanghai — a long journey which must have included a stop in Japan. Some of the sailors began to pull my leg by recounting how the men going to the crow's nest, high on the foremast, had to leap from the rigging which only reached the mast well above the lookout point. Often they would fall to the deck and be killed, I was told, to be washed overboard in the morning. I got so concerned about this that it was only after I was taken to the compartment in the bows and saw the men actually climbing up inside the mast that I was convinced that the story was a fairy tale.

A funny thing about sojourns with my father was that he introduced me to simple gastronomic delights. During my convalescence in the Matilda Hospital from appendicitis it was kippers and on the Trans-Pacific trip it was celery, curry and Worcestershire sauce in the soup to prevent seasickness. All have been favourites ever since! And he patiently read from *The Swiss Family Robinson* each evening.

Chefoo schools

From Shanghai we took a coastal steamer north to Chefoo. Chefoo is the name of a small village on a bluff of land connected to the mainland of the Shandong peninsula by a sand spit. The school was named after this village, though the town, in which it lies, is now called Yantai after the nearby walled city dating from the Ming dynasty. The China Inland Mission had established primary and secondary schools for European and American children from all over China. There were about 100 children in the primary school, 100 boys in the Boys' School and 100 girls in the Girls' School. The Prep School, as the primary school was called, was in an old building and I can well remember the misery of homesickness. After tea at six o'clock we were sent to bed, which seemed ridiculous. My father stayed a few days before sailing for Hong Kong but I saw very

little of him. When he left, I felt abandoned. Others even younger suffered the same fate but seemed to survive.

In fact, these schools were run by a most devoted staff of missionaries who took great care of us — body and soul. They were of a fundamentalist persuasion and expected very high moral behaviour from all of us. The standard of teaching was high and the students got good marks in the Oxford School Certificate Examinations. Pa Bruce was the headmaster of the Boys' School but it is Gordon Martin, a classics scholar, who I remember best. He had rowed at Oxford and had had two boats built for competition, the *Hero* and *Leander*. The boat race between these two crews was one of the highlights of the celebrations of Lammemuir Day — marking the day a ship of that name sailed from England carrying the first China Inland Mission missionaries in the nineteenth century. I cannot help feeling that it was one of his lantern-slide lectures about Oxford and its rowing that planted in my mind a seed of desire to participate in this excellent sport. He was also an accomplished artist at illustrating stories that he would write. In those days, we had no radio or television entertainment so he would read books to us. I particularly remember his keeping us enthralled in his reading of *The Cloister and the Hearth* though I cannot remember the story itself.

The four seasons

School life was regulated to fit the climate. The winters were bitter and so cold that one year we came back from holidays to find the sea frozen over. We walked from the docks to school over the sea. The summers were glorious. I suppose they were hot as I remember hearing of temperatures of 100°F (38°C) or more but the air was dry and on the whole not so hot as Hong Kong. The sea was perfect for swimming, which was allowed once it had reached the temperature of 64°F (18°C) for three successive days. Spring and autumn were intermediate — considerably colder than the summer but not the freezing temperatures of the winter. To cope with these extremes in climate, we had three sets of clothing — khaki shirts and shorts for summer, wool jackets and shorts for spring and autumn and thick wool jackets and plus-fours for the winter. The school buildings were also designed to cope with these extremes. The spacious verandahs round the playground of the Boys' School kept the hall and common rooms cool in the summer. In the

winter, wooden frames with glass were put up in the arches of the verandahs giving an extra layer of insulation while the central heating was going full blast.

There was always some excitement with each change of season. Watching the removal of the glass frames on the verandahs heralded the abandonment of our plus-fours. The production of khaki shirts and shorts meant swimming and rowing was not far off. I can remember so clearly gazing out of the bedroom window across the glassy calm sea in the early mornings, wondering if it had reached the magic 64°. In the autumn, the halcyon summer days would end abruptly with the 'breaking-up storm', a wild blow whose climatic explanation I cannot remember. Then came the first snow and the wooden frames for the verandahs were brought out again.

