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# BUILDING BRIDGES

*The Life & Times of  
Richard Charles Lee  
Hong Kong: 1905-1983*

VIVIENNE POY

加港文獻館

Canada-Hong Kong Resource Centre  
1 Spadina Crescent, Rm 111 • Toronto, Canada • M5S 1A1

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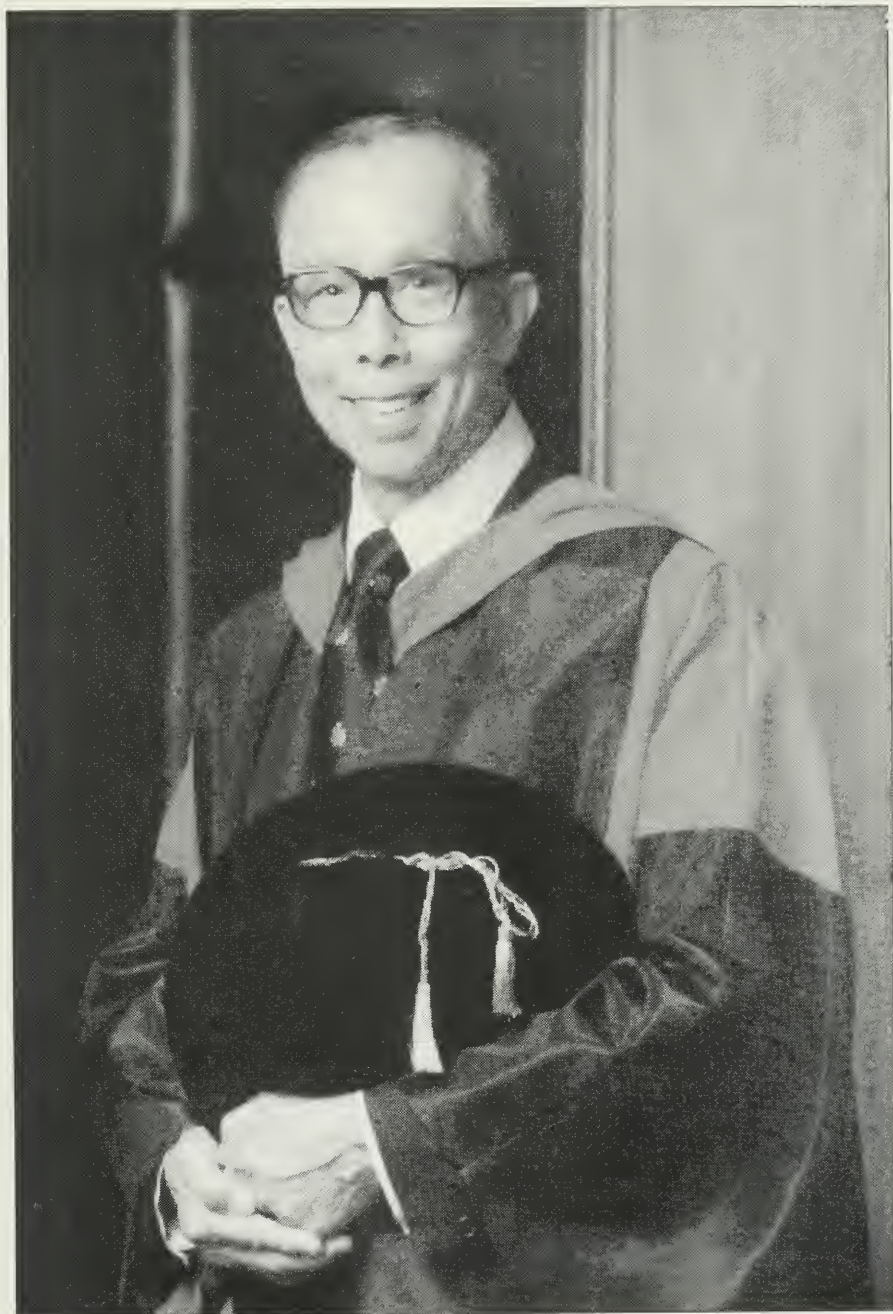
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Richard Charles Lee, 1964.





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VIVIENNE POY

館獻文港加

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Hong Kong, 1905-1983

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# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Foreword by Prof. Arthur K.C. Li</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Prologue</i>	<i>xvi</i>
<i>A Farewell</i>	<i>xvii</i>

## Chapter 1

The Young Man: From Hong Kong to Oxford . . . . .	1
Childhood	
Studies in Oxford	
Friendships	
Grandfather's Enterprises	

## Chapter 2

From Marriage in Hong Kong to Work in China . . . . .	16
Father Meets Mother	
The Wedding	
Grandfather's Murder	
Father as Head of the Family	
Work in Guangzhou	
Pioneers in Hainan	
Return to Hong Kong	

## Chapter 3

Storm Clouds Gather: Hong Kong Falls to the Japanese . . . . .	36
Defence of Hong Kong	
The Battle of Hong Kong	
Under Japanese Occupation	
The Chinese Guerrillas	
Father as a Resistance Fighter	

## Chapter 4

A Family on the Run . . . . .	55
Retreat from Hong Kong	
Life in Guilin	
On the Run Again	
Life in Chongqing	
The Japanese Surrender	

## Chapter 5

After the War: Society Changes .....	71
Rationing and Shortages	
Health Problems	
The Refugee Families	
Housing Problems	
Refugees and Industry	
Refugees and Education	

## Chapter 6

The Magical Years .....	83
Launching as Recreation	
The Lee Building and the Big House	
Servants and Hawkers	
Embassy Court	

## Chapter 7

Towards Racial Harmony: The Hong Kong Country Club.....	100
A Multi-racial Club	
Towards Racial Harmony	
Swimming at the Club	

## Chapter 8

The Lee Family: Business Projects.....	108
The Lee Theatre	
Property Development	
The Lee Gardens Hotel	
Father and Hon Chiu	
The Public Company	

## Chapter 9

A Daughter Grows Up .....	122
Grandmother's Funeral	
Father and My British Education	
McGill, Marriage and Family	
With Father in China	

## Chapter 10

From Turbulence to Reform: A Vision for Higher Education.....	137
The Riots of 1967	
Social Reforms	
Father and Education	
Higher Education	
A New University	

<b>Chapter 11</b>	
The Japanese Connection.....	154
The Japanese School	
Japan and China	
Yamaichi Securities	
<b>Chapter 12</b>	
The Chinese Patriot.....	163
Solving the Water Shortage	
Between Hong Kong and China	
The Chinese Connections	
The Garden Hotel	
<b>Chapter 13</b>	
The Businessman .....	181
A New Tunnel	
The Telephone Company	
The Gas Company	
The Rothschild Bank	
The Danish Connection	
A Shipping Company	
The Canadian Connection	
<b>Chapter 14</b>	
The Freemason: A Lifetime Commitment.....	197
<b>Chapter 15</b>	
A Look into the Future.....	202
At Peace with Himself	
Epilogue	213
Richard Charles Lee: A Career Summary	214
List of Father's Siblings	217
Map of China	218
Map of Guangdong Province	219
Map of Hong Kong	220
Endnotes	221
Bibliography	238
Photos	242





To those whose lives have been touched by my father





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## FOREWORD

By any standard, Dr. Richard Charles Lee led an incredible and remarkable life. He lived through the tumultuous events of modern Chinese history and played a major role in the making of Hong Kong as we know it today — a vibrant international city.

Born into an aristocratic Hong Kong family, Oxford educated and for his time, widely travelled, he took charge of a dynastic business empire at a very young age. His vision of a modern China, including the need for international ties and friendships and the role that Hong Kong should play, is as relevant for the future as it was in his day. His love for the people of Hong Kong and the many significant major contributions that he made to improve their lives, in housing, education, welfare as well as in many other areas are well documented here in this personal account by his daughter Vivienne Poy. She shares with us the story of a gifted and intelligent man whose life was not without personal tragedies, like the untimely loss of both his father and his son. Dr. Lee was compassionate without being sentimental, and maintained a simple lifestyle despite his wealth.

Dr. Lee was a decisive man of very strong principles. Few people have ever resigned, as he did, from the Executive Council of the Hong Kong Government. He believed in justice and righteousness, blending Confucianism with the best from the West.

As Vivienne playfully remarks, when people speculated long ago that Dr. Lee would be the first Chief Executive of Hong Kong after the resumption of Chinese sovereignty in 1997, little did they realise that he would have been 92 years old! However, the serious point is that speculation stemmed from hope, admiration and a yearning for someone of his stature and proven track record to take charge of Hong Kong. Perhaps, Dr. R.C. Lee was the best Governor or Chief Executive that Hong Kong never had.

*Arthur K.C. Li  
Vice-Chancellor  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong  
March 1998*

## PROLOGUE

What kind of a man was Richard Charles Lee, my father? He was a stern man, rather set in his ways, punctual, disciplined. He always expected a lot of himself. He was a typical Chinese father who never put us on his knees and cuddled us as children, but he always showed that he cared and he always made sure we were well looked after. People who didn't know him were often afraid of him because he looked so solemn when he was not smiling. He was actually very affable and laughed a lot. However, his self-image was that of a very serious man, so he almost never smiled when he knew a photograph was being taken of him. He was honest, intelligent, inquisitive, hard-working and kind, and he would go out of his way to help others. He was a man of great generosity to others, but was very frugal towards himself. He was a man of integrity and principle who was willing to die for his beliefs. He was public-spirited and cared for the people and the society he lived in. As I could see at his funeral, those who came to pay their respects to him reflected the life he had lived.

Father was a civil engineer by training. He was a builder both literally and metaphorically. He built two kinds of bridges in his life: those made of steel and concrete and those made of human kindness. Of the two, the most important were the human bridges he built for Hong Kong and for China.

Except for one year, I have been away from Hong Kong since 1956 and because of that, I missed a great deal of what went on in his life. I realize that he belonged not just to his family, but to Hong Kong, its society and its people. He was a part of the history of Hong Kong. For some time I have been very curious about his life, and now I am ready to write about it.

This is an account of Father's life based on my parents' recollections and their correspondence, research and interviews with those close to Father, my own observations and personal experience, and my relationship with him. We are a family of four children, two boys and two girls. Each of us, because of our diverse personalities, had a very different kind of relationship with our father. In this book, I am speaking from my own perspective. In order to protect the privacy of the rest of my family, I will mention them from time to time, but they will not play a major role in this account.

*Vivienne Poy, Toronto, 1997*

## A FAREWELL

July 11, 1983, was one of Hong Kong's typical hot summer days. By early morning, the sun was blazing. Mother, my brother, sister and I, the in-laws and the grandchildren were all up very early. We dressed in black and headed for the Hong Kong Funeral Home. It was the day of Father's funeral.

We had spent the previous few days at the funeral home where more than three thousand people came to pay their last respects. In accordance with Chinese custom, when guests approached the casket and the altar where the photograph of Father was displayed, they bowed three times, and our entire family, in black mourning robes provided by the funeral home, rose and bowed in unison to thank them. One day, we had to be at the funeral home unusually early because some of the Legislative and Executive Council members wanted to pay their respects before flying to Beijing for talks with China. On the morning of July 11, guests started arriving at eight in the morning, and many stayed for the service scheduled to start at ten.

It was obvious to anyone present that Father was not an ordinary man. On one side of his photograph was the largest wreath in the hall, from China's newly elected president, Li Xiannian; on the other side was the wreath from the governor of Hong Kong, Sir Edward Youde. Other prominently displayed wreaths were from the vice-chairman of the Military Commission, Yang Shangkun; vice-premier of the State Council, Gu Mu; Ji Pengfei, standing committee member of the Central Advisory Commission; member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party Xi Zhongxun; Ren Zhongyi, first secretary of the Guangdong Provincial Committee; the political commissar of the People's Liberation Army, Yu Qiuli; the governor of Guangdong, Liang Lingguang; the chief secretary of the Hong Kong government, Sir Philip Hadden-Cave; and many prominent citizens of Hong Kong.

The guests coming down the aisle represented a cross-section of the population. Among the many friends and family who came to pay their last respects were dignitaries from Hong Kong and China, including the chairman of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, Michael Sandberg; the managing director of Hong Kong Land, Trevor Bedford; Financial Secretary Sir John Brembridge; Chairman of the Urban Council, Hilton



Cheongleen; Executive Councillors Dr. Harry Fang and T.S. Lo; Legislative Councillors Francis Tien and Dr. Rayson Huang; as well as Sir Shiukin Tang and film magnate Sir Run Run Shaw. Two former directors of the local branch of the Xinhua News Agency, Wang Kuang and Lian Weilin, came from Beijing and Guangzhou to attend the funeral. What I remember most of all was the sight of many ordinary people there. Some were our former employees; I knew some of them but not all. They were there because their lives had in some way been touched by Father.

The ten pallbearers were: Fei Yiming, publisher of *Ta Kung Pao*; Chu-sei Yamada, Japanese Consul-General; Sir Yuetkeung Kan, Executive Councillor; Professor Ma Lin, Vice-Chancellor of The Chinese University of Hong Kong; friends P.C. Woo and F.S. Li; Arthur Gomes, the most senior mason of the Irish Constitution in the Far East; N.J. Gillanders, long-time Bursar of the University of Hong Kong; Shum Waiyau, publisher of *Wah Kiu Yat Po*; and Xinhua News Agency chief Xu Jiatur, who obtained special permission from Beijing to be a pallbearer.

The funeral was attended by fifteen hundred people. The service was conducted according to Christian rites by Canon Frank Lin of St. Mary's Church in Causeway Bay, where Father had been a member for more than twenty years. Before the sermon, an old friend of our family, P.C. Woo, gave a short account of Father's life, a life that was not only successful, but interesting, unusual and most of all, filled with kindness.

In a tribute to Father on behalf of Sir Edward Youde, the governor, who had left for talks in Beijing early that morning, acting governor Sir Philip Hadden-Cave said that with Father's passing, Hong Kong had lost "one of the major public figures of its post-war history."<sup>1</sup> Professor Ma Lin, vice-chancellor of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, said that Father's death was a great loss to the university, since he was involved in its foundation well before the university came into being. In fact, Father had always considered The Chinese University as one of his "children." Friends and business associates described Father as "a man of vision," "a sound man with great influence" and "the backbone" of the Lee family. China's leaders referred to Father as an "old friend" and a "patriot."<sup>2</sup>

The man on the street lamented the loss of a good man who cared about the ordinary people of Hong Kong. And I lost a loving father.



# BUILDING BRIDGES

*The Life & Times of  
Richard Charles Lee*

Hong Kong: 1905-1983



# 1

## The Young Man: From Hong Kong To Oxford

Hong Kong, at the turn of the century, was a city of palaces and more magnificent than the hillside Italian city of Genoa. Above the city of Victoria was a suburb hanging in the clouds of the Peak where the wealthy British lived. This was how American Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore described Hong Kong in her book *China: Long lived Empire*, published in 1900. A new hospital for Europeans had just opened on the Peak, and a newspaper, the *South China Morning Post*, had been launched. Only Europeans were permitted to live on the Peak, with the exception of Sir Robert Hotung's family.

At the foot of the hill, the first trams were put into service in 1904, all single-deckers, open to the elements. The carriages that used to fill the streets had vanished, and the coach houses of great mansions stood empty. Everyone went about by rickshaw or sedan chair, and carts were pulled by oxen or water buffalo. One could hear the sighs of coolies as they made their way along the streets, shoulders straining under their heavy loads on bamboo poles. The motor car had yet to reach Hong Kong.

The population of the Colony had reached over 325,000, the majority being Chinese. Water shortages were a perennial problem

and new and bigger reservoirs were being planned. In 1901, the drought was so severe that water had to be shipped from the New Territories to Victoria.

The port of Hong Kong was expanding, and huge warehouses, known as godowns, lined the Kowloon waterfront. The number of ships entering the harbour increased 60 per cent from the previous ten years. Industries such as sugar refineries, flour mills, cotton mills and cement works had sprung up. Hong Kong Land was progressing with its land reclamation in Central (commercial section of Victoria), and the area was dotted with new four or five-storey buildings. Businesses were controlled by the hong, such as Jardine Matheson and Butterfield & Swire in shipping, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in banking, and John Swire's *Taikoo* in sugar refinery.

While the hong was investing their opium fortunes in legitimate businesses, the government derived an annual revenue of about \$2 million from the sale of the opium monopoly to the highest bidder, despite the strong opposition to the drug in Britain. Opium smoking was so popular among the Chinese that it was estimated that one in ten men was an opium smoker. Even though there was a gradual reduction of divans (establishments where Chinese men gathered to smoke opium) and no new licences were sold by the Hong Kong government after 1910, the sale of opium remained legal until 1945, and licences continued to be sold to the highest bidder by the Portuguese government in Macao.

The population of Hong Kong lived in two separate communities, the Chinese and the non-Chinese, each having very little to do with the other except at work. The Chinese men wore their hair in queues (pigtailed) in Manchu style, and few dressed in Western clothes. Most of them wore mandarin jackets and pants or long gowns, with soft black shoes. They did not take part in foreign sport and none went swimming. The vast majority of them had no contact with Europeans at all. The old men spent time taking their caged birds for an airing outdoors, and the youngsters liked to kick a shuttlecock or fly a kite. In the evening, one could hear the clatter of mah jong, the favourite game of the Chinese.

As for the Chinese women, with the exception of petty hawkers, sampan women, scavengers and seamstresses, none went out onto the streets. The upper-class women had bound feet and never left their family compounds. The poorer classes wore cotton clothes like pyjamas, while the upper-class ladies wore beautifully embroidered pants, skirts and mandarin jackets.

Despite the description of Hong Kong as a city of palaces, it was, for the Chinese population, a very unhygienic place in which to live. Plague was endemic and malaria was widespread. Officers of the sanitary teams charged with rat-proofing houses and spraying mosquito breeding grounds were discovered, by an enquiry in 1907, to have made small fortunes by evading the law, in collusion with property owners and building contractors. Sanitary problems magnified racial prejudice, and demands were made for separate residential areas to be set aside for Westerners and Chinese. Following the creation of the Peak reservation, an ordinance in 1902 set aside an area in Kowloon for the Europeans, since the government believed the Chinese could not be trusted to keep the mosquito population down. However, exceptions were made by Foreign Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, who, on approval of a separate area for "people of clean habits," added that Chinese of good standing should be permitted residence there.

The Chinese population had come a long way since Hong Kong became a British colony in 1841. Many of its enterprising members had become wealthy. This new merchant class was recognized by the colonial government as leaders in their community due to their commercial success and their leadership in organizations such as the Tung Wah Hospital, a charitable organization which became the centre of Chinese power in the Colony. Despite the segregation in most schools, Queen's College encouraged the enrollment of boys of different nationalities. Chinese students from this school had the advantage of learning Western culture and the Western way of doing business.

This was the Hong Kong into which Father was born.

## Childhood

On March 7, 1905, concubine Cheung Mun Hee (Second Lady) of Grandfather Lee Hysan, gave birth to a son, Ming Chak, my father. He was not only the eldest son, but also the first surviving child in the family, as an older sister born to Grandfather's wife (Grandmother) died soon after birth. When Second Lady became pregnant, there was great excitement because Grandfather had been married for seven years and still did not have a child. A European midwife was arranged for the delivery, since Grandfather didn't feel that he could take any more chances after the death of his first child. It was believed that European midwives were cleaner and more knowledgeable than their Chinese counterparts.

When Father was born, Grandfather was delighted that he finally had an heir. Father's birth was also regarded as a lucky omen for the family, for from then on, Grandfather's import-export business flourished. His company, Nam Hung Shipping Co., carried goods from China to Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya and Rangoon. He became a well-known and respected merchant of the Nam Pak Hong Business Association in Hong Kong, an association of merchants who traded between China and Southeast Asia.

According to Chinese custom, when a concubine has a son and the wife does not, the son is taken from his birth mother to live with the wife, in order to bring her luck and fertility. This was the case with Father, who grew up in Grandmother's household. He did indeed bring her luck, for after the birth of a second son by Second Lady, Grandmother gave birth to two sons and two daughters.

Father had a very special relationship with Grandmother because he grew up in her household, and she came to treat him as her own. She respected his judgment and that became important for the entire family after Grandfather died.

Father was a healthy child, alert and sturdy, with a narrow face and a small stature like his mother, Second Lady. He had strong, square hands, and his skin was as dark and shiny as Grandfather's. He probably wore his hair in a queue when he was very young, as Grandfather did, since it wasn't until the Revolution of 1911 that Chinese men abandoned this custom.



As a small child, Father lived in Hong Kong and sometimes visited his grandparents, my great-grandparents, in China. At the time, Great-grandparents lived in our ancestral village, Garlieu, in the south of Guangdong province. Father once told me that Great-grandparents used to have only two meals a day, one early in the morning and the other between four or five in the afternoon. It seemed very strange to me, but that was the habit of the Chinese people who lived in the countryside. I'm sure it was also because food was scarce. As Grandfather became more prosperous, it was rumoured that bandits intended to kidnap his parents, so he built a house for them in Sun-wui city, not far from Garlieu.

Being the eldest son, Father was not only important to Grandfather, he was doted on by Great-grandparents. As a show of affection, Great-grandfather used to feed Father all the time when they were together, and even stuffed chicken legs in his mouth when he was asleep! He also told Father about the dreadful trip in a sailing ship across the Pacific to the Golden Mountain (San Francisco) during the gold rush, and the life of Chinese people in America. Even though Grandfather was the second son of Great-grandparents, Father's position in the family was considered so important that, when Great-grandfather died, and his body travelled in a boat along the river that ran past Garlieu village, Father sat in the front of the boat and Grandfather sat at the back, with the coffin in the middle. This was how the body was transported to the burial place according to our village custom.

Because of repeated outbreaks of plague in Hong Kong, Grandfather moved his family to Macao when Father was five years old. Most of the family remained there until 1918, although Grandfather continued to work in Hong Kong. As a well-educated man, he was concerned about the education of his children, both sons and daughters, so he hired a well-known Chinese teacher, Chen Zibao, to teach them.

As time went on, Grandfather invested in many successful businesses, and became one of the wealthiest men in the Colony. He took a second and later on a third concubine (Third Lady and Fourth Lady). According to Chinese custom in those days, it was considered a sign of wealth to have many concubines and children. The number

of children in the family increased, and Grandfather was good to them all. Realizing the importance of an English education for his children in the British Colony, Grandfather brought Father back to Hong Kong from Macao, and enrolled him in Queen's College, one of the best-known colonial schools at that time, regarded as the Harrow or Eton of the Far East.

Grandfather had learned English in San Francisco as a child, during the years he lived there with his father. After they returned to China, Great-grandfather had the foresight to enroll Grandfather in Queen's College in Hong Kong in order to continue his English education, where he was able to make friends who became important to him in later life. He wanted the same advantages for his children.

## Studies in Oxford

Since he was well acquainted with the English educational system, Grandfather thought it best for his children to send them to school in England so that they could be totally immersed in the English tradition. At the same time, they would have the opportunity to make friends who could help them later on in life. In 1917, at the age of twelve, Father and his third brother were sent to study in England with a governess. They lived at the home of a Mr. Churchill, and were tutored there in preparation for university entrance. It was then that they acquired their English names: Father became Richard Charles and Third Uncle<sup>1</sup> became Harold. Several years later, two younger sisters were also sent to England for schooling. Once the children went to England, they were expected to stay until they finished their education. The boys were told before they left that if they married non-Chinese while they were away, they would be automatically disinherited.

Father was fond of Mr. Churchill, whom he referred to as "Old Man Churchill" to us, and with whom he continued to correspond until Mr. Churchill died. Even when Mr. Churchill began to lose his sight, he continued to write to Father, with some help, I am sure. I remember seeing his scribbles.

By the 1920s, it was fashionable for the more adventurous and wealthy Chinese parents to send their children abroad to school — to France, Germany, England and Japan. These students were usually of university age. Most of the Chinese students from Hong Kong went to England. The only mode of travel was by ship via the Suez Canal, and the long trip took weeks.

In a letter to his old friend and neighbour in Macao, Father wrote about the Chinese he met:

Since my arrival in England, I have been well. Generally, the climate and life here are quite suitable to the Chinese ... In the town of Oxford, there were less than ten Chinese students including myself ... There are two Chinese in town, by the names of Zhou and Chen, from the village of Hoiping,<sup>2</sup> who are to be admired. They arrived here, by mistake, eleven years ago. They wanted to go to London, Ontario, Canada, to make a living. However, the tickets that were bought for them were incorrect, and neither knew that there were two Londons in the world. When they arrived in London, England, no relatives came to meet their boat, and they knew something was wrong. Not knowing whether to laugh or to cry, they realized they had arrived in a different part of the world, with no friends and with very little money. A few days later, they made their way to Oxford, and opened a laundry establishment. They worked hard and had become very well known for the best laundry service. Almost all the students in Oxford send their laundry to them. It shows that, for those who are abroad, with hard work, they will succeed. Being very busy, I am sorry I don't see them as often as I would like, and have forgotten their first names. These two can put many present-day overseas Chinese students to shame.

He went on to say that despite the importance the parents put on education, many of the Chinese students in England were not really interested in studying:

The majority of the present-day overseas Chinese students have no idea how difficult it is to make a living. They are generally lazy, and are constantly complaining how difficult the subjects are, so they often skip the examinations. But, fearing rebukes from their parents, they enroll into colleges that do not have examinations and anyone can be accepted. There are many such colleges in both towns of Oxford and Cambridge. These students will write home to say that they have entered Oxford or Cambridge Universities, and their parents would not know any better. Their parents will send them money which they will spend lavishly. In three years' time, they will buy a degree to return to China. There is usually a lot of fanfare when these students return home, but if they are ever asked, by someone who knows, which university they graduated from, Oxford or Cambridge, they would be in trouble ...

China is so weak among so many strong nations, if the younger generation has no ability, how can we save China? These students are not capable of thinking. There are so many in China who want to study, but their families cannot afford to send them abroad. Those who have the chance to go abroad and not study hard are to be pitied.

And he concluded on a personal note:

Oxfordshire has the climate that makes people tired. Many go to the seaside during the summer to avoid illness. I will be going away and will return to Oxford at the end of the summer.<sup>3</sup>

We can tell from this letter that Father's lifelong wish to help China and the Chinese people was already emerging.

In 1923, Father entered Pembroke College, Oxford, to study Civil Engineering, where he was known to the other undergraduates as Dickie Lee. Percy O'Brien, who entered Pembroke in 1924 to read Chemistry, remembers Father as a sprightly individual who was always happy and smiling. He walked quickly, was always in a hurry, and very

punctual. He was well dressed and carried a watch chain across his waistcoat. Father studied excessively hard and spent hours reading in the Radcliffe Science Library. At times he showed O'Brien some of his studies on the mathematics of engineering which O'Brien found very obtuse and difficult to understand.<sup>4</sup>

By the time he entered Pembroke, Father was already used to life in England, but life in the colleges was a different experience. Undergraduate behaviour was still controlled by the statute *de Moribus Conformandis* of 1636, even though rules had been modified. Colleges exacted small gate fines from those who were not back in college by a certain hour in the evening. Although tobacco could be purchased (its sale having been banned in 1636), no undergraduate was allowed to smoke in academic dress. A rule prohibiting students from keeping motor cars had been rescinded, and so Father was able to own one. Students were not allowed to play billiards before one o'clock in the afternoon or after ten o'clock at night, and they were forbidden to loiter at stage doors, attend public race meetings or take part in shooting and other sports. Their opportunities for dancing, drinking and dining were carefully regulated. A male undergraduate was not allowed to enter the room of a female undergraduate, but a female student was allowed to enter the room of a male with a chaperone, with special leave from the head of her college.<sup>5</sup>

Pembroke had some well-established customs that no longer exist. Undergraduates were obliged to attend college chapel daily at eight o'clock in the morning under the threat of a fine of two shillings and sixpence. Less onerous was the penalty for talking "shop" in the hall. The perpetrator could be challenged to drink one or more pints of beer without pause from a tankard marked by pegs within, to bring the ego down a peg or two.<sup>6</sup>

Father was privileged to have lodgings in the Old Quadrangle, regarded as superior by the students. His rooms were on the ground floor, with a bedroom, a small pantry and a fairly large sitting/dining/study room with a fireplace. The communal rooms were in the back of the Quadrangle, and the undergraduates sometimes had to trudge through snow and ice in the winter to reach them. There was no college



nurse or doctor in those days; the undergraduates were supposed to be tough. In the evening, the gates were closed at nine o'clock when the Old Town clock chimed. Latecomers were fined, so the students found ways of climbing into the residences without being caught.<sup>7</sup>

The residences were taken care of by "scouts," who were essential to college life. Each scout was in charge of a "staircase," meaning a set of rooms that branched off from a staircase. In some respects, a scout was like a servant, but in many ways, he was more like a "wife and parent" to his men. He cared for their general welfare, looked after them when they were ill, advised them, got them out of trouble and put them to bed when they were drunk. Father was very fortunate to have a fine scout named Fred. Fred would light Father's fire, clean his room, make his bed and do his laundry. It was also Fred's duty to make Father's breakfast and lunch and look after his parties.<sup>8</sup>

The Master of Pembroke during Father's time was Dr. Holmes Dudden, a man of great distinction and ability, a very good administrator and an author of some note. To be invited to dine at Pembroke was much sought after in the 1920s, because of its fine table and excellent wines.<sup>9</sup>

## Friendships

During his university days, Father made some very good friends with whom he kept in touch all his life. Many became prominent in their own countries. One was Percy O'Brien, who later became a tutor and Fellow of Pembroke. Until he retired in 1974, he was Director of the Nuffield Department of Clinical Biochemistry in the Oxford Medical School.

Another was Qian Changzhao, who became an important official in China under the Nationalist leader Chiang Kaishek. Both Qian and Father subsequently devoted themselves to the betterment of the lives of the Chinese. While Father spent most of his life in Hong Kong, Qian remained in China. After the Nationalist government was ousted, Qian served the government of the People's Republic of China. Qian was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. In the early 1960s, the two men were able to resume a friendship that had been interrupted during the



Chinese civil war (1945–1949) and the subsequent restrictions on its population imposed by the Chinese government.

Other schoolmates were Liu Jia, later Chiang Kaishek's representative at the United Nations in the 1950s, and Konosuke Koike, a graduate of Tokyo University, who later became chairman of Yamaichi Securities. Although Father lost contact with Koike because of the Pacific War, the two men were able to pick up where they left off in the late 1960s.

The one friend Father made who was not a student at Oxford was Ley On, whom we came to call Uncle. Ley On was adopted by a family without a son, in our ancestral village. He was badly treated, so he sold himself as an indentured labourer to North America when he was in his teens. When his contract was over, he stowed away on an ocean liner, not knowing where it was going. He arrived in France and found himself unable to communicate with anyone, so he boarded a boat to an English-speaking country, again as a stowaway, and arrived in London. This was around the same time Father and Third Uncle were in England. Ley On was an enterprising young man who started a small Chinese restaurant in London, catering mainly to overseas Chinese students.

Father and his young friends would go to Ley On's restaurant whenever they were in London. Father used to tell me that Ley On made his tofu with an ingredient that gave his patrons diarrhea! Despite that, the two young men became good friends. I am sure Father admired Ley On for his diligence and entrepreneurial spirit. Ley On went on to become a successful restaurateur in London and the owner of many racehorses. His restaurant was frequented by famous movie stars who befriended him. Probably because he had a classic Chinese face — with high cheekbones and slanted eyes — and was tall and dark-skinned, he was asked to act in small parts in Hollywood movies. I first met him when he stayed with us in Hong Kong in the early 1950s, by which time he had become an alcoholic. I remember Father telling him, "It's a custom in Hong Kong not to drink before sundown!"

All Oxford undergraduates boarded in the colleges, and they were required to have dinner with the Master and the fellows in the hall.

In fact, although undergraduates were free to choose whether they wanted to attend the lectures, they were *strictly advised* to attend the dinners. If an undergraduate's annual attendance at the dinners was not sufficient, he would lose the right to sit for examinations. At each table, ten to twelve undergraduates who had joined the college in the same year would sit together. In spite of the fact that the subjects they took were different, they usually became good friends, bonded by the habit of eating meals at the same table.

Konosuke Koike entered Pembroke College in 1923. Since he and Father both entered in the same year, they sat at the same table for dinners. They played sports together and became close friends. In winter, when the British students played rugby, Father and Koike would go to the gymnasium to box.<sup>10</sup> Boxing was a favourite sport of many Pembroke men. Father loved the sport even though he broke his nose doing it.

Father had high ideals and was a leader among men. He became President of the Chinese Students' Union of Europe in 1925. He already knew then that he would spend his life helping his countrymen. He kept all the menus of the Union dinners on which he and his fellow students sketched their plans for a brave new China.

## Grandfather's Enterprises

While Father was in England, Grandfather's businesses continued to prosper. He became one of the wealthiest men in Hong Kong and a well-respected citizen in the community. Real-estate development became his main business, and he purchased land and built row-houses, mainly for the Chinese middle class in Hong Kong. He also invested in many companies in Hong Kong, such as the China Sugar Refinery, Hong Kong Electric, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, and the Dairy Farm Ice and Cold Storage Co., and he became a major shareholder and a member of the consulting team of China Light & Power Company, which supplied electricity to south China and Hong Kong. Unfortunately, he also invested in the Yue Sing firm, which held the opium monopoly from 1924 from the Portuguese government of Macao, and this caused his misfortune later.

Around the time of the First World War, while Father was in England, Grandfather purchased a large piece of land on the side of a hill on Kennedy Road with the intention of building a home for his family. Because of the war and labour problems, the house was not built until 1920. It was designed and constructed by Palmer and Turner, the same firm that designed the head office of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank on the Bund in Shanghai. The designs of the two buildings were rather similar. The family home, called *Dai Uk*, meaning the Big House, was one of the grandest homes in Hong Kong. Father did not see the Big House until he returned to Hong Kong in 1927.

The Big House commanded a magnificent view of Hong Kong Harbour. The beautiful gardens with their fountains, pagodas, artificial hills and caves, bamboo groves, chicken coops and vegetable plots were surrounded by high walls. At the main gate stood a guard house where a tall Sikh kept watch with a shotgun. Sikhs were traditionally hired as guards in Hong Kong because the Chinese regarded them as fierce-looking. Our guard's family lived in their own compound beside the garden of the fountain of the Goddess of Mercy.

The Big House consisted of three floors. The second and the third floors were living quarters for the family, with large balconies and a kitchen on each floor. For family meals, the men were served on the second floor, and the women and children on the third floor. The ground floor was reserved for entertaining. It consisted of an enormous front hall, the library, the bamboo room and other entertaining rooms and the main kitchen in the back. From the front hall, one walked out onto the terrace to a panoramic view of the Hong Kong harbour. The house was filled with *objets d'art* from all over the world.

Besides being grand, the Big House was also a home away from home for all the Lee relatives or visitors from our ancestral village. There were many guest rooms behind the entertainment rooms on the ground floor, and anyone who needed a place to stay or a good meal was welcomed. Grandfather was known for his generosity which extended to distant relatives. Throughout his life, he made sure that his siblings were financially secure, and that all his nieces and

nephews were in good schools or were given good jobs. His sons carried on this tradition after his death.

The land where the Big House stood was so large that Grandfather decided to erect another building at the other end of the property higher up on the hill. It was a three-storey apartment built in the same style as the Big House, with a wide central staircase, and large balconies for each apartment. This was called *Lee Hong*, meaning Lee Building, and was rented to tenants during Grandfather's lifetime. I wonder whether at the time Grandfather could foresee that, as his family expanded, the Lee Building would be used by them as well. My family lived in both the Big House and the Lee Building until the beginning of the 1950s.

In 1920, experts from England went to Hong Kong to investigate land development around the harbour. In their opinion, the development in the west had reached its limits, and the Colony's future lay in the east around Kowloon Bay. Grandfather then looked into buying land in that area for housing development. Hong Kong island was difficult to build on because of the hilly terrain. In order to build row-housing, hills had to be levelled and the soil used for landfill to create more flat land. In January 1924, Grandfather made the most high-profile purchase of his life. He bought East Point Hill from John William Buchanan Jardine for the sum of \$3,850,960.35. East Point Hill was the original homestead, offices and godowns of the Jardine taipans. The property also included the homes of the number one and number two taipans, with a riding stable in between. The original agreement with the government was to use the soil on East Point Hill for land reclamation in North Point, but the government reneged on the agreement, so development was stalled. In the meantime, in order to earn income from the property, Grandfather turned it into a garden and amusement park for the Chinese, called The Lee Gardens. The Chinese population needed recreation areas, since parks built by the government were restrictive. The Lee Gardens became the year-round pleasure ground for the Chinese and was financially very successful. The taipans' houses became restaurants.

Grandfather planned ahead for his family. In 1925, he established the Lee Hysan Estate Company, which owned East Point Hill and a

number of other properties. He then continued to develop the areas in the vicinity of The Lee Gardens, clearing slums and building wide streets and well-constructed houses.

As an entrepreneur, Grandfather was always looking into new businesses. He loved Chinese opera, and felt that there was a need for a new type of staging that would make changing scenery in a Chinese opera easier. In 1926, he built the Lee Theatre on Percival Street and equipped it with a revolving stage which allowed the realistic touch of scenery changes as the actors walked along. Chinese opera in the Cantonese vernacular was the most popular type of entertainment, and the theatre became hugely successful. The theatre had a beautiful high dome, decorated with dragon designs and lights, and a movie screen was subsequently added. Many Chinese opera stars started their careers at the Lee Theatre.



# 2

## From Marriage In Hong Kong To Work In China

Upon graduation from Oxford University in 1927, Father returned to Hong Kong at the age of twenty-two, after having been away for ten years. His plan was to go back to England to do his practical training. Grandfather was delighted to have his eldest son back, and this time, he wanted to see his son get married before leaving again. The word was out, and many girls were brought to Grandmother for her approval.

The Hong Kong Father returned to was a society that he did not remember. He had been treated as an equal in England, and now he was back in a colony where the British still believed that they were the master race of Asia. There was segregation in every facet of life in the Colony. In hospitals and the Hong Kong civil service, segregation persisted until the Second World War. An example was the Matilda Hospital on the Peak, which in 1940 refused to admit an American woman because she was married to a Chinese. It was not until 1942 that the civil service dropped the demand that all candidates for positions should be of pure European descent. As late as 1992, all senior posts in the civil service were held by British officers. It was the policy of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank not to have

Chinese on the board, and many British firms forbade employees to marry non-British women.

Father was a diligent student who benefited from the British liberal education that taught the equality of men. Therefore, when he returned to Hong Kong, he could not accept the stigma of being a second-class citizen. Having been used to riding in England, Father wanted to join the Hong Kong Jockey Club, but was refused entry because he was Chinese. Grandfather immediately said, "We don't need them. We will start a Chinese Jockey Club." On hearing that, Father was immediately allowed to ride there, because the Hong Kong Jockey Club depended on the income from bets placed by the Chinese population.

Hong Kong's colonial snobbery was described by Ely Kadoorie, a successful merchant in Shanghai as well as in Hong Kong, as small "shopkeeper's mentality." He was comparing international Shanghai to a very British Hong Kong. However, at least the racial chasm in business was narrowing, for the Chinese were not excluded from any commercial activities. Father realized that Hong Kong was a place to do business, but, as someone who believed in the brotherhood of men, it was not a society he would choose to live in.

## Father Meets Mother

As a sociable young man, Father was always seen with a group of friends. One day that summer, not long after he returned from England, he was with his friends on a beach when two girls dropped by on their way home from a tennis game. As one of them caught his eye, he asked a girl he knew, Julia Wong, to introduce him. Julia said, "Don't bother with her, she's just my younger sister!" Father persisted, and thereby met Esther, my mother. They ended up spending the rest of the afternoon together.

Mother was only seventeen, a student at the Diocesan Girls' School, when she met Father. It was a whirlwind courtship and they fell in love. But Mother was not ready to get married; she wanted to finish school first. Father's parents were delighted that their son had



found someone so suitable. When Father proposed, they went to see Mother's parents to ask for consent, but Mother stated she was just not ready. Grandfather then came up with a brilliant idea: he would send Mother to study at Oxford, where Father was to finish his practical training. Mother could study Portuguese to help in the Lee family business. Grandfather also promised to take her parents on a trip around the world to visit the young couple the following year. That did it, and Mother agreed to get married.

All this happened so quickly that my parents didn't really have time to get to know each other well. Theirs was a relationship that grew with the years together, establishing mutual trust, understanding and respect that lasted throughout their lives.

The Wongs, Mother's family, were modern and progressive. Grandfather Wong, one of the élite in the Chinese society in Hong Kong, was good friends with Hong Kong notables Sir Robert Hotung and Sir Shou Son Chau. The Wongs lived a luxurious life on Prince Edward Road. When Mother and her siblings were growing up, they not only had a large household staff and gardeners, but also four cars so that the growing children could drive themselves around.

Mother always prided herself that her father was the first person in Hong Kong to own a motor car when cars were first imported into the Colony in 1912, despite the fact that the Chinese community described cars as "coughing, spluttering, honking demons." Mother's parents, Joseph and Jeannie, had eleven children of whom eight were girls. Mother was the number-five daughter. Mother and her siblings lived a free and easy life, driving everywhere, swimming, playing tennis and dancing. Mother used to get caught by the police for speeding, probably on her way to buy sweets, of which chocolates were her favourite. Mother also took flying lessons but never got her licence.