When I was at the school, a new building was completed for the Prep School and a new classroom block was built where the boys from the Boys' School and the girls from the Girls' School could take coeducational lessons. Reading Jean Moore's account of her days at Chefoo, I learnt that boys and girls were not only kept apart in their sleeping accommodation but also for lessons. This had been dropped by the time I went, so it was strange to find myself in a school for boys only when I went to England later on. We only mixed for lessons and church (where we sat apart except those in the choir — which I joined) and for the rest we existed in entirely separate schools.

In this school, we were also kept pretty isolated from the local population. We did not learn the Shandong language, though the teachers were entirely bilingual. We did not go into town but would come across Chinese on our walks in the hills. Here we would see men pushing incredible loads on huge wheelbarrows, the goods carried on platforms on either side of the massive central wheel. The handles of the barrow were joined by a strap which the men carried over their shoulders. Others carried great loads on bamboo poles. Mules were also beasts of burden. There were no motorable roads outside the town.

When the Japanese overran Chefoo, they set up a roadblock right outside the school and we would try to engage the soldiers in chat. The Japanese controlled the town but the hills were infested with guerrillas and we could occasionally hear firing in the night. The Japanese left us alone at that time for they were not at war with Britain. I had left China before Pearl Harbour, but once the Japanese were at war with the British and Americans, the school was closed down and students and teachers shipped off to another location as part of a prison camp.

Out of school

In the Prep School, our lives were confined to the school area and, in the summer, the beaches in front. We also went for long hikes in the hills behind the schools, but it was the beach that was most fun. On Sundays, we walked in crocodile the couple of miles along the waterfront to a church in the town — most going to the Union Church but some went to the Church of England. I do not recall any Roman Catholics among us and doubt whether I had heard of them then. Only recently I met a lady whose mother went to a Catholic school at Chefoo and attended a Catholic church there.

1935 was a memorable year because it was the Silver Jubilee of King George V. The British Consul in Chefoo put on a great fair to which we all went. Here we were given banknotes specially drawn for the occasion, which entitled us to rides and ice-cream and so forth. The banknotes were so attractive that I could not bring myself to spend them all and kept some for years.

From time to time, ships of the Royal Navy called at Chefoo and there would be sure to be some entertainment. Sometimes, it was open day on the ship; once they dressed up as pirates and came ashore on our beaches and gave us a party there. We also played football against them. The main port for the Royal Navy was Wei Hai Wei (now Weihai), some sixty miles down the coast. Chefoo was the summer home for the American fleet, who would have come up from the Philippines, and who also took us on boating expeditions to nearby islands.

Holidays at school

After two years in the Prep School, I was old enough to go to the Boys' School. The transfer took place during the summer holidays which I, like many others, was spending at school. As I said, children came to these schools from all over China. Most were children of missionaries, but businessmen also sent their children there. Some came from nearby — Qingdao, or Tianjin, or Shanghai. These children could go home for the month-long summer holidays and some even went for the two weeks at Easter. A party of us came from Hong Kong and South China. As it would take us ten days to get to Foshan, we only made the journey once

a year during the two-month long winter holidays. Others came from so far away in Yunnan Province that they never went home. So there were always a good many children in the schools during the holidays.

These holidays were made very enjoyable times for us. In the summer, it would be swimming and tennis. In the winter, some went skating but at all times the staff would think of amusements and games, hobbies and outings which came in great variety.

In 1937 my father had planned a trip to Peking, but the outbreak of hostilities with the Japanese prevented this. Instead, my mother came to Chefoo for the summer holidays and we all stayed at the Missionary Home. This was a simple hostel where we had our meals and slept, but that was about all. There was an Anglican church nearby and I recall the atmosphere of peace and reverence at my first Evensong there. During the day, we would be off to the beach annex of the Chefoo Club where there were rowing-boats and canoes. From nine in the morning until lunch-time and all afternoon, a crowd of us were in and out of the water, rowing out to the raft which was a converted junk with diving-boards. I got so brown that summer that the mark of the swimming trunks was still visible at Christmas time.