Mother was fond and proud of her family. Her grandfather, Great-grandfather Wong, had gone to the West Indies as a young man to work as a labourer. He returned to China with a sizable fortune when he was in his early thirties and moved to Hong Kong to work as a court interpreter because of his knowledge of English. He chose a wife from a convent school run by German nuns, a girl whose father and brother were both ministers of the church. She spoke not only English

and Chinese, but also German, and she wore only European clothes. That was unusual for a Chinese girl at that time. The two did not know each other well when they got married. Great-grandmother Wong later told her grandchildren she wondered on her wedding day why her wealthy husband had such rough hands.

As a court interpreter, Great-grandfather Wong was well paid. The Wongs lived on a large estate near Boundary Street in Kowloon. (The land was subsequently repossessed by the Hong Kong government, and they were relocated to present-day Prince Edward Road.)

Mother and her siblings were full of stories of the fun they had as children when they visited their grandparents. The person who was held in highest esteem by the grandchildren was the matriarch of the Wong clan, Great-grandmother Wong. She loved having them around and used to teach them to sing German songs. She was religious and encouraged the grandchildren to sing hymns to her by rewarding them each time. She spent her time doing charitable work, which continued after she was confined to a wheelchair. Her grandchildren were impressed by the fact that she chose a concubine for her husband when she was tired of bearing children. But the real reason for finding a concubine was to have someone willing to stay in the village in China to look after her in-laws, since Great-grandfather was the only son, and Great-grandmother certainly didn't want the job. There were a total of sixteen children, of which eleven were her own.

In his home village Great-grandfather Wong was regarded as the son who made good. When he returned to Dong Guan (Guangdong province) from abroad, he built a house with gun towers for the family in his ancestral village, Ho Pak Kiu. The Wongs were *Hakka*, (guests), who were later settlers on the land, and therefore got poorer land than the *Punti* (locals). They had to fight with their neighbours to protect the water supply needed for their fields.

The Wongs owned rice fields, leichee orchards and a peanut oil factory. Whenever Great-grandfather Wong or any of his sons returned from Hong Kong to check on the business, they were met at the train station by an armed brigade for protection.<sup>1</sup> Due to the deterioration of law and order in China, rural militarization became the norm, and armed guards were standard for the landlords, especially absentee landlords.

Traditionally, the *Punti* and the *Hakka* did not inter-marry. Father, being a *Punti*, used to tease Mother that *Hakka* women had big feet, considered ugly to the traditional Chinese. The fact was that *Hakka* women never bound their feet because they did a large share of the work in the fields, and besides, they were needed to help in the fighting and had to be able to run fast.

It was Great-grandfather Wong's wish that his descendants would one day return to the ancestral village, so at the entrance of the house he placed a large picture entitled "Hundred birds returning to the nest." However, only the eighth son, who was the first-born of the concubine, actually lived and remained in the village, looking after the rice fields and the business. The rest of the children chose to live in Hong Kong, and with the political unrest that existed over the years in China, it was at times impossible for them to return even for a visit. The only time a number of them went back was during the Second World War, after the surrender of Hong Kong. Food was scarce in Hong Kong, and there was always enough to eat in the village because of the rice fields that the family owned.

Great-grandfather Wong was well known and respected in Hong Kong. When he died, many people came to pay their respects by kowtowing all the way in from the entrance to the altar of their red house on Prince Edward Road. He had a grand funeral, with four white horses drawing the carriage that carried his coffin. The family was sent so many flowers that the colony's shops were said to have run out of flowers.<sup>2</sup>

Mother's father, Joseph, was the second son. He was a prosperous and well-respected member of Hong Kong society, a chartered accountant and the first president of the Chinese Association of Chartered Accountants. During the First World War, he was in the police reserve in Hong Kong, when many of the British went to fight in Europe, and the gap had to be filled. His daughters Josephine and Jennie remember him looking very handsome in his white uniform.

Whenever there was a shortage of personnel, Grandfather Wong would fill in as interpreter in the law courts. He became a Justice of the Peace in 1923, and subsequently was decorated by both King George VI and Dr. Sun Yatsen. After his first wife died childless, he

married Jeannie Maxwell, my grandmother. Jeannie's nickname was Beauty, because she was a beautiful Eurasian girl. Great-grandmother Wong encouraged her sons to marry Eurasians because she wanted beautiful grandchildren, and she had many.

Grandmother Jeannie Maxwell Wong was one of four children and the only daughter of John Maxwell and a Chinese lady whose name we don't know, because she was always referred to as Grandmother by Mother and her siblings. John Maxwell went to Hong Kong from Scotland in the nineteenth century, stayed on to work and to get married. He chose a Chinese girl from an orphanage which was the precursor of the Po Leung Kuk, an institution established in 1878 by a group of wealthy and influential Chinese gentlemen to protect destitute women and children. That was really his only option, since there were very few European women of marriageable age of his own class, and no Chinese girl from a good family would consider him eligible. Great-grandfather Maxwell worked as a policeman in Hong Kong, and by all accounts, he was a fine father to his children.

In those days, Eurasians did not belong to either the Chinese or the European communities, so they had to try very hard to be one or the other. Grandmother Jeannie Maxwell Wong became more Chinese than the Chinese. She could understand and speak English, but she could read only Chinese. She was the authority on Chinese customs, and everyone in the Wong family always consulted her. I remember her in her later years looking very serene in a Chinese cheongsam, wearing her hair in a bun.

## The Wedding

My parents' wedding took place on February 28, 1928, at St. John's Cathedral. Mother always said that she wished the fashion for wedding dresses that year had been long gowns instead of short, but, having to be fashionable, she had a short wedding dress of silver lace trimmed with pearls, and she carried white roses. Mother was a beautiful girl, tall for a Chinese and rather big-boned. She had to wear low-heeled shoes so that she would not look taller than Father. In fact, she kept growing after they were married and became quite a bit



taller than Father. She was as fair-skinned as Father was dark, with brown hair covered by her wedding head-piece that came down to her eyebrows, according to the fashion of the day. She had a large wedding party, with her sisters and cousins in dresses of different pastel colours and decorated with rosettes. They were beautiful young women and girls, and all Great-grandmother Wong's grandchildren.

The Cathedral was filled to the brim with Chinese and European guests, and many people had to stand outside because they couldn't get in. The wedding was performed by the Very Rev. A. Swann, Dean of Hong Kong, who broke tradition by officiating at a Chinese wedding for the first time. Hong Kong society was so divided between the Chinese and the Europeans that it was only on occasions like these that the two groups were brought together.

The reception was held at The Lee Gardens where a huge matshed (a structure of bamboo and straw) was erected, because the taipans' houses were not large enough to accommodate the two thousand guests. Hong Kong Hotel, which was one of Father's favourite hotels, catered the affair. A dais was erected to support a six-tier wedding cake. Sir Robert Hotung toasted my parents and speeches were made by Sir Robert, Dr. Robert H. Kotewall and Father.

After the wedding, my parents went on their honeymoon by boat to Europe. They sailed through the Suez Canal and did what most tourists do in Egypt, riding camels and visiting the Sphinx. Their first stop in Europe was Switzerland, where Mother met Third Uncle for the first time. He was attending school there. Subsequently, they went to England, where Mother met Father's sisters Doris and Ansie (Second and Third Aunts), who were in a boarding school for girls.

## Grandfather's Murder

During Father's visit to Hong Kong, Grandfather got embroiled in what became a court case over the Yue Sing firm's opium licence with the government of Macao. The Yue Sing firm had had the opium monopoly since 1924. A third of the company was owned by the Lee family, and Grandfather was the general manager. In March 1927, the Portuguese government announced in the *Boletim Oficial* that the

monopoly system under which opium had been imported, prepared, sold and distributed would come to an end; therefore its contract with the Yue Sing firm would be terminated, to be replaced by a government monopoly under the superintendence of the Inspector of Consumption Taxes. It established an Opium Administration and Pedro Jose Lobo was appointed as Administrator. By 1927, a quarter of the original investment of \$3 million had been returned to the subscribers of Yue Sing, but the winding-up proceedings in the courts in Macao would mean that the rest of the investment would be lost. This was something the subscribers to the firm had to accept.

Then Grandfather discovered that the Macao government had not taken back the licence, but had given it to another company, the Yau Sing Company, for a payment of \$120,000. The company opened an account at a branch of the Mercantile Bank of India in Hong Kong, and the comprador of the bank confirmed that the opium monopoly had been obtained by the Yau Sing Company by tender from the government of Macao. The Company was opened for subscription. A friend of Grandfather's was approached to buy shares, and he came to Grandfather for advice.

Grandfather believed that since the contract with Yue Sing had been terminated by the Macao government, no other firm should legally be given a new contract by the same government. He sent a petition to the governor of Macao, requesting fair treatment for his firm and for an enquiry into the matter, as well as the return, in due course, of the original deposit by Yue Sing to the Portuguese government. The petition was also sent to the Legislative Councillors, sixteen lawyers and the Consul-General of Macao. In his petition, the name of Pedro Jose Lobo was implicated.

In the spring of 1928, during the preparation of my parents' wedding, Pedro Jose Lobo sued Grandfather for libel and asked the Hong Kong court for an injunction to prevent him from sending further petitions to the governor of Macao. During the period leading up to the trial, Grandfather received letters threatening his life, saying also that bombs would be thrown at my parents' wedding. These letters were ignored by Grandfather even though friends and relatives advised him to be careful and change his routine. The wedding went



smoothly, my parents left for Europe, and the threats were forgotten. On April 17, Chief Justice Gollan of the Supreme Court in Hong Kong gave judgment in Grandfather's favour. And Grandfather believed that it was all over.

On April 30, at one o'clock in the afternoon, as Grandfather was entering the Chinese Yue Kee Club on Wellington Street for tiffin, which was his routine, he was shot in the corridor. He called out a couple of times, "*gau meng*," meaning save my life, and members at the Club heard the shots and his cries. When a *foki* (waiter), Law Lau, reached the corridor, he saw Grandfather injured, holding on to the wall, and looking very pale. Instead of stopping to help, he followed a man in white trousers and a short jacket who darted through the passage from the Club. By the time the members of the club reached Grandfather, he was already dead. He was forty-seven years old.

The family offered a reward of \$10,000 for information leading to the arrest of the assassin, but despite the police having many leads and some arrests, the murderer was never caught. The entire family was in shock. Grandfather left behind a wife, three concubines, seven sons and six surviving daughters, with daughter number-eight on the way.

My parents and three of Father's siblings were in England when the news reached them. They immediately began their return journey, but travel by boat through the Suez Canal was so slow, they missed the Buddhist funeral service. On May 25, Grandfather was buried in a beautiful site overlooking the ocean in the Permanent Cemetery in Aberdeen.

Later, at Lady Clara Hotung's suggestion, a matshed was specially built in The Lee Gardens. Buddhist services were held for seven days to pacify Grandfather's ghost and to raise his soul from suffering in the next world.<sup>3</sup>

## Father as Head of the Family

At the age of twenty-three, Father became the head of the family. Mother, at eighteen, was no longer a student, but his partner. Since Grandmother was illiterate, it was up to Father to make sure the huge family was taken care of. In order to raise money for death duties, he arranged for the sale of many of Grandfather's shares. Father suffered

insulting experiences, which he never forgot, when some of Grandfather's "friends" refused to open the door when he called on them. One of the exceptions was Arthur Morse, chief accountant of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, to whom he went to borrow money. It was very intimidating for Father, but the kindness and consideration shown to him by Morse made them fast friends for the rest of their lives.

Grandfather had mortgages on many of his properties, the largest of which was East Point Hill (now The Lee Gardens), which was held by Jardine. This meant that if we reneged on the payment, the property would be repossessed. Father borrowed money from the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank to pay off the mortgage.

Many people approached Grandmother to buy our properties, but with Father's encouragement, she refused to part with any of it. From then on, and for many years, the entire family lived on a tight budget in order to pay off the mortgages on our extensive holdings from the rents collected.

When Grandfather's estate duties were settled, Father remained in Hong Kong, working for the Lee & Orange Architectural firm to complete his practical training. One of his projects was the lengthening of the No.1 Dock of the Whampoa Dockyard in Kowloon.<sup>4</sup> Today, in the same location, is a shopping centre in the shape of an ocean liner.

My parents lived in the Big House with Grandmother and the rest of the family. With all the mortgage and loan payments, there was very little money to go around, and Grandmother held the purse strings. While Father was completing his training, he had no income. Mother, at the age of eighteen, found herself trapped in an old-fashioned, traditional household which was totally different from her own, and because Father was not earning an independent income, she had no psychological or financial freedom. She began to lose weight and became depressed, so her mother decided to take her to Lushan for a complete change of scenery.

Lushan, in Jiangxi province in the county of Jiujiang, not far from Poyang Lake, is famous for the beauty of its scenery and the wonderful mountain air. It was well known as a spot for patients to recuperate from their illnesses. It used to be (and still is) a retreat for the wealthy,

and spotted along the mountainside were many villas owned by Westerners and wealthy Chinese. Later on, both Chiang Kaishek and Mao Zedong had villas there. Mother called it the Switzerland of China.

At that time, the only way to reach the town at the top of Lushan was by walking or being carried in a sedan chair. Mother told me that she was so thin when they arrived that the chair-coolies fought to carry her up the mountain. However, by the time she came back down, she had gained so much weight, no chair-coolie wanted to carry her. Mother never said how long she stayed, but she slept and ate well until Father went to bring her home.

## Work in Guangzhou

When Father finished his practical training with Lee & Orange in 1931 and became a qualified engineer, he wanted to pursue his professional career. The various businesses of the Lee family were looked after by employees, and Father felt that it was not necessary for him to remain in Hong Kong as long as he was close by.

The 1930s were the years when the Chinese Republic needed a great deal of help to build a new country. Like many young Chinese at the time, Father was filled with hope for the future, and he wanted to do his part for China.

Being Cantonese, he went to Guangzhou, also known as Canton, to work in the government of Mayor Liu Jiwan. He occupied different posts over a number of years. He was Chief Secretary for the city, Chief Engineer, a member of the Department of Water Works, and also an auditor in the Ministry of Audit.

At the beginning, Mother remained living on the third floor of the Big House in Hong Kong while Father worked in Guangzhou. The children in the Lee family were Sixth Uncle, Seventh Uncle, Seventh Aunt, Eighth Aunt and cousin Hon Chiu, son of Second Uncle and the eldest grandson. Hon Chiu remembers that they were always hungry, not only because the family was cash poor, but also because Grandmother was very frugal. They used to visit Mother on Sundays at teatime and she would bake a cake as a treat for them. By that

time, Father had an independent income, and Mother was no longer cash-strapped. Those were memorable times for the children. Mother was the modern and fashionable sister-in-law, and was looked up to by all of Father's siblings. The younger girls who did not have the opportunity to go to England before Grandfather died wanted to have English names, and Mother named them Dione, Joyce and Amy.

When Father was more settled in his post in the Guangzhou government, Mother moved there. They lived in Dongshan, which was a pleasant residential area in the suburb of Guangzhou. They had by then become good friends with Mayor Liu Jiwan and his family. They socialized a great deal with government officials, and Mother was expected to keep company with their wives. One day, a group of ladies went to a fortune-teller, who told the officials' wives that their futures were not rosy, but that Mother's was very good. Mother found that embarrassing, being the wife of the most junior person in the hierarchy of the Guangzhou government. The other ladies were very displeased. Of course, at that time, no one foresaw the change of government in China from Nationalist to Communist, when all the government officials became refugees.

My parents commuted to Hong Kong every weekend by train, back to the Big House to see Grandmother and the family. By that time, as the Lee family expanded, many members had moved into the Lee Building, up the hill from the Big House. My parents stayed in the Big House during their weekend visits.

Since Grandmother was the only person in the family with a motor car, in order for the children to go swimming at South Bay, where the family owned a cabin, all the children would go to the Big House after half-day school on Saturdays to have lunch, and wait to see who would take them swimming. It was usually Father or Third Uncle (who had returned from Oxford by then) or Second Aunt. It was a much anticipated outing for the youngsters who enjoyed their afternoon picnic of tea sandwiches at the cabin, and a swim. Cousin Hon Chiu was just learning to swim then, so he mainly played on the beach. After their swim, Father always treated all of them to ice cream sold by a vendor for Dairy Farm.<sup>5</sup>

During the years when my parents commuted between Hong Kong and Guangzhou, they had friends who also made the same return trip each week, so the group usually played bridge during the journey.

During this period, Father worked closely with Yuen Menghong, Director of Public Works in Guangzhou. Yuen's cousin Yuen Yaohong used to tease Father that, as a foreign graduate, he would know only theory, and not anything about the practical side of building. Yuen Yaohong himself first started work in construction as a carpenter. However, the two men became good friends, and he became Uncle Yuen to us.

In the mid 1930s, Yuen Yaohong moved to Hong Kong and started to work for the Lee family as the general manager of International Entertainment Enterprises Ltd., the company which leased the Lee Theatre. This company was formed because one of Grandfather's brothers was in the habit of taking money from the till in the theatre, and no employee dared to challenge him. Since he was an elder, Father and his brothers were not in a position to stop him, even though the theatre belonged to them. The employees could then tell Grandfather's brother that the Lee Theatre was leased by another company, which meant he could no longer help himself to the till. From then on, if he needed money, he had to go Lee Hysan Estate Co. or to Lee Tung, the rental office.

When my parents' lives became more settled in Guangzhou, they bought a piece of land in Conghua, where there were natural hot springs. They built a small house on a beautiful hillside. The rest of the land was planted as orchards with many different fruit trees. The house, designed by Father, was built in the typical Chinese style with red walls and a green tiled roof which housed a tank fed by hot spring water. The kitchen was open to the outside. Aside from my parents' bedroom, there were no separate rooms. It was an open concept where all the guests slept on tatamis on the floor.

My parents spent many happy hours there with their siblings, friends and relatives. They often went swimming in a small lake which had a waterfall at one end. One day Mother's sister Jenny swam a little too close to the fall and almost drowned. The water in Conghua is well known for its medicinal qualities, and Mother's sister Sarah often



brought her son Jay, who was having skin problems, to bathe in the hot springs.<sup>6</sup>

The house in Conghua turned out to be such a wonderful country retreat that Mayor Liu Jiwan and many of the officials of Guangdong went there too. Later, the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party also built their villas there. The area became a favourite resort for the well-to-do.

After the Second World War, because of political unrest in China, my parents had no plans to use it any more, so they asked the caretaker, who had been looking after the house and grounds, to move into the house. I met the caretaker when he came to Hong Kong at the end of the 1940s to report the condition of the property to Father, and Father asked him in particular how the fruit trees were doing.

I didn't see this house myself until the late 1980s, when my husband, Neville, and I went to Conghua with Mother and her friend Daisy Li. The garden was completely overgrown with weeds, and it was difficult to distinguish the trees. The house was altered and in a terrible state of disrepair. Mother was so disappointed to see it painted white instead of the original red and green. A nondescript house had been built close to it, and a public dining hall was located in the area which used to be set aside for parking their cars. It saddened Mother to see the property in that condition.

## Pioneers in Hainan

In 1934 Father left his employment with the Guangzhou government to do something very different in Hainan Island. Situated between the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin, it is about the same size as the island of Taiwan. Except for the Paracel Islands, which had troops stationed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam, Hainan Island is the most southern territory of China.

Why did an Oxford graduate take his young wife to a backward place like Hainan Island? I never thought to ask Father, but I guess he had a sense of curiosity and of adventure. After all, he was an inquisitive person all his life. But I think the main reason was his desire to help China, by working in a remote and backward place. He believed



that one person could make a difference even in a country with a population of hundreds of millions.

Hainan Island was just beginning to attract the attention of the Chinese government in the 1930s. Minister T.V. Soong visited the island and expressed the opinion that it should be developed. Industrialists and educators began to realize the economic importance of the area known as the “larder of China,” where rice crops can be harvested up to three times a year. It was also known as “the paradise of China” because flowers bloom year round and delicious fruits and magnificent trees grow everywhere. Ancient Indian writers referred to Hainan as “The Island of Palms” because at least six types of palm grow luxuriantly on the island, producing considerable income. On this tropical island, the sun is so intense during the day that people cannot go out without hats or umbrellas. The humidity is usually high. In summer, the temperature goes up to as high as 98°F, and in winter, drops to 45°F. However, along the mountain range, Limu Ling, that runs through the middle of the island, the temperature is always cool.

Hainan became known to the Chinese at the time of the first emperor, Qin Shihuangdi (245–210 B.C.). The island, inhabited by aborigines known as the Li tribe, attracted about 23,000 Chinese colonists from the mainland during the Early Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 24.) By the end of the Later Han Dynasty (A.D. 25–219), the entire island was subjugated and the Li tribes were pushed into the centre of the island. The name Hainan, meaning “south of the sea,” came from the Yuan Dynasty.

In 1921, the island officially became part of Guangdong province. By the late 1920s, there were already more than two million Chinese living on the island. Chinese settlements were founded along the northern part of the island, where close contact could be maintained with the mainland. Haikou, the major city, was located at the northern tip of the island and was not only the home of the governor but also the headquarters of the Garrison Commander.<sup>7</sup>

Hainan Island was known as Qiongya province to the Chinese government. In the 1920s, the Chinese government started to build highways in order to open up the island for development. Besides

shops, restaurants, hotels and banks that catered to the population, there were some Chinese investments, mainly in rubber and sugar cane plantations. Some of these companies were later abandoned because of problems with bandits in the area.<sup>8</sup> In the 1930s, it was divided into thirteen counties, two of which were exclusively inhabited by Chinese. The Li tribe and the Chinese lived in separate communities even if they were geographically in the same areas.<sup>9</sup>

The Li aborigines physically and culturally resemble the Tai people who lived in Thailand, Burma, Yunnan province in China and Indo-China. They are stout, of medium stature, with yellowish-brown skin, straight black hair and dark brown eyes. Their facial features are quite different from those of the Chinese. (For centuries, Chinese scholars referred to them as the tattooed race of the south who knew no civilization.) The women are tattooed (in a practice known as *tantan*), apparently to make it easier to identify their own descendants. They have their own native costumes, but in the summer, the adult males usually wear only loin cloths and turbans. In the 1930s, they lived on hunting and farming.

Since Father wanted to help open up a primitive part of China for agriculture and trade, he and Mother moved to Hainan to work as pioneers in ranching, with the idea of selling cattle to Europe. The weather and the topography in parts of Hainan are known to be good for cattle farming.<sup>10</sup> He bought land "as far as the eye can see," according to the description in his land deed, and imported the best cattle from Europe for breeding.

Being adventurous, Father crossed the island through the Limu Ling mountains to the area known as the Li Country, where the aborigines lived. He was warned by the local Chinese not to go into the interior because of the danger of malaria and other diseases; nine out of ten people who went in, did not come out alive. Father had faith in modern science, and believed that as long as he had quinine and other medicines with him, he would be all right. And he was.

While in Hainan, Father also became a plantation owner, growing flax and sugar cane. In 1936, Father, together with other investors, bought Bao Cheng Company. Bao Cheng, which had been established in 1928 by two partners, owned 5,000 acres where flax was grown

as a cash crop. The cost to produce a ton of processed flax was seven pounds sterling, but it could fetch thirty pounds in the London market. It was a profitable business, but again, due to bandits in the area, the company closed between 1930–1931.<sup>11</sup>

After Father's group bought the company, he renamed it Lee Hing Plantation Company, and later changed the name to Lee Hing Agricultural Company Ltd. The company was situated on the north coast of Hainan near Ling Gao county (west of Haikou). The size of the farm was increased to 15,000 acres, growing flax and sugar cane. By January 1937, more land was purchased, and the size was increased to 20,000 acres. The company was well established with its own flax-processing machines and storage buildings, forty-five horse-power generators, gasoline storage, a garage for cars, an office building and residences for workers.<sup>12</sup>

My parents brought Second Uncle with them, as well as a young man named Leung Kwong Wing, who continued to be in the employ of the Lee family, eventually becoming one of our gardeners in the Big House. Men from the Li tribe were hired to clear the land and look after the cattle.

In the mountain streams in Limu Ling were gold nuggets, which the Li collected for use as jewellery, or for barter with outsiders. Father told me that he bartered with them using glass beads, mirrors and soap. They were fascinated by seeing themselves in the mirrors. They loved making soap suds in the river. Glass beads were a lot more colourful than gold nuggets.

Father had firearms for hunting, and perhaps also for protection against bandits, but issued strict instructions that guns were not to be given to or even handled by the Li aborigines. One day, he was beside himself when he found out that Second Uncle had used some of the guns for bartering with the aborigines.

Father used to say that because Hainan Island was so far out of the way one could always come across something unusual on the island and in its waters. One day, while my parents were at the coast, a fishing boat came back to shore dragging a garouper ten feet long. There was great astonishment because no one had ever seen a garouper that large before. The entire village, my parents and their entourage

included, celebrated with a meal from that one fish. We were very impressed by this story.

Father often went hunting for wild boars. It was a dangerous sport because the boars, if wounded, would charge at the hunter. Sometimes Mother would go along, riding a small horse. She was not a good rider, and was frightened whenever the horse jumped at the sound of gunfire. However, riding was necessary because it was the only way to travel in the interior.

My parents lived the lives of pioneers, hunting and growing their own food. Since there was no electricity, Father built his own generators with wind power.<sup>13</sup> My parents made friends there, mostly with other pioneers and missionaries, and with some of the local village headmen. They would sometimes go into town and stay in small hotels and meet their friends, and at times they took visitors to various parts of the island. They both loved living there. Tanned by the strong tropical sun, Father became almost as dark as the Li people. He often talked about Hainan Island with nostalgia, because it was a part of his life that he treasured but something that could never be repeated. The best souvenirs he had from Hainan were mango forks and knives which he had designed and crafted there, and which I still use and treasure.

But important events were happening elsewhere. On July 7, 1937, Japanese and Chinese troops collided at the Marco Polo bridge in the Lugouqiao region near Beijing. It was the beginning of the undeclared Sino-Japanese war. Father felt it was time for him to go back to mainland China to help. Mother told me, "Even if China had not been at war, when the war broke out in Europe in 1939, it would not have been possible to ship cattle or agricultural products there anyway."

## Return to Hong Kong

At the end of 1937, my parents moved back to Hong Kong and Father again commuted to China, this time to help the Nationalist government. Mother began to feel unwell, and a visit to the doctor confirmed that she was pregnant. In February 1938, ten years after their wedding, my eldest brother, Richard, was born.

Father thought the return to Hong Kong was just an interruption from his life in Hainan. He had left the plantations in the care of others, not realizing that future events would prevent him from going back, and that eventually all the land would be repossessed by the Chinese government. Although Mother told me that the land deed was kept in her safe deposit box, we couldn't find it after she passed away.

During the 1930s, the Central Chinese government under Chiang Kaishek enjoyed the support of many well-educated, highly qualified persons with high ideals about building a new and progressive China.<sup>14</sup> With the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, and the subsequent Marco Polo bridge incident in 1937, China's problems became urgent. In Hong Kong, a group of brilliant engineers gathered to discuss the rebuilding of China after the war and in 1938, the Chinese Institute of Engineers, Hong Kong Chapter, was established. The membership was restricted to qualified engineers who had more than seven years of practical experience. The first president was Huang Boqiao<sup>15</sup> who was Director of the Jinghu Railroad Bureau, and Father was the vice-president. As a young man, Ching Tong (C.T.) Wu was hired as secretary for the Institute, and that was how he and Father first met.<sup>16</sup> He became a lifelong friend and confidant, and an important source for this book.

In 1938, Japan invaded south China, and in October, Guangzhou was occupied by the Japanese. Father commuted between mainland China and Hong Kong frequently during the years before the fall of Hong Kong. He was involved not only as an engineer, but also in many other aspects in the war effort against the Japanese. He was an advisor and the purchasing manager for the China Tea Company, which was one of the most important branches under the Finance Ministry of the Chinese Central government. A large proportion of the country's foreign exchange income came from the sale of tea.<sup>17</sup> In later years, Mother explained to me the importance of selling Chinese tea for foreign exchange in order to buy equipment for the defence of China against the Japanese invasion. The head office of the China Tea Company was in Chongqing, and Father frequently commuted there from Hong Kong.



Father was also asked by the Chinese government to look after the distribution of sea salt.<sup>18</sup> In certain parts of the interior of China, the local population lacked iodine in their diet and goitre was prevalent. It was, therefore, important to make sea salt available to them. I remember the adults talking about this problem during the war, and in the interior of China we saw people suffering from goitre.

In October 1939, Mother gave birth to my older sister, Deanna.

Father's enthusiasm and reputation got him elected in 1940 as president of the Institute of Chinese Engineers, Hong Kong Chapter. His connections in Hong Kong made it possible for him to arrange visits for the engineers to various companies and factories, because he was trusted not to allow any stealing of trade secrets. An example was the Tian Chu Weijing factory (The Heavenly Kitchen Monosodium Glutamate Factory), owned by Wu Yunchu. At that time, monosodium glutamate was mostly manufactured in Japan. Under normal circumstances, Wu would never allow visitors to his factory, but Father was able to organize a tour for the engineers.<sup>19</sup> Dinners for the Institute were always held at the Big House. C.T. Wu said he was at times mistaken for one of the members because he was dressed in a suit and following Father around.

As the secretary of the Chinese Institute of Engineers, C.T. Wu made thirty dollars a month. Father took a liking to him and promised to find him a higher paying job. At the beginning of 1941, Father called up his friend Zhu Baiying, who was head of the research department of the China Tea Company, to recommend that he hire C.T. Wu. Even as a clerk, Wu's salary tripled. Wu's mother declared that he could get married since he was making so much money.<sup>20</sup>



# 3

## Storm Clouds Gather: Hong Kong Falls To The Japanese

The Japanese invasion of China began in 1937, and between 1937 and 1941 the population of Hong Kong increased from 700,000 to 1.5 million as refugees flooded in. Horrible tales of massacre, rape and starvation circulated in the colony, but Britain was powerless against Japanese military might. Since it could not count on the help of the Americans, it tried to placate the Japanese government in the hope of avoiding war. The more virulent anti-Japanese literature in Hong Kong was censored by the colonial government.<sup>1</sup> The British government misjudged the importance of Hong Kong to Japan as a centre for the movement of troops and war materials, and British military intelligence was unaware of troop preparations across the Chinese border and of Japanese spies who infiltrated Hong Kong.

Under the command of Major-General Takeo Ito, Japanese Intelligence officers worked in Hong Kong as bartenders, barbers, masseurs and waiters in establishments frequented by the British military, offering cold beers, exotic food, accommodating women, generous credit facilities, and listening to their conversations. In fact, the best men's hairdresser in Hong Kong, who over a seven-year period cut the hair

of two successive governors, generals, the Commissioner of Police, the officer in charge of Special Branch and the chairman of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, presented himself to his employer after the capitulation of Hong Kong on Christmas Day 1941, in the uniform of a Commander of the Imperial Japanese Navy.<sup>2</sup>

After the fall of Guangzhou in October 1938, the Japanese amassed troops north of the Hong Kong border. The 38th Army was training daily at Baiyunshan in Guangzhou, which had the same topography as the area at Gin Drinker's Line, in the southern part of the New Territories. Nightly, they prepared for a border attack on Hong Kong from Shenzhen.<sup>3</sup>

## Defence of Hong Kong

In 1939, while the Second World War was raging in Europe, the War Office in London was well aware of the military deficiencies in Hong Kong, but the Colony was regarded as expendable and in fact, militarily indefensible. When Lord Hastings Ismay, Prime Minister Winston Churchill's Chief of Staff, proposed at the War Office conference to demilitarize Hong Kong, he was accused of being a defeatist. Sir Geoffrey Northcote, Governor of Hong Kong, believed that Lord Ismay was a realist and wrote to Whitehall in October 1940 to urge the withdrawal of the British garrison "in order to avoid the slaughter of civilians and the destruction of property that would follow a Japanese attack."<sup>4</sup> No one listened. Besides, Northcote was about to retire due to ill health, and would be replaced by Sir Mark Young.

Both Whitehall and many Hong Kong residents wanted to believe Major-General Edward Grasett, the Toronto-born commander of the British troops in Hong Kong, who did not believe that the Japanese would declare war on the British or the Americans. However, he still felt that the garrison in Hong Kong should be reinforced, but his request was denied by the War Office. In 1941, Air Chief Marshall Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, Commander-in-Chief of the Far East, believing that Hong Kong could endure a siege of six months or

more, requested an increase in the garrison. He too was denied because Churchill believed that there was not the slightest chance of holding Hong Kong.

In the meantime, Major-General Grasett continued to campaign for reinforcements even after he knew of Churchill's decision. When he retired from the Hong Kong command in July 1941, he stopped off in Ottawa en route to England, where he met with Canada's Chief of General Staff, H.D.G. (Harry) Crerar, his old schoolmate. They discussed how long Hong Kong could withstand an extended siege if it had an addition of one or two battalions. He did not suggest to Crerar that Canada should supply the manpower, but he did make that proposal to the British Chiefs of Staff.<sup>5</sup>

So the defence of Hong Kong was dealt with half-heartedly. A single RAF squadron was diverted to Malaya, leaving five obsolete fighters as Hong Kong's air defence. Sea defence depended on the H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* and the H.M.S. *Repulse*, which were supposed to come from the South Seas to relieve Hong Kong when necessary. It was also assumed that the U.S. Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor would be able to contain the Japanese in the event of a major conflict.<sup>6</sup> On land, the defence of the Colony depended entirely on a garrison of 11,000 regular British and Indian troops, and a citizen force of 1,387 Hong Kong Volunteers. Batteries were put on the island of Hong Kong at the entrances to the harbour. Gin Drinker's Line was to be the first line of defence. Tunnels and bomb shelters were built all over the city in preparation for an attack.

The population of Hong Kong did have drills in case of a bombing attack, and students in middle schools were given uniforms and trained as air raid wardens.<sup>7</sup> As the news became more alarming, black-out practices became more frequent. Young civilian men were asked to join the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps. Among them was Bill Poy, who was married to Mother's cousin Ethel Lam, and who later became my father-in-law. However, the reality of war was not taken too seriously, because, as Poy told me, it was considered "fun for young men to be with their friends in a motorcycle squadron." Some actually joined because they would be given motorcycles.<sup>8</sup> Poy owned his own motorcycle at the time and he used to

take my future husband, Neville, on it to go to school at Ling Ying, at the top of The Lee Gardens. Poy, an Australian-born Chinese, was working for the Canadian Trade Commissioner in Hong Kong.

No one wanted to believe that Hong Kong would be attacked, even with the appearance of many refugees in the Colony. Overnight, Hong Kong became the cultural capital of the Chinese world because of the arrival of refugee artists, scholars and writers. The economy boomed when the population tripled, and a thriving smuggling trade with inland China, across Japanese-controlled territories, was making some people very rich. Manufacturing in the colony flourished.

In May 1941, in the midst of all this, I was born.

In July 1941, all Japanese assets in Hong Kong were frozen, following similar action in Britain and the United States. However, Britain still did not believe Japan would invade Hong Kong, and Japanese nationals in the Colony were not kept under close surveillance. When Colonel Suzuki, a Japanese intelligence officer, was exposed by a British agent, the Foreign Office did not expel him from Hong Kong because Britain and Japan were not at war. When he departed of his own accord at the end of November, barely two weeks before Japan attacked Hong Kong, he had with him the complete details of the British defence plan.

On September 19, 1941, the Dominions Office in London dispatched a secret telegram to William Lyon Mackenzie King's government, asking Canada to provide one or two battalions for the defence of Hong Kong.<sup>9</sup> On November 19, the population of Hong Kong welcomed the arrival of the two Canadian battalions. However, no one knew that the troops had no battle training, and no knowledge of the Colony or of local transportation. The information about these matters had been sent to Australia by mistake.

Life in our family went on as usual. No one was considering leaving the colony since conditions in China were much more serious. It was at this time that Father met Liao Chengzhi,<sup>10</sup> Secretary of the South China Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, and they became good friends. Liao was engaged in activities in Guangdong and Hong Kong until the fall of Guangzhou in 1938, when he escaped to Hong Kong. There he organized forces to send to

Huipo, which became the progenitor of the East River Detachment, an anti-Japanese guerrilla force in South China and Hong Kong. Father and Liao tried to negotiate with the British government to provide ammunition for the Hong Kong-Kowloon Brigade guerrillas to help to defend the island against the Japanese, but the talks failed because the British did not want ammunitions to fall into the hands of the pro-Communist guerrillas.<sup>11</sup>

The two men, along with an English friend, planned the sabotage of the electric plant in expectation of a Japanese invasion, but the Japanese attack took everyone by surprise.<sup>12</sup>

The one thing the Lee family did in preparation for a Japanese attack was to stockpile rice in the Big House. Some people in the Wan Chai district, just below us, knew of our rice reserve and this resulted in looting during and after the Japanese invasion.

On the evening of December 6, 1941, Governor Sir Mark Young attended a charity ball at the Peninsular Hotel. The following day, Sunday, at midday, the mobilization call went out and a state of emergency was announced over the radio. Many who heard it thought it was just another preparedness test. Bill Poy reported for duty, but he told me that many volunteers did not when they realized that there was real danger of war. Poy and Willy Eu, the son of Eu Tongsan, a very wealthy gentleman in Hong Kong, reported to Kowloon Railway station because they were attached to the Field Engineers. They had to mobilize to blow up roads and bridges in the New Territories in predetermined areas in case of an invasion. That day, Mother's youngest sister, Jenny, was preparing for her wedding scheduled for the following day. She and her husband were to sign the register in the City Hall in Hong Kong, and the wedding and reception were to take place in Kowloon.

## The Battle of Hong Kong

At eight-thirty on Monday morning, December 8, my future husband, Neville, who was in Grade One at the time, was told not to go to school. He went to the rooftop with one of his family's servants to



take down the dry laundry, and they saw planes in the sky. Just as someone said, "It's only another practice," bombs started falling on the urban area of Kowloon and on Kai Tak airport.

My Aunt Jenny and her husband had just gone to the City Hall to register. That was the end of the wedding since they could not get back to Kowloon for the ceremony. Until her husband's death, Aunt Jenny wondered whether their marriage was legal since there were no witnesses, and the ceremony never took place.

Grandparents Wong were living in Shouson Hill Road in Aberdeen at that time, next door to their good friend, Sir Shou Son Chau. The British military commandeered their house because it was in a strategic position and they were told to leave within four hours. With no time to pack anything, they came to stay with us.

The bombs on Kai Tak destroyed the five old fighter planes. Within a few hours, the people of Hong Kong heard about the destruction by the Japanese of the U.S. Fleet in Pearl Harbor, of the first bombs on Manila and Singapore, and of the sinking of the H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* and H.M.S. *Repulse*.<sup>13</sup>

The Big House was hit by shrapnel, and a bomb created a huge hole on one side of the Lee Building. We were very easy targets because we were so high up on the hill. Members of the Lee family gathered their essentials and moved to the backstage area of the Lee Theatre. We were grateful to Grandfather for building the theatre as strong as a fortress so that his descendants could use it in times of war. Along with our Wong Grandparents, we moved into the rooms behind the backstage area which also had a kitchen. We were crowded, but safe. We were not able to bring enough rice, so we had to make do with congee, a type of gruel. The older children were given crispy rice to ease their hunger between meals. As a seven-month-old baby, I immediately started getting sick and could not drink the powdered milk my mother brought along. Mother blamed it on the lack of clean water, because we used well water at the Lee Theatre. From then on until the end of the war, my health was poor.

During the period of fighting, whenever there was an air-raid signal, everyone would go to the bomb shelters. The one near the Lee



Theatre was at Leighton Road. During one of the bombing raids, Grandfather Wong did not enter the shelter fast enough and was hit on his shoulders by shrapnel.

Once the Japanese took control of Kowloon, artillery was stationed along the waterfront facing Hong Kong. Mother's younger sister Josephine's home in Tsim Sha Tsui was commandeered by the Japanese for that purpose.