Holidays at home

A great part of school life was the holidays at home. Home at this time was in Tung Shan Terrace off Stubbs Road in Hong Kong, when my father was building the Chinese Methodist Church in Wan Chai — the triangular red brick building that stood at the junction of Hennessy Road and Johnston Road. This was home not in a flat but a three-storey house, with a garden overlooking Happy Valley. At the back, we had access to Bowen Road which was a safe place to play as there were no motor vehicles. Those holidays I remember chiefly for rambles up to Sir Cecil's Ride and a major hike over to Tai Tam from Wong Nei Chung Gap. And we went to a school pantomime at the Central British School (now King George V School) where the bad guy called himself 'ZBW my middle name is Trouble You' — ZBW being the call-sign of the embryo Radio Television Hong Kong. We had our first family car here, an Austin Seven with a folding roof, and went for picnics to the beaches at Repulse Bay and Big Wave Bay and at Stanley where a new prison was being built. Although it was winter in Hong Kong, the climate was comfortable for us from the north and we had no hesitation in swimming.

Our journeys home in the winter holidays were considerable undertakings. Of course, there was no air travel; nor was rail travel possible. Instead, we went by sea on the B&S ships of the China Navigation Line. These were coasters of about seven thousand tons which made their way up and down the China coast, carrying cargoes of all sorts, a small number of passengers in cabins and a much larger number of deck passengers. Sometimes, we were able to get a ship that went all the way from Chefoo to Hong Kong, but often we had to get off in Shanghai and wait in the China Inland Mission hostel for a suitable connection. Some luckless schoolmaster had to accompany some twenty or so children — more as far as Shanghai — on these journeys. They were carefree days and I have often wondered how we all survived. We would sit up on the taffrail undeterred by the possibility of toppling over into the sea. I remember getting into frightful trouble from practising throwing a penknife into the cabin bulkhead. In the ports we watched the loading and unloading of cargo, listening to the varied languages of the coast in Fuzhou, Xiamen and Shantou. It was always a thrill to catch the odd Cantonese phrase as we neared home. At one port, we took on board a large number of pigs which were housed in pens on the deck forward of the accommodation. The loading of these pigs involved tremendous squealing generated by the beating of the pigs to make them move. We thought this was cruel so, in the evening, when the loading was finished, several of us sought out the bamboo poles that had been used for beating the pigs and threw them overboard. At sea we would come across massive fishing fleets. On one occasion, our ship was in collision with one of these fishing junks and took the crew on board. We heard that one man had been lost but the rest rescued, including the family of the owner. They looked a miserable wet group on board. I imagine there was a good deal of argument about whose fault the collision was and bargaining about compensation. In any event, the ship was stopped for several hours before the fishermen were taken off by one of the other boats.

Storms and pirates

These journeys were made in the winter so there was no danger from typhoons, but the north-east monsoon produces almost continuous gales in the Taiwan Strait and China Sea. This monsoon sped us on our way south but held us up on the way back. The little ships bucketed about all

over the place, but any seasickness was soon over. It was great fun hanging over the very bows in a big sea watching the ship's stem come right out of the water and plunge back. The year when the sea froze over we found the first ice in the form of tiny plates like fish-scales. These got larger and larger until we found drifts of serious ice. The ship had to take one or two runs at some of these drifts and we had a great struggle to get alongside when we reached the port in Chefoo.

Pirates were common on the China coast, but only once was a school party involved in a piracy. This was the Shanghai party travelling back to school on the *Tungchow* in, I think, January 1936. The pirates, believing that this ship had a load of silver, got on board in Shanghai as deck passengers. The deck passengers were segregated from the cabin area and bridge by bars and locked gates while armed White Russian guards patrolled the decks near the bars day and night. Once at sea, the pirates killed the White Russian guard and took over the ship. The ship disappeared for days. Nobody had any idea where on the thousands of miles of China coast to look for her. As time wore on, the distance she could travel extended until it could be anywhere from Tianjin to Hanoi. The Royal Navy had an aircraft-carrier based in Hong Kong and this was drafted into the hunt. An aircraft from HMS *Hermes* spotted a ship like the *Tungchow* anchored in Bias Bay (Daya Bay) which was a well-known haunt of China coast pirates. It was indeed the *Tungchow* and the pirates, seeing the plane swoop over, realized that they had better decamp. Once they were away, the Captain sailed for Hong Kong where he arrived a few hours later. Although the pirates escaped, they had a frustrating piracy. They had got the wrong ship. The silver was on another ship which delivered its cargo safely. The *Tungchow* carried no silver but a cargo of oranges. The pirates broke open the crates in their hunt for the silver so that the ship was running with oranges which the boys gathered in quantities. The pirates did no harm to the children but at first kept them shut up in the passenger accommodation. You can imagine what tales the Shanghai party had to tell when we all got back to school.

We leave China

In 1939, my father's tour was up and he decided, after twenty-five years, to retire from the mission field. He was in his mid-fifties and few stayed so long. Today, this sounds an early retiring age but today we have the

untold advantage of constant air-conditioning to temper the severity of our summers, and much greater control over diseases. The advance of the Japanese and the threatening war situation in Europe may well have influenced his decision too.

In any event, my parents and our younger sister set off from Foshan while my brother, other sister and I set off from Chefoo on the last of our journeys on a B&S coaster for Shanghai. My parents travelled up from Hong Kong on a Canadian Pacific steamer, the *Empress of Russia*, which we joined in Shanghai. We had a few days' wait when we took advantage of the mountainous inflation. My purchase was a tennis racket at the old price of only a few dollars. By this time, Shanghai had been occupied by the Japanese though they were still at peace with Britain and America. In the occupied parts of the city, security was tight, especially round the docks, and we had to pass through several checkpoints manned by pretty rough soldiers. Once at sea, those worries were left behind, but as a postscript, when we sailed from Yokohama a few days later, we found ourselves in the midst of large-scale manoeuvres by the Japanese fleet with accompanying aircraft firing at and bombing targets not far from us.

Now, more than fifty years later, I find myself living on Bowen Road along which we used to play in the winter holidays. For some years, my wife and I lived across the valley from the Matilda Hospital where I was born and where I forgot how to walk. The other day my brother and I went on a visit to Foshan. The bungalow where we often stayed on Cheung Chau was still there last time I visited the island. In all these places, I have seen traces of the past. I have yet to get back to Chefoo.

Epilogue

Retirement

In retirement, I soon found that I could not keep up with the minutiae of government activity. Once outside the government, you are outside the system of briefings and off the circulation of policy papers. I became much more an armchair critic, more interested in broader issues as seen in the media, or discussed in gossip. So my account of events after my retirement is less backed by personal knowledge and is bound to include more speculation.

Tiananmen

The glow of good relations with China that followed on the signing of the Joint Declaration replaced the more uneasy relations that had existed between China and Hong Kong during the negotiations. Sir Edward Youde gave priority to the clearing-up of old problems and some new ones such as identity card and passport issues.

These friendly relations with China took a disastrous turn after the Tiananmen troubles in 1989. People watched, with increasing unease, the prolonged demonstrations which were so damaging during the visit of Russia's Gorbachev. The whole of Hong Kong revolted at the news of the brutal suppression of the demonstrations. My wife and I were two

among the sombre thousands at the Happy Valley Racecourse on 4 June. These crowds which gathered in enormous numbers, at first in Central, and then at the racecourse, were quiet and orderly without a policeman in sight. There was a very moving outpouring of grief which pervaded the whole community. There were elements of fear, but the predominant feeling was one of anguish at the appalling breakdown in human relationships in Beijing.