At the Queen Mary Hospital, Joseph Tam was a nurse in training on his early morning shift that started at 6 o'clock. The moment the bombs started to drop, all in-patients were discharged to make room for war casualties. Those who still needed care were transferred to St. Stephen's Girls' College, which was converted into a relief hospital with camp beds set up for the patients. Female nurses were sent home, with the exception of those who wished to stay, and the male nurses took on most of the responsibility. By afternoon, many injured soldiers were brought in. Tam, as a nurse-in-training, had to look after twenty-four patients, most of whom were Canadians. Some of the doctors left for China and some were conscripted to stay to help in Hong Kong. Two of the Chinese doctors Tam worked with were Sik Nin Chau and Han Suyin.<sup>14</sup> Many of the Irish doctors stayed, because Ireland was a neutral country.<sup>15</sup>

The doctors' offices and the nursing school at the Queen Mary Hospital were converted into dormitories and some government officials moved in. Among them were Governor Sir Mark Young. Father T.F. Ryan, leader of the Irish Jesuit priests in Hong Kong, and some professors of Hong Kong University also stayed in the hospital.<sup>16</sup>

On December 10, 1941, at three o'clock in the morning, there was a loud banging on the door at villager Chung Poon's house in Wong Chuk Shan in the New Territories. Thinking that it might be bandits, he approached the door with a knife in his hand. He opened the door to find several guns pointing at him. For Chung and the rest of the population in Sai Kung, in the New Territories, the occupation had begun. Two days earlier, the Japanese army had overrun Tai Po and Shatin, and the day before had taken Shingmun Redoubt, which was part of Gin Drinker's Line. British forces were withdrawing from the New Territories to the island of Hong Kong, and a contingent of

Sepoy soldiers were covering the retreat at Devil's Peak. The Japanese soldiers had come over from Shap Sze Heung, intending to find their way to Kowloon, and had probably strayed into the village of Wong Chuk Shan by mistake. The soldiers were knocking at every door to force villagers to act as their porters. On December 11, the Japanese cavalry passed the Sai Kung Market. There was no disturbance or fighting, since the police had been withdrawn before the Japanese arrived. The villagers just stayed indoors.<sup>17</sup>

The British defensive positions on the New Territories and Kowloon had been prepared with a view to a delaying action that would allow consolidation on the island of Hong Kong. However, within forty-eight hours, the Japanese had broken this defence line, capturing the Jubilee Redoubt at Shing Mun Dam. (Jubilee Redoubt on Gin Drinker's Line overlooked the Sing Mun Dam of the Jubilee Reservoir, just north of the range of hills separating Kowloon from the New Territories.) The Volunteers retreated to the island of Hong Kong and reported to Headquarters. The Japanese fired mortars at the British defences, but there was no bombing. By December 12, enemy guns were lined up along the Kowloon wharves. At nine o'clock the next morning, a Japanese staff officer crossed to Victoria Pier in a launch bearing a flag of truce, and presented to Governor Mark Young a demand for the surrender of the Colony, under threat of heavy artillery and bombardment from the air. The Governor rejected the offer and the blitz began.

During the night of December 18 to 19, the Japanese landed at three different points on the island — North Point, Braemar Point and Shau Kei Wan — cutting the island into eastern and western halves. The Japanese who landed in North Point took over the electrical generating station which was guarded by civilian volunteers, a group of older men, all of whom were killed.<sup>18</sup> The Japanese troops crossed the island and there was a great deal of fighting towards Repulse Bay and Stanley. Bill Poy saw a Canadian general killed in a bunker in Wong Nai Chung Gap while he was delivering messages between Headquarters and the troops. On December 21, the governor was given further instructions from Churchill that "there must be no thought of surrender."<sup>19</sup>

Father was in Chongqing, China, when the Japanese invaded Hong Kong. He immediately flew back on one of the China Tea Company planes and had actually reached Hong Kong air space but the plane could not land. It was diverted to Huizhou. It was fortunate for Father, for he used to tell us that if he had been there and had been captured by the Japanese troops, he would have been executed because of his involvement in the resistance movement.

By Christmas Eve, the British and Canadian troops had retreated to the Peak because they believed the Japanese had taken over the Gap. Bill Poy was sent to take a look, but didn't see anyone, so the troops moved back into the Gap. By then, news had come to the troops that negotiations were in progress with the Japanese who had occupied half of the island. They had not yet moved into the city of Victoria.

## Under Japanese Occupation

On Christmas Day 1941, at 6:30 in the evening, Governor Sir Mark Young surrendered to the Japanese. He was removed to the Peninsular Hotel, and subsequently to Taiwan and then to Mukden (both under Japanese rule at the time). The survivors of the garrison and the non-Chinese members of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps. were sent to POW camps — North Point, Shum Shui Po, Argyle Street and Ma Tao Chung. Many of the POWs were shipped to labour camps in Japan and other Japanese-occupied territories. The Chinese Hong Kong Volunteers were given permission to take off their uniforms and return home. The internment of civilians classified as enemies at Stanley camp was a slower process, and they remained there until the end of the war. There were many stories of heroism, treachery, great suffering and survival during these times.

When Bill Poy heard of the surrender, and before orders were given, he asked the senior officer what they, the Volunteers, were supposed to do, and he was told to wait for instructions from the Japanese. Poy said, "I'm not going to wait, I must join my wife and children." He then turned to Willy Eu and said, "Let's go!" They went to the Portuguese Volunteers Unit, where they left their revolvers and their motorcycles. They changed out of their uniforms

into Chinese clothes which they always carried with them, just in case, and walked to Eu Yan Sang, a Chinese medicine shop owned by Willy's father, Eu Tongsan. From there, they phoned Willy's mother at Euston on Bonham Road, one of the Eu castle-style homes in Hong Kong. She told them everything was all right, and that the Japanese had allowed them to stay. That night, Poy and Eu could hear the Japanese troops moving in and cordoning off the city.

The next day, Poy and Eu decided to go up to Euston, but when they looked out of the medicine shop they saw a Japanese sentry posted almost outside the door. In order to look as casual as possible, they went outside, chewing on Chinese dried plums. The next thing Poy knew, he'd been hit on the head. He didn't know that he had to bow to all Japanese soldiers. They made their way to Euston bowing all the way.

The rest of the Poy family was at home in Happy Valley. Neville was very sad that, because of the lack of food, they had to let Snow White, their Borzoi (Russian wolfhound), go. It was probably caught and eaten the moment it was let out of their sight.

For a period, there was total chaos, because the Japanese soldiers, some of whom were Taiwanese, were given a free hand to rob, rape and murder. The soldiers went from house to house looking for "flower maidens," and young women hid wherever they could. They put mud and ashes on their faces and wore tattered clothes to avoid being raped. As in all wars, there was tremendous suffering. Some were luckier than others. The entire population was gripped with fear.

The following day, the cook at Euston returned home late and was scolded by Willy Eu's mother. He said the Japanese had stopped him to do some work for them and given him a card with which he could go anywhere. The next day, Bill Poy borrowed the card which gave the name and the age of the cook, who happened to be approximately the same age as himself. He used it to pass all the sentries to get to Blue Pool Road in Happy Valley where his family was. When he arrived, he found out that there had been rapes and atrocities in their apartment building. A few people were killed and Tang Siu Kin of the Kowloon Bus Company, a well-known person in Hong Kong, had been stabbed many times by Japanese soldiers. Tang had gone

there because a fortune-teller had told him that it would be a safe place to be.

Fortunately, when the Japanese soldiers came, Ethel Poy had her mother with her. She hid in the cupboard with blankets over her, while her mother took Neville and his sister, Adrienne, and sat on the floor in front of the cupboard. Her mother told the soldiers that they were alone. It was a very close call. After the Japanese soldiers left, Ethel and her mother took the children to join her brother David and his wife, Connie, downtown. The servants in the apartment told Bill Poy where they had gone.

After he found his family, Poy told his wife that he had to return to their apartment, to retrieve three diamonds which he had hidden in one of the legs of their sideboard. He used the Eu's cook's ID card again. On his way, he was stopped by a sentry, but he was able to explain, with his few words of Japanese learnt as a youth in Manchuria, that he needed to go home to fetch clothes for his children. As he was approaching their apartment, he saw their dining table on the street for sale.

When he entered the apartment with a Japanese sentry, he saw clothes strewn everywhere, some of which had been used as toilet paper. The sideboard was still there, but he had to get rid of the sentry. Fortunately, the sentry was called away for a few minutes, and Poy got the diamonds out just in time before he returned. "You've never seen anyone working so fast with a screw driver!" Poy told me. The sentry then asked him, "Are you twenty-six?" That was the age on the ID card. If the question had been, "How old are you?" he would have been in grave trouble because he had forgotten to check the cook's age on the card.

Bill Poy returned to his family downtown. He wanted to take them up to Euston, but by then it was dark and there was a curfew. Ethel said, "You go and return with help tomorrow morning."

The next morning Bill and one of the Eu's servants found the apartment empty. The walls were covered with bullet holes and smeared with blood. His neighbours told him his wife and children were hiding under the stairwell. He found Neville holding a flask, and Ethel had Adrienne on her back, with biscuits in her hands. Ethel's mother,



David and Connie had already left but Ethel and her children had waited for Bill.

Apparently, after Bill left, Japanese soldiers had come to the building to look for young women. Ethel's mother put Ethel and Connie in the cupboard and put a blanket over them. She and David put a mattress on the floor, and lay down with Neville and Adrienne, in front of the cupboard. Two Japanese soldiers came into their apartment with flashlights (there was no electricity), and fortunately, just in the nick of time, the Kempeitai (Japanese Military Police) came in and told the soldiers to leave.

With the servant carrying Adrienne, Bill, Ethel and Neville walked to Wan Chai, where they saw a big street parade with Japanese on white horses, and soldiers carrying their dead comrades in boxes. They passed a small family restaurant and went in to get something to eat. They bought a chicken for one hundred dollars, and ate it while waiting for the parade to pass. They then headed to Euston, where there was no sign of war, and there was food. When Neville went to bed that night, he asked if he could stay there forever.<sup>20</sup>

The Japanese army took over the Queen Mary Hospital and everyone was told to go except the mechanic Ah Law, who was needed to operate the hospital steam room and the big stove. Everything, including all the medicine, was discarded, and replaced by shipments from Japan. After some months, Ah Law was dismissed.<sup>21</sup>

Some of the staff of the Queen Mary Hospital served in the relief hospital that had been set up at St. Stephen's Girls' College. St. Stephen's remained a hospital for close to five years and admitted only Chinese Hong Kong citizens. A small classroom was converted for minor surgery and dressings. There were Chinese and Irish doctors, such as Dr. G.E. Griffiths, Dr. K.D. Ling and Dr. Raymond Lee. Most of the British nursing sisters and the doctors were, by then, interned, with the exception of Dr. Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke,<sup>22</sup> who continued to serve as Director of Medical Services. In that capacity, he was able to help many of the citizens of Hong Kong during the occupation. Joseph Tam and other medical staff were given notes by Dr. Selwyn-Clarke so that they would get employment with the British, should they get to Free China.<sup>23</sup>



The Hong Kong-based research department of the China Tea Company was closed. The Chinese Finance Ministry gave instructions that the money in the company in Hong Kong was to be distributed to all the employees and each received the equivalent of four months' salary. C.T. Wu volunteered to help withdraw the money from the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank for the company, and in the distribution of the cash, took his share in ten-dollar bills, because he felt they would be much more acceptable than the larger bills in times of war. He was right, because later the Japanese banned the use of notes larger than ten dollars. With this money he went into China as a refugee.

Two days after the Poy's arrived in Euston, Bill Poy went downtown to Pedder Street. He passed a French jewellery shop that he sometimes visited with Eu Tongsan, Willy's father. The shop was flying a Vichy flag (a sign of neutrality). Poy had an idea. He knew the Japanese wanted watches and so asked the owner, Mr. Walsh, if he would trust him to sell some watches to the Japanese for him. Mr. Walsh gave him ten of the ones that were more difficult to sell, and a couple of the lower line of Rolexes. Poy went straight to the headquarters of the Kempeitai where he saw sacks of flour and rice, as well as cigarettes and whisky. When the sergeant in charge asked how much the Rolex was, Poy told him, "For you, it's free." The sergeant then offered Poy goods from the station and Poy asked for a sack of flour, cigarettes, whisky and some rice. The sergeant not only gave these items to him, but had them delivered to Euston. However, the flour was found to be full of weevils. When Poy told the sergeant, he asked Poy if he could sell the remaining sacks of flour for him. Poy went to a Chinese friend who in turn sold these to the Japanese. For each sack, the sergeant got forty yen and Poy kept sixty yen. From then on, if the Japanese wanted to buy anything, Poy would go and look for them. At that time, one Japanese yen was equivalent to two Hong Kong dollars, and it was useful to have some Japanese money.

By hanging around the Kempeitai headquarters, Poy was able to help his friends get supplies such as rice and flour. Within a short time, he became friendly with more members of the Kempeitai, who visited them in Euston and sometimes brought rice. Since the Kempeitai had control of Hong Kong, the family did not suffer. Neville,

only six then, remembers that the sergeant of the Kempeitai was very nice to him and Adrienne, who was three. Neville, being musical, was often asked to perform for the Japanese when they visited them. However, to his parents' great concern, he liked to sing *Qi Lai*, a Chinese revolutionary song that schoolchildren used to sing at assembly in school every morning, and to play *Colonel Bogey* on the piano. His parents had to stop him whenever he wanted to perform these pieces when the Kempeitai were around. For the rest of her life, his mother never lost her fear of or dislike for the Japanese.

Japan not only needed Hong Kong as a naval base, but also considered it as a source of income and of material wealth. Anything that could be of use in Japan was confiscated, including cars, building materials and machinery, and shipped to Japan. The Japanese helped themselves to whatever they liked. Aunt Jenny's family car was taken by the Japanese, but they were fortunate that the soldiers gave them a bag of rice in exchange. The soldiers even took their pet monkey. Hong Kong harbour was filled with heavily loaded outgoing cargo ships. Few armaments left by the British were taken by the Japanese because the guerrillas as well as the local population got there first. Some of these were smuggled into China. There was a thriving market of British armaments between December 10 and December 31, 1941, in the Kowloon City area. The buyers were Hong Kong people, Sai Kung villagers, as well as the guerrillas.

## The Chinese Guerrillas

After the British surrender, the Lee family members left the Lee Theatre and went home. Mother and the three of us went to live in the Lee Building with many other members of the family. The Big House had been looted and there were many dead bodies lying around because the Japanese soldiers shot looters on sight. It was a very difficult time for Mother, being so young and with three small children. What she didn't know was that she was looked after by "agents" sent by Father, since he could not be there himself.

The "agents" were Chinese guerrillas or guerrilla sympathizers. Few people in Hong Kong knew that Chinese guerrillas and agents of

various political factions had infiltrated into the New Territories by the beginning of 1941. There were official guerrillas who were paid and armed by the Nationalist government under Chiang Kaishek. However, the most active guerrilla group in Hong Kong after the British surrender on Christmas Day 1941 was that of the Hong Kong–Kowloon Brigade, a subdivision of the East River Detachment, the foundation of which was laid by Liao Chengzhi in Hong Kong after the fall of Guangzhou. The Detachment went officially under the Communist banner in December 1943, when the name changed to the Guangdong People's Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Corps.

The Chinese guerrillas in the Colony had a network for intelligence, communications and sabotage. During the initial stage of the occupation, guerrillas of different political stripes were busy smuggling important Chinese and Allied nationals out of Hong Kong. One of the first was Liao Chengzhi, who escaped on January 5, 1942.<sup>24</sup> Within the first seven months of occupation, more than three hundred important Chinese nationals were rescued. Among the more well-known names were: He Xiangning, Liu Yazhi, Zhou Taofen, Mao Dun, Qiao Guanhua, Sa Kongliao, Liang Shuming, Hu Die, the famous movie star, and Shang-Guan Xiande, the wife of Yu Hanmou, Commander of the Seventh War Zone of the Central Chinese Army.<sup>25</sup> Admiral Chen Ce, the chief Nationalist intelligence agent in Hong Kong who liaised with the British, made an escape on his own. Escapees from POW camps were assisted by the guerrillas and guerrilla sympathizers, who took them across the water by sampan or overland through mountain paths. The guerrillas worked with the villagers in the New Territories to hide and feed escapees, and lead them into Free China. Children as young as nine years old were recruited into the guerrilla camp to help as runners and as spies. They were called Siugui (Little Devils).

The first plans for escape from a POW camp were made in Shum Shui Po in January 1942 by Lt.-Col. Lindsay T. Ride, of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps Field Ambulance, and Lance-Corporal Francis Lee Yiu Piu, who had originally been with No. 3 Machine Gun Company of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, but who transferred to Field Ambulance to be with Ride. Ride was an Australian doctor and teacher who was appointed to the Chair of Physiology at

the University of Hong Kong in 1928. He had served in the First World War and was twice wounded in France. Lee, a slim, bespectacled and shy clerk, worked in the Physiology department and had earned respect and admiration from Ride for his hard work. Lee was not supposed to be in Shum Shui Po camp, because Chinese members of the Hong Kong Volunteers were given permission to return home. He told Ride he remained because he wanted to know what it was like being a POW, and he also wanted to stay in case Ride needed help to escape, and he felt he would be of more use inside than outside the camp. He played a vital role in the escape.

Lee made their travel arrangements with the help of contacts inside the camp, guerrillas or guerrilla sympathizers who delivered food or supplies. Many were later killed by the Japanese for what they had done. When the escape plans were made, Ride and Lee were joined by Lieutenant D.W. Morley, a lecturer in Engineering at the University of Hong Kong, and Sub-Lieutenant D.F. Davies, a lecturer in Physics at the same university, both from the Hong Kong Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. The group escaped on January 9, 1942.<sup>26</sup>

The party was picked up by sampan and let off on a beach near Castle Peak Road. From there they walked through the New Territories, dodging Japanese search parties while they made their way to the outskirts of Sai Kung. After the occupation, the Japanese had left the Sai Kung peninsula in the hands of Wang Jingwei's men. (Wang was a Nationalist minister who defected to the Japanese side. He was Chiang Kaishek's most important rival in the Nationalist party.)<sup>27</sup> Then bandits moved in and caused chaos. Fortunately for the escape party, on January 9, the guerrillas had taken control of the Sai Kung peninsula. When the news of the escape reached the guerrillas and Wang Jingwei's men, they raced to see who could get to the escapees first. The Hong Kong-Kowloon Brigade leader was Cai Gualiang, whom Lee brought to meet the escapees at a rendezvous. Ride described in his diary the amazing experience he had of seeing Chinese villagers appear from nowhere to help them. Without them, the escape certainly would have failed. The escape party was given food, shelter and clothing. Dressed as Chinese villagers, they arrived in Free China on January 17, 1942.<sup>28</sup>

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In Free China, Ride was instrumental in starting the British Army Aid Group (BAAG) in order to pass much-needed medical supplies into the POW camps, plan escapes and help those who managed to escape on their own to reach safety. BAAG was established under MI9 because it was also part of British Intelligence, with the reluctant approval of the Chinese government, which did not want to have foreign Intelligence working within China. However, the British were allies in the war. The work of BAAG in Hong Kong could not have been carried out without the help of the guerrillas. In Ride's report to the War Office, the guerrillas were referred to as "our" guerrillas because they were the escapees' lifeline to Free China, and at times "red" guerrillas because of their Communist leanings. Ride considered them to be "the most active, reliable, efficient and anti-Japanese of all Chinese organizations."<sup>29</sup>

The Chinese guerrillas infiltrated every aspect of life in Hong Kong under Japanese occupation. They were in the city and in the villages. They worked in Japanese banks, printing presses and even in the Japanese high command. They were involved in espionage, sabotage and rescue missions. They were an important link between the people of Hong Kong and the free world.

The control in the Japanese occupation zone was actually quite porous. People were smuggled back and forth across Japanese lines between Hong Kong and mainland China. It was also possible to sail to neutral areas like Macao or the French colony of Guangzhouwan, and then into China.

Initially, the guerrillas assisted many POWs to escape, but then it became too difficult, and the punishment of the prisoners who were left behind so severe that escape was no longer worthwhile. They passed information to the Chinese High Command, some of which was passed on to the Allies. It was with this information that the U.S. Air Force was able to bomb Hong Kong during the occupation, and a number of times guerrillas rescued Allied airmen who were shot down during these bombing raids.

### Father As a Resistance Fighter

Since 1937, Father had been involved both in an official and an unofficial capacity in the Chinese resistance against the Japanese. He

wanted to help as many people as possible, while making sure that his family was well looked after. His “guerrilla” activities involved both the Nationalist guerrillas and the pro-Chinese Communist Party guerrillas based in the East River Basin, Guangdong province. If it had not been for the protection of the guerrillas, it would have been almost impossible for our family, during the entire duration of the war, to escape unscathed, not only from the Japanese, but also from the Chinese bandits who were just as cruel.<sup>30</sup>

Father did not belong to any political party, and his actions were considered beyond reproach by both the Nationalists and the Communists. Once he overheard that the Nationalist Party was going to arrest Zhou Enlai who was with the Nationalists at the time (Zhou was the Chinese Communist Party liaison officer with the Nationalist Party, under safe conduct from Chiang Kaishek), and he immediately warned Zhou to escape. Zhou never forgot that. After the war, Zhou gave an order to the Xinhua News Agency, which was in effect an unofficial Chinese consulate in Hong Kong, that Father was to be given free access anywhere in China.<sup>31</sup>

Father was in Huizhou, a Chinese guerrilla base in the East River Basin, when Mother and the three of us arrived in China. I don't believe he ever joined the guerrillas because the situation was very confusing. Different factions were competing with each other while working against the Japanese. There were actually two types of guerrillas, the “red” guerrillas and the official guerrillas who operated in Guangdong under General Yu Hanmou. In addition, there were spies from Wang Jingwei's group, the British Army Aid Group and others. During those years, Father became friends with Soong Chingling, the widow of Dr. Sun Yatsen, and Edgar Snow, Mao Zedong's friend, as well as many top officials from the Nationalist government of Chiang Kaishek. After the war, Edgar Snow used Father's office whenever he was in Hong Kong.<sup>32</sup>

Father acted as a liaison between the escapees from Hong Kong, the guerrillas and the Chinese government, and his position was that of a humanitarian. He was frequently mentioned in Lt.-Col. Lindsay Ride's diary for his help in getting supplies such as blankets and medicine to POWs in Hong Kong and the refugees who made it into China. It was likely that he was able to get these supplies because he



was the treasurer of the Chinese Red Cross. Father's other wartime activities will be mentioned in a later chapter. Fourth Uncle told me that he went to see Father in Qujiang (the wartime capital of Guangdong province after the fall of Guangzhou to the Japanese), in northern Guangdong province, in 1942, where Father was with Ride at the British Army Aid Group headquarters. Fourth Uncle, who was working for the Bank of China, was fortunate enough to be transferred to London and remained there until 1947. Ride and Father earned each other's respect and became good friends. After the war, when Ride became the vice-chancellor of the University of Hong Kong, Father was on the Council.

# 4

## A Family On The Run

The years between 1941 and 1945 were the early years of my life. As a war baby, I went with my family into China as refugees. Many events were told to me by others who were there. However, I do have some memories that remain fresh even decades later.

Under the Japanese administration, there was widespread propaganda of “A New Asia where Asians were ruled by Asians,” meaning Asians ruled by the Japanese. People constantly lived in fear. The wealthier managed to buy rice at black market prices, and the rest just died of starvation.

By the beginning of 1942, the Japanese military made a public announcement of their intention to reduce the population in Hong Kong from 1,600,000 to what they deemed a “manageable” number of 500,000. They very nearly succeeded. The unfortunate were picked up in the streets and taken by truckloads to junks in the harbour. These were towed out to sea and sunk or set on fire. In 1942 alone, 83,435 burials were recorded, many being victims of war, terrorism and reprisals.<sup>1</sup> The rest of the population was reduced by starvation to the point where cannibalism was practised. The rice ration of 8.46 oz. per person per day was provided for those who were fortunate enough to get it and this was often mixed with sand.

The streets of Hong Kong were dreadful sights. People lying in the streets were cut up for meat before they were dead, and anyone who

forgot to bow to a Japanese soldier risked being decapitated. Whenever Joseph Tam went to visit his girlfriend's home on Bonham Road, he would see truckloads of dead bodies being dumped into a long rectangular pit on the side of the Upper-level Police Station<sup>2</sup> (the present-day site of King George VI park), which was situated just below Euston, where the Poys were staying with the Eu family. In Central Market, Chinese tea houses were turned into gambling places. Special red-light districts in the city, known as comfort stations, were set up for the Japanese soldiers.

## Retreat from Hong Kong

The Chinese in Hong Kong were encouraged by the Japanese occupation government to return to China. Many in the Lee and the Wong families went to different parts of China, although a few chose to remain in Hong Kong.

The only branch of the Lee family that went to our ancestral village, Garlieu, was Second Uncle, with his wife and the three younger children. His older son and daughter went into China with the rest of the Lee family. Because of that, their experiences over the war years were different from those of the rest of the family. They went by boat through the Pearl River, then made their way to Garlieu. The two older boys, aged three and five at the beginning of the war, attended the village school.

Whenever there was news that the Japanese soldiers were in the area, the entire village would hide in the little huts in the fields, or they would all move to a neighbouring village to get out of the way. Cousin Raymand, who was three at the beginning of the war, remembers that whenever the villagers had to go into hiding, he and his younger sister would be put into large baskets, and carried on a bamboo pole. However, his older brother, Hon Ching, who was five at the time, had to walk with the adults. The problems in the village were caused not only by Japanese soldiers, but also bandits, who looted villages at will. As a child, Raymand thought it very exciting whenever there was news of bandits approaching, because the whole village would assemble at our ancestral home, which was large

enough to accommodate the entire village, and Second Uncle would give out guns to all adult males who defended predetermined posts, turning the house into a fortress. Cousin Raymand does not recollect any major damage done by bandits during their stay in Garlieu.<sup>3</sup>

Grandmother and Second Grandmother (Father's biological mother) went into China as refugees with their respective families. Helena, the older daughter of Second Uncle, followed Second Grandmother. Fourth Grandmother (concubine Ng Yuet) went to her own home town of Wuzhou in Guangxi province. All the teenaged children travelled to China together, and they attended school wherever they went. The only person who stayed was Third Grandmother (concubine So Han) who remained in Hong Kong with her son, Fifth Uncle, who worked in our rental office throughout the war years, collecting rent.<sup>4</sup> Our family members took two routes to enter China — by land through Sha Tau Kok or by boat to Zhanjiang, formerly known as Guangzhouwan which was under the Vichy government, and therefore neutral. Many of us met up in China.<sup>5</sup>

Since Father was not able to get back to Hong Kong to take charge of us, he sent an underground messenger, probably a member of the guerrilla force, with a letter to Mother, asking her to follow the man into China with all of us. Mother at first suspected a trap and refused to go. When a second letter came, she decided to leave.

Many refugees sewed bits of jewellery into the lining of their clothes, or hid them in the soles of their shoes since they were subject to body searches by the Japanese and robbery by bandits. Jewellery could be used as cash, but the value was difficult to determine. By far the most valuable form of money was gold coins, which were easily convertible for the purchase of food and other necessary items. Mother must have hidden whatever she could in our baggage and clothing. However, she buried the bulk of her jewellery in the garden of the Big House with the help of Bill Poy.

In February 1942, my family left for China together with thousands of refugees from Hong Kong. Mother took four-year-old Richard, two-year-old Deanna, and me, nine months old, two servants, and six huge bags, and headed across the harbour by boat to the train station on the Kowloon side, accompanied by Fourth Uncle and Bill Poy, and

watched over by the guerrillas. Bill Poy had obtained passes from the Kempeitai sergeant by telling them that Mother was his sister. He did this to avoid the possibility of us being stopped and searched. With his connections, he was also able to exchange some money for Mother before we left. After the war, Father asked Poy for the name of the Kempeitai sergeant in order to find him to thank him.<sup>6</sup> Whether he was successful or not, we don't know.

The train was crowded and we had difficulty stuffing our bags in. Fourth Uncle said goodbye at the train station, and we headed for Fan Ling, still accompanied by Bill Poy. We got off at Fan Ling and Mother hired some bicycles to carry our luggage. From there, we walked with a stream of refugees towards Sha Tau Kok, one of the entry points into China. Richard and Deanna were carried by the servants on their backs, and Mother carried me. At Sha Tau Kok, Bill Poy said goodbye to us and Mother immediately destroyed the passes. Then we boarded a boat. When we got off we walked for about a day to Huiyang, and boarded another boat again to reach Father in Huizhou.

From Huizhou, we travelled by truck to Shaoguan, in the northern part of Guangdong province, and then by train to Guilin.<sup>7</sup> Father instructed his younger siblings and nephew Hon Chiu to follow the same route, and to meet us in Guilin. We were able to travel safely through enemy-and-bandit controlled territories probably because we had the protection of the guerrillas.

Soon after my family left, news came to Bill Poy from the Canadian Trade Commissioner's office where he was an employee, that he and his family had a chance to go to Canada. It seemed that they were fortunate enough to have been put on the list for diplomatic exchange between the United States and Japanese governments. The U.S. government was exchanging Americans captured by the Japanese for Japanese interned in America.<sup>8</sup> Since there were more Japanese than Americans, Canadians were allowed to make up the difference. And since all Canadian soldiers in Hong Kong were in POW camps, the deficiencies were made up by the employees of the Canadian Trade Commissioner's office.

When Bill Poy heard the news, he thought it might be a trap set by the Japanese. He went to their family doctor, who was a brother-



in-law, to get his wife's X-ray which showed a scar in one of her lungs. Then he went to see the Kempeitai sergeant to sound him out to see if it was a trap. The sergeant advised him to take his family to Canada when Poy showed him the X-ray, saying that his wife really needed treatment. The sergeant didn't know that it was an old X-ray.

The Poys — Bill and Ethel, Neville and Adrienne — left Hong Kong in August 1942. To this day, the Poys don't know how their names got on the list. When they arrived in Canada, immigration officials told them they were not allowed into the country because they were Chinese, until they saw their names on the exchange list. They were permitted to stay, becoming the first Chinese refugees in history to arrive in Canada. They were given housing, and Bill Poy continued to work for the Canadian government in Ottawa in the Department of Trade and Commerce. They had originally planned to return to Hong Kong after the war, but because of conditions in Hong Kong in 1945, Poy decided that the family should stay in Canada. They were made Canadian citizens by an Order in Council in Parliament in April 1949.

## Life in Guilin

On our way to Guilin, Father encountered C.T. Wu again in Liuzhou. It was here that Wu met Mother, my siblings and me for the first time, and from then on, he became very close to our family.

In Guilin, we lived in a large house outside the entrance to the Seven Star Cave, which is a well-known tourist attraction. In 1942, houses were built right in front of the cave where now a road runs through to bring tourists to the site. Whenever there was an air raid, which happened more and more often as the Japanese advanced towards Guangxi province, we went into the cave for shelter.

Cousin Hon Chiu, who was in boarding school, used to stay with us on weekends. He came to get a little more to eat, because the boarding schools provided only two meals a day, and the children were always hungry. One of our servants, Suen Zeh, who was with us in Guilin, told Hon Chiu that we had ghosts in that house. From then on, he thought he actually felt someone pressing on top of him when he slept. He never dared to mention this to my parents, but

whenever he had the excuse, he slept in Second Aunt's house, which was only five minutes away on Jiangan Road.<sup>9</sup> Hon Chiu also said that he would go to whichever house had more food. Hon Chiu was with us, off and on, during the entire period of the war, and so was Second Grandmother.

We lived in Guilin for over a year. During our stay there, our two servants gave notice that they were going to leave. Mother thought it wise to go back to Hong Kong before the servants got there, because she was sure that they knew where her jewellery was buried. Jewellery could be used as cash, and it was necessary for our survival. She also needed to bring into China as many of our household necessities as possible.

Leaving us in the care of the servants and Father, Mother headed for Hong Kong with her sister Sarah, through Zhanjiang. However, Aunt Sarah could not get a pass to go to Hong Kong, so Mother went alone, while her sister waited for her in Zhanjiang. This meant that she had the added responsibility of getting Aunt Sarah's household belongings as well as her own.

Mother went back to the Big House to gather our belongings with the help of servants who had remained in Hong Kong. The first two floors of the Big House were covered with dead bodies. These were bodies of looters who had died from shrapnel or had been killed by Japanese soldiers who shot looters on sight. It seemed the looters never made it to the third floor where my family used to live. Mother told us how they had to walk over the dead bodies to get around. She used the third floor to pack the household belongings because the parquet floors on the ground and second floors were caked with blood. (After the war they had to be completely replaced because they could not be cleaned.) I can't even begin to imagine how Mother managed.

Mother stayed in the Lee Building, further up the hill from Wan Chai, which had not been looted. She saw her parents and her younger sister, Josephine, who visited her there. One day, Mother was with her mother when they passed someone dying in the street and the person cried out, "Please save me!" The two women were helpless themselves, but Grandmother Wong, being a religious person, said, "Pray to Jesus, and He will help you."

In Mother's later years, especially after Father died, whenever she came across any difficulties, she would tell me that since she had survived the war, she was no longer afraid of anything.

Mother stayed in Hong Kong for a couple of weeks, then left by boat for Zhanjiang to meet Sarah. Everyone was convinced that Mother was well protected by the guerrillas. She brought with her not only her jewellery, hidden in all kinds of places, but also more than twenty large bags of household necessities, some of which belonged to her sister. The most important items were warm clothing and padded silk blankets.<sup>10</sup>

People had the most imaginative ways of hiding things during wartime. I love the story of how one of my parents' friends, Lucy Chan, a lawyer, whom I was to meet in 1949, handled the situation. She boldly wore all her jewellery, big diamonds and all, and convinced the Japanese soldiers that they were fake.

When Mother returned to Guilin, she gave a padded silk blanket to C.T. Wu, for which he was very thankful, because throughout the war years he was always cold, but could not possibly afford to buy one himself. To this day, he has high regard for Mother as a very brave woman.

Throughout the war years, Mother sold or bartered her jewellery for our family to live on. For personal reasons, Father refused repeated offers to work as an engineer for the Americans in China, but carried on with his wartime resistance activities and was, therefore, without an income. He worked closely with the Chinese Central government, the East River guerrillas, as well as the British Army Aid Group, on a voluntary basis. He had all his light-coloured clothing dyed dark in order to cut down on laundry. Being a thrifty person, his needs were few. We were barely managing financially, but he told Mother that when the war was over, everything would be fine. She was not to worry about our lack of possessions or the disposal of her jewellery, for he would replace them, and he certainly kept his promise.

When the Japanese reached Guangxi in 1942, the repair and the completion of the Qian Qui (Guizhou Guangxi) railway lines<sup>11</sup> became of immediate importance for the movement of refugees. The

Central government formed a committee of four engineers,<sup>12</sup> headed by Hou Jiayuan, who was a Kuomintang (Nationalist) member. However, they still needed someone capable and reliable to supervise the work, and Father was chosen for the job, and made an Honorary Kuomintang Executive Member.<sup>13</sup>

At that time, C.T. Wu was the manager of the Yong Guang Coal Company<sup>14</sup> in Guilin. Father convinced him that he would have a better future with us, and he became Father's secretary. Father needed someone like C.T. Wu who could speak Mandarin fluently, as Father could not. Wu often had to express what Father wanted to say at meetings. The two of them represented the Central government, and neither one was a genuine Kuomintang member.<sup>15</sup>

Wu accompanied our family to Yishan, in Guangxi province, where the Head Office of the Railway Administration was located. Here, Director Hou Jiayuan gave us a piece of land close to the Administration Head Office, on which Father designed and personally supervised the building of a two-storey house for us to live in. This house was built in the typical local fashion, of woven bamboo sheets patched with mud. Ours was better built than most, because Father had some concrete mixed in with the mud, and the mixture was thick enough to stop the wind coming through the walls.<sup>16</sup> By the time we built our house in Yishan, Second Grandmother rejoined us.

All through the war years, Father was, among other things, a volunteer treasurer for the Red Cross in China. Because of this connection, he had in his possession the drug Sulphanilamide which was not readily available in China. While in Yishan, C.T. Wu had a bad infection on his arm that was treated by this drug.<sup>17</sup>

From time to time, C.T. Wu had to represent Father in a supervisory capacity when Father was down with malaria.<sup>18</sup> In later years, Father always prided himself that he had never been sick in his life, but he had forgotten the war years. When Father's health deteriorated to a point when he felt he had to resign his post as the Honorary Kuomintang Executive Member looking after the repair and building of the Qian Qui railway lines, he found alternative employment for Wu. Through his friends Lu Yanming,<sup>19</sup> Lian Yingzhou<sup>20</sup> and Ouyang Qi,<sup>21</sup> Father arranged a job for Wu with the Overseas Union

Bank of Singapore in Liuzhou. This bank was owned by overseas Chinese from Shantao, China, and under normal conditions, only Chinese from Shantao were trusted as employees. An exception was made for Wu because of Father's recommendation, and he was put in a position of trust, with responsibility for buying supplies for the bank.<sup>22</sup> However, a few months later Liuzhou fell to the Japanese, and the bank moved to Chongqing.

### On the Run Again

By 1943, with Japanese troops advancing, it was too dangerous to stay in Guilin. The five teenagers — my uncles, aunts and cousin Hon Chiu — needed to move to safer areas, but train tickets were impossible to come by. Former Lee Theatre employee and friend of the family, Yuen Yaohong, came to their rescue. He knew someone high up in the Central government bureaucracy, Huang Maolan, whose father was a general. Yuen persuaded them to let the teenagers cram into the general's private carriage on the train. They arrived in Liuzhou, temporarily safe. From there, they took a train to Yishan. By that time, we had already left for Dushan in Guizhou province. Second Grandmother was still in our house in Yishan when the five of them moved in. Hon Chiu remembers that we had a garden where we planted a lot of tomatoes, and we also raised chickens. It was at this time that he learnt to kill chickens. He said if he hadn't, no one would have had chicken for dinner. They stayed in Yishan for a little while and then followed us to Dushan.

Transportation was always a problem in China, particularly during the war. Father's friend Wang Aigai, who was in charge of transportation for the Bank of China, had a fleet of trucks which provided a means of transport for our family members from Yishan to Dushan. Dushan was a hilly town and our house was on the outskirts. Conditions were primitive, and there was no running water. When the teenage uncles, aunts and Hon Chiu arrived, they attended school there; Hon Chiu was in junior high school at the time. Father would take Hon Chiu with him every day to bathe in a nearby brook with a waterfall, no matter how cold it was. My older brother was



spared because he was too young to withstand the cold. Father used to tell Hon Chiu about his past, and about his engineering studies at Oxford.<sup>23</sup> The bonding between uncle and nephew began at this time, and Mother remembered Hon Chiu saying that he would like to be like Father when he grew up.

In Dushan I became very ill. I was just skin and bones and too weak to hold my head up. Mother said I looked like a starved kitten, I was so small and frail. I was taken to a very primitive hospital, and one day the woman missionary doctor told Mother that I was about to die, and that Father should be called to see me for the last time. My teenaged Sixth Uncle, who was with Mother at the time, hopped on his bike and rode home to fetch Father. When Father heard the news, he came, bringing with him the only “magical” drug he had in his possession — Sulphanilamide. The doctor had never heard of it, but Father asked her to give it to me, since there was nothing to lose. The drug saved my life.

I was a burden during the war because I was sick all the time, and ended up in hospital wherever we went. I started getting sick at the age of seven months, when Hong Kong surrendered to the Japanese. I had intestinal problems, dehydration, and once I had lymphangitis of the leg. My parents thought many times that they had lost me. On top of that, both my parents and my older brother had malaria. Fortunately, we all survived, and I lived to tell the tale.

As the Japanese troops were advancing into Guizhou, it was time for us to leave Dushan. By this time, I was old enough to know what was going on. After one of the bombing raids, Mother and I happened to walk past our former house. She was very surprised that I immediately recognized it even though the roof was gone, and only the thick walls were still standing.

When we left, we once again had the help of Wang Aigai’s transport fleet of the Bank of China. We travelled with them, on top of the cargo, to Guiyang, the capital of Guizhou. The journey along the hilly mountain roads was treacherous, and going downhill was hair-raising, especially when the brakes didn’t work very well. Along the way, the convoy was stopped several times by Nationalist troops turned bandits. Fortunately, we were not harmed.<sup>24</sup> As a child of two,

I can remember climbing on top of the cargo using something that resembled a rope ladder, and holding on for dear life. I also remember being very carsick and throwing up hard-boiled eggs. Wherever we travelled in the primitive unhygienic parts of China, Father would not buy any cooked food (he described all the meats as looking black because they were covered with flies), so we had to survive on hard-boiled eggs. It has taken me fifty years to get over my phobia of hard-boiled eggs.

It was a lengthy journey. When we arrived in Guiyang, it was evening, and the sky was getting dark. The trucks arrived at a theatre, and out came former Lee Theatre employee Yuen Yaohong with a bag in his hand. He said to Father, "Dick, take this. It's for you." It was a bag filled with money. Hon Chiu said that it was a moment he would never forget, he was so impressed. No one in our family had money during the war. Yuen was managing that theatre in Guiyang at the time. He also looked after our living accommodations. In a house that was not soundproof, with my family upstairs, and Second Grandmother, the teenage uncles and aunts, Hon Chiu and his sister Helena downstairs, Hon Chiu said he could hear everything that went on upstairs.

## Life in Chongqing

From Guiyang we moved on to Chongqing, in Sichuan province, again by the Bank of China convoy. This part of the journey was more secure because it was better controlled by the Nationalist troops. When we entered Sichuan, we were exposed to practices and foods that were distinctly different from those in southeast China. Sichuan foods were hot with chili, and it was difficult for us to eat because we were not used to it. Mother found it rather an appalling custom that the wealthier inhabitants had their coffins made ahead of time and placed under their own beds.

Since I was just a small child, I have only interesting memories. The adults had the worries, and I was the observer — that is, when I wasn't in hospital. I had the greatest adventures with our servants all over the countryside, in my wooden clogs in the summer and cloth shoes in the winter. Leather was saved for making boots for the soldiers, so civilians

didn't have leather shoes. We would walk along the rice paddies to see the farmers working and watch people picking snails. In our home snails from rice fields were never eaten because of parasites. Just the same, it was interesting to watch. One day, the servant and I heard a great commotion as we were walking, and we went to see what the excitement was all about. We saw a large catfish struggling for air, stranded in very shallow water. It would be somebody's dinner. Another time, we heard that in one of the farms in the vicinity, a cow was about to give birth. The servant took me there just in time to see the birth of the calf. It was a wonderful learning experience for a child. Sometimes we would go to buy eggs, and some of these eggs would be fertilized. I still remember the embryos when the eggs were cracked open. Once, someone had the idea of having goat's milk, so my teenaged Seventh Uncle got hold of a goat and tried to milk it. What a sight!

When we entered Chongqing, we crossed the Yangtse River. We joined Grandmother, Third Uncle and Fifth Aunt, who were fortunate enough to have flown directly from Guilin in the transport plane of the Shanghai Commercial Bank.<sup>25</sup> They had not experienced the hardship that we had. Sixth Uncle, sixteen years old, wanted to join the Chinese army but was turned down because of his age. He left school anyway in order to make some money, and worked for the Chinese government as a translator because his English was good. He was later sent to Burma.

In Chongqing, my family lived in Tao Yuan, a complex of houses that belonged to the Tao family, friends of my parents. The complex was built by Tao Guilin, who was the biggest contractor in China, having built some of the most important buildings in the country, especially in Nanjing and Shanghai.<sup>26</sup> The Tao family lived in the large house on the left as you entered the gate, and we lived in the last house on the far right.

Grandmother, Third Uncle and some of the other uncles and aunts lived in Tian Tan Xin Cun, which was owned by the Shanghai Commercial Bank. Third Uncle, being a director of the bank, had the use of one of its houses.

By the time we were in Chongqing, I was close to three years old. I remember the little bungalow we had in Tao Yuan, on the banks of

the Yangtse River. It was a simple house, with the living room in front, and the bedrooms at the back. The house was perched on the bank of the river, so even though the entrance was at street level, the end of the bedrooms was high above ground, since the river-bank was steep. The interesting feature of this house was that the kitchen was in a separate building down towards the river.

My brother, sister and I used to catch fireflies after dinner. We would put them in a bottle, and watch them glow. We caught turtles along the river-bank and tied them to a string attached to the back of the sofa in the living room so that they would eat the mosquitoes.

The kitchen was so far down the river-bank that it always got flooded. Whenever the water rose, all the adults in the family would rush down to the kitchen to move everything to the house. After each flood, I would have something new to play with, because the water always brought interesting things to the shore. Once we caught a crab that I wanted to play with, but Father was afraid that the pincers would hurt me. He did not know about tying the pincers, so he crushed them and put mercurochrome on them. He obviously did not know the biological difference between a human being and a crab. He tied a string on it so that I could walk it. We had no toys in those days, and I certainly never missed them.

I had friends I played with and visited, who taught me to speak a childish version of Mandarin which I've been able to retain to a certain extent since. During our years in China I came to be called Mei Mei, for little sister, because I was the youngest of the three, and after the war, I got stuck with the name May, short for Mei Mei. It was a name I disliked because it is so common among Chinese girls.

While in Chongqing, we visited with our relatives, many of whom ended up there. In fact, with the advancing Japanese armed forces, that was the safest place to be, since it was the wartime capital of China.

On New Year's Eve 1944, my mother's younger brother Daniel, his wife, Helen, and their children were visiting us at Tao Yuan. After dinner, while the adults were chatting in the living room, the children went into my parents' bedroom to play. All of a sudden, my older brother felt sick, and he climbed up on a chair and vomited out of the window. The rest of the children clamoured up to see what was

happening, and suddenly my cousin Joan fell out of the wide window. Being the youngest, I was watching on the sideline. None of the older children made a move, so I went into the living room to tell the adults that cousin Joan had fallen out of the window.

One can imagine the hysteria. It was fortunate that electric wires strung across the back of the house under the window broke her fall. Otherwise she would have fallen a distance equal to two stories. Since it was not only wartime in Chongqing, but also New Year's Eve, getting medical attention was not a simple matter. However, my uncle and aunt managed to get a couple of rickshaws to take them to the closest hospital. Fortunately, cousin Joan was not badly injured, and ended up with nothing more than a scar under her chin. Till the end of my parents' days, they talked about my presence of mind at the age of three and a half.

## The Japanese Surrender

Hostilities ended in Europe in May 1945, and the war against Japan assumed a different character. The objective in the Pacific became one of bringing the war to a speedy conclusion with as few casualties as possible. On August 6, the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, followed by another one on Nagasaki three days later. On August 14, 1945, at 23:30 Tokyo time, the Emperor of Japan formally announced an unconditional surrender to the Supreme Command of the Allied Forces.

On the same night in Chongqing, the Oversea Union Bank of Singapore was having a dinner party. Among the guests were Minister of Foreign Affairs Chen Qingyun and the former mayor of Shanghai, Wu Tiechen. Chen's family phoned the bank to let him know that the Japanese had surrendered. Bank Chairman Lian Yingzhou and general manager O-Yang Qi immediately asked C.T. Wu to buy firecrackers. Lian and Ou-Yang, who were from Chaozhou (Guangdong province), did not know that the people of Sichuan only lit firecrackers when someone had died. When the people on the street heard the firecrackers going off, they thought someone at the bank



had died. That night, when the news was broadcast, no one slept. The crowds in the streets celebrated and everyone got drunk.<sup>27</sup>

In Hong Kong, the moment the news of the Japanese surrender came, everyone went out onto the streets to look for Japanese soldiers to beat up.<sup>28</sup> Chiang Kaishek claimed that Hong Kong was part of the China theatre, and therefore the Japanese forces should surrender to him. The future of Hong Kong had been discussed in earlier wartime summit meetings, and the retrocession of Hong Kong had been supported by President Roosevelt. However, Churchill was not going to let that happen. For the next few days, there was confusion as to who was going to take over from the Japanese government. A message was sent to Franklin Gimson in Stanley camp, through the British Army Aid Group agent Y. C. Leung, code-named "Phoenix," on August 23, to take control of the government. Three days later, Gimson moved out of the camp to take up office in the French Mission building in town. On August 30, Admiral Sir Cecil Harcourt arrived with the Royal Navy to begin the postwar military government of Hong Kong, which lasted until May 1, 1946.

That August, Father, Third Uncle and Grandmother, flew back to Hong Kong from Chongqing on the plane of Lieutenant-General Sir Adrian Carten de Wiarte, who was the special representative of Prime Minister Churchill in the China theatre. Having been under Japanese rule since December 1941, Hong Kong's monetary system was in disarray. As one of the first to arrive back to Hong Kong, Father was asked to hand-carry a large amount of cash for the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank.<sup>29</sup>

Mother and the three of us, together with our servants, returned to Hong Kong the usual way, as did other refugees in China. Mother told us that the war was over and we were going home. Father had to go first because he was needed immediately to help Hong Kong get back on its feet. Part of our journey was on a small, crowded, flat-bottomed boat, on which we placed our bedding next to each other. The last part of our journey was by train and seats were difficult to come by. Fortunately, our family knew the stationmaster, who told Mother that, in order to get seats, we had to be at the station at

four o'clock in the morning. We took his advice, and we were on our way home.

Our teenaged uncles and aunts, together with Hon Chiu, remained in Chongqing to continue their schooling. Food for the boarders in the schools in Chongqing was quite plentiful, unlike Guilin's two meals a day, so when the older members of the family left to go back to Hong Kong, they were not as badly missed. During this time, whenever the teenagers needed money for school fees and living expenses, they would go to the Shanghai Commercial Bank. Hon Chiu remembers someone by the name of Karl Wu, a friend of Third Uncle at the bank, who would invite Hon Chiu for coffee from time to time. Hon Chiu was very impressed by the beautiful mansion Wu owned.

In 1948, when Hon Chiu graduated from high school, he planned to go to Shanghai to stay with Third Aunt and her American husband, Henry Sperry, in order to take the entrance exams for Jiaotong and Qinghua universities. By that time, the Chinese Communist Party was already in control of northeast China and had reached Beijing. Father telegraphed him to return to Hong Kong immediately to take the entrance exam for Lingnan University in Guangzhou, and to wait for an opportunity to go to the United States. When Hon Chiu left Chongqing to return to Hong Kong, Wu saw him off at the airport. The following year, China was liberated by the Communists, and Hon Chiu never saw Wu again.

# 5

## After The War: The Society Changes

At the end of the war, Hong Kong was in shambles. Then civil war broke out in China. The ensuing tide of refugees to Hong Kong caused a population explosion from 1.6 million in 1946 to 2.36 million by the end of 1950. In the first six months of 1950 alone, 700,000 refugees poured in from the mainland. In May of that year, the government adopted a quota system, which proved to be totally ineffective. Most of the refugees were unskilled labourers who were willing to work and were determined to make their new homes in Hong Kong. Some of them did not even know where Hong Kong was before they arrived there.

Occasionally, my parents would get a phone call in the night from a relative or a friend who had escaped from China and had reached Hong Kong. The landscape became dotted with squatters. Many of the huts on the hillsides were made from boards or scrap metal from junkyards, and there were beggars everywhere.

The Chinese Communists erected loudspeakers at Lowu and Man Kam To pointing towards Hong Kong, pouring forth propaganda and abuse against the British in general and the authorities in Hong Kong in particular. Along the border stood the guards from China and Hong Kong, facing each other. The Chinese troops would shoot anyone who was caught trying to escape. However, many did escape, which contributed to the increase in Hong Kong's population.

We were lucky to have homes to return to. We even had a large garden where we had many fruit trees, a large chicken coop and a tennis court. Grandmother moved back to the Big House with her own children. Third Uncle got married and lived on the third floor as we had done before the war. Fourth Uncle, who returned from England in 1947, and Fifth Aunt lived on the second floor with Grandmother. Grandmother's other daughter, Second Aunt, was married before the war.

My family moved into the Lee Building, and occupied the top-floor apartment on the left. There were six apartments altogether, three on the right and three on the left of a wide central stairway. No one lived in the apartment below us. Father's old friend from his "guerrilla" days, Major Hector Shulwan rented the ground-floor apartment. Shulwan might have had connections with the British Army Aid Group in China. Shulwan, an English engineer who spoke fluent Mandarin, was a confirmed bachelor and his only hobby was car engines. During the day, he worked as Director of the Labour Department in Hong Kong, and after work he would put on his overalls, and we would always find him under his car. I was fascinated by this tall man in the greasy overalls whom we called Uncle Shulwan.

On the right side of the building, Second Uncle and his family lived on the top, Second Grandmother one floor below them. Fourth Grandmother lived on the bottom floor. With the children of Second Uncle, and with the frequent visits of many other cousins, we had lots of playmates.

My brother, sister and I shared a large bedroom. At night, one of the servants would set up her bed in our room to keep us company. She would tell us stories from Chinese operas, and at times, these stories were so long that they would carry on for many nights. In the summer, we all slept with mosquito nets over our beds. In the winter, our beds were warmed by brass hot-water bottles wrapped with towels and pinned with large safety pins.

Even though Father was considered well-off, and we had a nice home, we had very little money. For the first and only time in her life, Mother made some of our clothes. I remember Mother dressing quite simply and wearing costume jewellery. The first toy I owned was a doll my parents bought me for my first Christmas in Hong Kong in

1945. I was four and a half years old. It remained my favourite toy throughout my childhood.

## Rationing and Shortages

The most important tasks the postwar Military Administration faced were the repatriation and resettling of prisoners of war and internees, the closure of the prison camps, and the demobilization of the armed forces and auxiliary defence services. There was a great shortage of government staff, and for the first time, local Chinese and Portuguese personnel were given much more responsibility. The credentials they were able to establish during this period could not be ignored by future Hong Kong governments.

The first years after the war were very difficult for everyone in Hong Kong. The major concern was food, which was rationed. Supplies were controlled by the United Nations. The rebuilding of a healthy, growing community was constantly under threat from sheer lack of food. On May 14, 1946, the government appointed Father as Rice Controller for Hong Kong. The following week, Father held a press conference to announce that since Hong Kong was allowed only 20,000 tons of rice by the United Nations, which was half the required amount for the population, flour and green peas would be added to the ration.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the month, he protested to the United Nations because of the limitation imposed on Hong Kong. By September, the rice ration had to be reduced again, so biscuits and additional flour were added. Throughout 1947, conditions remained stable, but by the beginning of 1948, prices for flour and rice began to increase. In order to control prices, Father allowed the sale of cheaper rice imported from Thailand and Vietnam, and flour, which met with public approval. On May 6, 1948, Father resigned his voluntary post, but was kept on as an advisor by the government.<sup>2</sup>

Father carried out his duty with such efficiency and correctness that no one, not even family and close friends were given preference with the rice ration coupons.<sup>3</sup> I remember one incident in school when one of the boys teased me and said, "Your father is the 'shit' Controller." When I related this to him, Father said with a smile, "Ask him what he eats."



During Father's term as Rice Controller, he became very good friends with Ma Luchen, an overseas Chinese in Thailand, frequently called the "rice king" of Southeast Asia. Since that time, the Ma family has sent us bags of Thai rice, pomelos and mangoes every year. The white flower mangoes from Thailand are, I believe, the best in the world, but because they don't transport well they are not commercially available. Yearly, my parents distributed these gifts to family members. This practice was continued by Ma Luchen's son after his father died, and it went on until my mother died in 1996.

During those early years, when there were shortages and small industries had a difficult time, Father tried his best to help. Companies such as Yu Tat Chi, which manufactured candied ginger, and the Garden Bakery, which needed sugar for baking, were grateful to Father for arranging supplies of sugar.<sup>4</sup> I remember the beautiful ginger jars and the wonderful candied ginger we used to have after dinner. Garden Bakery sent my parents cakes on special occasions, and they continued to do so, even after Father died. I saw the beautiful Christmas cake sent from Garden Bakery to Mother in 1995, the year before she died.

Another problem Hong Kong faced with the large increase in the refugee population was the shortage of water. Hong Kong had, up to that point, depended on rainwater, which was collected in reservoirs. The water supply became inadequate, and water rationing started. Depending on the time of year, water might be available for only a few hours twice a week. Because of the lack of water pressure, those who lived on the upper floors in high-rises might not get any water from their taps at all. It was particularly desperate in the poorer sections in the city where people had to line up at public taps with buckets and fights often broke out. The newspapers and radio stations reported many stories of woe. At least the wealthy could check themselves into a hotel when they needed a good shower, because there was no rationing for the hotels. I remember this time very well. Our lives were consumed by this problem. My parents would tell us when water was available and insisted that we be frugal with it. Our household staff used to fill the bathtubs and all available containers when the water was turned on.

A large new reservoir was built at Tai Lam Chung in the New Territories, but when it was finished, the government realized that it was not big enough. The government could not keep up with the needs of the increasing population.

## Health Problems

Health was also a major government concern in postwar Hong Kong. I remember the public-health nurses coming to the school to give us typhoid and cholera injections. I often had painful reactions to these, sometimes accompanied by a fever. We also had tuberculosis tests and smallpox vaccinations, when we had to wear wire covers over the vaccination area to prevent us from scratching. I dreaded those “public-health nurse days.”

With my usual inquisitiveness, I found out that Father gave blood regularly to the Red Cross. I just happened to ask one day after school because I thought he was home a little earlier than usual. He never talked about it, but it was rather unusual for a Chinese to donate blood in the years immediately after the war.

It's not possible to think of the postwar years without mentioning de-worming. Father was quite aware of the state of hygiene in China during the war, and in Hong Kong right after the war. Once a year on a weekend during the cool months, all of us would starve ourselves for one day, eating only very liquid plain rice congee. At the end of the day, Father would give us worm medicine. The idea was that any parasites living in our bodies would be hungry and would ingest the medicine. The next morning, we would be given castor oil with orange juice, a horrible mixture. Presumably, that would eliminate the worms and the eggs from our bodies. Father never planned too far ahead, because it had to be at his convenience. Our cousins always hoped to avoid this procedure, even though they loved staying over at our place, but anyone who happened to be with us that weekend would get the same treatment. Father impressed upon us that if we allowed parasites to live in our bodies, all our nutrition would be taken from us and we wouldn't grow. He was absolutely right. I did have worms in my body and I saw them being expelled.

Father also believed his children should be trained to have regular bowel movements in the evening. So every night after dinner, the three of us would troop into the washroom. My brother would sit on the toilet, my sister on a tall spittoon, and I would be on a small spittoon. Often we just talked and did nothing.

When we bought our first launch in 1947, the *Swan*, one of the crew members, Ah Gun, was scrawny and looked as though he had been affected by parasites. Father treated him with worm medicine. Over the years he worked for us, he actually grew taller and became much healthier.

Some time in the late 1940s, my parents came to the realization that my hearing was impaired. This was caused by my frequent illnesses during the war, and subsequent ear infections. A friend of Father's, Dr. Chan Yik Ping, was an eye, ear, nose and throat specialist, trained in Vienna around the same time Father was at Oxford. Like many doctors who were licensed in China, Dr. Chan was able to work only for the Hong Kong government health service,<sup>5</sup> and not allowed to have his own practice. However, my parents had great respect for his ability and asked him about my hearing loss. He diagnosed a perforated eardrum in my left ear. After school on a regular basis I was taken to see him by Father, who always came with me because he was so anxious and concerned. Dr. Chan inserted a thin tissue in place of my eardrum, and applied an ointment to encourage regrowth. Eventually, my eardrum did grow back, but I still notice a difference between my right and left ears.

## The Refugee Families

My first personal experience with what was happening in China was when we suddenly had visitors. Sing Sheng<sup>6</sup> and Dorothy Chu, who was related to the Tao family we stayed with in Chongqing, arrived on the first day of Chinese New Year 1947. In January, the two had left Shanghai for Hong Kong to get visas to go to the United States. The plane in which they were travelling was diverted to Manila because of stormy weather. Then two of the four engines caught fire

and the pilot ditched the plane in the China Sea. Seven of the thirty-six passengers died and the survivors stayed afloat in two rubber rafts for thirty hours until they were rescued by an American ship. After being hospitalized for two weeks, Sing Sheng and Dorothy finally arrived in Hong Kong and were welcomed by my parents.<sup>7</sup> They stayed for about a month, in the apartment below, and had all their meals with us, while they waited for their visas. I was six years old at the time, and just loved hearing their stories. After they obtained their visas, they returned to Shanghai to prepare to go to the United States.

Between 1948 and 1949, friends and relatives who came out from China stayed in the Lee Building. I am not sure whether it was because of a shortage of rental accommodations or because it was a temporary measure. At one time there were three families living in the same apartment below us. As children, we thought it was wonderful to have even more playmates, but I was beginning to realize the seriousness of the political upheaval in China by listening to the adults talk. I knew that the new playmates were only there temporarily and I was quite aware of the overcrowded conditions our guests were living in. Knowing that people had to leave their homes was not a comforting thought.

The apartment was divided into three sections for the three families. One of them was the family of Mother's older sister Pearl. Aunt Pearl left Shanghai with her six children while her husband, C.C. Kwong, stayed behind. Uncle C.C. was a highly qualified engineer who felt that he could stay in China to help the country. By 1950, he believed that the political situation was settling down, and he came out to Hong Kong to take his family back to Shanghai. However, they left behind their eldest son, Joseph, with us because he was of conscription age, and they did not want him to be sent to Korea to be "cannon fodder," now that the Korean War was on. Within two years, their other children escaped back to Hong Kong, one by one.

The Chans were another family — husband, wife and four children. Lucy Chan, a friend since the 1920s, was the lawyer mentioned earlier, who trained in England at the same time Father studied there. Mr. Chan was the son of an important official in China. What I

remember most was the fact that Mrs. Chan, besides being a skilled lawyer, could knit a sweater in a day. She could even knit while she was having an afternoon rest.

The third family was Father's former employer in Guangzhou, Liu Jiwen, his wife and their children. Mrs. Liu, a beautiful and serene lady, was a gifted painter. During their stay with us, every day after school I would go downstairs and watch her paint. Because she knew I was so interested, she showed me how to grind traditional Chinese colours, and how to use Chinese brushes. Soon, I was sitting next to her at her table and she was teaching me Chinese painting. Mrs. Liu told Mother that I had artistic talent, and should be given painting lessons.

In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party formed the government of the Peoples' Republic of China, and the Nationalists of the Republic of China under Chiang Kaishek retreated to Taiwan.

## Housing Problems

Father played a major role in helping the people of Hong Kong both privately and through the government. In 1946, Father was made a Justice of the Peace (JP). One of his duties was that of acting as a judge in the JP court, presiding over cases of minor infractions, such as hawkers who set up their stands where they were not allowed to by law. In appreciation of Father's service to the community, particularly as the Rice Controller for Hong Kong, the British government awarded him the OBE in 1949.

In 1953, Father became a member of the Urban Council. He immediately spoke out publicly on the lack of affordable housing. He encouraged large companies to work with the government to build housing for their employees by providing affordable mortgages. He knew that this would greatly improve the relationship between employers and employees. At the same time, he also brought up the subject of the lack of understanding by the general public about public health issues and suggested that the government produce brochures explaining the problems.<sup>8</sup>



The crisis in housing caused severe health problems. The poor lived in shacks or in the open. Others paid landlords to be allowed to build shacks on top of buildings. There were no toilets or running water.<sup>9</sup>

On Christmas Day 1953 there was a terrible fire in an area filled with squatters, and 53,000 people were hurt. The government finally realized that a third of the population of Hong Kong was made up of refugees who had nowhere else to go. Something had to be done to integrate them into the community. From then on, the Hong Kong government embarked on an ambitious resettlement program to provide safer housing at minimal cost. This also helped to clear the land occupied by the squatters for industrial and commercial developments. Despite the speed with which public housing was built, the squatter population grew even faster.

In 1961, as an unofficial member of the Legislative Council, Father complained that the government was working too slowly. It had promised to move 75,000 people into public housing in 1959. According to Father's information, as of February 1961, only 32,432 had been moved. He urged the government to cut the red tape to speed up the process, giving priority to those earning less than \$300 a month.<sup>10</sup>

It took until the 1980s to solve the problems of housing. The shacks on the hillside gradually disappeared and were replaced by high-rise public housing. The majority of these refugees became the backbone of Hong Kong's industrialization.

## Refugees and Industry

During the Korean War of 1950 to 1953, the United Nations placed an embargo on China, dealing a fatal blow to the entrépot trade in Hong Kong. Fortunately for Hong Kong, some of the refugees brought with them not only money but industrial and technological know-how. According to one estimate, several billion Hong Kong dollars came with the immigrants during this period. Between 1947 and 1949, more than two hundred Shanghai enterprises transferred their registration to Hong Kong.

Industrialists arriving from northeastern China provided a boost to local industries, and were in turn aided by the established international trading networks in Hong Kong.<sup>11</sup> Because of its lack of natural resources, Hong Kong's most valuable resource was its manpower, much of it including the refugee population and their knowledge and skills. Hong Kong's textile industry originated with these new arrivals. The opening of factories helped to provide jobs for the masses. By the beginning of the 1950s, "Made in Hong Kong" labels began to appear on many manufactured goods, a change from the late 1940s, when "Made in Japan" labels were common. At the same time, there was a growing need for skill and knowledge so that the Colony could become competitive internationally.

As more and more factories were built, important changes in social structures occurred. The traditional Chinese family with live-in Chinese female servants gradually declined. Many of these servants were women who originally came from the silk districts of the Pearl River Delta and had worked in the silk industries near their home villages until the Great Depression. When their factories collapsed, they moved to Guangzhou (Canton), Macao and Hong Kong. Some were women who had decided they were not going to get married, others were widows who had chosen not to remarry. Since they were illiterate, their only alternative was to work as household servants. They formed a sisterhood, *zei mui*, and depended on one another for moral and sometimes financial support. They were known as women who put their hair up, *sau hai*, meaning they would never marry. They braided their hair in the back in one thick braid, and it was never cut. The older women sometimes wore their hair in a bun. I was always fascinated by the amount of hair these servants had, and loved watching them going through the ritual of hair washing, using a certain type of wood shaving, *pao far*, which they bought from the market, and which added a lovely sheen to the hair.

With the opening of more and more factories in Hong Kong, many unskilled jobs were available, and these were filled by the younger servants. The older ones remained with the families they had been with for years. Gradually, the factories absorbed all the unskilled labour in Hong Kong, and no Chinese household servants were available.

Working in a factory meant being able to have one's own home and family. Government subsidized housing had helped greatly in this respect and the standard of living for the majority improved. The positions of household servants were gradually filled by Filipino maids, and later, maids from Thailand brought by employment agencies into Hong Kong. By the 1970s, live-in household help was almost entirely from other Southeast Asian countries.

As for me, the real change in Hong Kong began when we started to hear the Shanghai dialect spoken in public, and noticed the odour of "smelly" tofu, a popular Shanghai dish. We were frequently visited by the "Shanghai Woman," a gem agent who, with private references, went to wealthy homes to sell jewels smuggled out of China by refugees. The rich smuggled whatever they could out of China into Hong Kong, and overnight there was an abundance of jewels available for sale, the proceeds of which, I was told, were used to finance factories and various other businesses. For the next few years, the "Shanghai Woman" would call on Mother whenever she had something special. She was a chubby lady who wore a plain loose cheongsam, inside which was an undergarment full of secret pockets. I used to watch in great fascination as she unbuttoned her cheongsam, and from each secret pocket of her undergarment came the most beautiful pieces of jewellery. I always hoped she would come when I was home after school, and sometimes I was lucky. With such valuables on her person, I often wondered about her safety, but I didn't think it was my place to ask.

## Refugees and Education

Father became involved with grass-root organizations, such as the Szeyup Business Association (an association of people from the area of our ancestral village in China), Wan Chai Kaifong Benevolent Association (a community organization to help the needy), Tung Wah Hospital (a hospital for the poor), Po Leung Kuk (for the protection of women and children) and many others. He spent a great deal of time organizing donations of warm clothing, and helped to set up free medical and dental clinics, free primary schools and also donations of free

coffins, which was very important to the Chinese. As an education enthusiast, he was often invited to different schools for prize-giving days or for new school openings. Many of these were Chinese-language middle schools catering to the refugee population that needed someone to raise their profile. Throughout his life, Father always had time for those who needed him.

Schools in postwar Hong Kong were in a state of disarray. Many of the buildings were either destroyed or so badly damaged that they could not be used. With the increasing number of people moving into Hong Kong from China,<sup>12</sup> there was constantly a shortage of schools. Classes were held in any available building. Between 1946 and 1948, I changed school four times. Two of the four schools soon ceased to exist.

In the 1950s Rev. R.O. Hall, Bishop of Hong Kong, set up Workers' Schools for refugee children. The Colonial government suspected these schools of communist infiltration<sup>13</sup> and anti-British indoctrination and closed them down, and in some cases, deported the teachers.<sup>14</sup> The Education Ordinance of 1953 and its subsidiary regulations prohibited any kind of political activity in schools, including discussions of contemporary Chinese politics or of colonialism.

Improvisations such as three-sessional schools had to be adopted by the government. This meant that three sessions of school were held in the same building, morning, afternoon and evening, each with its own set of teachers and students. In 1952, my older brother, Richard, and my sister, Deanna, were sent to school in England. My younger brother, Christopher, and I attended St. Paul's Co-educational College. We were very glad to be in the morning session, which started at eight o'clock.

I subsequently learnt that, because of food shortages and the disorganization of the schools in Hong Kong, the Poy family decided to stay in Canada where conditions were much better.

# 6

## The Magical Years

From the end of the war to the early 1950s, my family lived in the Lee Building. Those were magical years for me. There were so many children living in the same building that we were never short of playmates. I loved the freedom to play in the garden, swinging on tree branches, picking fruit, and chasing chickens in the chicken coop. I constantly had scraped knees and my legs were dotted with mosquito bites. I loved the beautiful fragrance of the flowering trees and bushes. Mother used to pick the flowers to put in her hair. Whenever I hear the sound of heat bugs buzzing now, or smell the fragrance of Chinese jasmine, I am reminded of my childhood in our garden, a carefree time, full of fun.

We built a little “club” house with pieces of boards. We had small wooden benches and stools, and the most important item was a little coal burner. Every Saturday night, all the children got together to tell stories and roast sweet potatoes on the burner. I remember once Grandmother had her cook make soya sauce chicken and bring it to us in the club house. My sister had told Grandmother that she came first in class, and we deserved something for our Saturday night club. Being the youngest in the group, I was mainly a listener and observer. We were allowed to stay up as late as we liked. I was so pleased that I was allowed to join this group even though I was always frightened by the ghost stories the older children told. At the end of the evening, without fail, everyone ran upstairs calling out, “Ghosts chasing us!” I was always the last to reach the top of the stairs because I couldn’t run as fast as the others.



One night, I woke up and saw a white shadow with long hair moving from our bedroom to the bathroom. The first thought that came to mind was what Mother had said: no one had died in the Lee Building during the war. I thought, if there was no violent death in the house, we would not be harmed.

Another night, I woke up and saw a white shadowy female figure with long hair standing between my bed and my sister's bed. I thought it had to be the servant, but when I sat up in bed to check and saw her fast asleep, I froze. I couldn't even cry out. The white figure moved closer and closer, then turned towards my sister's bed and fingered the mosquito net with her long nails. I kept saying to myself that she was not going to hurt us since we had never hurt anyone, then I passed out. The next morning, I asked the servant whether she had gotten up in the middle of the night to adjust my sister's mosquito net, and she said no. I never told my parents about this because I didn't want to worry them.

To this day, I can't explain what I saw, but I remember those images very clearly.

Even though we lived on the side of a hill and were surrounded by trees full of birds, Father loved having birds in our home. We had a parrot and a couple of canaries. Father would give the canaries water, bird seed and dried squid cartilage. The cages hung in our balcony, and sometimes, wild canaries were attracted by them. Father enjoyed hearing them sing, especially early in the morning. Our cook also liked to feed the blackbirds that flew to the window of her kitchen in the back.

There were a lot of hungry people in Hong Kong during the post-war years. Sometimes our cook would give them leftover food from our kitchen.

Very early one morning, I was awakened by the sound of Father shouting from the window. When I went to the window to see what was happening, I saw a man carrying two chickens, one under each arm, running down the slope from the Lee Building towards Wan Chai. Apparently, he had climbed into our garden, and got into our chicken coop. Father saw him just as he was getting away.

Those were the days when we were visited quite regularly by men who purchased recyclable and reusable cans and bottles. These men carried on their shoulders bamboo poles strung with huge baskets on each side. This was the postwar Hong Kong way of recycling.

Father was an early riser, unlike Mother, who liked to sleep in, so we always had breakfast with him. The first things he put in front of us were cod-liver oil, a brown thick liquid that we took with a tablespoon, as well as vitamin C, and calcium. He made sure we had a full breakfast. He retained the English habit of having bacon and eggs, or kippered herring. I used to like a piece of pan-fried fish if the cook could get it in the market early enough.

Father was always in a good mood in the morning. That was his best time of the day. He liked to drive us to school even though school in Hong Kong could start as early as eight o'clock in the morning. He liked to get to the office before everyone else, including the office boy. I asked him once why he didn't have the chauffeur drive us, and he said, "I don't want Ah Muk to have to get up so early since he lives in Kowloon. He can get the car from me at the office, and come back to drive Mommy." But I actually think he liked driving us to school.

My childhood image of Father was that of an old-fashioned, stern man on whom we could always depend, and one who commanded a great deal of respect. I was a quiet child who listened and absorbed everything around me. I don't believe Father knew how much I admired him. I was but a few years old when I realized that I was as strong-willed as he was, a quality he came to accept in me. I remember an incident when I was about five years old when he insisted that I should finish my lunch. I was not hungry and I refused. Since I was not allowed to leave the table until I finished, I sat there for hours until he relented. Ever since then, he knew I always made my own decisions.

As a child, I would rather listen than talk. We usually spoke Cantonese at home, but during dinner time, my parents always spoke English to each other so that the servant would not understand what they were saying. In order for me to understand what was said, I had to learn very quickly. That was how I learnt English, by listening. I could understand the language before I could speak it.

It was also around this time that I was made aware that I was an inquisitive child, for Mother complained that if she told me about a person, I would always want to know everything, including what the person's intestines look like.

In 1947, since my sister was a boarder at the Diocesan Girls' School and thrived there, my parents decided that they were going to enroll me as well. My stay didn't last very long. Not only did I have nightmares, I also cried every Sunday afternoon when it was time to go back to school for the week. My parents finally gave up and enrolled me in Grade Three at St. Paul's Co-educational College, which was a day school.

I used to have to fill in forms at school. At first I would write "engineer" under Father's occupation. But then I thought, it couldn't be right, because he seemed to do so many different things, and I knew he didn't make a living being an engineer. I decided to ask him one day what I should put as "father's occupation." He was involved with so many businesses that he took a minute to think, and then said, "Just put director of companies."

In the summer, we used to go swimming in South Bay, using the Lee family's swimming shack for changing. Our car was usually driven by our chauffeur, Ah Muk, but Father liked to drive us to school himself during the week and to swim on the weekends. The summers were so hot and humid that we used to develop boils on our skin, but Father told us that the sea water was very good for our boils. Whenever we went to South Bay, the winding roads reminded me of the rides on top of the Bank of China transport trucks, and invariably, I would be carsick, and Father had to make frequent stops.

One day, while we were swimming in South Bay, Father asked me whether I would like to have our own house in that part of the island, and I was just delighted. However, what worried him was the isolation and the lack of public security during those years in Hong Kong and he changed his mind.

In 1946, I could sense something new was going to happen to our family. In May 1947, my younger brother, Christopher, was born.

## Launching as Recreation

Father believed in fresh air and sunshine. In 1947, as soon as he could afford it, he bought a launch, the *Swan*. It was the first of four he owned in his lifetime. The other three were the *Mayflower*, the *Fortuna* and the *Atalanta*. Boating became a part of our lives, and I loved it. On weekends Father would take us out on our launch, and sometimes we would have dinner in one of the floating restaurants in Aberdeen. Later Aberdeen Harbour became so polluted that Father would not permit us to eat in any of the restaurants there.

We never stayed overnight on the launch in the outer islands, because Father said there were pirates around Hong Kong. However, we begged and begged, and one day he agreed. We stayed overnight in the typhoon shelter in Causeway Bay. Our sailors hung a light over the water for us that night, and we caught quite a few cuttlefish to bring back to Mother, who was home with the new baby.

We used to have spectacular sunsets in Hong Kong, particularly in the summer. That was before the Colony became overcrowded, and the atmosphere was full of pollution. I always observed the sunsets when we were on the water and tried to remember the colours and the shapes of the clouds. Because I was very young, often, at the end of a long day on the launch, I would fall asleep before we got home. Father would carry me in and tuck me in bed. The next morning when I got up, I would get out my water-colours and paint the sunset from the night before. My parents loved my paintings and my appreciation of the beauty of nature.

Spending time on the launch was the only recreation Father enjoyed. Some of our best moments were spent on our launch, out on the water, or on one of the off-islands in Hong Kong, away from the hustle and bustle of the city. It was also the time when the whole family was together, often joined by relatives or school friends. My parents rarely used the launch for entertaining, especially when we were young, because it was reserved for the family.

Father was one of the very first people in Hong Kong to own a launch, so we were able to go to many unspoiled beaches. Those

were the days when the water was clear, and the beaches were so clean that we could dig clams to bring home to eat. We could observe sea life not normally accessible to city dwellers. I touched a baby octopus, watched a baby sole flapping in shallow water, saw sea-horses swim near our launch, and caught transparent shrimps with a handkerchief. We learnt the names and habits of many sea creatures from our crew, all of whom were *Tankar* people, who lived their whole lives on boats.

Being a public-spirited person, Father would clean the beaches of broken bottles and sharp rocks with the help of our crew. We were never asked to help because he wanted us to have as much time to play as possible. I taught myself to swim in shallow water. Because of my perforated eardrum, my head had to stay above water, in order to avoid an ear infection. I used to love waiting for low tide because that was when I would find interesting sea creatures that were normally under water. Even now, whenever we go to the seashore, I wait for low tide.

Once we docked in a bay where there were many jellyfish. They had claws that looked like chicken claws and poison which was hazardous to people. Father asked the crew to scoop up as many as they could and put them on the beach, where they melted in the sun and turned to water.

In the summer, because of the heat, we always went out in the afternoon for high tea and sometimes for dinner as well, returning to Hong Kong harbour when all the lights were reflected on the water. I can still feel the sea breezes on my face and smell the salty air. Those were special moments that I will always treasure. The harbour is no longer the way it was. Land reclamation has made it narrow and it is crowded with busy boat traffic.

In the winter, we would go out on the launch in the morning and have a picnic lunch. After lunch and a short rest, Father would hike with us on the islands. We saw rather primitive burial plots and jars where descendants collected the bones of their ancestors. We saw fields of sweet potatoes, and crumbling buildings that had been there for hundreds of years when these islands were first inhabited by fishermen, farmers and those who worked in the plantations of



fragrant wood which was exported to mainland China. It was fascinating for me to see how the villagers lived. Their lives had not changed for generations, little touched by the progress in Hong Kong. We would always return by late afternoon before it got too cold. Even today, I like going to the off-islands to trek across the hills when we visit in the winter.

Throughout the year, when we were on one of the islands, we would see fishing boats coming back to shore late in the day. Once we were on the beach and a fisherman asked Father whether he wanted to buy some scallops shaped like half-open fans. He then opened one, and to my surprise, there were little pearls in it. The fisherman told us that they scraped these from the bottom of the ocean for the pearls as much as for the flesh of the scallops. I was disappointed Father didn't buy any.

We loved fishing with fishing-lines and often caught many colourful fish. My parents did not participate. We asked our crew many questions about the different types of fish we caught and learned a lot about marine life. At times a fishing boat would come up to our launch to sell fresh fish. From the hold in their boat where we could see many colourful fish swimming, my parents would choose one or two that we would take home to cook for dinner.

By the middle of the 1950s, we had our third launch, *Fortuna*. It was my favourite because it was so big that we were able to have large picnics with our friends and cousins, uncles and aunts. I was the most gregarious of the four children and I always enjoyed these outings. We kept our crew busy looking after us. They would watch over those who were swimming to warn us in case a jellyfish surfaced. Once, a cousin was touched by the yellow tentacles of a blue jellyfish just as he was climbing up the swim ladder. He had to be taken to the hospital immediately.

## The Lee Building and the Big House

Out of our living-room window in the Lee Building, we had a beautiful view of the hill and waterfalls. One of the waterfalls flowed into a rock formation that resembled a pool, where in summer,

children would swim and play. We were not allowed to go there, but I loved watching them.

We had many different fruit trees in our garden, such as papaya, logan, guava, loquat, mango, wongpei and leichee, all planted by Grandfather. As children, we loved picking fruit off the trees, or in the case of papaya, because the trees were usually too high and too straight to climb, we would knock a ripe papaya off the tree with a stick, and catch it in an old raincoat. We would open it up and eat it right there in the garden. We played on the swing and the slide, we rode our bicycles around the garden, and walked on stilts that Second Uncle had made for us. We caught tadpoles in the fish ponds and the fountains, and we watched the goldfish swim. The older children would play basketball in the basketball court.

Occasionally, we also went to the Big House to see Grandmother, who always looked solemn and always sat in the same chair. We would sometimes have a chat with the Sikh watchman in the guard house, Nam Singh, who would show us the snakes he caught. In the evening, when the servants came looking for us to have our baths, we would hide in the artificial caves Grandfather had built in the garden.

We often dropped in on Second Grandmother and Fourth Grandmother, and visited our uncles and aunts since we all lived so close together. In the Big House, we had our altar to our ancestors, to whom we paid our respect on special occasions. Second Grandmother and Fourth Grandmother had altars to Buddha in their prayer rooms. We were often at Second Grandmother's because she was Father's own mother. I was fascinated by her serenity and her faith. I liked to watch her smoke her water-pipe, making a gurgling sound and blowing puffs of smoke. At a set time every morning and every afternoon, she would go into her prayer room, light the incense, put on her coarse brown prayer robe and kneel in front of the altar to Buddha with her prayer beads in her hands. She would then recite her prayers and move the beads with her fingers as if counting them. She was always so entranced that she wouldn't notice us going in and out making faces behind her back.

Second Grandmother was thankful for what life had given her and I never once heard her complain about anything. She always spoke of Grandfather with great respect, and she would go out of her way to

have harmony in the family. She was a small woman with a strong and resilient character which gained her respect in the family. After Grandmother died, Second Grandmother became the matriarch in the Lee family.

On Father's birthday according to the Chinese calendar, Second Grandmother always made a village dish of duck cooked with taro, because that had been Father's favourite childhood dish. She would not let the servants make it, but always made it herself in the old Chinese fashion, cooking it slowly on a stove in the garden with dry straws. After she moved from the Lee Building to Caroline Mansion in the 1950s, she had to do this in a more modern kitchen.

My parents entertained a great deal. With Father's involvement with the Hong Kong government and with business, Mother was kept very busy being a hostess. In 1948 and 1949, Father was Hong Kong's delegate at the 4th and 5th Sessions of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East. By the beginning of the 1950s, he was on many government commissions, as well as being a member of the Urban Council. For as long as we lived in the Lee Building, they entertained in the Big House. I remember my parents getting dressed up and walking down through the garden. These were catered parties, but Mother had to supervise the menus, the flowers, the guest lists and the seating. My parents' parties were known to start early and end early. Father was famous for saying, "When the guests leave, the host will regain tranquillity."

Until the beginning of the 1950s, the Big House was the focal point of our lives. All family gatherings, Christmas parties and wedding parties were held in the main hall. The first day of Chinese New Year, we would all put on our padded cheongsams, little gold rings and bracelets, and gather at the Big House to pay our respects to Grandmother. On the second day, wearing the same dresses, we would go over to the Wong Grandparents to pay our respects. Every dress I had as a child was red or pink, because these are good-luck colours for the Chinese. I got so sick of red and pink that it took me almost forty years to wear pink again. I still can't wear red.