Britain broke off negotiations with China in the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group which dealt with details of relations between Hong Kong and China. Hong Kong people had sent considerable funds to support the protesters in Tiananmen Square which was covered in Hong Kong tents.

In October 1989 the Governor, now Sir David Wilson, announced impressive plans for the development that the building of the new airport would require. Outline planning for these major works had been completed. They now had to be announced so that detailed planning and the work could go ahead. The Governor had told the Chinese, on more than one occasion, what was planned and what he would say in his annual speech to the Legislative Council in October. He received no adverse response. We had not sought prior Beijing agreement for such major public works as the first cross-harbour tunnel or the construction of the MTR, but this project was different. It might just be completed before the handover, but it would leave considerable debt behind for the new government, even though the forecasts projected that there would be no trouble in meeting the obligations. Hong Kong's record in public investment of this sort was impressive, but the money could only be raised if China backed the scheme. Yet, this was so soon after Tiananmen that nobody was talking to the Chinese.

The bad feeling from Beijing was still so strong, and the suspicions so deeply held, that the Chinese could see nothing but evil in the plans. The communist press started to publish stories that the 'Rose Garden' plan was the last fling of the colonials to bleed the place dry, line the pockets of British construction firms, leave Hong Kong with enormous debts and an airport that would be a white elephant.

Long and rough negotiations led to an Airport Agreement with China which included Chinese support for the new airport. An important aim of the Chinese seems to have been to get John Major, the British prime minister, into Beijing to sign it. He was the first Western leader to make a call after Tiananmen.

David Wilson retired to the House of Lords, where, as things turned

out, he has distinguished himself with such service to his native Scotland that he has been awarded the prestigious Knighthood of the Thistle, Scotland's highest award, as was Murray MacLehose. John Major would know that a general election was due the following year. He would probably lose some good men in parliament. He banked on being able to find a suitable politician for governor for the last five years of colonial rule.

The political governor

The man he chose had good credentials. Chris Patten had played a significant part in securing a Conservative victory in the election though losing his own seat. He was chairman of the party and a close friend of the prime minister. He has many pleasant personal characteristics and a great ability to woo the masses. When he made his first policy speech in October, he — predictably — infuriated the Chinese by trotting out a panoply of arrangements for Legislative Council elections without any previous consultation with them. This was not in the traditions of quiet soundings which the Foreign Office mandarins and Hong Kong governors were so skilful at. It was quite exciting. How would the Chinese react to this blunderbuss approach? The Chinese announced that there was no scope for discussion on these proposals and would not meet. It was not until the following spring that, after internal battles in Beijing, they agreed to start negotiations. Of course, they would be tough. Nothing less was expected.

The point of negotiating is to do a deal. True, the British side had no cards but then we had none in the negotiations on the Joint Declaration. This time Patten failed to do the deal. The contrast with the earlier negotiations is stark. Those politicians in Britain, who sneered so openly at what they saw as the Foreign Office mandarins' subservient acceptance of Chinese dictates, thought Patten was a hero who had taught the Chinese a lesson. He had done nothing of the sort. His arrogant rejection of any need for compromise that went beyond his imagination meant that the last four and a half years of British colonial rule were characterized by Anglo-Chinese bickering of the most undignified and petty sort. Thank goodness, there had been nothing like this during the much more difficult negotiations leading up to the Joint Declaration. If there had been, we should never have had a Joint Declaration at all.