The empty apartment below us in the Lee Building was occasionally occupied by my Grandmother Wong when she visited us. Our

Wong Grandparents lived in Kowloon, and crossing the harbour was not so convenient then. One day, when I came home from school, Grandmother Wong had just returned from the Lee Theatre after seeing a war movie starring Errol Flynn. She had a headache and asked one of the servants to get her an ice bag. By the time the servant brought it, she had passed away. She had had a stroke, although she was only in her sixties. It was my first encounter with death in the family. I always remember her as a beautiful and gentle person.

### Servants and Hawkers

It was the custom at that time for well-to-do families to have many servants — a cook, a laundry *amah*, a baby *amah*, and one or two servants for general housework, besides gardeners and a chauffeur. Second Grandmother also had a *muitsai* (meaning “little girl”) in her household. In China, when a father was poor and had no way of supporting his children, he would give away his young daughter to a wealthy household to become a *muitsai*. In keeping with old Chinese tradition, money was often paid to the parents. Sons were never given away. The household that took in a *muitsai* was supposed to have her as a general helper, and in return, she got her board and lodging, and learned household work. This was not always the case, and there were frequent abuses of the system. When a *muitsai* grew up, it was the duty of the family to marry her off. In my Second Grandmother’s case, her *muitsai* was her masseuse, who also performed light household chores.

Even though Father was against the *muitsai* system, he did not interfere until after the war. Then he told his mother that her *muitsai* had to go. Whether Second Grandmother married her off, I really don’t know, but I suspect she was sent back home, because I remember her being a rather young girl. In my own home, no one ever worked without pay, so I did not know about this custom. I merely thought the servant was called *muitsai* because she was so young.

One day after school, I met a *muitsai* of friends of my parents who came to our home to say goodbye, because she was to be married to someone in the United States. She was telling Mother about

the English lessons she was taking in preparation for the journey. By listening, I began to learn more about the custom of *muitsai*.

Father was always concerned about the well-being of others, and he always had time to help people from all walks of life. What I noticed everyday was his consideration for our servants. Never was there an unkind word. He always helped them to improve their lives, even though it meant that we would lose them from our service.

We had a servant called Ah Nam, who was hired to look after my baby brother, Christopher. One day she was spitting blood and was so distraught she wanted to kill herself. Mother took her to the doctor's and found out that she had tuberculosis. She was hospitalized and went through lengthy treatment which was paid for by Father. She never worked as a servant again, but when she was better, she got married and had a family. When Caroline Mansion was built on Yun Ping Road in the early 1950s, she went to see Father because she wanted to have a small retail business. Father gave her a space, a stairwell that had a lot of walk-by traffic, to sell slippers and magazines. She did well and prospered. She always insisted on giving all of us her merchandise, but because she wouldn't take any money, we told her that we didn't read the type of magazines she sold. She insisted, however, that we could always use slippers, and she would press these into our hands. The last time I saw her was when Mother moved from Tower Court after Father died. Tower Court was just a few steps from Caroline Mansion where Ah Nam had her stand.

After we moved into Embassy Court in 1951, we had a house boy called Ah Mun who Father thought was too smart to remain in that position. Father felt that he should have an education to better himself, so he sent him to night school to learn English, and later to learn drafting. Often, dinner parties were planned around Ah Mun's school examinations. He sometimes had to miss a class if my parents really needed him to help serve. I remember him looking very smart dressed for school in a jacket and tie given to him by Father. Ah Mun sometimes practised his English by reading Mother's recipe books, and he learned to bake a very good orange chiffon cake. Once Ah Mun completed his drafting course, he left our home to seek better employment.



On one of our trips back to Hong Kong in the late 1960s, I met the new cook, Ah Wu. She had been a cleaner at Tower Court, the building we lived in. Father noticed that she was a hard worker, and he offered her a job in our home so that she could learn cooking. Ah Wu stayed with us for many years, and she is like family to me as well as our children. Over the years, Father helped her and her husband buy an apartment so that they would have security. Ah Wu's employment had interruptions because of differences with Mother, but she always came back. In fact, after Father died, and after she retired, out of gratitude to Father, she came back to help Mother near the end of Mother's life. The last time I saw her was at Mother's memorial service in October 1996.

Despite the fact that Father was considered a wealthy man, he never carried more than a few dollars in his pocket. His secretary in the 1970s and early 1980s, Anna, said that it would be a waste of time picking his pocket. This could sometimes be an inconvenience. Anna told me of an incident when Father saw a street hawker in front of one of our office buildings, One Hysan Avenue. He wanted to buy some pears from the man but didn't have enough money on him, so he went upstairs to his office, and asked Anna to buy some for him. Anna sent an office boy, who said to the hawker, "The big boss, Mr. Lee, sends me." The hawker, frightened because he should not have been selling there, said, "I'm leaving right away." When the office boy assured him that Mr. Lee only wanted to buy some pears, the hawker immediately offered them for free. It was Father's policy never to accept anything for free, so the office boy paid ten dollars. But instead of the usual eight pears for ten dollars, the hawker gave him twenty pears.<sup>1</sup> Father, totally unaware of the price of pears, thought it a good deal.

## Embassy Court

By the beginning of the 1950s, all the refugee families who stayed with us in the Lee Building had gone their own way, and my parents were planning our new home in Embassy Court, on Hysan Avenue, which was the first high-rise owned by the Lee family.

I still remember the architectural plans Father brought home. These were drawings of the two-level penthouse we were going to live in, with the entire roof as our garden. Mother was very much involved in the planning and the decor. My parents would spend time in the side streets of Hong Kong looking for interesting artifacts and antiques. It was an exciting time for them. From then on, they would be able to entertain at home instead of in the Big House.

The building was designed with large water-storage tanks on the roof, so that when water was available, it would be piped to the tanks first in order that no one in the building would suffer from the lack of water pressure. This type of design continued with our subsequent buildings. I was aware of Father's concern, not only for us, but for all the tenants. Father had always been proud of all our buildings because they were so well built that they would never budge when typhoons hit Hong Kong, unlike many other high-rises that used to collapse with high winds or torrential rains.

After we moved to Embassy Court, Father continued to drive us to school every morning. Being a practical person, he liked to give rides to as many students as possible. A friend of mine, Miranda, who lived near us, always got a ride just outside her home. The next person we picked up was Ah Woon, who would be waiting for us outside the Big House. The daughter of Grandmother's cook, she was a student at Sacred Heart School.

My life changed dramatically after our move. I not only lost the garden to play in, I actually became a serious student. Like most students in Hong Kong, I had a tutor. Miss Chan would come after school and teach me mathematics. I had a system worked out to get a high average. It was almost impossible to get a grade higher than 80 per cent in any subject except mathematics, because of the way examinations were marked. So the only way was to try to get a 100 per cent in all three mathematics subjects.

The first year I entered secondary school I came first in a class of forty students. Actually I think Miss Chan should have been given the credit. When Mother heard the news from my principal, Miss Bobby Kotewall, she was so excited she couldn't sleep. It was generally known that St. Paul's Co-educational College had high academic

standards, and to come first was extremely difficult. One of my teachers said to me the following year, “For someone with your family background, I don’t understand why you work so hard!” People have been saying that to me ever since.

My parents were so pleased that they gave a luncheon for all my teachers. Subsequently, my art teacher presented my parents with a large Chinese painting he had done of peach blossoms, which complemented the pale blue colour of our dining room. This painting was treasured by my parents and remained hanging in their dining room until Mother passed away.

Once we moved into Embassy Court, I started Chinese painting lessons with a well-known artist, Boa Siu Yao, who lived not far from us. I used to walk there after school, and during the summer, I went every morning. I also took piano lessons and singing lessons. The singing lessons only lasted about a year because I soon found out that my voice was not very strong, even though I love singing. Painting was still my favourite extracurricular activity. I was kept so busy in my early teens that I wasn’t even interested in going out. I had a painting table in my bedroom, quite separate from my desk so that my paints and paper never had to be put away. In the 1970s Father came across some of my paintings and sent them to me in Toronto.

The first couple of years after we moved into Embassy Court, Richard and I used to ride our bicycles to the South China Stadium after school or on weekends to fly kites. I think I was able to fly a kite properly only once and found it frustrating. In late summer we made nets to catch huge dragonflies in the partially flattened ground of The Lee Gardens right opposite us. One Chinese New Year, Richard put firecrackers in glass bottles that exploded like bombs.

In order for the Lee family to develop the land at The Lee Gardens, the hill had to be levelled. During the few years we lived in Embassy Court, I saw the hill situated on the other side of Hysan Avenue removed right before my eyes. Day after day, the hill became lower. I saw men and women carrying heavy loads of rocks and soil from the hill to the trucks, which were then driven to a dump site. Occasionally, I would hear dynamite going off to break up the rocks. During that process, beautiful rock crystals were found. Father treasured

these, and had carved wood stands made for some of the large pieces. He kept some himself and gave some away.

Many interesting events occurred during the excavation of The Lee Gardens. A Goddess of Mercy or Guanyin statue was found buried in the hill. It was said that anyone who dared to remove it would become ill. Work was halted and monks and nuns were brought to the site to chant and pray. It was decided that they were the only people who could remove the Goddess of Mercy. An auspicious date was set, and with all the proper respect paid to the Goddess, the statue was removed ceremoniously to be housed in one of the Buddhist temples in the New Territories. Work on the levelling of the hill was then resumed.

During the excavation, a large iron bell was unearthed, dating back to over two hundred years. It had been donated by the Lo family to a temple on the hill in gratitude for their good fortune. "Favourable weather" was inscribed on the bell, referring to the Lo family as farmers. This was a treasure Father was very proud of. He had a beautiful large carved wood frame made to hold this bell which weighed tons. It became his prized show-piece in our living room.

Living in Embassy Court meant that I got to see how my parents entertained. The upper level of the penthouse was for entertaining, and the bedrooms were all downstairs. Whenever my parents entertained, they always had a Chinese restaurant do the catering. Catering in those days meant moving all the equipment to our entertaining kitchen upstairs (for everyday, our cook used the kitchen downstairs), and everything would be cooked there. After school, I liked to see what type of food was being served. If winter melon soup was to be one of the courses on the menu, the vegetables in it would be cut in the most beautiful stylized forms of birds, butterflies or fish. I would also check Mother's floral decorations and decide which one I was going to paint the next day. Just before I went to bed, I would look at the party from behind the Chinese screen. I loved the glitter of the silver candelabras and the crystal, the flickering candlelight and the sound of talk and laughter. Mother always used the most beautiful Chinese crocheted tablecloths with matching napkins. If the party was Chinese style, there would be three tables of eight. If it was a

European-style dinner (Chinese food served European style), it would be a long table of twenty-four. Only Chinese food was ever served in our home; my parents' Jewish friends, who could only eat Kosher food, always ate dinner at home before coming to our parties.

During these years I often saw Uncle Quo Wai (Q.W. Lee) and his wife, Aunt Helen, at my parents' parties. Uncle Quo Wai is Father's cousin who worked at the Hang Seng Bank. Father had high regard for this cousin whom he believed had great potential, so he wanted to introduce him to as many of his friends as possible. Today, Uncle Quo Wai is Sir Q.W. Lee, a prominent Hong Kong citizen. In addition to holding many other titles, he is the chairman of the Hang Seng Bank.

Father's habits became well known to everyone. Besides never going to the movies, he never danced, to Mother's dismay. He wouldn't agree to be on any company board if he had to socialize with movie stars. He never gambled, and mahjong playing was not allowed in our house. Mother had one mahjong game a year on her birthday, when she played with her siblings. Father loved his work, and his only form of relaxation was going out on the launch on Sundays, enjoying nature.

There was a story about father being invited to the opening of the May Flower, a dance hall owned by a business friend of his. Father abhorred places of that sort and was not going to attend, but Granduncle Lee Shu Yuen persuaded him to go with him. The dance hall was on the second floor of a building and could only be reached by an escalator. Apparently Father went up the escalator, turned around and came back down, and considered that as having attended the opening.<sup>2</sup>

After we moved into Embassy Court, the yearly Christmas party would be held at our home. It was a party for close relatives only, and they always numbered over a hundred. There were presents for each child and adolescent, and a raffle of a few gifts for the adults. I liked getting involved in planning the presents, which included a large number of Japanese toys.

For Christmas 1953 we did not have a party. Instead, my parents took Christopher and me to Bangkok, Thailand. We were invited by Father's friend, the "rice king" Ma Lushen, to travel on one of his



merchant ships returning from Hong Kong to Bangkok. It was my first cruise and it was a wonderful experience. We had private cabins, and dined with the Danish captain and his officers. It was exhilarating to see flying fish sail through the air along the side of the ship.

Early one morning, Father called us up on deck so that we could watch as the ship entered the estuary towards Bangkok. The sun was just about to rise, and we saw jungle on both sides. As we approached the city, we saw the silhouettes of temples backlit by an orange sky. Then a red ball rose from behind the temples. It was absolute magic!

We stayed in the Oriental Hotel where we dined outside by the river, with mosquito coils burning on the tables. That was before the hotel was renovated and the dining room became enclosed. We were invited by the Ma family a few times to their home and to restaurants.

During our visit I learned that the young men in Thailand, at the age of eighteen, had to go either into national military service or to a monastery to become a monk for a number of years. It was a wise policy because it recognized that not all men are warlike.

We were invited to the American Embassy in Bangkok to see *This Is Cinerama*, the first seventy-mm, three-projector, three curved-screen movie. My parents also took us to see orchid farms and rice fields and we went on a river cruise to see how the local Thai people lived.

At the end of our stay in Bangkok, Father thought we were all having such a good time that he wanted to extend the holiday and to take us to Singapore. I objected, because examinations would begin the moment school started in January, and I needed to go home to study. My father accepted my reason and we all returned to Hong Kong.

# 7

## Towards Racial Harmony: The Hong Kong Country Club

**B**ack in 1927, when Father returned from England at the age of twenty-two, he wanted to join the Hong Kong Club, which used to be called the Hong Kong British Club until the end of the nineteenth century. He was turned down because he was Chinese. He never forgot this refusal. Later, when he was asked to join, he declined the offer. As I grew older, I came to understand his feelings.

One day after school in the 1950s, I was introduced to two visitors, Governor Sir Alexander and Lady Grantham. Lady Grantham was a friendly American who told me that I looked just like Father. Before they left, they came into my room to say goodbye, and Lady Grantham said to me that I looked just like Mother. Then she said, "Now, what am I saying? I guess you look like both your parents." After they left, Father said, "Don't mention this visit to anyone in school. The governor is not supposed to be a guest in a Chinese home." I wondered about the fact that we were, in effect, second-class citizens, in a place we called home.

## A Multi-Racial Club

Soon after the war, Father and some of his friends came together to discuss forming a multi-racial family social club in Hong Kong. Historically, and well into the 1960s, access to social clubs in Hong Kong was restricted by one's race, nationality or religion. The Hong Kong Club, the Chinese Club, the Jewish Recreational Club, the Club Lusitano for Portuguese, the German Club and the American Club kept the different races separate. The exceptions were the cosmopolitan clubs that only catered to sports or special interests.

The formation of a multi-racial club was the work of Father and his friends over a period of fifteen years. In the forefront were Father, his close friend, J. R. Jones, legal advisor to the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, and D.F. Landale, the taipan of Jardine Matheson. Landale, who had unsuccessfully campaigned for the Chinese to be admitted to both the Hong Kong Club and the Shek-O Country Club in the late 1940s, provided two hundred dollars to cover the initial expenses of this club.<sup>1</sup> Landale retired in 1956, and his successor, Hugh D.M. Barton, assumed an active role in the formation of the club.

In 1947, Father and J. R. Jones submitted the original plan for the interracial club to D.M. MacDougall, the Colonial Secretary. The government was receptive to the idea of a multi-racial club. The site on Brick Hill was chosen because it was easily accessible to the residents of Hong Kong. A group that included Father, D.M. MacDougall and Sir Arthur Morse, Chief Manager of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, who had been so helpful to Father when Grandfather died, held informal talks. The group estimated that \$1.5 million was required to build the club. J.R. Jones sent letters to various consular representatives, heads of banks and representatives of different nationalities, setting out the broad outline of the scheme of the club.

The planning went smoothly with the informal committee, and in June 1948, a meeting was held in the boardroom of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank to discuss the offer from the government. The government agreed to lease approximately 7.5 acres fronting the sea to the club at an annual rent of \$7,200 for twenty-one years.

A general meeting was called in April 1949. Some of the original members of the informal committee had either left Hong Kong or were on leave, and the composition of the membership changed. At this meeting, the original name of the International Club was replaced by the name Hong Kong Country Club. It was interesting to note that of the fifty-six representatives from the various national communities in the Colony, only two Chinese attended, Father and M.W. Lo. The two confirmed the interest of the Chinese to join once the club was formed. Three sub-committees were formed — Legal, Financial and Building. The Financial Committee, working through a wider Appeal Committee, was able to obtain a total pledge of \$2 million from companies and individuals.

Negotiations with the government continued through 1949, although the formation of the People's Republic of China by the Chinese Communists caused a general feeling of uncertainty in the colony. In 1950, when war broke out in Korea and the United Nations imposed an embargo on shipments from Hong Kong, the committee decided to postpone the development of the club.

In May 1951, the committee wrote to the government, requesting that the site for the club be reserved pending a more favourable outlook. By this time, D.M. MacDougall was no longer the Colonial Secretary, and the government advised the committee that the offer of the site could not remain open indefinitely, and that if other applications for the site were received, an auction would have to be held. This was an unexpected ultimatum. A legation consisting of Father, J.R. Jones, M.W. Lo and G. L. Wilson called on the Colonial Secretary, R.J. Nicoll, and an agreement was reached to reserve the site until January 1952. Thereafter, J.R. Jones would report orally to the government every six months. In the meantime, everything was on hold.

Up to the end of the 1950s, the plans for the Hong Kong Country Club remained unchanged. By May 1958, the acting Colonial Secretary, E.B. Teesdale, again warned that the site would not be reserved indefinitely. The government wanted a concrete proposal as evidence of a firm commitment from the sponsors to build the club. Unfortunately, at

this time, the reaction from the sponsors was discouraging, and it looked as though the club would not be established.

In January 1959, the government gave the committee a deadline of April 1 for the receipt of a concrete proposal. This called for definite action, so Father and J.R. Jones called on two old friends, Sidney Gordon, an accountant with Lowe, Bingham and Matthews, and Y.K. Kan, a lawyer with Lo and Lo, to discuss whether the building of the club was viable. At this meeting, it was agreed that renewed effort should be put into building a club, particularly since so many refugees had arrived from China, and there was a great need for club facilities. J. R. Jones promptly called together as many former members as possible, and a new committee of ten members was formed. Since Jones was fully occupied with the Government Salaries Commission, Hugh Barton agreed to be the convenor, with Third Uncle as secretary.

In May 1959, a General Organizing Committee was formed consisting of five Chinese representatives, three Britons, two Americans, and one representative each from the Portuguese, Dutch, French, Scandinavian, Swiss and Italian communities. A legation consisting of Hugh Barton, J.R. Jones and Father called on the governor to seek his support. The government confirmed its willingness to lease about 5.25 acres at the Brick Hill site to the club at an annual ground rent of \$10 per acre, with a building covenant of \$1 million. Having secured the land, the committee decided to raise the necessary financing by issuing debentures at \$5,000 each. By February 1960, sufficient funds were pledged. By December, when the club was incorporated, 420 interest-free debentures had been issued, and the subscribers were accepted as the first members of the club. From then on, good progress was made under the supervision of architect Eric Cumine, a friend of the Lee family.

In 1962, Father's dream of a multi-racial club for Hong Kong was a reality. Even though the construction was not quite completed, January 29 was picked for the official opening, since it was thought that the Year of the Ox would be a more propitious year for the club opening than the Year of the Tiger. The Hong Kong



Country Club was opened by Chief Justice, Sir Michael Hogan. He said that it was to be:

a place where all nationalities and communities can meet and relax in the pleasant, easy, companionable atmosphere that one is accustomed to find in a club ... Ideas can be interchanged, views expressed and arguments deployed in an atmosphere conducive to goodwill ... I am sure that it will contribute to the future strength and stability of Hong Kong.<sup>2</sup>

Construction was completed in February, and the club opened its doors to members. In September, Jerry O'Donnell, a member of the first General Committee, proposed a fashion show for the members to view twenty of the latest fashions from eight cities from around the world. Mother and Mrs. Hugh Barton were invited to organize a Ladies' Committee to promote the show, and this became the first Entertainments Committee of the Hong Kong Country Club.<sup>3</sup>

## Towards Racial Harmony

Father always believed that there should be harmony among all races. The Hong Kong Country Club was unique because of the membership structure which was an integral part of the club's philosophy, written into its Articles of Association. Admission to both ordinary and junior members would be according to a national quota system in order to maintain the truly international character of the Club: 10 per cent American, 20 per cent English, 50 per cent Chinese, and 20 per cent all other nationalities. However, due to anti-Japanese feelings which still existed in Hong Kong at that time, a special quota had to be created within the last group in order to maintain a truly multi-national character.<sup>4</sup> The chairman of the Club was elected yearly. The first chairman was the Hon. Hugh Barton, and Father followed for the term of 1963–1964.

In 1965, J.R. Jones, Hugh Barton and Father were nominated as honorary life members. The membership was extended to Mother

after Father died. The then chairman, Q.W. Lee (Uncle Quo Wai), in bestowing the honour on J.R. Jones, cited:

the invaluable work that Dr. J.R. Jones had done for the Club ... It can be said that, without Dr. Jones' pervasive and persuasive enthusiasm, it is very doubtful that we would have an international club at all.

J.R. Jones, in turn, said of Father that he had:

worked in close co-operation with myself and was on the original Building Committee of the Club. Richard also worked very hard to get the Club on a sound footing and bring the venture to the successful conclusion that we see today.<sup>5</sup>

Since its opening, the Hong Kong Country Club has become a big part of social life for families in Hong Kong. The club was Father's pride and joy, despite the fact that during its first fifteen years, it struggled to be financially profitable. We had many wonderful lunches and dinners there (the dining rooms serve both Chinese and Western foods). Our children have spent many happy hours at the club during our visits to Hong Kong. We love the congenial and unostentatious atmosphere and it has become a second home for us as well as for many others in Hong Kong.

One Christmas, when we were in Hong Kong, our son Ashley, at the age of three, asked why there was a Santa Claus in Toronto and one in the Hong Kong Country Club, and why the latter had a female voice! Another year, the March break of our children's school happened to coincide with Easter. Our boys will never forget the fun they had at the Easter party with the magic show and egg hunt at the Club.

In the 1970s, when corporate nominee memberships were introduced, the Club became financially profitable, and it earned enough to embark on a complete renovation and beautification program. The understated and congenial atmosphere, the sports facilities, the swimming pools, the children's playground and the children's programs, the restaurants for casual and formal dining and the adult

social programs made it popular, even though new clubs were being started in Hong Kong at the time. With the help of professional management, the Club blossomed. By the 1980s, companies were lining up to pay \$1 million for a corporate nominee membership. Father was a happy man.

## Swimming at the Club

Father was well known for his early morning swim at the Hong Kong Country Club. He would usually arrive around five o'clock, and the pool would be opened especially for him. Whenever we were home visiting, he would return after his swim in time to have breakfast with us. Even with that kind of schedule, he was still the first person to arrive at the office in the morning.

One morning, on his way to swim, Father was stopped by a policeman for a routine check. He was asked to show his I.D. card, which everyone in Hong Kong was supposed to have. Father had never bothered to get one because most people knew Father by sight. I'm sure if he had been chauffeured in an expensive car instead of driving himself in a Volkswagen Golf, he'd never have been stopped. When he returned to the office that morning, he told his secretary about the incident, and asked her to get him a card right away. Although I.D. cards had to be obtained personally, an exception was made for Father.

During the years when he drove to go swimming at the Country Club, he used to pick up poor schoolchildren from the area who had to walk to school along his route. He got to know a number of them, and their parents as well. One morning, one of the children he usually drove was not there. The child's father was waiting for him instead and he begged Father to help his sick wife. Father took them to the hospital, and saw that she was cared for.

In 1972, when Hong Kong Land wished to take over Dairy Farm, Father was asked to help. Dairy Farm's chairman and major shareholder was Sir S.N. Chau, a good friend of Father's. Hong Kong Land chairman Henry Keswick, nephew of Father's old friend, John Keswick, former head of the Jardine Group, came looking for Father. Since it was

very difficult to get an appointment to see Father in his office, Henry Keswick decided to go early in the morning to the Country Club to catch Father while he was swimming. He followed Father along the edge of the pool as he swam back and forth, and tried to convince him to assist. His persistence paid off, and the takeover was successful. Hong Kong Land Company Ltd. and Dairy Farm, Ice & Cold Storage Company Limited merged in December 1972.<sup>6</sup> After that, everyone teased Henry Keswick about how nice it was of his Uncle Dick to help him take over Dairy Farm.<sup>7</sup>

# 8

## The Lee Family: Business Projects

**R**ebuilding the family business after the war was a slow process. To start with, many of our property records had been lost. Father's first secretary after the war, Violet Kong (who later married one of Father's cousins and became Aunt Violet), used to follow Father to the Land Registry Office to look for the original records. Father's Eighth Uncle (a cousin of Grandfather's) worked there and was able to help. However, the work was complicated by the fact that the properties had been registered under different names by Grandfather when he purchased them. Some were under Grandmother's name, others under the names of Lee Hysan Estate Company or Lee Cheuk Yu Tong, the latter is the collective name representing all of Grandfather's descendants.<sup>1</sup>

Many of our properties were in bad condition because of the war. Some of the older buildings were so out-dated that they did not even have flush toilets. After the war, landlords were not allowed to raise rents above prewar levels, so most landlords could not afford to repair or upgrade their buildings; some could barely cover their taxes. Some of our old apartments had rented for as little as twenty dollars a month before the war. Moreover, during the Japanese occupation, some old tenants had gone to China, and others had moved into the empty apartments. There was a prevalence of multiple occupancy and



multi-layered subletting that further complicated matters. It was difficult to establish who the legal tenants were.<sup>2</sup>

Those who profited from this situation were tenants who paid pre-war rents and sublet their apartments at current rates. Businesses that occupied older premises benefited from the 10 to 12 per cent rise in prices of products which, unlike rents, were not controlled.

The problem of what to do with the prewar buildings was not solved until the mid 1950s. On March 19, 1956, Father was elected Chairman of the Hong Kong Association of Property Owners. Since the Lee family owned a lot of prewar properties, he was able to speak out for landlords in the same predicament. Father appealed to the government to allow rent increases that would be fair to both tenants and landlords.<sup>3</sup>

Our family company, Lee Hysan Estate Company, moved into an old building, Alexander House, in 1946. It was put under the management of Tsui Gang Bo, who later became Uncle Tsui to us. I particularly remember the creaky floors in the building. Throughout their lives, the Lee brothers had their offices together. Sometimes after school, I would go there to wait for Father to go home, and one of my favourite pastimes was to play with the typewriter. Cousin Hon Chiu remembers how impressed he was that Third Uncle had a window unit air-conditioner in his own office, which was considered very progressive right after the war.

There were two rental offices. One office, Lee Cheuk Yu Tong, collected rent from properties belonging to Grandmother. The other, Lee Doong, collected rent for Lee Hysan Estate Company.<sup>4</sup> As cousin Peter Lee told me, everything in the family company was done in the old-fashioned way for years after the war, agreements and decisions were by word of mouth or recorded on bits of paper that have since been lost. Peter, a lawyer and a director, has been general manager of the family company since the early 1980s. He has tried very hard to look for past company documents, such as land title deeds or company meeting minutes or contracts for our buildings, but with little success.<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of the 1970s, the Lee brothers decided to abandon their conservative approach to business.<sup>6</sup> Through his friend the Hon.

J.D. Clague, Father was introduced to Chan Tak Tai, a developer who had been very successful in the development of the Chungking (Chongqing) Mansion in Kowloon. Chan suggested to Father that the family form joint ventures in developing two buildings in the Causeway Bay area, One Hysan Avenue and Leighton Centre, with Lee Hysan Estate putting up the land, and investors putting up the capital. Chan himself invested a small percentage.<sup>7</sup> In 1970, a private company, Hennessy Development Co. Ltd., was incorporated.

Up to that point, all our postwar buildings had been wholly owned by the family company and built by Lam Woo Construction because of the friendship between the two families. From the beginning of the 1970s on, building plans were sent out for tender. The new approach also demanded fresh blood in the family business. The first person the Lee brothers turned to was the eldest grandson, Hon Chiu. In 1976, while Hon Chiu was working for the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) in the United States, Fourth Uncle asked him to return to Hong Kong to help. Hon Chiu was in his forties with a growing family. He agreed to return to Hong Kong, but his wife, Doris, stayed on in the States so that their children could continue their education without interruption.

## The Lee Theatre

The Lee Theatre was back in operation by 1946. International Entertainment was again under general manager Yuen Yaohong and manager Dong Zi Jun. At the end of the war, C.T. Wu was still working with the Overseas Union Bank of Singapore and was about to be sent to the branch in Shanghai, but Father convinced him that he would have a better future with us. So he came back to Hong Kong and became the house manager of the Lee Theatre. The theatre was renovated and a high quality screen, good lighting and comfortable seats were installed.<sup>8</sup>

There was no television in those days, and it was a treat for all the Lee children to go on Sunday mornings to the Lee Theatre to see cartoons and the Three Stooges. Box B, the best box in the theatre, was reserved for the family. We seldom went to other theatres because the

Lee Theatre showed some of the best movies in town. I sometimes went to see American feature films with other family members, but until I was able to understand enough English, they were not very meaningful, except for Tarzan and cowboy movies. Cantonese movies gradually gained popularity, but they were all sad. Most of them were about suffering in the last war. I stopped going to those because I didn't believe in crying when I wanted to be entertained. By then, I had noticed that Father never went to movies. He was much more interested in working.

In 1948, International Entertainment was asked to be the distributor in China for the London Film Company. Armed with four blockbusters which had been shown at the Lee Theatre with overwhelming success — *The Thief of Bagdad*, *Lady Hamilton*, *The Four Feathers* and *Elephant Boy* — general manager Yuen Yaohong and house manager C.T. Wu went to Shanghai, but the response was very disappointing. The theatres in Shanghai did not seem to know how popular these movies were in the rest of the world. The two men didn't even make enough money on that trip to cover their expenses.<sup>9</sup> However, while they were there, they made some important contacts with producer Xia Yunhu and director Cai Chusheng, who wanted to establish good relations with the Lee family, and subsequently sent the films *Yi Jiang Chun Shui Xiang Dong Liu* (*A River of Spring Water Flowing to the East*) and *Ba Qian Li Lu Yun He Yue* (*Eight Thousand Miles of Cloud and Moon*) to be shown in the Lee Theatre. These very sad movies, which depicted the life of the Chinese during the war and were critical of the actions of the Nationalist government in China, became great hits in Hong Kong. Despite their sympathy towards the Communists, both producer and director were later killed during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>10</sup>

Not long after Yuen and Wu left, Shanghai was liberated by the Communists.

The performance of Chinese operas in the Lee Theatre was on the decline, despite the fact that, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the most celebrated performances in Cantonese opera from the innovative Sin Fung Ming Company, which was very highly regarded by both the community and local government, were held there. At the same time, the Lee Theatre became a favourite venue for stage performances from

different parts of the world. I especially loved Xavier Cougat and Abby Lane and their troop of Latin American dancers. The theatre also presented magic shows, and later, international beauty contests. In the early 1970s, after the Lee Gardens Hotel was built, the beauty contestants were always housed there. Mother's sisters used to love to go to The Lee Gardens to see the beauty contestants. At the end of the 1980s, Fourth Uncle and I were passing the Lee Theatre one day, and he told me about the International Chinese Beauty Contest that had taken place in the theatre that year. He said, "One of the contestants was from Scarborough, Ontario," and I told him that I had been one of the judges in the competition held by the Scarborough Chinese Business Association which chose that particular contestant.

The accountant for International Entertainment was Grandfather Wong who worked until he was over eighty years old. Father kept him in that position just so that he would have something to do. He was pampered whenever he was in the office. He remained very bright into his late eighties and he died at the age of ninety-two.<sup>11</sup>

## Property Development

The perennial problem facing building developers in Hong Kong was the lack of flat land. It was the same with the Lee family. If we wanted to erect more buildings, we had to level the Lee Gardens hill and obtain dumping rights from the government. Before the Second World War, a small part of the Lee Gardens hill had been levelled and the soil moved to North Point for landfill. We then purchased that piece of land from the government and built two factories, a nail factory and a paint factory called Duro Paint. The nail factory was subsequently sold to another Chinese manufacturer. Duro Paint was sold to Swire<sup>12</sup> in 1948, and Duro Paint Holding Co.<sup>13</sup> was formed. The Lee Hysan Estate Company was given shares in lieu of payment, resulting in the family being one of the largest shareholders of Swire. This was the beginning of a long and meaningful relationship between the family and the Swire Group. Fourth Uncle was a director of Swire Industries, and Third Uncle became a director of Cathay Pacific (owned by Swire Pacific).<sup>14</sup>

The first postwar real-estate development by Lee Hysan Estate Company was the further levelling of the Lee Gardens hill. The Hong Kong government gave permission for dumping in Chai Wan and Aberdeen. Opening up the area also meant building roads. Hysan Avenue, named after Grandfather, became the main avenue; Lan Fong Road, named after Grandmother, was the one behind it. Other streets were named Sunning, Sunwui, Hoiping and Yunping, after the Szeyup counties in China which formed the nucleus of our ancestral and neighbouring villages. Pak Sar Road was named after Chan Pak Sar (Chen Buosha), a famous scholar in the Ming Dynasty from Sunwui, our ancestral village, and Kai Chiu Road was named after Liang Kai Chiu (Liang Qichao), another famous scholar at the beginning of this century from Sunwui. And of course, there had to be a Lee Gardens Road. These were all private roads that were subsequently turned over to the government.

One day in the 1950s, after we moved from the Lee Building to Embassy Court on Hysan Avenue, Father was driving me to school. As he was making a turn from Hoiping Road to Hysan Avenue, a man was taking his time crossing the road. Father, being very impatient, said to him, "Hurry up!" The man said, "I can take as long as I want. It's not your road." To which Father replied, "It *is* my road!"

In order to finance new buildings, the family sold some of our very old row-houses and apartments. The first postwar apartment building put up by the family company was Sunning Court, on the south side of Hysan Avenue. Sunning Court was the first building in Hong Kong that sold apartments outright.<sup>15</sup> It was built in a U-shape, with the bottom of the U facing Hysan Avenue. The part of the building with the frontage on Hysan Avenue was sold to Kwong Lee Enterprises, a company owned jointly by Lee Hysan Estate Co. and Shanghai Commercial Bank. It ran a small hotel called Sunning House, with fifty-two rooms. Father was the chairman of Kwong Lee, and its directors were Third Uncle, Tsui Gang Bo, Zhu Rutang and Wang Changlin of the Shanghai Commercial Bank.<sup>16</sup>

Sunning House opened for business in 1949 with C.T. Wu as manager. The Communist takeover of China had made it into an instant success. The connection with the Shanghai Commercial Bank helped



bring many of the important Shanghai industrialists who came down to Hong Kong to stay there.<sup>17</sup> It became a landmark and its Champagne Room was the hottest spot in Hong Kong throughout the 1950s. There, guests could dine elegantly and dance to the beautiful music of the Three Bubbles, which was carried on Rediffusion<sup>18</sup> every Wednesday night. Guests had to be well dressed to be admitted into the Champagne Room, and gentlemen had to wear ties. I remember a humorous write-up in the newspaper in the mid 1950s about a minister of the church wearing a Roman collar, who was not allowed in because he was not wearing a tie. The Champagne Room was patronized by visiting movie stars, such as Hedy Lamarr, Clark Gable, Ava Gardner, William Holden and Rita Hayworth. A popular night spot for locals and for visitors, it was said that if you had not been to the Champagne Room, you had not been to Hong Kong.<sup>19</sup>

The next major project of the Lee family was Embassy Court on Hysan Avenue. It was the first high-rise owned by the family. When it was completed, my family, Fifth Uncle and his family and Third Grandmother moved into the building. Following that was the building of Caroline Mansion, at the intersection of Hysan Avenue and Yunping Road. When that was completed, the rest of the Lees who had been living in the Lee Building moved in.

The Lee Building was rented to outsiders, as it had been in Grandfather's day. It was an unwritten tradition in the Lee family that every member of Grandfather's family — wife, concubines and children — had free accommodation in family-owned buildings, and everyone got to choose where they wanted to live. Because of this tradition, family members tended to live very close to one another. This tradition does not extend to my generation.

In 1954, the Lee family built two more high-rise buildings, Tower Court and Caroline Mansion, just a few steps away from Embassy Court. On the weekends, whenever we were not on our launch, Father would go to check the new buildings. He would walk all the way to the top to see that the workers were doing their jobs properly.

My favourite haunts in the 1950s were the Lee Theatre, the Champagne Room in Sunning House and the soft drinks factory of Spa Foods Company Limited, also owned by the Lee family after the

war. As children, we used to visit Spa and watch the bottling process with fascination. We could naturally drink whatever we wanted. The best seller at the time was the grape drink,<sup>20</sup> but my favourite was the red drink which I thought was cherry, but was really only coloured sugar water.

In 1953, Seventh Uncle came back to Hong Kong after graduating from Boston University. Together with Third Uncle, he bought the majority shares from Spa and formed the General Bottling Company. From then on, the Lee Hysan Estate Company only had a nominal share in Spa. In 1955, General Bottling secured the franchise for Schweppes, and a year later, the franchise for 7-Up, and subsequently a Japanese beer. The children in the family continued to be welcome to visit the factory, and any soft drink that we wanted would be delivered to our homes. Seventh Uncle became very successful. He used to ride in the delivery trucks (in American style) to the chagrin of the locals.<sup>21</sup> I still remember trucks driving up to St. Paul's Co-educational College during recess and handing out free 7-Up. A brilliant marketing ploy. Seventh Uncle named 7-Up as Seven Happinesses in Chinese. Because of its lucky name, 7-Up was served at all Chinese celebrations.

## The Lee Gardens Hotel

By the late 1950s, the Lee Gardens hill was completely flattened. One of the people from our village in China, who was using part of the land for keeping honeybees, was worried that once the land was built on, he would have nowhere to keep his bees, and he went to the Lee brothers to express his concern. He was allowed to carry on his business on a piece of land in Sha Tin which was in the name of Lee Shiu Yuen, Grandfather's young cousin.<sup>22</sup>

The development of the first phase of what was later known as the Lee Gardens Hotel began in 1964. The original plan was to build a residential complex with an office podium. The office portion, consisting of the first six floors, was built and rented mainly to the Medical and Education Departments of the Hong Kong government. The ground floor was let to commercial establishments. However, construction of the residential component was stopped, because of

the Cultural Revolution in China and the subsequent 1967 riots in Hong Kong. At the end of the 1960s, with the completion of the Cross Harbour tunnel whose exit was nearby, and because of the shortage of hotel rooms in Hong Kong at the time, the family decided that a hotel should be built. A nine-hundred-room hotel above the podium was completed at the end of 1971.<sup>23</sup>

The Lee Gardens Hotel was a private company, with Lee Hysan Estate Company as the major shareholder. Some of the other shareholders were Swire Pacific, Hong Kong Bank, Hong Kong Land, Tai Cheung Development and A.P. Møller. Swire chairman H.J.C. Browne was invited to be the first chairman of the Lee Gardens Hotel Company.<sup>24</sup> He was followed by Third Uncle. After the sudden death of Third Uncle, Father became chairman. Father was involved in the hotel right from the beginning as a director. Through his personal connections with China the original carpets for the hotel lobby were custom-ordered from Tianjin. Because of Father's connection with the Japanese community, tour groups from Japan always stayed at our hotel.

At the time, the Lee Gardens Hotel was one of the few locally managed hotels of international standard. It was initially associated with Forum Hotels, a division of Intercontinental.<sup>25</sup> Over the years, the hotel became the favourite of Asian tourists due to its location in Causeway Bay. The hotel once again put the name Lee Gardens on the map of Hong Kong.

As Mother was getting on in years, it became too much work for her to entertain at home, so when the hotel opened, my parents entertained almost exclusively there.

There were different restaurants in the Lee Gardens Hotel, but my parents' favourite was the Chinese restaurant, the Rainbow Room. When they had parties, they would usually reserve a private room (with a round table seating twenty-four guests), or take over the entire restaurant. My parents were very proud of the standard of the cuisine there, and Father always said that the Peking Duck was number one in Hong Kong, and better than in Beijing. He liked to point out to guests any special dishes introduced from mainland China. Friends from all over the world were invited to the Lee Gardens Rainbow Room.

With the completion of the Lee Gardens Hotel, the entire area of what was the Lee Gardens was developed. Along Hysan Avenue was planted a row of Bauhinia, which is now the symbol of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Trees with yellow flowers were planted on the side roads, which were named after ancestral villages. Father showed them to me with pride, not only because they were usually in bloom when we visited in the winter, but also because he had them specially brought in from south China.

### Father and Hon Chiu

When Hon Chiu returned to Hong Kong, the family company had just moved into its premises in the newly completed office building, One Hysan Avenue. Hon Chiu was able to learn how to manage an office building. Although Third Uncle wanted Hon Chiu to keep an eye on the staff on the twenty-second floor, Father gave him an office on the twenty-first floor with all the uncles, a corner office overlooking the construction of Leighton Centre.<sup>26</sup> Father gave him the responsibility of overseeing the actual construction of the building, taking over the responsibility Father used to impose on himself during the construction of our former buildings.

Hon Chiu had coffee with Father every day and gave his report, which “must not be longer than fifteen minutes.” Father was an impatient man. He needed to know about progress, and if Hon Chiu ran into any difficulty, Father could usually solve it for him within half an hour because of his extensive connections.<sup>27</sup> Father also suggested that Hon Chiu join the Hong Kong Country Club. It had a long waiting list, but since Father was a founding member, there was no problem for his nephew to join. Father also introduced him to many of his good friends, such as Geoffrey M.T. Yeh and Yao Kang,<sup>28</sup> who turned out to be extremely helpful to him for years to come, and for which he was very thankful.

Every Sunday throughout the year, Father and Hon Chiu would spend the day on our launch. By the late 1970s, Mother had lost interest in the launch, and seldom went out with them, but if any of us were in Hong Kong, we loved to go along. Father no longer liked

staying out late, so his habit was always to return to Queen's Pier around four in the afternoon. Father was grooming Hon Chiu for future leadership of the Lee family's many enterprises.

In 1978, a directive (not an order) was received by Lee Hysan Estate Company from the Hong Kong government to build on our empty land along Hennessy Road. There had never been any rush among the Lee brothers to build on this site.<sup>29</sup> In 1976, Third Uncle had held discussions with the Citibank about a joint venture to build an apartment building on the land, but the talks fell through. Now the area around it had been built up, but our land remained empty. People in Hong Kong were wondering why the Lee brothers didn't develop the land since it was so valuable. The truth was that nobody had the time, so no one bothered. Now that nephew Hon Chiu was back in Hong Kong, it became his responsibility to supervise the development of this project, known as Hennessy Centre, on Yee Wo Street, under the company name of Hennessy Development. It was again a joint venture between Lee Hysan Estate Company and investors.

When the foundation of Hennessy Centre was first excavated, Hon Chiu would go to the site every weekday, as well as after the launch picnic on Sunday. Sometimes Father would go along with him. The excavation dragged on, because the construction crew was having trouble reaching bedrock. It was very puzzling for both the foundation builder and for Professor S. Mackey, a retired engineering professor from Hong Kong University, who was hired as the consultant. In the meantime, Father was extremely impatient and was getting after everyone, including Hon Chiu. So, every weekday, after morning coffee with Father, Hon Chiu would call Professor Mackey to see if there was any progress that day. As Hon Chiu laughingly told me, "If you haven't reached bedrock, you haven't reached it. Getting after people wouldn't make it any faster!"

Finally, one day, Professor Mackey decided to go to the bottom of the hole to check the situation with the structural engineer Stanley Weber from Eric Cumine's architectural firm. He assessed the situation and gave his "O.K." for the foundation to be built. And that was good enough for everyone. Hon Chiu said, "When Professor Mackey said 'O.K.', it's O.K.!"



The Lee brothers disagreed over the plans for the top and the bottom floors. Fourth Uncle wanted the lower floors built as a theatre for Chinese opera and performances of Chinese music, but this was considered an unprofitable proposition by the rest of the brothers. Finally nephew Hon Chiu had the plans redrawn to the satisfaction of all the uncles. Hon Chiu moved the original carpark from the basement to the lower floors, and the basement became retail space. After many discussions, it was finally agreed that the top two floors would be retained for rental to a private club, and it was taken up by the Japanese Club. It was not unusual for the Lee brothers to disagree over family business, but matters were always settled within the family, and they always presented a united front to the community.<sup>30</sup> The Hennessy Centre was completed in 1981.

The next project was the redevelopment of Sunning Plaza. The property consisted of Sunning House, the small hotel with its main entrance on Hysan Avenue, and Sunning Court behind, which contained more than sixty apartments. Every apartment owner was a shareholder of Associated Property. Presentations were made to the shareholders, and after many questions and various disagreements, votes were taken. Hon Chiu noted that that was the only time in the seventy-four-year history of Lee Hysan Estate Co. Ltd. (the company founded by Grandfather in January 1924) that votes had to be counted, because of the involvement of so many outside shareholders. In 1980, the Sunning Plaza project, with I.M. Pei as architect, was begun.

## The Public Company

Because the ownership of Leighton Centre, One Hysan Avenue, Hennessy Centre and Sunning Plaza and Sunning Court was split between investors and Lee Hysan Estate Co. Ltd., in many different shareholding structures, the Lee brothers decided to consolidate and create a public development company. The original Hennessy Development Co. Ltd., which was incorporated in 1970, became Hysan Development Company Ltd. in 1981,<sup>31</sup> and obtained listing on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in August, issuing 500 million ordinary shares. Father was the chairman of the company. Hon Chiu and

Fourth Uncle formed a committee to take care of details, and every day, Hon Chiu gave Father his progress report over coffee.<sup>32</sup>

Wardley Limited, our merchant banker, advised the family that it would be more attractive to investors of Hysan Development if, in addition to rent collecting, there were other activities, such as buying and selling properties for further developments. Wardley suggested the injection of the property known as the Big House and the Lee Building, our ancestral homes with its surrounding gardens (74-86 Kennedy Road)<sup>33</sup> wholly owned by Lee Hysan Estate Co., into Hysan Development Co. Evaluations were done by Jones Lang Wootton. Since Hysan Development did not have the cash to buy the property, the property was exchanged for deferred shares in the company for the family in the amount of \$875 million. When Hysan Development took over the property, it was developed in 1985 into a luxury residential complex known as Bamboo Grove, which consisted of 345 apartments. Again, many family members moved into this new complex, including Mother after Father passed away.

When Hysan Development first went on the market in 1981, its shares were valued at one dollar. From then on, the Hong Kong market started to slump and the shares gradually went down to as low as thirty-nine cents. One reason was the death of Chen Tak Tai, one of the big shareholders. His son David, who held his shares, decided to sell all of them, thus bringing down the value. Both Father, as chairman, and Hon Chiu, as the managing director, had a lot of responsibilities and worries. Father appealed publicly to the shareholders not to sell, reassuring them that the value would go up again. Time proved him right.

One day in the early 1980s, while out on our launch, Father told Hon Chiu that “if nobody says anything bad about you, you are already doing very well. Don’t expect anyone to praise you for what you do.” Hon Chiu said that these were some of Father’s words of wisdom that he would always remember. After Father passed away in 1983, the chairmanship of Hysan Development went for a few years to Fourth Uncle, who then passed it on to Hon Chiu,<sup>34</sup> who remains chairman today.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Hong Kong faced a major economic downturn. I remember seeing pessimism everywhere, except in my

own family. Father, of course, had never-ending faith in the future of Hong Kong. These were the years when Britain and China started talks for the return of Hong Kong to China. From the mid-1980s on, Hysan Development continued to buy more and more properties for development, not only in Hong Kong, but also in China, Singapore and San Francisco. The stock market gradually turned around, but Father never lived to see the great prosperity gained by Hong Kong in the early 1990s.

With the development of Caroline Centre, a joint venture between Hang Seng Bank and Hysan Development, the company shares went up to thirty-two dollars in 1994. Hysan Development, controlled by Lee Hysan Estate Co., the oldest Chinese property company in Hong Kong, is highly respected in the business world and is regarded as one of the top ten property companies in Southeast Asia. With its conservative policy and the high-end tenants it attracts, Hysan Development is regarded as a “boutique” property company.<sup>35</sup> Father would have been very proud of its achievements.

At the end of 1997, the Hong Kong stock market had another downturn because of the economic crisis in Asia. Although share prices of Hysan Development Company dropped, the profits of the company continued to increase and its future remains bright.

# 9

## A Daughter Grows Up

By 1954, my parents were planning to move from Embassy Court to Tower Court, a new high-rise the Lee family was building on Hysan Avenue. Again we were going to occupy the penthouse, which took up the entire top floor and half of the floor below. We moved in 1955.

### Grandmother's Funeral

At the beginning of 1956, Grandmother became very ill. When she died in early summer at the age of seventy-six, the Lee family held a traditional Buddhist funeral for her. Her body was kept on ice for forty-nine days in the pagoda by the fountain of Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, in the garden of the Big House. Matsheds built of bamboo and straw matting were erected in the bamboo garden next to it. The right side was reserved for the men in the family and the left side for the women. Robes of black or white were worn by the descendants who took turns keeping watch over the body. As a granddaughter, I wore white when I went every day after school. We had very plain rice and vegetables for dinner, and we all ate together in the matshed, sitting on the raised floor covered with woven straw.

Near the end of the forty-nine days, groups of monks and nuns were hired to burn incense, and chant and pray for her. I believe they were from different Buddhist denominations because they wore different types of robes. On the day of the funeral, the procession lasted for hours. Afterwards, we all went back to the Big House. I was told that the soul would leave the body in the form of a bird or a butterfly. As I was standing in the main hall and looking at Grandmother's picture hanging in the centre of the end wall, I suddenly saw a butterfly flutter towards it, stop on the photograph and then fly out to the terrace, and then it was gone.

That night, before we all gathered for dinner, paper objects were burnt in the terrace to send to Grandmother in the other world. The most important was a paper bridge, without which she couldn't reach the other side. Other paper objects were in the shape of servants, a big house, gold and silver money and a car. I was watching with fascination while these objects were being burnt, when Fifth Aunt's husband, Uncle Y.H. Kan, came up to me and said, "I guess Grandmother is going to the United States. The car has a left-hand drive!"

Then, we had a family dinner in the Big House. I remember Mother and all the aunts had to wear special dull-coloured costumes for that particular event, because the body had been buried and the family had entered another stage of mourning.

A few days later, all the sons returned to the Big House after dinner because the spirit would be coming home. They walked around the house and the garden, making sure the spirit knew that they were there. And while they were in the garden, they said to one another jokingly that they had better not relieve themselves since they couldn't see where the spirit was.

I remember that Hon Chiu was about to marry an American, Doris, in the United States when Grandmother died. Once they were married, he would be allowed to remain in the States to work. By Chinese tradition, descendants of the deceased were not allowed to marry during the period of mourning. With his usual good sense, Father put a stop to any objection from the family by saying that whoever objected to



the wedding would have to offer Hon Chiu an equally good job in Hong Kong. So Hon Chiu got married and remained in the United States for the next twenty years.

## Father and My British Education

Father had benefited a great deal from his studies and experiences in England, and he believed that what was good for him would be equally good for his children. At the beginning of the 1950s, he had sent my older brother and sister to England, but because of my different temperament, Father kept me at home. When I was fifteen years old, it was decided that I, too, would go to school in England.

In August 1956, my parents saw me off at Kai Tak airport. That was when Hong Kong was still in the process of building a much-needed new runway, which had been under discussion since the end of the 1940s. The airport at that time was very small and quite primitive. There was only one doorway for arrivals and departures.<sup>1</sup>

I flew to England with my sister and a friend, David K.P. Li.<sup>2</sup> My sister and David were returning to England after the summer holidays. It was my first time away from home.

I had heard of London fog, but never quite knew what to expect until our plane touched down in London. It was in the evening, and I couldn't see anything. Not only could I not see, I was choking on yellow smog. We were met by Uncle Ley On, Father's old friend, with his Bentley, driven by his Burmese chauffeur, Ah Ong. We stayed for a few days with him and his wife, Aunt Betsy, in their lovely house with a beautiful garden in Surrey, outside London. It was in Uncle Ley On's restaurant that I first came across the Chinese dish called "Chop Suey." I wanted to know what it was, so I ordered it, but the waiter wouldn't give it to me. He said that it was not for the Chinese; it was just a name for left-overs.

Between 1956 and 1958, I attended Upper Chine School in Shanklin, on the Isle of Wight, in southern England. I was sent there to join my sister. The total number of students in this exclusive private girls' school was just over two hundred, from Grade One to Upper Six (Grade Thirteen). Most of the teachers were excellent, and

the more advanced students were put into special classes. The smallest class I was in was the mathematics class of two students, myself and a girl from Thailand.

The school was situated on the upper part of the Chine River, which was more a brook than a river. The school grounds, maintained by ten full-time gardeners, were very beautiful. During the summer holidays, the grounds were open to the public. In the spring, daffodils adorned the river-banks. During the summer term if it was warm enough, we would sometimes have our classes out of doors. Roses bloomed throughout the summer and fall. But in the winter, everything was grey, cold and miserable.

When I went to Upper Chine, I skipped a year from Form Three (Grade Nine) to Form Five (Grade Eleven). Since I was expected to go to Oxford, I had to take six "O" (Ordinary) level examinations at one time. I wrote the examinations in my first year, as well as the "A" (Advanced) level Chinese examination. In the following year, I took many more. My parents were very pleased with my academic progress because I came first in my class, but I was not happy.

What bothered me was not so much the school but the British public-school system. For a person like me who already had self-discipline and an artistic flair, the system just didn't work. I hated to be told what to do at what time and on what day. I needed time and space of my own and that was not possible when six to eight girls shared a room. Lights had to be out at a prescribed time at night. We were told when to eat, when to sleep, when to write our parents, when to bathe (three times a week; the weekend was free, so I managed to bathe five times a week instead of daily as I was used to at home), and almost when to breathe — that was when we were supposed to go outside for recess no matter how cold it was. In the afternoon, we were supposed to do sports. Since I hated sports, I always went for walks with some of the girls from the Middle Eastern countries who hated sports too.

I was always hungry and cold because there was no heating. We had to sleep with the windows open even in the winter with snow flying in. I slept with layers of clothing, and nine blankets on top and a hot-water bottle at my feet. Fearing that I didn't have enough fresh fruit in my diet, Father arranged for me to have two apples every day

which I picked up in the kitchen during recess. And knowing that I was always hungry, he arranged to have Cadbury send me boxes of chocolate biscuits every term. But any food sent to the students could be eaten only on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. Those were the only years in my life when I became heavy, and I had chilblains on my fingers and toes.

I also didn't believe in a school for girls only. I felt it a very artificial environment with a lot of silliness that wouldn't exist in a co-educational school. No matter how well I did academically, or how much I liked my teachers, I didn't feel that I belonged there.

Mother came to visit us in England in spring 1957. She first went to see my older brother, Richard, who was in school in Nottingham. When she saw him, she felt something was not right. He was showing signs of mental illness that no one in the school seemed to have noticed. She asked to have him seen by a psychiatrist, and from then on, my parents' lives were never the same.

Since mental illness was something my parents couldn't cope with, they seldom talked about it. As a result, I knew little about my brother's condition. During my second year at Upper Chine, Richard was hospitalized outside London. That year, I made a Christmas cake in my Domestic Science class, the only Christmas cake I've made in my life. During the holidays, I went with an aunt living in England at the time to take Richard the cake. I felt that our childhood closeness was starting to come apart. His condition sometimes improved, and he had some good years, but his illness often caused him to stay away from family members. Only a number of years later did I learn that his condition was schizophrenia, which strikes about one child in a hundred, and which usually manifests itself in the late teens or early twenties.

During my second year at Upper Chine, I wrote my parents to say that I was leaving at the end of that year, and that I would finish my last year of high school at St. Paul's Co-educational College. I didn't list the reasons why, because I didn't want my parents to try to dissuade me. I was a wilful child.

Father was very disappointed because he believed in the English public-school system. To most people it was almost an admission of failure. However, that year, I came first again in my class. Besides

adding many more “O” levels to my credit, I also passed the “O-A” level in Mathematics with high marks.

I went home to Hong Kong in the summer of 1958 and did my last year of school at St. Paul’s. Father had very little to say to me at first, because he was still upset by my leaving England. I guess he also knew that I didn’t intend to return to England for university as he had originally hoped. The direction in my life had also changed. I decided that I didn’t want to study mathematics as my teachers at Upper Chine had recommended. (Mother thought I was such a good student that I should study law, but Father did not express an opinion.) Instead I wanted to study arts subjects, and take history at university. Because of my change of direction, and also the change of school system, I had to do two years’ work in one in order to write my Matriculation examinations. I borrowed notes from my old school friends to catch up, but the results were not as good as before.

In 1958, my sister entered Oxford to study medicine, and Sixth Uncle returned from the United States after getting his Ph.D. at Princeton. He suggested that since I didn’t want to return to England, I should apply to colleges in the United States. Father put a stop to that. He said that no child of his would be educated in the United States. I did not know why he was so anti-American. I applied to two Canadian universities, McGill University in Montreal and University of Toronto. It was Father who decided that I was to go to McGill.

That year, I was working so hard that I was hardly aware of what was happening in Hong Kong. I used to study in our roof garden, besides going out on the launch, which by now was the *Atalanta*, smaller than the *Fortuna*. The only other child left at home was my younger brother, Christopher. Our last coxswain, Ho Ning, came to work for us then and remained with us for over twenty years. My parents no longer wanted large groups of guests on our launch picnics, especially when I wasn’t there to do the inviting. For relaxation from studying, I again turned to painting water-colours. It was then that I started drawing faces.

This was also the year that I asked my parents not to call me “May” any more, and to call me by my given first name, Vivienne, the name I always used in school. Mother said, “It is a little late for us to make

the change now, but when you go to Canada, no one knows that we call you May, and people will only know you as Vivienne.”

I was growing up, and would make many more decisions for myself.

## McGill, Marriage and Family

In August 1959, Mother and I flew to Canada. As usual, Father made all the travel arrangements. We went first to the west coast, then to the Rockies. Mother’s cousin Ethel and her husband, Bill Poy, invited us to stay with them in Ottawa and Bill and his son, Neville, came to meet us at the Toronto airport. We stayed in Toronto and visited Niagara Falls, then drove to Ottawa for a few days. From there, Mother and I flew to Montreal. Once I was settled in residence at McGill University, Mother left for New York, and went home via England, where she visited my older brother and sister.

I entered McGill as a sophomore, and Neville was in his final year of medicine there. The years at McGill were wonderful, but I spent so much time with Neville that I did not do as well as I should have academically. My priorities were different then. Mother wasn’t happy because she had other plans for me, but Father was not opposed to my going out with Neville because he always appreciated able people.

In 1961, Neville wrote to Father to ask for my hand in marriage. Father thought it was rather premature since I was still in university. Later that year, I wrote to my parents to tell them that I was getting married the following year when I graduated and turned twenty-one. My parents had always known me to be headstrong but sensible. Father approved of Neville, but Mother was so upset that she didn’t speak to me for years. She wondered why I had chosen a “poor boy.” Knowing that love or happiness cannot be bought, I disagreed with Mother. In the short twenty years of my life, I had met many miserable, wealthy people, and I wanted to be sure that I was not going to join their number. As Neville himself said, he had no assets except for his training and abilities, and that was good enough for me. Besides, I was going to marry the man I loved, and Father understood that.



Since Mother was having nothing to do with my wedding, I had to look after all the arrangements myself, while studying for my final examinations. Neville and I also had to find a place to live. I wanted the graduation and wedding to be timed close together to make it easy for Father to be present for both occasions. In the space of two weeks, I had my twenty-first birthday, my graduation and our wedding. Right after the Convocation, Father asked me why I had only honours and not first-class honours. He didn't realize what stress I had been under in the last few months. However, I appreciated the fact that he believed I was capable of doing better.

Neville was working in burns research at McGill University, teaching anatomy, and getting his master's degree in surgery. The year after our wedding, he went into the plastic surgery training program at McGill. In 1964, he received a Molson Fellowship to spend a year in England, training in the Mount Vernon Hospital in Middlesex, a major plastic surgery centre. During that year, I took courses at the Institute of Archaeology, University of London. It was a wonderful year for both of us. We drove all over central Europe on twenty-five dollars a day, before Neville started at Mount Vernon on July 1.

During our year in England, we were able to see my brother Richard quite frequently. He was in London, married, and had a son. In the spring of 1965, we took a cruise in the Mediterranean, travelling steerage, and drove around Scotland and Wales at Easter. My parents were visiting England and I went to see them, and took Mother a bunch of red roses. She spoke little to me, though Father talked quite a bit. Mother's antagonism made it very awkward for him, and I appreciated his kindness.

That summer Neville and I returned to Montreal, where he continued his training at the Montreal General Hospital. In September, our first son, Ashley, was born. The following year, we began to hear about the separatist movement in Quebec, while the city of Montreal was busy getting ready for Expo 67.

The year 1967 was an important one for us. Neville wrote his fellowship examinations while bombs were going off in public places and mail boxes in Montreal. It was the beginning of the Front for the

Liberation of Quebec (FLQ) crisis in the province. Because of the political unrest, when Neville was offered a staff position in the plastic surgery department at the Scarborough General Hospital, we moved to Ontario, even though Neville had already been offered a junior staff position at McGill.

In February 1968, Mother suffered a minor heart attack. Subsequently, her doctor advised her to take a cruise abroad, so she took her cousin's daughter, Chi Chao, to study in the United States. Mother planned to visit her relatives there as well as in Vancouver. Her heart attack prompted her to get in touch with me and she asked me to go to see her when she arrived in Vancouver. That summer, I took Ashley to Vancouver to see her. Mother's change in attitude towards me made life a great deal easier for Father, and from then on, my parents came to see us every year.

Whenever they visited us, Father always noticed how wonderful Toronto was with all its parks and its residential areas lined with trees. Father loved nature, and often said there weren't enough trees in the populated areas of Hong Kong. Knowing me to be an avid gardener, he often told me about his friend Sir Evelyn de Rothschild, who also loved gardening.

We were living in a rented town-house complex in Toronto when my parents visited in 1970. Neville was the only staff surgeon at the Scarborough General Hospital who didn't own his own house. Father thought it inadequate for a growing family, as we already had two children by then — Ashley and Justin, who was born in 1969. He said we should be in a house with a garden. But I had very particular ideas about the type of house I wanted — I wanted one with an art room connected to the kitchen, and we hadn't been able to find one. A house like that just didn't exist, so we decided to build our own, and we were saving up for it. It had always been important to me to bring up our children with artistic training. I hadn't dreamt of asking my parents for help, but Father generously offered so that we could proceed to build our house on the land we had already purchased.

In the spring of 1972 we moved into our new house. When Father saw our unusually large living room, he offered to have a special

carpet made for it through his connections in Tianjin, who had made the carpets for the lobby of the Lee Gardens Hotel. He told me that a custom-made carpet would take up to a year, but if I wanted it right away, I could have two carpets laid side by side. I chose to have something really special. I was sent books from which to select the style I wanted, and I clipped colour samples from pictures of flowers in a magazine to match the bricks of the living-room wall. Father also asked me to choose a standard-sized carpet for our blue dining room. It did take a year for the large carpet to arrive, but it was worth the wait. It was most kind of Father, not only to have given us the carpets, but also to have gone to all that trouble.

In 1972, Father arranged for my brother Christopher, who had graduated from The Chinese University of Hong Kong, to have international financial training. He was to go to Geneva, then Wall Street. The last stop was Tokyo, where he would work at Yamaichi Securities, and Fuji Bank, whose president, Yoshizane Yuasa, was a friend of Father's.<sup>3</sup> This was to be Christopher's golden opportunity.

Christopher was married and had a son. When he and his family were on their way to New York, they visited us in Toronto and we had a great time together. The strange thing was that he told me during that visit, "Second Sister, I don't think I have long to live. Maybe a maximum of fifteen years. But, I want to make it big before then!" He was overweight, but he had had a check-up just before he left Hong Kong, and had been given a clean bill of health.

One day, not long after Christopher and his family arrived in New York, I got a call from Father saying that Christopher had died. He was only twenty-five years old. Neville and I quickly left for New York. Father was on his way from Hong Kong, but Mother didn't come.

Apparently, Christopher had been walking with a friend during lunch hour, when he suddenly collapsed and died. All the Lee family members in New York were called, and they were there for us, helping Father make funeral arrangements. Sixth Uncle, who was teaching at the University of Kansas, also flew in. I was close to Christopher, but I couldn't even begin to feel the pain Father must

have felt, or what Monica, my sister-in-law, must have gone through. Fortunately, the baby, Marcus, was too young to be traumatized by the event.

Father took Marcus and Monica back to Hong Kong with him after the funeral. He now had the added responsibility of Marcus's well-being. From then on, he became a father as well as a grandfather to Marcus. When Marcus was a little older, they spent every Saturday morning together. Marcus would go to Father's office to learn Chinese calligraphy, watched over by Father, and taught by Miss Leung, a staff member well known for her calligraphy.

In the early 1970s, I was made aware of the eventual change of sovereignty of Hong Kong. During one of my parents' visits, Father told me that he had been assured by the Chinese government that Hong Kong would remain the same for fifty years after 1997, so he was to feel free to invest and carry on with his business.

At Christmas 1976, as part of our annual visit to Hong Kong, Father treated us to a cruise on the *Rasasayang*, from Singapore to Bali. Our children—Ashley, Justin and Carter, who was born in 1973—were so excited because it was their first cruise, and they thought they were going on the *Love Boat*, which they had seen on television. When the hotel reservations were made in Singapore, Father would not book the Mandarin Hotel despite the fact that it is regarded as the best, because his friend owned it, and would not charge if he knew Father was the one making the booking.

February 1978 was my parents' golden wedding anniversary. Father wasn't one to celebrate because he did not even celebrate his own birthday. He never wanted anyone to make a fuss. But Mother was very happy when Fourth Uncle insisted that such an important occasion should be marked, and the entire Lee family would do it for them.

As the celebration was in February, only Carter and I could attend. Our other sons had to stay in school and Neville stayed behind with them.

The party, held at the Lee Gardens Hotel, was attended by mainly family members and some very close friends. My parents had a really good time. They had a beautiful anniversary cake covered in

golden *Oncidium* orchids. When Father spoke, he pointed out that fifty years ago, he and Mother had been married on exactly the same spot in The Lee Gardens. The only difference was, in 1928, they had stood on top of the hill. Father also mentioned that the recipe for a long-lasting marriage was “arguing a little from time to time!”

### With Father in China

In the fall of 1978, I mentioned to Father that I wanted to take Neville and our sons to China. At that time, there was no tourism in China, only groups arranged by the Chinese government. We had to go to the Embassy in Ottawa for visas, and we could only get them because Father had made arrangements through Beijing.

Father planned a wonderful trip for us. We first went to Hong Kong for Christmas; we then went into China by train. Those were the days when you could tell immediately when you crossed the border, because the scenery changed from high-rises and motor cars to vegetable fields and bicycles. At the train station in Guangzhou, we were met by officials, who helped us through border checking and customs. Then we were met by our guide, who stayed with us throughout our trip.

We flew from Guangzhou to Beijing and then worked our way south, visiting all the major sights, as well as areas that tourists were not normally allowed to enter. We met Mother’s cousin and his wife, Professors Eugene Chan and Winnifred Mao,<sup>4</sup> who were able to make special arrangements for us to visit the Plastic Surgery Hospital outside of Beijing, which was normally out of bounds. Neville marvelled at the work that was carried out under very primitive conditions. In the Central Hospital in Beijing, we watched surgery performed while acupuncture was used as anaesthetic. It was my first experience in an operating room, and was I amazed that the patient was talking to the nurse while undergoing a thyroidectomy. We were also shown various other traditional Chinese treatments.

We visited the Great Walls and the Forbidden City, then we went on to Hangzhou and Guilin. Everything we saw made a deep impression on us. At that time, people dressed in Mao suits, and referred to



one another as comrades. There were no modern hotels, and we ate in dining halls. There was no water early in the morning. But I noticed that under the Chinese Communist regime, there were free markets on Sundays where the population could exercise their entrepreneurial skills.<sup>5</sup>

When we arrived in Guilin, our son Justin became ill. Neville diagnosed it as scarlet fever, and put him on antibiotics right away. The last day we were there, Justin felt much better and came on the tour with us. We then flew to Guangzhou on New Year's Eve, where we were met by Father.

While in Guangzhou, we were guests of the government, because of Father, and we stayed in the guest house reserved for visiting heads of state. Our boys wanted to buy firecrackers, so Father took us in a minibus to look for some. We ended up having a city tour, but we never did find any firecrackers. However, Father showed me a bridge of European design which he had helped to build at the beginning of the 1930s while working for the city of Guangzhou.

That evening, we were the guests of the deputy governor of Guangdong, since the governor was away. The dinner, held in the dining room of the guest house, was splendid. Food for officials, even in a poor Communist country, is the same anywhere in the world.

Father had planned for us to leave early the next morning to drive to our ancestral village, so the only time he could show me the garden in the complex was after dinner. We were all going to take a walk, but Justin said he couldn't walk because of swelling in his knees. Neville carried him to the bedroom while I took a walk with Father.

When I returned, Justin had a fever. Obviously, the antibiotic was not working. A doctor was called immediately, and she suggested that we take Justin to the hospital for a blood test. When we walked into the hospital, with Justin in Neville's arms, Justin said, after one look at the condition of the emergency department, "Don't leave me here!" We had no intention of doing that. Since it was New Year's Eve and all laboratories would be closed for two days, I decided that Justin should be taken back to Hong Kong right away.

When we returned to the guest house, I went into Father's bedroom and woke him up. I said, "Daddy, I have to take Justin back to

Hong Kong right away. Can you get us plane tickets for the earliest flight out?" He didn't have to ask me why and what happened at the hospital, because he knew there was a reason for my decision. "Tomorrow is New Year's Day. It may be very difficult," he said. "In that case," I said, "get me a car, and we will start driving to Hong Kong right away." He answered, "That would be even more difficult. The roads are bad, and it would take me longer to arrange for smooth passage through the border check points. I'll see what I can do. I'm expected at the ancestral village, Ashley and Carter can come with me." Unfortunately, Carter's name was on my passport, so he had to return to Hong Kong with us.

Neville and I started packing immediately while Father went downstairs to make arrangements. We were told by one of the officials that he would take us to the airport by five in the morning. He couldn't guarantee us four seats on the first flight to Hong Kong, but he would try his best. In the meantime, Father phoned Mother to say that she was to call Seventh Uncle to make arrangements for a paediatrician friend of his to see Justin when we arrived. On New Year's Day it would be impossible to find a private doctor willing to work. Father phoned the Hong Kong airport to arrange for us to be met with a wheelchair, and for a car to take us to the Lee Gardens Hotel. (We always stayed at the hotel unless I was in Hong Kong alone or with just one of the children in order not to inconvenience my parents and the household staff.) The hotel was right across the street from my parents' home. After making all the arrangements, Father then went back to sleep.

The next morning we were awakened very early. The kitchen had prepared us a sumptuous breakfast which we could hardly swallow because we were so anxious. We said goodbye to Father and Ashley and left. We were very fortunate to be on that first flight to Hong Kong, which took only twenty-five minutes. We were met as Father had arranged. As soon as we arrived in our suite at the Lee Gardens Hotel, Mother called to say that Seventh Uncle had made the medical arrangements. Then Seventh Uncle himself called to say that he was sending his chauffeur to pick us up and he would meet us at the Emergency Department of the Hong Kong Sanatorium.

At the Hong Kong Sanatorium, Seventh Uncle introduced us to a paediatrician friend who was trained in the United States. The doctor confirmed that Justin had scarlet fever and prescribed a higher dose of antibiotic for him to take for a few more days. Everyone in Hong Kong knew how expensive the Hong Kong Sanatorium was and still is, and we were overwhelmed when Seventh Uncle said it was “on the house,” as he had already taken care of our medical bills. I’ve always had a very special relationship with him — he was more of a good friend than an uncle. After all, he was only ten years older than Neville. By that afternoon, Justin was already beginning to feel better. The next day, we all went to a movie at the Lee Theatre.

These events made me realize how very much I’m like Father. We understood each other without having to say a word, and I know that if I had been in his shoes, I would have made arrangements exactly as he did.

In the meantime, Ashley was having the time of his life being a VIP guest with Father in Sunwui city, our ancestral home in China. In anticipation of our visit, Father had also planned to take us all back to Neville’s ancestral village of Sunning, which is close to ours, being one of the Szeyup villages. Although Neville wasn’t there, Father took Ashley to Sunning anyway, because he felt it important that Ashley know where his ancestors from both sides of the family came from. To Ashley’s surprise, villagers from Sunning brought gifts to them, including a live chicken.

Back in Hong Kong, Ashley told us about his adventures. He said, “Gung Gung (maternal Grandfather) took me to a firecracker factory where one of the people there brought me outside to light firecrackers. I was allowed to light as many as I wanted. We went to see a hydro dam, and a large banyan tree by a river that was inhabited by thousands of white cranes. We sat in a hot spring where Gung Gung and I put eggs into the water to cook. But sharing a room with him is a problem, he snores so loudly!”

Father was really glad to see that Justin had recovered his health. Knowing how much Ashley had enjoyed the experience, he said to Justin, “The next time will be your turn. I’ll take you into the village.”

Father was always happy when he was in China.

# 10

## From Turbulence To Reform: A Vision For Higher Education

Hong Kong society in the 1950s was divided into a number of factions — pro-Communist, pro-Nationalist, Pro-British and others. Since politics were never mentioned in my home, I was not sure what faction my parents favoured. At that time, the Chinese government's attitude towards Hong Kong became more relaxed, and in 1956, due to strong local demand, the border between China and Hong Kong was reopened. Visitors from China were admitted freely into Hong Kong provided they possessed re-entry permits to China. From February to September, 60,000 came into Hong Kong and disappeared into the general population.<sup>1</sup> This became an added burden on the existing water supply, so the government moved to close the border again. That year, violence erupted soon after I left for school in England. A dispute over the Nationalists' National Day (October 10) celebrations led to rioting between Nationalist and Communist supporters and against the colonial authority. The riot lasted for several days until British troops were called out. Dozens were killed, and thousands were arrested, imprisoned or deported.

The Hong Kong government passed a series of laws to tighten control of the population, giving it the power to close newspapers and imprison its publishers for political offences. When any society was formed, it had to register with the commissioner of police and it was a criminal offence for any nine unrelated persons to assemble on the street. Even under these regulations, there was a certain amount of freedom as long as one did not advocate the overthrow of the colonial government. I was old enough to understand the restrictions, and they affected my attitude towards the colonial government of Hong Kong.

Then came the 1960s which witnessed the terrible Cultural Revolution in China (1966–1976). The upheavals spilled over to Hong Kong as social and political turbulence and riots. At the time, people were shocked. But there were some positive consequences, as social protests eventually led to social reforms.

## The Riots of 1967

In China, in September 1965, Chairman Mao began to attack his opponents in earnest, and this led to the Cultural Revolution. The youths in China were given a free hand to attack culture, learning, and, worst of all, educated people whom China needed most. In the summer of 1966, there were eight parades by the Red Guards, a total of 15 million youths, in Tiananmen Square. On August 22, 1966, mobs of Red Guards, inflamed by reports of atrocities perpetrated in Hong Kong by the British, invaded the British embassy in Beijing. The gates were broken and petrol cans were thrown at the buildings which were set on fire. Zhou Enlai had to send the police and the People's Liberation Army to rescue the diplomats.

The Cultural Revolution in China did not prevent my parents from travelling there in the 1960s. On one trip, He Mingsi, the Secretary of Xinhua News Agency, accompanied them. They went to Chongqing, where we used to live during the war. While Father was reminiscing to He Mingsi about the old days, they were surrounded by crowds of Red Guards. He Mingsi was really afraid, but fortunately, nothing



happened.<sup>2</sup> The Red Guards were apparently just curious, since my parents, who tried to dress like the locals, didn't really look like the rest of them.

In 1966, a peaceful protest in Hong Kong by a small group of young people over an increase in ferry fares led to days of rioting by frustrated working-class young men against what they saw as the inequalities of society from which they had no way out. The police stopped the riots by force. One young man was killed and many arrests were made, and one demonstrator committed suicide afterwards. On top of that, the unrest in China spread to Hong Kong.

In 1967, a factory labour dispute led to rioting in the working-class districts, which touched off continuous demonstrations by students from Communist schools against the Colonial government. This soon developed into sporadic acts of violence by students and workers. Some Hong Kong Communists or self-styled "Red Guards" manufactured homemade bombs which killed several people. Bombs, commonly known as "pineapples," were left in public places in order to cause maximum disturbance.<sup>3</sup> Some of them were real and some were not. C.T. Wu, Deputy General Manager of the Mandarin Hotel in Hong Kong at the time, said that the hotel remained open, but there was hardly any business at all. The police started taking the offensive that summer, making raids on Communist stores, unions and schools.<sup>4</sup> There were a few deaths and many people were arrested. During these times of unrest, hundreds of community organizations publicly declared their support for the government and against the Communists.

In one of the letters Canadian Ruth Hayhoe<sup>5</sup> sent to her mother from Hong Kong that year, she wrote that the bombs were "small and innocuous," and that she saw a Communist blown up by his own bomb in the summer. She also wrote that there was trouble in the Heep Yun Middle School where she was teaching. A fourth-form student put up a poster on the bulletin board denouncing the "slavery education" of the school (Heep Yun is a Christian missionary school), and hung a red flag outside the school. When reproached, the student was very defiant and brought her father to the school. He was so

angry that he slapped the head teacher across the face. Such was the atmosphere in Hong Kong in 1967.<sup>6</sup>

Rioters threw stones at buses, and drivers were beaten up. The London Insurance Association ordered Hong Kong insurance companies to cancel all riot insurance. The managing director of the Kowloon Bus Company went to see Yao Kang, a junior manager of Swire Insurance, to appeal to the company not to cancel their riot insurance, in order to give their drivers some measure of reassurance.<sup>7</sup> Rumours even spread that the Red Guards were marching against Hong Kong. With growing panic throughout the colony, the population hoarded food supplies and store shelves were empty. While my parents were on a trip to Europe that summer, rumours spread that Dick and Esther Lee had left Hong Kong, so conditions must be irretrievable. On hearing that, my parents returned to Hong Kong immediately.

Father felt a deep sense of responsibility to the people of Hong Kong. He believed that he could make a difference by appealing to the Chinese government not to incite the crowd. Father's friend Jack Cater, who was Defence Secretary of the Hong Kong government at the time, came to Father's office every day during the worst period, asking for help.<sup>8</sup> Father appealed to Lian Weilin, Director of Xinhua News Agency and Fei Yiming of *Ta Kung Pao*, to ask Zhou Enlai not to allow the riots to spread into Hong Kong.<sup>9</sup> Actually, what happened in Hong Kong had very little to do with China, for Premier Zhou Enlai had instructed the Xinhua News Agency that there would be no change in the status of Hong Kong.

Memories of the fall of Hong Kong in 1941 came back to Mother, and she was frightened. Father, on the other hand, would never consider abandoning Hong Kong; he would defend it with his life. Father took the lead, speaking publicly to calm the populace. He was outspoken against the Communists for their actions, and for the disturbance caused in Hong Kong.<sup>10</sup>

Conditions in China went from bad to worse. Anyone could be subject to attack. Mother's cousins, Professor Eugene Chen and his wife, Professor Winnifred Mao, both ophthalmologists, were denounced, beaten and driven out of their home. Their crime was that they were

educated, especially since Professor Chen had been trained at Johns Hopkins in the United States. They survived and moved away and lived in obscurity until my parents found them at the beginning of the 1970s. At the end of 1978, when we met them during our visit to Beijing, Professor Chen showed us the French beret and a pair of Western-style leather shoes he managed to hide from the Red Guards. He said that if these had been found, they would both have been killed.

As the Red Guards went through China like locusts, dead bodies were dumped into the rivers. Some of these floated into Hong Kong waters<sup>11</sup> and stirred up feelings of sadness and fear, since everyone in Hong Kong had relatives and friends in China.

However, conditions gradually improved in Hong Kong. By the beginning of 1969, everything was back to normal.

## Social Reforms

The riots that started in 1966 prompted the Hong Kong government to triple public spending on education to provide more opportunities for young people, and to improve housing, health care and social welfare. In 1967 the government realized that its legitimacy was no longer based on the Sino-British Treaties of the nineteenth century, but had to be earned by its performance and by some sense of community involvement.

By the beginning of the 1970s, the children of the refugees had grown up. The census of 1971 showed for the first time a locally born majority. As the older generation among the refugees died and were buried in Hong Kong, their offspring gained a sense of belonging to the Colony. Those who had made possible the economic and industrial take-off in the 1950s and 1960s could now enjoy the fruits of their labour.

Improvements in government assistance in education meant that more children of illiterate parents now had the opportunity to finish high school. A grant and loan scheme introduced in 1969 guaranteed funding for needy students to complete courses at local universities. The availability of opportunities for those with merit helped to further

economic growth and encouraged a sense of belonging. When the people of Hong Kong realized that they had not only been born and bred in the Colony, but had also made great contributions to its success, they started to demand improvements. The demands were not political, but social and economic.

There were successive strikes and protests spearheaded by university students, teachers, social workers, church leaders, nurses and trade unionists. These strikes were basically peaceful and orderly, and were characterized by a sense of purposefulness and self-discipline, even though they broke the law against illegal association and illegal assembly. The limited amount of violence that took place was often provoked by the police.<sup>12</sup>

University students led the Chinese-language movement which demanded that Chinese be made an official language along with English. After numerous sit-ins and public forums that were widely supported in the community, the government conceded official status for Chinese (Cantonese) for most public, administrative and political uses.