The real tragedy of this quarrel was that it was unnecessary. Detailed arrangements for a 'through train' for the Legislative Council for the period from 1995 to 1999, non-stop through of the handover station in 1997, had already been worked out in secret discussions between London and Beijing in 1990, before David Wilson left. The drafting of the Basic Law, which contained the principal provisions, was, strictly, purely a matter for Beijing and the Basic Law Drafting Committee in Hong Kong, a body containing no government officials. It would only come into force after Hong Kong had reverted to China. In practice, it was clear to both governments that the chances of maintaining Hong Kong's prosperity and stability would be enhanced if the contents were acceptable to both governments as well as in Hong Kong. It is said that Patten did not know about these discussions or the documents exchanged during them. This almost passes belief. There were plenty of people in Hong Kong and London who knew all about them and there had been enough leaks in the press for everyone to know that something was going on. It is also extraordinary that Patten himself did not think to ask what had happened between Britain and China in the five years between the signing of the Joint Declaration and the publication of the Basic Law. In the end, it was the Chinese who told him that he was going over old ground that had already been settled between Britain and China two years earlier. He would not revert to agreements that had already been reached. British politicians are no fonder of losing face than Chinese.

Although I believe that the main thrust of Patten's policies was wrong, he did secure one important benefit for a significant minority. This was the UK government's agreement to grant British citizenship to those people of Hong Kong not of Chinese race. They could not become Chinese nationals for this is a racially determined status. They had lost the nationality status of the countries from which their forbears had come. He argued that unless these people, mostly originally from India, became British citizens, they would become stateless. His political skills were such that he did, in the end, secure this concession against the stiffest opposition from the Home Office in London.

I was in England during the handover itself. I was astonished at the universal apprehension that pervaded the media. I was told recently that the Foreign Office was just as frightened. I saw no reason why the days of easy relations that had followed the Joint Declaration would not return. The British politician had gone. The Beijing officials and those in Hong Kong understood each other much better. When we got back to Hong Kong in the early autumn, we found a new relaxed atmosphere everywhere.

Gone was the daily Anglo-Chinese quarrelling that had filled the press before we left. The People's Liberation Army had indeed come in but were nowhere to be seen. The street names were unchanged. The only change was the occasional red flag with a bauhinia in the middle, and the colour of the postboxes: they had been painted green.

The civil service

Hong Kong never stands still and of course there is constant change. There is, however, a continuity in that most important component of government, the civil service. Those at the top now were not quite so high up when I retired sixteen years ago but they were there. Most have matured in a most impressive manner. There have been problems and mistakes but this is not new. The general level of administration is as good as it ever was. Modern technology has produced a much more accessible bureaucracy through web sites and electronic telephone replies. Nothing like this was available when I was in the service.

The present crowd has the immense benefit of not having to answer to London all the time. In my early days, Hong Kong was a small, insignificant colony out of the mainstream of the empire. The important places were in Africa and the big change in the empire was the move towards independence. This absorbed all the attention that Whitehall could devote to colonial affairs. Hong Kong was left alone. We managed to stay a bastion of the free market economy during the years of socialist government in England with only occasional attempts to divert us. Even in 1980, when I was Hong Kong Commissioner in London, the Foreign Office department concerned with Hong Kong, and other remnants of empire, had only two people in it. It was a long time before telegrams became as common as airmail letters. Hong Kong was left to run its own affairs with the 'high degree of autonomy' that is so central to the Joint Declaration. In the 1980s, during the negotiations on the future, the Foreign Office began to take a greater and more detailed interest in us. This was accompanied by questions and suggestions that must have been irritating to my successors as they became more and more inquisitive and supervisory.

Governing Hong Kong as a Special Administrative Region of China is much more relaxing than operating under the watchful eye of London in the last days of the empire. There is no interference in the

day-to-day work of the government. Even when major crises occur, the place has to manage on its own. I try to imagine the flood of telegrams that would have burnt up the airwaves when the money market made a concerted attack on the Hong Kong dollar's link to the US dollar, if this had happened in colonial days. The unprecedented action taken by the government would surely have been vetoed by the Bank of England. As it was, China was sympathetic, but left it to Hong Kong to tough it out. Donald Tsang, Joseph Yam and Raphael Hui triumphed over the money men by their bold intervention in the stock market — and made substantial increases in the government's reserves in the process.

The anomalous Legislative Council

Set against this are the increasing requirements of the Legislative Council. Much of this seems to be confrontational which must be due to the anomalous position of the Legislative Council. At election time, people think they are electing those who have something to do with the government. Yet, those who are elected are not required to play any part in policy formation and are not accountable for policies. They do their best to be seen to be requiring the civil service to account for their performance. But they are not the advocates of policies which they have formulated. Their only function can be to criticize. This must be as frustrating for the legislators as for the civil servants. The legislators have to demonstrate to the voters that they are doing something but they are denied any responsibility for administration. The civil servants have to work up their proposals without any but informal input from the legislators. Most of the points that are raised when the policies are published must have been considered during the process of policy development. The civil servants then have to go over the same ground all over again.

Some better method must be devised to involve the people elected to this important constituent of the government in the processes of policy formation. They should be expected to assume a measure of responsibility for policy. Only in this way can they play a more useful part in explaining the policy conclusions to the public. They may not all agree with the conclusions reached, but the public could see that it was their elected representatives who were responsible, and adjust their voting in future

accordingly. Voting for members of a debating society is singularly unsatisfying.

I do not think I have heard any public defence of the present provisions by either the government or the legislature, except as a purely transitional arrangement. It follows that I hope we shall see some more coherent proposals for constitutional development soon.

Constitutional development

It remains to be seen whether the steady, albeit measured, pace of constitutional development we have followed will prove to be more successful in the long run than the more precipitate methods followed in former colonies or advocated by some reformers both in the past and at present.

The sedate pace of constitutional reform that we pursued throughout my years of service continued after I retired. It was interrupted only for a few months by a governor who tried to make things go faster. It continues under Chinese sovereignty.

There is an old Chinese story of the farmer who daily visited his paddy-fields. He could see the rice shoots growing but thought they were not growing fast enough. He pulled each one up — just a little bit — to help it grow faster. The crop withered.

We do not have complete formal electoral arrangements but we have always had a very wide range of consultative bodies and an effective machinery for maintaining close contact with practically all strands of public opinion. In some ways, in a small territory, this is an even more effective way of maintaining touch with opinion than great elections every few years with politicians free to do as they will in the interval. We were, of course, helped by a vigorous and free press. If we behaved too unreasonably, people always used to be able to go over our heads to parliament in London.

Present arrangements for producing the Legislative Council and the Chief Executive are a great advance on those in colonial days. Then the Governor was appointed by London without any consultation with Hong Kong at all. All members of the Legislative Council were appointed in a similar way, up to the time when I retired.

The Basic Law envisages steady progress in constitutional reform and lays down detailed provisions for the composition of the Legislative Council

up to the year 2007. The 'ultimate aim' set down in Article 68 of the Basic Law is 'the election of all the members of the Legislative Council by universal suffrage'. Similarly, the ultimate aim for the selection of the Chief Executive is also by universal suffrage after nominations by a broadly representative nominating committee.

Present arrangements are clearly not good enough to last for long. There is beginning to be some discussion about constitutional development. I should think there is a good deal of thought being given to it in the Government Secretariat

Functional constituencies

Some business leaders are said to be planning to push for retention of the functional constituencies after 2007. I am sure this would be a mistake. When they were introduced, there were no elections for the Legislative Council at all. Legislative Council members were appointed. The appointment process was not arbitrary nor was it a process of looking for yes-men who would simply back everything the government did. The aim was to find men and women from different social groups who would give serious thought to proposals and, if they were no good, to say so. Doctors, lawyers, bankers and the rest were not appointed to represent their narrow interests but because they were individuals who had demonstrated that they had a much broader view of the public interest. A similar balance in the representation of various walks of life was hoped for in an elected Legislative Council, so the circles from which appointments used to be made were enabled to elect their own representatives. Those elected from functional constituencies in the early years did not confine their work to the interests of their electorates. With the passage of time, and with the realization that it is only through the votes of their constituents, that members are elected to functional constituencies, we have seen a narrowing in their interests. This was seen most clearly in the election campaign for the year 2000 elections. And the farce of a Council member being elected by a few hundred voters, or less, clearly has to be ended. If we can survive one more Council with a few functional constituencies, it will be about as much as will be good for us. In Britain, it was not until after the Second World War that the functional constituencies formed by the graduates of Oxford and Cambridge Universities were deprived of their right to

return members of Parliament. But then things do move more slowly there.