Corruption has always been endemic in Hong Kong. Not much was done until the 1970s, when demonstrations were organized by university students and church groups involving tens of thousands of citizens. The anti-corruption movement targeted the Hong Kong police and other public agencies. In 1973, High Court Judge Sir Alastair Blair Kerr was appointed by Governor Maclehoze to sit on a one-man commission to investigate the conduct of the Chief Superintendent of the Royal<sup>13</sup> Hong Kong Police Force, Peter Godber, who sneaked out of Hong Kong while on suspension from duty during an investigation of his suspected corrupt activities. The two Blair Kerr reports and the ensuing public outcry led to the establishment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in February 1974, with Jack Cater as Commissioner. Peter Godber was extradited from Britain and brought back to Hong Kong to face trial.<sup>14</sup> Many police officers were charged, many more resigned, and the force was reorganized. Eventually, the Independent Commission Against Corruption Ordinance outlawed gift-taking by public officials.

Throughout the 1970s, the Christian Industrial Committee and other church-related groups organized labour protests, and encouraged the development of a movement independent of the Communist or Nationalist parties, resulting in a number of improvements to the Labour Ordinance. A successful primary-school teachers' strike led to the formation of the Professional Teachers' Union. This was followed by a nurses' strike. Both white- and blue-collar unions raised the spectre of a rightful challenge to arbitrary authority. Areas such as Chater Garden, Victoria Park, the square outside Central Government Offices and the side gate of Government House became well recognized sites for public gatherings. While the ordinances against illegal associations and assembly remained in the statute books, their application became rarer. Demonstrators were met by police escorts who directed traffic, and by government officials who received the petitions.<sup>15</sup>

In many cases, significant concessions were made to the protesters. Through this process, both Hong Kong society and government became strengthened. Hong Kong changed from the colonial style of government to one that was more responsive to the needs of the population in education and language. The civil service was upgraded and social justice improved. The government, while retaining ultimate political power, exercised it in a radically different manner by the early 1970s.

It was my parents' view that since the 1970s, the governors of Hong Kong were diplomats who no longer dictated to the people of Hong Kong.

## Father and Education

Father had always been a great supporter of education. Until 1969, there were no scholarships for higher education in Hong Kong, and students who were accepted into university but couldn't afford to pay for their tuition had to approach private individuals for financial help. Father was often approached with such requests. He kept letters from students in his pocket so he wouldn't forget to look into matters for them. He would check into the entrance records of these



students, and if the requests came from a worthy student, he or she would be given financial support, consisting of money for tuition, lodging and expenses. In fact, in his later years, he gave financial support to worthy students a year in advance, just in case something should happen to him.<sup>16</sup>

We were told by some students that he was the only wealthy person in Hong Kong who bothered to answer their letters. Many of these students have gone on to great careers, and even though Father did not want any thanks, they never forgot him. Father's concern for the education of the young didn't end at the personal level. Despite being a Christian, he officiated at the opening ceremony of the Confucius Hall Middle School in 1964. In striving to help a greater number through the establishment of educational institutions, he helped in activities such as raising funds for the Mong Kok Workers Children's School, a school for the children of blue-collar workers.<sup>17</sup>

During the Cultural Revolution, Chi Chao, one of the daughters of Chen and Mao, Mother's cousins, escaped to Hong Kong. She and a classmate in her graduating class at Zhongshan Medical College in China came in a boat with other refugees. Mother got a call from her after she arrived in Hong Kong. My parents took it upon themselves to take care of her education and sent her to the United States to learn English. She later entered the school of medicine at Johns Hopkins University. In spite of having to start her studies all over again in another language, Chi Chao, to her great credit, completed her training in ophthalmology at Johns Hopkins, as her father had. She is now the head of the immunopathology section of the National Eye Institute in Bethesda, Maryland.<sup>18</sup>

When Father's secretary, Mabel Wu, retired in the early 1970s, he asked Anna Li, a secretary at Western Trading, one of our subsidiaries, to work for him. Anna told me that she was asked because she was not like other secretaries who would read popular magazines in their free time. On occasions when Father was at Western Trading, he always saw Anna studying, but he didn't know that she was studying for the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) examination. She was then nineteen years old. She was reluctant to work for Father because she said she was too young

and inexperienced. However, he convinced her that she could learn a great deal from him.

It was just like Father to send his secretary to evening school at the University of Hong Kong to learn English. Anna said she never missed a class even when she didn't feel well, because, with Father's connections at Hong Kong University, he would know if she missed one. When Anna first worked for Father, she said she didn't sleep for three months because she was so nervous. During the years she worked for him she spent many hours crying, because he was very direct, but she knew he always meant well. Anna was unsure of speaking English on the phone, and since this was very necessary in Father's office, he sent her to Oxford the following year for a six-week summer course, again arranged through Hong Kong University. The course was not to start until July, but Father paid for everything in January. Anna's sister took her place as Father's secretary during the time that she was away.

Father continued to help many students. One of them, Gloria Tam, wrote to Father during her two-year scholarship stay in England. She wanted to go to medical school at Hong Kong University, but her family couldn't afford it. When Father found out that she was a scholarship student, and that her parents worked as reporters at *Ta Kung Pao*, she was told that if she could get in, he would put her through. Gloria became a gynaecologist. After Father died, Anna's husband was helped by Gloria in finding employment, thanks to the relationship that Father had established.

Gloria is at present Assistant Director of the Department of Health in Hong Kong. During the H5N1 epidemic (chicken flu) in Hong Kong in 1997–1998, it was her responsibility to negotiate with China for the importation of healthy chickens to Hong Kong.

Anna was the one who knew how Father treated others, not only because she saw him every day during the week, but because she prepared the cheques for him to sign. Anna said, "I made out a cheque for eight hundred dollars monthly for one of the watchmen for his children's schooling because he had contracted tuberculosis. And when it came to help for university students, your father always gave them their allowance a year in advance."

Anna married the son of Father's old friend Tsui Gang Bo. In the late 1970s, when Anna had a family, Father would often let her use our launch with her husband and children when he wasn't using it himself.

## Higher Education

After the end of the Second World War, and the civil war in China that followed, the great influx of population<sup>19</sup> from China into Hong Kong put heavy demands on the education system of the Colony, particularly higher education.

Up to the mid-1960s, there was only one officially recognized and government-funded university in Hong Kong, the University of Hong Kong. It was established in 1911 to serve as a centre for Sino-British contact in the sphere of learning, and for the maintenance of good relations with China. In other words, it was not intended to serve the Hong Kong public. Before the Pacific War, the university served mainly as an outpost of Western culture, admitting students from Southeast Asia and China, as well as Hong Kong. In 1946, it was felt that the greatly damaged university should be re-established because of the need to maintain the British position and prestige in the Far East. In 1948, when Father's friend Lindsay Ride became vice-chancellor, Father became a member of the Court of the University.

By 1950, the government was becoming aware that the University of Hong Kong should reflect the needs of local society, instead of being an institution to uphold British prestige.

With the continual political turbulence in China, foreign academic organizations withdrew from the mainland, and international cultural activities were interrupted. Hong Kong was now in a position to play an important role in Chinese and Western cultural contacts.

The demands of industrialization had created a need for higher education in the Colony. Among the refugee population was a large number of students from the Chinese middle schools who could no longer return to China and wanted to continue their higher education in Hong Kong. However, not only was the number of places available at the University of Hong Kong inadequate, there was little chance

that any student from the Chinese middle schools could gain admission, since English was the language of instruction.

Governor Alexander Grantham appointed a special committee to look into the problem, and the result was the *Keswick Report*. It was the first public document to propose that higher education in Hong Kong should be geared to the needs of the people. It also recommended that the university remain the only institution to award degrees. The government immediately allocated funding to the university for the introduction of Chinese-language courses, beginning with the 1952–1953 academic year. This move was widely supported by the Senate of the university, but turned down by the Council. There was an underlying fear that the introduction of Chinese-language courses would eventually transform the university. The Council said that in the postwar period, what the university needed most was time for consolidation rather than a new direction in its development.

In 1953, Ivor Jennings and Douglas Logan, experts in British university administration, were invited to advise on the development of the university. The *Jennings-Logan Report* asserted that the University of Hong Kong should remain an English-speaking university. As far as they were concerned, it was the government's job to fill the gap between the university and the Chinese middle schools. In order to prepare these graduates for admission into university, a special two-year program was designed at Clementi Middle School. However, this program did not solve the problem, because it could accommodate only a very limited number of students.

The education system in Hong Kong has always been divided into Chinese and English. The students in the English system had access to a complete education from primary to university levels, whereas the students in the Chinese system could not go farther than middle school. Before 1949, these students were able to continue their education in mainland China. The Chinese system in Hong Kong followed the curriculum prescribed by the Nationalist government in China, and used textbooks produced in Shanghai. Many Chinese schools in Hong Kong were associated with schools in Guangzhou. However, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong students could no longer go to the mainland to complete

their studies. This placed an added burden on the education system, and the situation was exacerbated by the large influx of refugee students from China.

A number of dedicated and experienced refugee scholars from China took up the challenge. Driven by educational ideals, the mission of propagating Chinese culture and educating the young, as well as the need to earn a living, scholars and professionals in various fields used crude facilities and rented classrooms to establish so-called "refugee colleges." According to a government survey in 1952, there were more than thirty colleges of this kind, varying in standards and the length of their programs. Nine of these were of higher standard, offering four-year programs in arts and commerce. Among them were New Asia College,<sup>20</sup> Chung Chi College, and the forerunners of United College. These three were to emerge later as the Foundation Colleges of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. The survival of these colleges depended greatly on international support, and in the case of Chung Chi, the support of the Protestant church. The government granted the site of Ma Liu Shui Valley to Chung Chi College, thanks to the persistence of Rev. R.O. Hall, Bishop of the Hong Kong Anglican Church. It proved to be an important asset to the future Chinese university.

By 1956, the degrees awarded by the colleges gained recognition from many universities in America and Europe, some of which even granted scholarships to the more outstanding students. Yet in Hong Kong, the degrees were not recognized by the government for employment or for further training. The private colleges received no financial support, but were still subject to the control of the Education Department and the Education Ordinance of 1952. So in 1956, the three colleges banded together to strive for government recognition and support.

After consultation with the representatives of the three colleges, Charles Long, Yale-in-Asia representative at New Asia and a trustee of the College, sent a memorandum to D.J.S. Crozier, Director of Education, on August 16, 1956. The memorandum began by pointing out that the private colleges should not be governed by the Education



Ordinance of 1952, which was intended to apply to primary and secondary education in Hong Kong, and that special regulations should be drawn up for colleges that were aspiring to university standards. It went on to state that, as part of the Hong Kong education system, the colleges could not depend entirely on the financial assistance of foreign missions, foundations and private donations. The government should take responsibility for providing support for basic facilities and recurrent expenses. The memorandum also said that under the existing government policy, thousands of intelligent young people were leaving the Colony in search of higher education overseas or in Taiwan, thereby creating a potential loss in leadership. The memorandum concluded that it would be difficult for the private colleges to provide the best contribution to tertiary education unless the government offered support for them to develop university status for awarding degrees. This became the first document in the government file on the founding of The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

In January 1956, L.G. Morgan, Deputy Director of Education, observed that the Chinese middle school could not but feel grievance at a situation whereby the government provided \$8 million annually to the University of Hong Kong for the students from the Anglo-Chinese schools, and made little or no provision for those from the Chinese middle schools. In another memorandum by Morgan in October the same year, five possible measures were proposed to meet the overall needs of the Chinese secondary-school students. The most significant proposal was “the establishment of a Chinese university with its own charter and degree granting powers.”<sup>21</sup> However, Morgan’s own recommendation still suggested that the University of Hong Kong broaden its function and accept a greater responsibility in meeting the needs of the community. In October 1956, there were bloody riots caused by confrontations between pro-Nationalist and pro-Communist political groups. This persuaded the government that it could no longer ignore the demand for more post-secondary education for its population.<sup>22</sup> In January 1957, representatives of Chung Chi, New Asia and United, the “refugee colleges,” met with the Education Department. Bishop Hall and Charles Long also attended the

meeting, which ended without any decision. In February, the Chinese Colleges Joint Council was established. After numerous meetings and discussions, in August 1958, it was finally decided that another university would be established in Hong Kong.

## A New University

On June 2, 1959, the Hong Kong government officially announced that it was prepared to establish a new university with Chinese as the main language of instruction. Sir John Fulton, Professor of History and a tutor at Oxford for many years (and incidentally, a former teacher of Father's, as well as of Governor Sir Robert Black and Governor Sir Murray Macle hose), was appointed as advisor to Governor Sir Robert Black. In his 1959 report, *The Development of Post-Secondary Colleges in Hong Kong*, submitted to the Governor in March 1960, he stated that academic freedom, university autonomy, and research and bi-cultural mission were especially important in shaping the basic character of the future university.<sup>23</sup>

According to Professor Ma Lin, vice-chancellor of The Chinese University from 1978 to 1987, Sir John Fulton, now Lord Fulton, was the midwife of The Chinese University, and the good results of the delivery were in many ways due to the close friendship between Sir John and Father. On several occasions, Father flew to Yorkshire, where Sir John lived in his retirement, to speak to him regarding The Chinese University, and Father could be very persuasive.<sup>24</sup>

Up to this point, the colleges had their roots in China and an early association with American educational foundations and universities, but they lacked British experience and connections. Sir John Fulton brought with him the experience of three different British universities, Oxford, Wales and Sussex. The introduction of new ideas was facilitated by the British Council and the University of Hong Kong in a series of open forums and conferences held in 1960 and 1961. Following the *Fulton Report*, a Provisional Council was formed composed of twenty members: two government officials, the three presidents of the Colleges, the vice-chancellor of the University of Hong Kong, Lindsay Ride, and prominent members from the community. The Council was

chaired by C.Y. Kwan, with Father as the vice-chairman. The Council promptly adopted the name The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Father had the added responsibility of being the chairman of the Campus Planning Committee as well as the chairman of the Tender Board. From then on, until the end of his life, Father spent a great deal of his time and energy promoting the establishment and growth of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. He considered it to be one of his "children." Prof. Ma Lin told me that without Father's dedication, The Chinese University wouldn't be the way it is today.<sup>25</sup>

It was to the credit of the Council that the magnificent site of three hundred acres adjacent to Chung Chi College at Ma Liu Shui<sup>26</sup> was secured from the government. The area was able not only to accommodate the university, but also provided ample space for future expansion. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Ordinance, together with its Statutes, was passed in the Legislative Council and came into effect in September 1963. On October 17, 1963, the governor, in his capacity as chancellor, officiated at the inauguration ceremony.

On October 9, 1964, the first meeting of the Campus Planning Committee was held in Father's office in Edinburgh House. These meetings continued to be held in Father's office at different locations until 1977, when the venue changed to the Lee Gardens Hotel. Father served on this committee and on the Council until he passed away in 1983.

Being a civil engineer, Father was in the perfect position to oversee the buildings to be erected on campus. The work was monumental. The project was similar to building a mini-city on hills that had to be terraced, and the mud and rocks were transported to the opposite side of Tolo Harbour for the construction of the Plover Cove reservoir.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, except for the campus of Chung Chi College, the Committee was working with raw land, most of which was without infrastructure, such as roads, water and sewer connections. In the minutes of the meeting of 1966, it was mentioned that sea water had to be used for flushing because it was not clear whether the government would be piping water from the Sha Tin Treatment Works within the next two years. In the minutes of 1967, it was noted that planting on steep hilly sections had to be done immediately because the slopes were too steep to be turfed.

The fact that Father had so many friends in the government was a great advantage for the university. Father's friend Szeto Wai was hired as the architect and Plover Cove Engineers were the engineers for the university. In the initial stage, Father asked Szeto to travel to the best universities in the world to learn from them. In the mid-1960s, Szeto visited fifteen of the best and most beautiful campuses in the world before he designed the campus for The Chinese University of Hong Kong.<sup>28</sup>

As the vice-chairman of the Council, Father would chair the meetings once or twice a year. Father had a reputation of chairing meetings that were short and efficient. They always started on time, and were seldom longer than forty-five minutes. Once, a Council member arrived ten minutes late, and by the time he sat down, his part of the meeting was over.<sup>29</sup>

On my parents' visits to Toronto, I often heard Father mention the importance of establishing a Chinese university in Hong Kong for the Chinese. Father not only worked very hard for the university in dealing with the government and getting the new buildings built, he also donated a great deal of money to its foundation. His greatest show of faith was when my brother Christopher attended the university and graduated from it. When Christopher lived in residence, he told Father that the mattress in the residence was uncomfortable. So, Father bought new mattresses for the entire residence!

At the beginning of 1983, Father wanted to experiment with the reproduction of purified yeast used in the production of Chinese rice wine, which many Chinese use for medicinal purpose. He asked Professor Ma Lin to see if it could be reproduced in the laboratory at the university. The experiment was successful, and Father planned to experiment with fermentation at home. Father was always interested in different medicines.

Father was so concerned about the well-being of The Chinese University of Hong Kong that he treated it as one of his "children" in his will. Mother not only continued to be a great supporter of the university after Father died, but she also considered it as one of her "children." And because of Father's influence, different members of the Lee family continue to be very generous to the university.

My favourite artifact from Grandfather's time, an ivory mammoth tusk carved with the story of the Three Kingdoms, is proudly displayed in the museum at the university.

Shortly after Father's death, Mother established the R.C. Lee Memorial Gold Medal in Surgery, to be awarded to the best student in the final year in the Faculty of Medicine, Department of Surgery.

In September 1987, the Council at the university decided to name the Science Centre Lecture Hall Complex the "R.C. Lee Lecture Hall" as a perpetual memorial to Father. In October 1988, The Chinese University of Hong Kong awarded Mother an honorary degree for her role as a public figure in Hong Kong, and for her continuous support of the university.



# 11

## The Japanese Connection

For obvious reasons, after the Second World War, it was very difficult for Japanese businesses to get established in Hong Kong. Although Father had been in the resistance during the war, when peace came, he felt that everyone should put the past aside. He believed that Japan would prosper, and he wanted to build long-term relationships in order to bring prosperity to the people of Hong Kong.

As a progressive thinker, Father was always invited to the Sauntering meetings, started by a Chinese scholar who had attended Waseda University in Tokyo. It was a study group, a monthly dinner gathering of about twelve top Japanese businessmen in Hong Kong.<sup>1</sup> Father would always invite the group back. He was held in such high esteem that Japanese businessmen, and even the Consul-General of Japan,<sup>2</sup> would pay him a courtesy visit whenever they were in Hong Kong.

When the Japanese Club was established in 1955, Father was one of the first to offer assistance.<sup>3</sup> The Club was originally located in the Victoria Hotel, with 106 corporate and private members. By November 1996, the membership had increased to more than 25,000. Aside from dining facilities, the activities available included language instructions in Chinese and English, doll-making, Chinese painting and calligraphy.<sup>4</sup> And throughout the history of the Club, it has been located mostly in buildings owned by the Lee family.<sup>5</sup> Starting in the 1970s, my parents hosted a dinner at the Lee Gardens Hotel for all

the Japanese executives in Hong Kong, once a year, in order for them to make friends with members of the Chinese business community.

By the late 1960s, it became absolutely necessary for the survival of Japanese financial institutions to establish Hong Kong subsidiaries in conjunction with leading Hong Kong business people. Father had been invited to be a partner by different Japanese enterprises but he made it his policy not to get involved.<sup>6</sup> However, he viewed his involvement in education quite differently.

## The Japanese School

Father played an important role in the establishment of a Japanese school for Japanese children whose parents lived in Hong Kong. He helped the school acquire government permits to operate as a foreign school, and negotiated and sought approvals from the Departments of Education, Public Works, Health and Fire. According to a report sent to the Japanese government from the Consulate-General of Japan, without Father's help, the process would have been difficult and lengthy.

When Father first heard of the plans to establish a Japanese school, he suggested that it be located in the space in Tower Court, on Hysan Avenue, one of the buildings owned by the Lee family, which was about to be vacated by the Hong Kong Education Department.<sup>7</sup> However, the preparatory committee for the establishment of the school had not yet been formed,<sup>8</sup> and no action could be taken.

Fifth Uncle, who looked after rentals in the Lee Hysan Estate Company, had many inquiries about the space, but Father stubbornly insisted that it be held for the opening of the Japanese school, without any rent or deposit. It stood vacant for half a year. In January 1966, the Japanese government allocated a subsidiary budget for the Hong Kong Japanese School, and only then was the school able to pay rent. An official tenancy agreement was then signed. On May 10, 1966, the Japanese school,<sup>9</sup> located on the second and the third floors of Tower Court,<sup>10</sup> opened with seventy students. The following day, Fifth Uncle showed up at the school to see Ichiro Fujita, the principal, to return the cheque. Father had ordered that the rent from

January to March was not to be accepted. Everyone at the school was overwhelmed by his generous spirit.<sup>11</sup>

Father continued to take great interest in the Japanese School and gave advice to Ichiro Fujita. The school opened extension classrooms in the Ling Ying Building,<sup>12</sup> and on January 24, 1976, a primary school opened on Blue Pool Road. The school kept expanding, and the junior high school opened on Braemar Hill Road on October 23, 1982. Father was their special guest at each of the opening ceremonies. At the opening ceremony of the Braemar Hill Road school, Ichiro Fujita made a speech in front of all the students and guests, referring to the cherished friendship between himself and Father, expressing his heartfelt and sincere gratitude, and introducing Father as the “true benefactor and patron of the Hong Kong Japanese School.”<sup>13</sup>

On March 12, 1969, Father was decorated with the Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon, by the Japanese Emperor. The third-highest Order in Japan, it was established in 1888.<sup>14</sup> The ceremony was held at the official residence of the Consul-General of Japan, Akira Okada, at 24 Po Shan Road in Hong Kong. Father was proud of this award, despite the fact that it took several years to get permission from the Queen of England to wear and use the name of the Order. One of the conditions imposed was that its name must always be given in full, to prevent confusion with British Orders.<sup>15</sup>

## Japan and China

By the 1960s, the Japanese government wished to re-establish relations with the government of China. Since direct contact was not possible at the time, the responsibility was given to the Consul-General of Japan in Hong Kong, Akira Okada, a close friend of Father's. In his book *Mizutori Gaiko Hiwa (The Secret Story of Mizutori's Diplomacy)* Okada mentioned that when he and his wife were guests of my parents on our launch on August 17, 1969, he and Father discussed the possibility of working towards the resumption

of relations between Japan and China. At that time, Father offered help through his friends Zhou Enlai and Liao Chengzhi in Beijing.

On September 10, 1971, Consul-General Okada met with Japanese Prime Minister Sato to discuss the relationship with China. The prime minister told Okada that Japan was willing to accept the Chinese view that Taiwan was a province of China, and that Japan would not object to China's entry into the United Nations. However, he said, China must stop interfering with the internal politics of Japan. Also, although Taiwan's membership in the United Nations was considered temporary, Japan would not ask for its resignation in the immediate future. The Japanese government needed advice on how to proceed towards the normalization of relations with China, since at this time, the Chinese government would not receive anyone sent by the Japanese government. Prime Minister Sato asked Okada to seek help from his friends in Hong Kong to reach the right contacts in Beijing. Okada was given permission to go to Beijing if necessary to carry out his mission. This was so important in the agenda of the Japanese government that he was asked to report to the prime minister directly, bypassing the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Consul-General Okada returned to Hong Kong on September 14 to proceed with this mission. One of the friends he might have turned to for help was P.Y. Tang, who had been a classmate of Zhou Enlai's at Nankai University, but unfortunately, Tang had died on June 17. Father was on his priority list, not only because of his contacts in China, but also because of the friendship between him and Okada. However, Father was away from Hong Kong for a few weeks, so Okada turned to Father's cousin, Uncle Quo Wai of Hang Seng Bank. Uncle Quo Wai knew Consul-General Okada through the bank, but he had connections with China only through Father.<sup>16</sup> The two men met the following day. Uncle Quo Wai immediately contacted Father's good friend Fei Yiming of *Ta Kung Pao*, who relayed the message to Beijing.

On September 16, Zhou Enlai met with Hide Kawasaki, a member of the Diet, who was visiting China, and told him that Japan had to recognize the People's Republic as the rightful government of China,

and accept the fact that Taiwan was part of China. If those conditions were met, he would welcome an official visit from Japan. Consul-General Okada wondered whether this reaction had been due to the contact Uncle Quo Wai had made, but he doubted that China would have responded so quickly. When he and Uncle Quo Wai spoke again on September 17, the latter said that it would not be difficult to arrange a meeting between a Chinese official and the Consul-General in Hong Kong, but an official meeting with the Japanese Foreign Office would depend on Beijing. He suggested that Prime Minister Sato personally write a proposal and have it passed on to Premier Zhou through unofficial channels by one of the many Japanese visitors to Beijing. On September 20, Consul-General Okada telephoned the prime minister's office, and learnt that the prime minister was not planning to write a personal letter to Premier Zhou as yet.

The following day, it was rumoured in Hong Kong that Chairman Mao had died, and the October 1 National Celebration would be cancelled. It was already in the news that Japan would bring up the question of China's representation in the United Nations. With all the recent events, Consul-General Okada wondered whether an answer from the Chinese government would be forthcoming by September 23.

On the evening of September 22, 1971, Consul-General Okada received an urgent call from Uncle Quo Wai, apologizing that due to an urgent matter, Beijing would not be able to meet with a representative of the Japanese government to discuss normalization of relations. As it turned out, the urgent matter was the Lin Biao incident.

Lin Biao was the originator of the "Little Red Book" of Mao's sayings, *Quotations from Chairman Mao*. In 1965, he produced a pamphlet, "Long Live the Victory of the People's War," suggesting that China could win over the world by mobilizing the people of backward countries just as Mao had mobilized the poor peasants of China. In the Ninth Party Congress in April 1969, he was named sole vice-chairman and Mao's official heir. However, by April 1970, Lin Biao and his wife, Ye Qun, detected Mao's changed attitude towards them and they plotted against Mao.<sup>17</sup>

On September 14, 1971, the Chinese ambassador to Ulan Bator was summoned to the Mongol Foreign Office early in the morning,



and was told that a Chinese aircraft (transporting Lin Biao, Ye Qun and Lin Ligu) had violated Mongol airspace and had crashed at 2:00 a.m. the day before.

The news of this case was suppressed for months in China, and it took a year before it was disclosed to the foreign press. Even up till spring 1972, no one knew of this incident, and the Japanese press continued to mention Lin Biao as if he were still alive.<sup>18</sup>

On October 8, 1971, Uncle Quo Wai asked Consul-General Okada if he would like to meet Fei Yiming of *Ta Kung Pao* at the Australian National Day reception on October 25. The two were introduced on an unofficial basis. Fei Yiming confirmed everything that had been said and done by Uncle Quo Wai, and requested patience from the Japanese government in awaiting the next step from Beijing. On the same day, the United Nations admitted China as a member, and Japan's support of Taiwan's membership failed. Unfortunately, due to the Lin Biao incident, Okada was not able to complete his assignment of mending relations between China and Japan during his term of office. Uncle Quo Wai was sure that if he had been able to complete his assignment, Okada would have been named the first Japanese ambassador to China since the Second World War.<sup>19</sup>

## Yamaichi Securities

In the early 1960s, Father re-established a friendship with his boxing friend from his Oxford days, Konosuke Koike, and they visited each other in Hong Kong and Tokyo. Koike was the eldest son of the founder of Yamaichi Securities,<sup>20</sup> and the chairman of the company. In 1964, Yamaichi encountered financial difficulties and asked for help from major Japanese banks headed by the Industrial Bank of Japan (IBJ). Koike resigned and Teru Hidaka from the Industrial Bank of Japan came to Yamaichi as president. By May 1965, the company's financial position had deteriorated further, and it sought more help from the Bank of Japan and the Central Bank.

At the beginning of 1970, when the situation had improved and Yamaichi Securities wanted to open a company in Hong Kong,

Yamaichi took advantage of the friendship between Father and the former chairman, Konosuke Koike. Officers from Yamaichi paid Father a visit with a letter from his old friend Koike requesting help in the setting up of the Hong Kong company. On hearing that his friend had taken the responsibility for mismanagement in the company and had resigned from the chairmanship, Father was sympathetic. He remembered his own experiences as the eldest son, and the financial difficulties our family had experienced when Grandfather was murdered. Father said that if by agreeing to join the board of Yamaichi (Hong Kong), he could help his friend, he would do so gladly. He immediately gave suggestions for possible contacts as directors and shareholders.<sup>21</sup>

Yamaichi International (H.K.) Ltd. opened its office in Hong Kong in July 1971. Teru Hidaka was named chairman and Father was the deputy chairman.<sup>22</sup> Konosuke Koike became an honorary advisor. Father brought many influential people into the company as directors, and introduced many important clients.

August 16, 1971, was the date set for the cocktail reception at the Mandarin Hotel, celebrating the opening of the Hong Kong company. The weather was dreadful and the typhoon signal was up. By evening, the cross-harbour ferry had stopped running. However, in spite of the weather, many distinguished guests attended, and Yamaichi credited Father's influence for the fact that so many people made the effort.<sup>23</sup>

Shinichi Shiraishi,<sup>24</sup> the sales manager of Yamaichi International (H.K.) Ltd.<sup>25</sup> came to know Father because it was his responsibility to increase business in Hong Kong. He met Father from time to time to explain the situation of the Tokyo stock market and to report the business results of the Hong Kong company. Father was pleased to see the business growing steadily, and was always very happy to see his old friend Koike at the shareholders' meetings which took place every July in Hong Kong. Shiraishi noticed how Father always paid a great deal of attention to Koike and his wife, even though Teru Hidaka was the "big boss."<sup>26</sup>

By 1982, Yamaichi Securities wanted to become a wholly owned company. Officers from the company consulted Father as to the possibilities of buying back the shares in the Yamaichi International

(H.K.) Ltd. With his usual wish to help others, Father asked them to leave the matter with him. He proceeded to contact the Hong Kong directors and shareholders and made arrangements for the company to buy back the shares. Yamaichi International (H.K.) Ltd. became a wholly owned company, and the board and shareholders felt greatly indebted to Father.<sup>27</sup>

Mother told me that the Causeway Bay area became very prosperous because of Father's Japanese friends. Causeway Bay is in the area where Grandfather bought East Point Hill, which his descendants have subsequently developed. It is also where many members of the Lee family lived from the beginning of the 1950s to the mid-1980s, including my own family. There are many Japanese businesses located in the area. When the first Japanese department store, Daimaru, opened in Causeway Bay in November 1960, a Chinese managing director was needed in addition to his Japanese counterpart, so Father introduced his friend Liu Huo Yan from Taiwan, who spoke Japanese, to the post.<sup>28</sup> Sogo Department Store opened its first store in Causeway Bay in May 1985 and has since opened many branches all over Hong Kong. The well-known up-scale department store Mitsukoshi, the Japanese Club and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce are all located in Causeway Bay.

Father often lent a hand to these businesses when they opened in Hong Kong. At the Mitsukoshi (Hong Kong) opening, he took part in the ribbon-cutting ceremony. In his letter of thanks, Shigeru Okada, President of Mitsukoshi Limited, wrote:

... I firmly believe that it was indeed in virtue of your personality and through your courtesy that we could have the notables and the potentates of all spheres of social activities in Hong Kong and varied V.I.P.'s at those occasions, and herein I express my sincere gratitude for it.<sup>29</sup>

By the 1980s, Japanese investments became one of the major economic forces in the colony. Father's gift for making friends and building relationships had helped to bring prosperity to Hong Kong.

During the Asian economic crisis at the end of 1997, Yamaichi Securities, the fourth-largest securities company in Japan, went bankrupt.

The Hong Kong operations, Yamaichi International (H.K.) Ltd., was sold to Core Pacific Group,<sup>30</sup> a Taiwanese conglomerate, at just under \$88 million, which was the net value of the business. The offer was considered a good deal by Yamaichi advisors, given the tough Asian market conditions. The company was valuable because Core Pacific wanted to capitalize on Yamaichi International's strong business presence in mainland China. The company would be renamed Core Pacific Yamaichi.

In a letter to me, S. Shiraishi, former vice-president of Yamaichi wrote:

Since YIH (Yamaichi International Hong Kong) started business in 1971 with great help of your father and your family members, YIH has established its name not only in Hong Kong but also in Asia in general during last 27 years. The co. has favorable financial conditions and many capable and dedicating local staff.

YIH is very active in handling China related stocks in the last few years.<sup>31</sup>

Given the circumstances, Father would have been pleased to know that the purchase agreement with Core Pacific included keeping all 121 employees of the Hong Kong operation.<sup>32</sup>

# 12

## The Chinese Patriot

The leaders of China called Father a patriot, meaning he was loyal to the Chinese government. But I believe that patriotism meant something different to Father. He was patriotic to the Chinese people, irrespective of the governments they live under.

The letter Father wrote in his youth to his school in Hong Kong shows that he had always been proud of being Chinese, and at the same time concerned with the state of affairs in China. I became aware of this by the end of the 1940s, for by then I was old enough to observe how he conducted his life. He tried very hard to alleviate human suffering both in Hong Kong and in China. He was only one man, but he believed that one man could make a difference.

Mother told me one day that when she first met Father, he spoke English with an Oxford accent, but later (by the time I understood English), he spoke it with a Chinese accent. She was sure this was intentional. Most people would have flaunted their Oxford accent for the rest of their lives, but not Father. Because of his pride in Hong Kong, for a number of years Father arranged, at his own expense, for a number of students from Oxford to broaden their experience by practical studies in Hong Kong.<sup>1</sup>

Father had no interest in politics, and so was effective in helping many. There were times in his life, because of his friendship with the leaders of China, he was asked if he was a Communist. His answer



was, “No, I am not. Even if I were to want to join the party, I don’t qualify, as I’m a capitalist.”

After the Second World War, the civil war between the Nationalists under Chiang Kaishek and the Communists under Mao Zedong began in earnest in China. In a way, Father retreated to Hong Kong. He looked upon Hong Kong as a Chinese colony under a period of British management, and believed he could be just as useful in working towards the improvement of the life of the population there. From then on, he concentrated on Hong Kong, but he never forgot his roots in China, and waited until he could be of help to China again. At the same time, he always acted as a responsible citizen of the world.

Every year, on October 1, the People’s Republic of China celebrated National Day. In the 1950s, Father was the first and only person (non-Communist) in Hong Kong to receive an invitation to attend the celebration.<sup>2</sup> As far as he was concerned, not only were his friendships important to him, but also his special and unique closeness to the leaders of China, which could bring about a better life for the people of Hong Kong. He realized how dependent Hong Kong was on China, not only as an entrêpot, but for its food and water supply.

## Solving the Water Shortage

As the refugee population in Hong Kong increased, the water supply became insufficient. Hong Kong depended on rainwater collected in reservoirs during the rainy season and although the number of reservoirs was increased, supply could not keep up with demand. Rationing of water began in the 1950s, but that was only a temporary solution to the problem. Water was supplied a few hours per day, then every other day, and then once every three days. The decrease in rainfall in the early 1960s turned the water shortage into a crisis.

As always, when Hong Kong had a problem, Father regarded it as his own responsibility. His concerns and public appeals to save water were constantly reported in the newspapers. While Father appealed to the public to save water, he also explained to the population the reasons for the shortage and that the government was doing its best

to solve the problem.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the only major long-term solution to the problem was to obtain water from China. Due to the fact that Beijing did not recognize the legitimacy of British presence in Hong Kong, they would not negotiate with London over Hong Kong issues. This meant that the Chinese in Hong Kong had to negotiate with the Chinese government. The job of negotiating fell on Father, who was the only person in Hong Kong who had access to the leaders in China.

Xinhua News Agency, also known as the New China News Agency, had established a branch in Hong Kong in 1947 and was the unofficial Chinese consulate. In the early 1950s, the director was Lian Weilin, a good friend of Father's. The issue of obtaining water from China was discussed and Lian was the go-between, with Father and Sir Tsun Nin Chau negotiating for Hong Kong, and Tao Zhou, the First Secretary, and Chen Yu, the Governor of Guangdong province, for China.<sup>4</sup>

In May 1963, Premier Zhou Enlai allowed tankers to go up the Pearl River daily to supply water to Hong Kong. At the same time, the Chinese government ordered a feasibility study for transporting water to Hong Kong from the East River in Guangdong province, in order to solve future problems of water shortage in Hong Kong.

While Father was in the midst of discussions, there was fear that Hong Kong would run out of water completely. On May 31, 1963, Father made a public appeal to save water, while he explained that transporting water from China was only a temporary measure and could not solve the problem completely. He also mentioned that talks with China were under way to bring about a permanent solution.<sup>5</sup>

The shortage became so severe that it was announced, starting June 1, 1963, that water could only be supplied for four hours every four days in the heavily populated areas, and three hours every four days in the less populated areas.<sup>6</sup>

On April 23, 1964, agreements were signed between the Hong Kong government and the Water Works Department of Guangdong, and work began on the building of conduits from the East River to reservoirs in Shenzhen.<sup>7</sup> From there water could be piped to Hong Kong.

In January 1965, Father was interviewed by *Wah Kiu Yat Po* about his hopes for the new year. Besides wishing for the prosperity of the citizens of Hong Kong, he looked forward to the completion of the water project, scheduled for March 1 of that year.<sup>8</sup>

The project was finished in January 1965 and by March it started to supply water to Hong Kong, 60 million cubic metres<sup>9</sup> per year. By summer, two-thirds of the water consumed in Hong Kong was from the East River.<sup>10</sup> My parents were the only people from Hong Kong who attended the opening of the facilities in Shenzhen. Sir Tsun Nin Chau had wanted to attend but was not allowed by the British Government.<sup>11</sup> No one could have stopped Father.

However, the water supply to Hong Kong was interrupted during the riots of 1967. That summer, the rainfall was below normal. The agreement with China was for 15,000 million gallons plus an additional 1,800 million gallons requested by the Water Authority, to be used between October 1 and June 30. By the beginning of June, this amount had already been drawn from the system in Hong Kong. By June 28, a request for an additional 2,000 million gallons for the month of July had still not been answered by China. Until the request was accepted, Mr. Michael Wright, Director of Public Works, announced that the supply of water would have to be reduced from eight hours each day at the beginning of June to four hours on alternate days, starting on June 29.<sup>12</sup> Under the existing agreement with China, the new water supply would not begin until October 1.

By July 1967, the water shortage was so severe that supply to the population was further reduced to four hours every four days, starting July 13.<sup>13</sup> No one really knows why the request for more water from China was not answered. One can only guess that, because of the turmoil caused by the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government was in no condition to look after the needs of the population of Hong Kong.

By the end of the 1960s, life had returned to normal. There were two subsequent phases of redevelopment of the water supply from the East River. The first one started in 1976 and finished in 1978, and a second phase started in 1981, increasing the supply to 660 million

cubic metres<sup>14</sup> of water to Hong Kong annually, which solved the water supply problem for Hong Kong once and for all.

## Between Hong Kong and China

During the 1960s, Father's relationship with China was viewed by some with jealousy and suspicion. Although he helped solve the water crisis,<sup>15</sup> some people accused Father of negotiating for the benefit of China.<sup>16</sup> The colonial government needed him when it was necessary, but they also wanted him to stay away from China. That caused a great deal of conflict between Governor David Trench (1964–1971) and Father. Father had built long-term relationships with people in China and he was loyal to his friends. In the case of the water crisis, if it hadn't been for China's help, Hong Kong would have ceased to be a viable place in which to live.

Father believed that as a Chinese, he had a right to visit friends and relatives in China as long as he was allowed into the country. After all, he was a free man. When the Hong Kong government demanded that he stop his visits to China and that Mother stop visiting her relatives, I can imagine the fireworks. Father had no respect for Governor Trench, whom he believed was not qualified for the position of governor.<sup>17</sup> He believed that Trench used the Chinese and at the same time treated them badly. David K.P. Li, who used to see Father at least once a week, told me that Father, while pro-British, was fed up with the abuses of the colonial government towards the Chinese. Arguments ensued, and Father decided to resign from all his voluntary positions with the Hong Kong government.<sup>18</sup>

Up to that point, Father had been expected by everyone to be the next in line to be knighted by the Queen. Mother had bought a beautiful blue vase which was decorated with a deer, a pine tree, and a monkey holding a peach, signifying officialdom, wealth and long life, in preparation for the celebration of the event. Then Father gave her the news that he had resigned.

When my parents returned from a trip to Madagascar on June 13, 1965, they were met at the airport by a number of unofficial members

of the Legislative Council. A letter accepting Father's resignation was handed to him by Y.K. Kan.<sup>19</sup> By 1966, Father had resigned all his voluntary positions with the Hong Kong government. His resignations meant that he was no longer given any official recognition for anything he did, but it didn't change his desire to help the people of Hong Kong. From then on, he represented himself instead of the Hong Kong government.

When David K.P. Li went to London subsequently to inquire why Father hadn't received a knighthood after all that he had done for Hong Kong, he was told that Father had been blacklisted by certain members of the colonial government.<sup>20</sup>

Father built good relations with the People's Republic of China, not only because he had many old friends in the government, but also because he knew very well that Hong Kong had to return to China one day, and he wanted to pave the road for a smooth transition. As he told me many times, "There must not be any fighting. The transition must be peaceful and beneficial to everyone." The leaders in Beijing knew of Father's sincerity and had great respect for him. Father believed that the people of Hong Kong had to rule Hong Kong one day, and that final decisions about their future could not be left to London or Beijing.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, he didn't live to see the peaceful change of sovereignty of Hong Kong.