To end the functional constituencies does not mean the end of functional interests lobbying and bringing pressure to bear in the Legislative Council. One needs only to look at Britain or America to see that. After all, how many days in the year is it really necessary to have a representative of the tourist bodies, or lawyers, or the education establishment, or a social worker actually sitting in the Legislative Council to ensure that their concerns are considered? The many advisory bodies that exist may become more active in making their views known. Entirely, new pressure groups could spring up if the legislature was riding roughshod over any substantial body of interest. To try to pack the Council with representatives of all the vested interests in Hong Kong is impossible. Only a few can make it even now. It is ridiculous to suggest that it is only the wise heads of the functional constituency members that preserve us all from anarchy in the legislature.

Universal suffrage

What does universal suffrage imply? There has not been much discussion about this, yet it must surely be the most important constitutional issue to be faced not only in 2007, but by the whole population as they prepare to elect the 2004 Legislative Council. Arrangements after 2007 must have the backing of two-thirds of the Legislative Council and this means the Council elected in 2004.

The subservient status of the Legislative Council cannot survive the election of a Chief Executive by universal suffrage. Such a Chief Executive could only win election with massive public support. This support can only be generated by an organized appeal to the voters. In other words, the Chief Executive thus elected will have to have the machinery of a major political party behind him. No political party capable of getting the support of the population at large will be an organization ruled despotically by an individual. There will be a team. This team will contribute a substantial number of Legislative Council members, probably a majority. They will insist on taking part in the formation of, and accepting responsibility for government policy in a way that the present Legislative Council is prevented from doing. The suggestion in the 1984 Green Paper that the Legislative Council elect from among themselves

the majority of Executive Council members might be one way of moving that way.

Talk about attempting to eliminate a political background from any candidate for the highest political office is clearly condemned to fail. The whole point of standing for election to the highest office must be to secure widespread public support for political aims, whether these are disguised as 'reforms' or 'new initiatives'. The electorate is not there to elect a god-like creature without any policy other than 'Trust me: I shall do the right thing'. He is not a judge who, although independent of the executive, is bound by the law. The government makes laws. It taxes and spends the citizens' money. Anyone elected to such a position will be the person who has convinced the great mass of the people that he will lead a government that has the best programme for the stability and prosperity of the population as a whole.

Universal suffrage, as promised in the Basic Law, will bring major changes. Some will view them with apprehension, fearing the advent of an irresponsible government manned either by venal politicians out for their own ends or by those making fanciful promises which they cannot keep. But are Hong Kong people really such simpletons? The place is full of all sorts of organizations of broader and narrower interests, but few of them are run by idiots or crooks. Why should Hong Kong people be fooled by incompetent people out for their own ends?

Hong Kong is just not equipped to be run by a repressive government and never has been. We cannot put people in prison unless they have been sent there by the courts which are independent of the executive. There is no government control of the media. Freedom of expression and assembly are enshrined in the constitution. We have a formidable machine for combating corruption. It is inevitable that Hong Kong will move towards a more conventional system of government based on general elections which produce the people who will take the important decisions of government policy — political decisions made by politicians. Of course, there are risks that some fools get elected, but we have to go through this stage until voters realize that votes are for matters that really affect their daily lives.

Evolution or revolution?

No system of government is immune to revolution. We never came anywhere near it. So long as steady progress towards the 'ultimate aim' is maintained, this should continue to be the case. Trouble would certainly arise if progress is halted or put into reverse.

To try to hold back the move towards a much more meaningful job for people elected by the general population runs the serious risk of something much closer to revolution than a few religious geeks sitting about protesting in yellow shirts.

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