Father and Uncle Quo Wai were the first people from Hong Kong to know about Deng Xiaoping's policy of "one country, two systems" and his fifty-year plan for Hong Kong. On one of Father's trips to China with Uncle Quo Wai in the early 1970s, Father was called into a room to be given special information. He said, "Quo-Wai, you come in too. I want you to hear what's being said."<sup>22</sup> Father was given the assurance that business would continue as usual after the change of sovereignty of Hong Kong.

When my parents visited us in Toronto at the beginning of the 1970s, Father and I had a discussion about China. It was his view that China had had its share of bad times for the last two centuries, but that the twenty-first century belonged to China and I would live to see China strong again. I realized how very concerned he had always been about China and the Chinese people.



Father had always maintained that there was a great difference between the relationship of the governments of Hong Kong and China, and that of the population of Hong Kong with China. In a speech Father gave in June 1982, in Frankfurt, Germany, at the International Conference on the Economic Opportunities in Hong Kong, he said:

There was no doubt that the strained relationship between the Hong Kong Government and the Government of China, more apparent than real, was largely due to the short-sightedness of the former Colonial Cadet Officers and to the policy of the then Colonial Office in London, but not so between the Chinese of Hong Kong and the Chinese Government.

He was referring to the 1960s. He noted improvements under governor Sir Murray Maclehoze in the 1970s:

The relationship between China and Hong Kong started to improve steadily during his term of office. This improvement is due, in large measure, to his foresight and great administrative ability.<sup>23</sup>

## The Chinese Connections

The 1970s were the years Father helped to build a bridge between Hong Kong and China. Having made the break with the colonial government, he could no longer be criticized by the Hong Kong government for his actions. Those were the years when business people in Hong Kong did not invest in or travel to China. In fact, mainland China was a place to be avoided.

Because of Father's wish for a smooth transition, dialogue was necessary. In order to help bring the two sides (Hong Kong and China) together, Father held a spring feast every Chinese New Year, inviting all the prominent members of the business community in Hong Kong, members of the Hong Kong government, as well as his foreign friends who might wish to make friends with China, to meet representatives of China. Because of Father's prestige, everyone came. By so doing, he was able to build friendships that continue to bring prosperity to all.

Xinhua News Agency would have liked to contact those in the business circles as well as the Legislative and Executive Councillors, but as the director of Xinhua in the 1970s, Lian Weilin, told me, "If I had sent out invitations, no one would turn up. But when your father did, everyone came."<sup>24</sup> Father's spring feast at the Lee Gardens Hotel was like a Who's Who in the colony. It became one of the most important annual events in Hong Kong.

At Father's spring feast, spouses were not included. It was generally known to be a party for men only, although women councillors were invited. Anna, Father's secretary, was required to help, but she had to leave before dinner started. There was a story in a celebrity magazine about how a foreign friend of Father's arrived in Hong Kong for the party with his wife, only to be told at the Lee Gardens Hotel that spouses were not invited. He had to take his wife back to the hotel and return to the party.<sup>25</sup>

One year we happened to be in Hong Kong when Father held his spring feast. Neville was invited, but I was not. Father asked me to take our boys to see the magic show at the Lee Theatre. Even though Father always thought of this as an event for men only, after he died, Mother, who had never taken part in the spring feast, continued to hold it for him for a few more years. If Father only knew!

Like all Chinese, Father frequently went back to our ancestral village, which was also the first area in China he helped after the war. The first thing he did in Garlieu village was to give money for the building of a new bridge over the river on which he had travelled as a child, when he and Grandfather brought Great-grandfather's body in a boat for burial. When I went back to the village with my family in the early 1990s, that was the first thing the villagers were proud to show us.

During our visit, we were also shown the school buildings and the playground that Father and Second Uncle had donated money to build. We were taken to a small hat factory which Father had helped the villagers to start. It was a very large room, clean, well lit and well organized. By the time we visited the village the second time, the hats they were making included well-known labels from overseas. The villagers were proud of their achievements.

Over the years, Father and his brothers helped build hospitals and schools in the city of Sunwui. By so doing, they were acting like generations of Chinese in the past by not forgetting where they came from, and offering help to those in their ancestral home town. In honour of Father, Mother was presented with a gold key in 1992 to the city of Sunwui, making her an honorary citizen. In 1993, Mother was also presented with a gold key to the city of Hoiping, where Great-grandfather had originally come from.

Because of my parents' frequent travels in China, Father was able to talk knowledgeably about the country. He Mingsi of the Xinhua News Agency, who often accompanied my parents to China, was impressed by how inquisitive a traveller Father was. He was interested not only in the development of the cities, but also in the outlying areas of the vast country.

In 1977, my parents went on an extensive trip through western China, visiting sights in Gansu province and Xinjiang Autonomous Region. The following January, Father gave a talk to the Chinese Bankers' Association. He showed, complete with slides, not only the sights, including the hydro-electric plants, but he also brought pieces of rocks from the area.<sup>26</sup> Father always had a special interest in the beauty of rocks. His enthusiasm in everything he did was infectious.

When my parents visited us in 1978, they told us about their trip to western China and gave us photographs of their visit. The one I liked best was a picture of Father on a dromedary. My parents had been invited to dine with the local chieftains in Ürümqi, Xinjiang Autonomous Region, who had served them their best. It was the first time they had ever eaten fresh *fat choy*, generally known as hair vegetable because it looks like hair. It is always used in dishes for Chinese New Year for good luck, because *fat choy* sounds the same as prosperity in Cantonese. The majority of Chinese don't know where it comes from, and generally presume that it is a seaweed. *Fat choy* is actually a desert plant. Being special guests, my parents were also served the local delicacy — sheep's eyes. Mother said, "When I saw the head on my plate with those eyes staring at me, I immediately felt sick!"

Father also promoted cultural exchanges. In 1968, during an excavation in the Man Chen District in Hebei province, the Tomb belonging to Prince Ching (Jing) of Chung Shan (Zhongshan) (personal name Liu Sheng) of the Western-Han dynasty (206 B.C. – A.D. 24) was discovered.<sup>27</sup> Inside was the body of a princess dressed in a garment of jade threaded together by gold filaments. This spectacular garment, 188 cm long, had never been shown outside of China. In 1978, Fei Yiming of *Ta Kung Pao* wanted to put on an exhibition in Hong Kong of this jade garment, together with other funerary objects, such as a gold-plated bronze Zhang Hsin Palace lamp from the same tomb, and bronze horses and chariots from a tomb from the East Han dynasty excavated in 1969.<sup>28</sup> Fei was not able to organize the exhibition and asked Father for help. Father asked Henry Fok to hold the exhibition in Star House and organized the insurance, security and ticket sales. It was a large collection which occupied three floors. It was the first time such an exhibition had ever been mounted in Hong Kong, and the attendance was overwhelming. At the same time, it gave China an archaeological presence in the colony.<sup>29</sup>

It was not uncommon for Chinese government officials to send special gifts, such as fruit, from a particular area of China, to Father through Xinhua News Agency. What they sent was often not available commercially in Hong Kong, and Father was always proud of these presents. During Chinese New Year, it would be peonies and kumquat plants and small tangerines. This show of respect continued towards Mother after Father died.

One day in the 1970s, a call came from Xinhua News Agency to say that they had a gift of “*yut lup leichee*,” meaning a basket of leichee, which had been specially sent from China for Father. They asked the office to send a large car to pick it up. Anna, Father’s secretary, wondered why a large car had to be sent for “*yut nup leichee*,” which meant one leichee. She thought the person from Xinhua was speaking in slang by changing the “n” sound in the word “*nup*” to an “l” which was a common habit among young Cantonese.<sup>30</sup> However, she did send a large car as requested, and when the car came back, it held a huge basket of leichee. The term “*lup*,” which meant “basket,” was no longer commonly used by the younger generation,

and Anna had been confused. She said that was an incident she would never forget. Anyway, there was a distribution in the office of leichee for everyone that day.

Father helped a great number of people in his life, and he often received gifts from them, but there were one or two people who were jealous of Father, and who would send him clocks. Anna found this most objectionable because, according to Cantonese folklore, giving a clock means that you want that person to die. But Father was not superstitious. He said, "If they want to give it to me, that's fine."<sup>31</sup>

As Father was very well known, and was the first prominent person from Hong Kong to travel extensively in China after the war, over the years, some young men from the mainland claimed to be his sons. What was not reported in the newspapers was the fact that Mother usually accompanied him and that he was always escorted by officials from the Chinese government. So, he ignored this nuisance. (In a similar way, young women in Hong Kong claimed to be Mother's goddaughters, since they could not very well claim to be her biological children.) It became a joke in the office whenever the staff heard about another claimant. Because of the way Father conducted his life, Grand-uncle Lee Shu Yuen and the office staff agreed that if it had been anybody else, the claims might be credible, but not Father. The claimants should have done their homework first.<sup>32</sup>

During the 1970s, Father became good friends with Yao Kang<sup>33</sup> of John Swire & Sons (H.K.) Ltd. Even though the Lee family had had a good business relationship with the company since 1948, and Father was the head of the family, the two men became close friends only when Yao became a Master in the Masonic Lodge in 1972. They often sat together at the Masonic meetings, and Father came to trust him. Yao often went with Father to the Masonic Lodges in Japan in January, and Father often called Yao to deal with both personal and business matters.

Yao, who had worked for many years in China, had established good relationships there, and spoke many Chinese dialects. Father often invited him to participate whenever there were visitors from China in Hong Kong, be it for breakfast, lunch or dinner. In this manner, Yao got to know people like the governor of Guangdong and



vice-premiers and ministers from China while they were visiting Hong Kong unofficially.<sup>34</sup> Yao was impressed by Father's willingness to help others and by his extensive connections with top Chinese government officials.

In 1978, China opened up for business. The Chinese government invited the Swire Group to visit Beijing, since Swire was an old established foreign company that had operated in China since the 1800s. When the name of the representative from the company was submitted, Father said no, Yao should be the one to represent Swire. Yao went, even though he was getting on in years, and thought a younger person should represent the company. Father trusted Yao, and believed he would do justice to both China and Swire.

One day in 1981, Father phoned Yao Kang and asked him to keep the following Wednesday clear because he needed him to look after a minister from China for the whole day. He asked Yao to plan a program for this man who was an engineer by training. At 8:30 in the morning on that day, with Hon Chiu at the Lee Gardens Hotel, Yao was introduced to Jiang Zemin who was then Minister of Electronic Industries. Father said to him, "Y.K., you better take good care of this man. He has great potential." Yao showed Jiang the airport, and in particular, the maintenance department, the facilities of Cathay Pacific (owned by Swire) and public housing in Kowloon, in all of which Jiang showed great interest. Yao also took him to lunch, and spoke to him about finance and commerce in general. Father thought Yao was the perfect person to take Jiang around since they were both from Shanghai, and would have a lot in common. As it turned out, Jiang's vice-minister Wei Mingyi had been Yao's roommate at Beijing University, and it was Wei who had originally advised Yao in 1948 to take the job with Swire in England. After that visit, Jiang became Mayor of Shanghai, and Yao visited him and they became good friends. After the June 4, 1989 incident at Tiananmen Square, Jiang became Party Secretary, and Wei Mingyi became the president of China International Trust and Investment Corporation (CITIC).<sup>35</sup> To this day, Yao Kang thinks that Father had vision, and like many others, always gives him credit for being able to see potential in others.

In 1979, Sir Murray Maclehoze was the first governor of Hong Kong to be invited to visit Beijing and tour western China. At the end of his visit, he attended the Guangzhou-Kowloon Through Train<sup>36</sup> ceremony in Guangzhou. My parents, who were visiting Hainan Island, accompanied by the Director of Xinhua News Agency, Wang Kuang,<sup>37</sup> were invited to attend the ceremony. A special plane was sent to Hainan to take them to Guangzhou, but they almost didn't make it because of high winds. The plane had to take off due west instead of north, but finally landed in Zhaoqing, and from there they made it to Guangzhou.<sup>38</sup> The event was very important to Father because it signalled the beginning of communication in earnest between Britain and China.<sup>39</sup>

Not only did Father build a relationship between Hong Kong and China, but his international network also extended to Europe and Japan. He worked with N.M. Rothschild and Sons of London, A.P. Møller of Denmark, Yamaichi Securities of Japan and many others. Foreign investments poured into the colony and eventually into China. His prestige rose while he kept busy looking after his many businesses and starting new ones. Once there was friendship, dialogue and business followed. And when China opened up for business in the late 1970s, Father took the lead in the first joint venture.

By the 1970s, Father had attained the respect and trust of different segments of society in Hong Kong, members of the government as well as by the leaders in China. He was regarded internationally as one of the "decision makers" in Hong Kong.<sup>40</sup> He was satisfied that the Hong Kong government was working on behalf of the population. These were important years, when he helped to lay the foundation for a peaceful transfer of sovereignty, both in business links between Hong Kong and China, and in the structure of the future government of Hong Kong.

He was regarded by many in Hong Kong as the ideal person to be the Chief Executive when Hong Kong returned to China on July 1, 1997. Whenever I heard that mentioned, I always pointed out that by 1997, Father would be ninety-two years old.

I'm sure that Father was able to work at the age of seventy-eight like a young man of thirty-five because he was full of ideas, and was

always starting new projects. By the beginning of the 1980s, he had planned two new projects in China: to improve the international telephone system in Guangzhou, and to build a double railway line between Shenzhen and Guangzhou. These unfortunately could not be realized before his death.<sup>41</sup>

By January 1982, China was the largest supplier of goods to Hong Kong, overtaking Japan for the first time in recent history. Father believed that the increase in trade between Hong Kong and China called for improvements in China's transportation system:

To meet the ever-increasing volume of trade, the means of transportation between Hong Kong and Guangdong must be improved. In order to reduce delays in the transit of goods and to reduce the cost of transportation and handling, the Guangzhou-Shenzhen railway must be double-tracked to link up with Kowloon as an order of first priority. Hong Kong is the only deep-sea port with all modern facilities on the South China coast and an increasing number of containers will flow in both directions between Hong Kong and Guangzhou. This traffic must, in the near future, be carried by rail....The double tracking of the railway could be carried out with comparative ease and completed quickly at reasonable cost — to the benefit of Hong Kong, China and the world.<sup>42</sup>

When our family attended the grand opening of the Garden Hotel in Guangzhou in 1985, and one of our sons could not be with us, I was able to call direct from our hotel room to Toronto without any problem. I was very impressed.

## The Garden Hotel

When China was opened for joint ventures with foreign capital, Father immediately responded. In taking the lead, he wanted to give the Chinese government credibility. Since he knew that the hotels in China were all substandard, he planned to build the largest and most beautiful hotel in China.

In the late 1970s, the Chinese Communist Party was inexperienced in dealing with joint ventures, and Father's was the first. It became extremely trying for him because of endless negotiations, red tape, delays, and the resulting escalation in cost.

Father had originally wanted to build a hotel in Beijing, but was asked to build one on Hainan Island instead. He realized then that those in the Chinese government involved in this project had no concept of business. Hainan Island in the 1970s did not have the infrastructure to support a project of that magnitude.

Instead, Father chose a prime location in Guangzhou, close to the train station which would be convenient for business people coming to the Guangzhou Trade Fair. The site was near Beiyunshan, which had an important airfield, and was a high-security defence location for Guangzhou. Father was asked to build a hotel with anti-aircraft guns on the roof and a bomb shelter underneath. It again took time and patience while he and Yang Shangkun, who was then the vice-chairman of the Military Commission, talked to those who had made the request in Beijing, and the demands were dropped. The hotel, however, was built with its own emergency generator, which was and still is very necessary.

So the Garden Hotels Holdings (Hong Kong) Limited was formed and a joint venture agreement<sup>43</sup> was signed between it and the Guangzhou Lingnan Enterprises Company on March 28, 1980.<sup>44</sup> The development site, covering 52,600 square metres, was located south of Guangzhou Baiyun Guest House, on what had been vegetable farmland. The Garden Hotel<sup>45</sup> was to be built by Guangzhou Pearl River Foreign Investment Construction Company in two phases — 1,300 rooms to be completed in the first phase and 940 rooms in the second — at an estimated cost of about US\$50,000 per room.<sup>46</sup> The project was comprised of a hotel, a conference centre and an apartment tower.

Father raised the capital among his friends and from the banks, with himself as the major shareholder. Many of his friends rallied behind him. Swire was asked to participate, and even though it was totally against Swire's principles to take part in this type of investment, Yao Kang persuaded the company to become a minor

shareholder. A.P. Møller, the Danish company which continues to this day to have a close relationship with the various businesses of the Lee family, invested in the company because of Father. The total amount raised was HK\$700 million.<sup>47</sup>

I remember the enthusiasm with which Father talked about the project. It was to be not only a five-star hotel, the largest in China, but one of the largest and most beautiful in the world, and it was to be his gift to China. On December 27, 1980, Yang Shangkun laid the foundation stone for the Garden Hotel. Father expressed the hope that this would contribute in a small way to the modernization of China.<sup>48</sup>

The architect for the Garden Hotel was Szeto Wai, Father's friend who had designed The Chinese University of Hong Kong. The Chinese parties in the joint venture<sup>49</sup> requested that all the rooms be almost identical. C.T. Wu and his son were drawn into the planning, because Father had wanted them to help with the future management of the hotel. They objected to making all the rooms the same and insisted that there should be many different configurations of rooms in a modern hotel. They also objected to the design of a revolving restaurant because they felt that it was not suitable for the location. All this caused delays in the construction. Corrections were made to construct the rooms in different sizes, and suites were added to make the hotel more marketable. But the revolving restaurant remained. Unfortunately, this led to bad feelings between C.T. Wu and his son on one side, and the hotel group on the other.<sup>50</sup>

By early 1983, because of bad financial management, there were huge cost overruns. The problems of the construction became obvious and it was very stressful for Father.<sup>51</sup> When he passed away in July, Beijing requested that Mother take over the chairmanship of Garden Hotels Holdings (Hong Kong) Limited.<sup>52</sup> Xu Jiatur, the newly appointed director of Xinhua News Agency, organized a dinner for the representatives from China, and Mother agreed to become the chairman. Now it was up to her to solve the financial crisis. Despite the fact that Swire was only a minor shareholder, Yao Kang took the lead in helping to solve the problem. He told the representative from the Chinese side of the hotel company that Swire would raise sufficient



additional capital, on condition that the company could send auditors into China to check the books. But when the auditors went in, they couldn't get the information they needed. There were no books to show how the US\$100 million had been spent. In order for the project to carry on, all the original investors were asked to put in additional capital, not only because of China's appeal for foreign investment but also out of respect for Father's memory. Swire took the lead in putting in additional capital, and also made up the difference when an investor failed to put in their share. The accountant for the company was set aside, and the hotel proceeded to completion.<sup>53</sup>

On October 28, 1984, the hotel opened for business. Among the major tenants were offices of the American Consulate and the Japanese Consulate,<sup>54</sup> and their residences were in the twin tower.<sup>55</sup> My parents' old friend Reiko Ogata became the liaison in the Garden Hotel for the Japanese government and businesses. She later worked in promotion for the hotel in Tokyo until 1988.

The grand opening of the hotel was planned for August 28, 1985, and guests were invited to stay for three days. We flew to Hong Kong to join the group for the celebration. Many cars of the through train from Hong Kong to Guangzhou were booked for guests, and the party really started at the train station in Hong Kong.

We arrived to a red-carpet welcome. Just as I expected, the hotel was not only grand, it was absolutely beautiful. When I saw Mother making her speech in Mandarin, I felt very proud, and wished that Father could have been there too.

In 1989, after the June 4 incident in Tiananmen Square, all businesses in China suffered. The Garden Hotel had no income, yet it still had interest payments to make to the syndicated loan.<sup>56</sup> It faced foreclosure by the banks. Mother decided to go to Beijing to seek help. An official visit was planned to see President Yang Shangkun, who was a pragmatic person and had great respect for my parents.

In early 1990, accompanied by a senior official from Xinhua News Agency, Mother paid a visit to President Yang, who invited her to dinner at Diaoyutai.<sup>57</sup> Mother told the president that the investors had come to the end of the road, so the choice was for the Chinese

government to take over the hotel, or else it would have to be closed. President Yang said to her, “The Garden Hotel will never close, Mrs. Lee, don’t worry.”

A month after Mother’s visit, the Bank of China called to say that the Garden Hotels Holdings (Hong Kong) Ltd. had an unsecured line of credit of US\$25 million. Mother’s “rescue” mission was successful. Fortunately, the line of credit didn’t have to be used, because business gradually returned to normal, and within a few years, the entire loan was paid off.<sup>58</sup>

In Father’s later years, he was sometimes asked why he put money in the Bank of China. The bank’s interest rate was only 4 per cent, whereas he could get a much higher return at other financial institutions. His answer was, “I don’t intend to take the money out. China is my country.”<sup>59</sup>

# 13

## The Businessman

“Victory in war and profit in business,”<sup>1</sup> was what Father once said the name Lee stands for, and he certainly had a winner’s mentality. However, he never could be a “successful” businessman in the true sense of someone who is completely profit-oriented. People often said that Father could have been a lot wealthier than he was, but he had a different agenda. He was a socially responsible businessman for whom people came first and profit second. He believed that money ought to be used to benefit people and not to pamper oneself. When he was interviewed in 1975 by Berta Manson for a series called “The Empire Builders” in the *South China Morning Post*, he lamented that the rich industries were doing “too little for the lot of Hong Kong’s underprivileged youth.”<sup>2</sup>

Many people in Hong Kong had become overnight billionaires through speculation.<sup>3</sup> It was a practice Father abhorred, because it upset economic stability and drove prices up, making life difficult for ordinary people. He considered speculators the scourge of mankind. Although the Lee family owned many properties in Hong Kong, he cringed whenever property prices were driven sky high, because it meant that many people would not be able to afford a place to live.<sup>4</sup> He spoke very publicly on this issue on many occasions, and certainly practised what he preached.

Investment and not speculation was, to Father, the key to responsible and good business. Father believed “a company must have a solid foundation and expand over the years....The best improvement is long, gradual and steady.”<sup>5</sup> In a speech in 1982, he said:

Such business activities [speculation], which may enrich a few individuals, bring no real wealth to the community and provide little employment to the local population. Activities of a highly speculative nature cannot be of benefit in a new “Hong Kong Order.”<sup>6</sup>

It was something I have learnt from him. With speculation, one can make a great deal of money overnight, but one can also lose everything, and many people are destroyed along the way. Investment to him also meant investment in people, providing jobs and improving people’s standard of living. Many young people nowadays might think this philosophy belongs to the dinosaur age, but I still believe it is the basis of a sound and stable society.

Father tried to instill his belief in others. Anna, his secretary, told me about an incident in the 1970s that concerned the purchase of condominiums. The procedure for purchasing condos in Hong Kong was and still is quite different from that in other parts of the world. People have to line up for numbers just to obtain the right to purchase. Many people go without sleep just to get to the front of the line. One day, Father told all the office staff that if they were interested in purchasing a condo in one of the new developments owned by someone he knew, he could get them low numbers (meaning they would have priority), but they had to promise him that they were purchasing a condo to live in and not for speculation. Anna said, “I missed a chance to make some money, but I didn’t dare disobey your father!”

Father did not believe in bargaining because he felt that everyone had a right to make a living. If the price is not right, you don’t buy. I remember being with him and some of my parents’ friends at a Chinese New Year bazaar. A friend of Mother’s wanted to buy a budding peach tree<sup>7</sup> for her home and bargained for a lower price, but was stopped by Father. He believed that people should be able to make a bit more money around Chinese New Year.

Father was known as a thorough person. Whatever he took on, he gave it a great deal of his time and effort. As company chairman — and he was chairman of many companies — he would check the annual reports carefully and make corrections before they went to print, which was normally not his responsibility.<sup>8</sup> And yet, as an entrepreneur with a lot of ideas and great connections, he was not interested in the details of operations. He was more excited in making deals than in the bottom line, so at times he trusted the wrong people in management, and certain businesses didn't do well for him.<sup>9</sup> Because he was an honourable man, he expected others to be the same. Once he trusted someone, he would continue to trust, despite warnings from others that the person was working against him. At times like these, it was very upsetting for Mother, who could see what was going on, but was powerless to do anything about it.

This was true of his experience with Kowloon Taxi, which he started soon after the war. Father was probably one of the first people to buy diesel-fuelled Mercedes-Benz cars as taxis. But Kowloon Taxi eventually went downhill because of bad management, and was finally sold when the Cross Harbour tunnel was built.<sup>10</sup>

I often heard Father say that he wasn't interested in being the wealthiest man in Hong Kong, even if with his connections, he could have been. This doesn't sound like a statement by a businessman. He was a thrifty person, and money didn't have great significance to him personally. Like most members of the Lee family, Father never wore flashy clothes or drove fancy cars. I remember him telling me when Rolls-Royce first came to Hong Kong, that he was approached to buy one, and his answer was, "I can't afford the ostentation." He would rather drive around in a Volkswagen Golf. And yet, at the same time, nothing would stop him from buying Mother precious jewels. Those probably were the only times he ever splurged.

In March 1960, Father led the Hong Kong Trade Mission to West Africa. On his return, he made suggestions to Hong Kong manufacturers about packaging, pricing, sizing and marketing. He recommended that shoeboxes be improved because rats ate the Chinese glue made from rice flour that was used to make the boxes, that



chinaware be shipped in wooden crates to prevent breakage, and that clothing sizes be standardized. He lamented that manufacturers had lost orders because of poor quality. He believed that Hong Kong products could command the same prices as Japanese products if they were well made, because there was a demand for them. He also suggested that all Hong Kong manufacturers get together to print a catalogue to make ordering easier for buyers.<sup>11</sup>

In 1963, Father was asked by the Hong Kong government to lead a delegation to the Frankfurt International Trade Fair in August. Since he had already been invited by the German government to tour Germany as their guest, he made arrangements to do both around the same time. Upon his first stop in London, he was handed a letter from St. James's Palace, inviting him to attend an Investiture at Buckingham Palace on that Wednesday, July 24, to receive a CBE from the Queen. Since Mother was not with him on that trip, he invited two friends, Colonel Jack and Major General Tom Churchill, to accompany him to the palace. Everything happened so suddenly that he had to rent a morning coat for the occasion.

It was Father's habit to make frequent trips to Europe. That summer, Father flew from London to Denmark to visit friends, the Jebbens, in Aabenraa and at their cottage on Romo Island. When Mother, who was not with him on that trip, heard about Father swimming in the frigid water of Als Fjord, her comment was that Father still thought himself a young man. Father was driven by another friend, Martin Schroter, from Romo Island to Hamburg, Germany, where he was taken to major centres, guided by officials of the German government, Helmut Kluge and Verner Walbroel. From there, Father flew to Vienna to meet Uncle Quo Wai and they toured factories and hydro-electric stations in Austria. At the end of August, he led the trade delegation to Frankfurt. Father was a tireless learner.

In the 1960s, as many small factories sprouted up in Hong Kong, land became a problem. In March 1963, Father spoke in the Legislative Council, on behalf of the new and small factory owners, against the government's policy of forcing them off the land in order to sell it to developers. He said that the industries had obtained their licences to

operate from the government, and should be protected. If the government wanted them to move, alternative locations ought to be provided at a reasonable rent. They should also be notified when the land they occupied was to be auctioned, as they had a right to put in a bid. He rejected the suggestion that small industries should be absorbed by the large ones, and stressed the importance of protecting hard-working small-industry owners who were the backbone of society.<sup>12</sup>

There were concerns during those years that Hong Kong was losing investments to other areas of the world. It was a problem that Father had often mentioned. In 1963, Father suggested at the Legislative Council meeting that the inheritance tax be abolished. The tax collected that year only came to \$20 million, which was a fraction of the amount of investment lost to other jurisdictions because of it.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, his advice was not taken.

Besides helping other industrialists, Father was involved in industries himself. In 1964, he started the Hong Kong Tube and Metal Products Ltd. in Peng Chau, one of the islands off Hong Kong. The product from this factory was new to the colony. In the opening ceremony on December 21, Father was proud to announce the establishment of a new industry for Hong Kong. The Hon. D.R. Holmes officiated at the opening, and in commemoration of the event, the board promised to make an annual donation to provide for ten free places in two local schools for the children of Peng Chau.<sup>14</sup> Hong Kong Tube and Metal Products used only the best supplies. For example, they purchased their steel from Nippon Steel Corporation, and hot rolled steel coils from Yawata Iron and Steel Co. Ltd., both Japanese companies. The Hong Kong Tube and Metal Products continued in operation until Father's death, at which time it was sold.

Although he was involved in many businesses, Father never lost his interest in engineering problems. Soon after the war, Father suggested that the government build a tunnel through the mountain from Happy Valley to Aberdeen. At that time, he estimated that it would cost only a little over \$1 million. However, the government was not interested. A tunnel was finally built at a much later date and at much greater cost.<sup>15</sup>

In 1964, the Legislative Council was planning to erect additional buildings for the British armed forces stationed in Hong Kong in areas such as Shek Kong in the New Territories. Father recommended that all buildings be designed so that they could be converted to libraries, schools or offices with minor alterations. Thus, when the time came for them to be handed back by the British to the government of Hong Kong (Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong), they would remain valuable properties.<sup>16</sup> Father was already preparing Hong Kong for the change of sovereignty in 1997, and he did not want to see resources wasted.

Also in 1964, he experimented with solar heating for hot water by building a contraption on the roof of Tower Court where we lived. The structure was of canvas and inside were six black tubes each six inches wide. The black tubes would absorb the heat of the sun and warm the water in the structure. It was the first solar heating system ever built in Hong Kong and cost only a hundred dollars. Although it was successful, and his efforts were reported in the media, it was never built for commercial use.<sup>17</sup>

## A New Tunnel

Ever since 1955, there had been public discussions in Hong Kong of improving harbour crossings between the island and Kowloon by building either a bridge or a tunnel. A bridge would be exposed to the weather, and it might not be safe during the typhoon season. However, a tunnel would be a much more complicated engineering undertaking and would cost much more than a bridge. Public discussions on the subject continued for a number of years. It was not until May 1963 that the Hong Kong government made the decision not to build a bridge. After that, discussions were concentrated on the tunnel.<sup>18</sup>

A tunnel between Hong Kong and Kowloon would put an end to the long line-ups at the Yaumatai Car Ferry. In those days, no one took a car across the harbour unless it was absolutely necessary, because it was a full-day excursion. Our family would take the car across only for special family gatherings and Chinese New Year. Most people crossed the harbour by ferry and then hired a taxi on the other side.

In 1963, Father, J.L. Marden of Wheelock Marden, the Hon. J.D. Clague and Lawrence Kadoorie formed the Victoria City Development Co. Ltd., whose main objective was the building of a cross-harbour tunnel between the island and Kowloon. The name was later changed to Cross-Harbour Tunnel Company Limited, Hong Kong. The original plan was to build a tunnel for both cars and pedestrians.<sup>19</sup> It was to be a two-lane tunnel and the plan and the layout were sent to the Colonial Secretary and the Crown Lands and Survey Office in January 1964.<sup>20</sup> But by August 11, 1965, when approval for the construction of the tunnel was finally passed by the Hong Kong government, the plan had changed. The tunnel would be for cars only. It would be open twenty-four hours a day even during typhoon season, and it would cost an estimated \$210 million. The Hong Kong government would be the owner of one quarter of the project.<sup>21</sup> Construction was to start the following fall.

When the right to build the tunnel was granted, Father worked very hard to find investors for the project. Most of the financing came from a British merchant investment banker.<sup>22</sup> During the 1960s, the economy was poor in Hong Kong and it was difficult to persuade people to invest. Father and Lee Hysan Estate Co. were some of the original investors, together with Marden and the Kadoorie family. Father tried to convince the owner of the Yaumatai Car Ferry, Lau Ding Kuok, to invest in the company, especially when the business of his ferry service would be affected by the building of a tunnel, but Lau declined, and to this day, he regrets it.<sup>23</sup>

During the formation of the company, Father went to visit Fei Yiming of *Ta Kung Pao* to ask if he thought the timing was right to build the cross-harbour tunnel. I believe he meant the political timing. Fei's answer was that it would be absolutely necessary for the convenience of the citizens of Hong Kong, and assured Father that Hong Kong's political stability would be maintained for a long time.<sup>24</sup>

During my parents' visit to us in Toronto in the early 1970s, Father told me how difficult it was to get the cross-harbour tunnel under way. In the beginning, it was difficult to get the Hong Kong government to provide financial support. However, when the government of France showed interest in injecting capital into the project, the Hong Kong government immediately became interested.

Father oversaw the engineering of the tunnel. Building a tunnel under the harbour in the 1960s was a difficult feat, although Hon Chiu told me, “Today, it is as easy as making duck soup.”<sup>25</sup> Being a civil engineer, Father always liked to get involved in the construction. When the first section of the tunnel was completed, Father invited Fei Yiming to inspect it. The night before the tunnel was due to be opened for traffic, Father invited Fei to drive with him from Hong Kong to Kowloon. He explained the technical aspects of the construction to his friend, about air circulation and the prevention of water seepage.<sup>26</sup> Fei was most impressed by Father’s complete involvement. Father was very proud of this project.

When the tunnel was opened on August 2, 1972, traffic between Hong Kong and Kowloon was revolutionized.<sup>27</sup> It was no longer a big undertaking to cross between Hong Kong and Kowloon by car, and line-ups at the Yaumatai Car Ferry were a thing of the past. Business was not brisk at the beginning, because it cost five dollars for the crossing, but people soon appreciated the convenience and there was no turning back. Subsequently, when the exchange rate of the HK dollar became very favourable against the pound sterling, the loan was quickly paid back and the company went on to make great profits.<sup>28</sup>

During one of our visits after the tunnel was first opened, we were in a car with cousins driving across from Kowloon to Hong Kong. One cousin said to me, “Every time we pay five dollars to cross, two out of that goes into your father’s pocket!” I was sure she was exaggerating.

## The Telephone Company

In January 1962, Father was appointed to the board of directors of the Hong Kong Telephone Company Limited by the chairman, H.R.M. Cleland. In 1965, he himself became the chairman.<sup>29</sup>

The Hong Kong telephone system was rather backward in the 1960s. In 1966, there were only 300,000 telephone lines in Hong Kong, which came to eight for every one hundred persons. At the same time, sixty thousand people were waiting in line for telephone service. That year, Father decided to expand the operations of the



company by building more stations in different parts of Hong Kong, to make it possible to increase the number of telephone lines to 1.8 million. Cables were laid under the ocean in Southeast Asia to improve communications, and technical and management level personnel were hired to manage the increased demand. The profit that year went up to \$29 million.<sup>30</sup>

Because of his admiration for German engineering, Father decided to purchase German equipment to improve the performance of the telephone system. He was advised by Jardine Fleming<sup>31</sup> to use Swiss francs to fund the purchase. Unfortunately, the rate of exchange on the Swiss francs appreciated many times against the Hong Kong dollar, which made the purchase very expensive. Yet Father did not want to raise the telephone rate. This produced great controversy and Father had to shoulder the blame. David K.P. Li, whose father, Fook Su Li, was on the board, believed that Father was badly advised.<sup>32</sup>

In 1969, despite the public outcry, the number of telephone lines had increased to five hundred thousand, which was 12.45 per one hundred persons, the second highest per capita in Asia after Japan. When satellite communications were established in Hong Kong that year, communications with other parts of the world were greatly improved. The most important work for the company in 1970 was the building of computerized connectors in the Lai Chi Kok station. When it was completed, it was the most advanced independent system in the world, able to service the New Territories as well as Hong Kong. In the technical department, almost two thousand employees were trained. Four Chinese engineers were sent to England for advanced training, and six were sent to Munich in Germany for technical training. A school in Kwun Tong to train employees was scheduled to be finished by April 1971.<sup>33</sup>

During Father's term as chairman, it was discovered there were a great many problems in the management of the company. Rumour had it that there were people within the company who were taking bribes, and that this problem went all the way up to the general manager, Charles Male.<sup>34</sup> Lydia Dunn, the present Baroness Dunn, was one of the people sent by the government to investigate the mismanagement.

Unfortunately, the investigation could not proceed because Charles Male left for South Africa. Since there was no extradition treaty between South Africa and Hong Kong, he could not be brought back to answer questions.<sup>35</sup>

At that time, Father's office was on the twenty-fifth floor of the Prince's Building, and the Telephone Company was on the fourth floor. He was very much aware of the constant flurry of investigative activities between the two offices and this caused a great strain on him.

Father asked his friend Jack Cater<sup>36</sup> to be the general manager of the Telephone Company, but since Governor Sir Murray Macle hose needed Cater to head the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), which was established in 1974, Father decided that the public needed his friend more, and the general manager's position went to F. L. Walker.

Father waited until the controversy was over and the company was back on its feet, then he resigned. He expressed to Fei Yiming that, in time, people in Hong Kong would appreciate what he had done to improve the telephone system.<sup>37</sup>

## The Gas Company

In 1964, Father became the first Chinese chairman of the Hong Kong and China Gas Co., which was established in 1862 to provide gas lighting to the colony. In 1975, Hong Kong Electric, which was controlled by Jardine, attempted to take over Hong Kong and China Gas. Father resisted. It became a high-profile takeover attempt that Father referred to as "a big fish swallowing a small fish."<sup>38</sup> He was constantly on the news explaining to the shareholders why they shouldn't sell their shares to Hong Kong Electric, and exposing the financial position of the latter which he believed would be detrimental to the shareholders of China Gas. Even though the Hong Kong and China Gas Company was a much smaller company, he managed to show his shareholders how economically stable and profitable it was.<sup>39</sup>

In all this, Father spent a great deal of time with two of his board members, the Hon. J.D. Claque, a taipan of the Hutchison Group,

and Noel Croucher, a leading stockbroker, who helped prevent the hostile takeover by advising his clients not to sell their shares to Hong Kong Electric.<sup>40</sup> By August 20, 1975, Father and the board of directors succeeded in preventing the takeover.

The Gas Company was originally registered in the United Kingdom. In 1982, Father, as chairman, made the decision to move the registration to Hong Kong. At the time of the transfer, only 2 of the 2,238 shareholders were registered on the London Register. Father explained to the shareholders that while the company had always been at a disadvantage because it had to comply with British legislation, Britain's entry to the European Economic Community in 1973 had resulted in an even greater degree of legislative control, most of which was inappropriate to a company operating in Hong Kong. At a cost of \$1.2 million, the company severed its ties with Britain. The ceremony was held in Hon Chiu's office in Sunning Plaza, and Hong Kong and China Gas became a Hong Kong company. To commemorate the event, all employees were presented with a one-ounce gold coin, and grants of \$250,000 each were made to the University of Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Polytechnic.<sup>41</sup>

The Hong Kong and China Gas Company's profits rose from \$39 million in 1980 to \$235 million within six years, and it achieved the status of a major utility company after 125 years of operations. Gas was no longer the fuel of the wealthy, but an everyday necessity for the people of Hong Kong.

Ever since the 1970s, Father had worked towards obtaining natural gas from China, building pipelines under the ocean to Hong Kong. This would not only bring in foreign exchange for China, but would benefit the people of Hong Kong. Unfortunately, due to safety problems and engineering difficulties, his dream was not realized during his lifetime.<sup>42</sup>

After Father died, the Hong Kong and China Gas company signed a joint memorandum with Qin Wencai, president of the China National Offshore Oil Corporation in 1985, to bring natural gas to Hong Kong, at a date to be determined.<sup>43</sup> When this finally happens, it will usher in an era of cheaper gas for Hong Kong.

## The Rothschild Bank

The Rothschild Bank wanted to establish a bank in Hong Kong and approached Father to be a founding director. In March 1973, N.M. Rothschild & Sons (Hong Kong) Limited was formed, and in January 1974, Father was appointed deputy chairman. Everyone wondered why he was approached by a Jewish bank, and the rumour in Hong Kong was that he must have been circumcised. The fact of the matter was that the bank needed someone with an impeccable reputation to head it. Sir Evelyn de Rothschild was the chairman, but since he was not based in Hong Kong, Father chaired many of the meetings. In the meantime, the two became very good friends. Sir Evelyn referred to Father as the first chairman of the bank in Hong Kong.

During Father's term as deputy chairman, 1974-1978, he introduced potential business opportunities to the bank and assisted in the recruitment of local executives. Sir Evelyn wrote to me that Father was very keen on putting the following motto in Chinese in front of the bank office:

Devotion with zeal in Finance,  
 Wealth is developed by the golden mean;  
 Enterprise is all-embracing,  
 Exchanges pervade the four seas;  
 Assets abound in resources,  
 Making fortunes by fair and honest dealing;  
 Steering a course in economic growth,  
 For the benefit of commerce and industry;  
 With united and popular support,  
 The outlook for prosperity is bright!<sup>44</sup>

Having an international outlook made it easy for Father to make friends and have business associations with people from all over the world, as with the Rothschild Bank. In a 1979 letter to Father,

Sir Evelyn wrote:

... I was also very pleased to see that N.M.R. Hong Kong is doing so well and I know much of the success is due to your guiding hand, which is greatly appreciated.

... Again my grateful thanks to you for all the help and kindness you showed me ...<sup>45</sup>

## The Danish Connection

Father's association with Messrs. A.P. Møller of Denmark began in the 1960s. The relationship grew stronger as time went on, and the company invested in many of Father's projects. The owner, Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller and Father became good friends.

Messrs. A.P. Møller was started in 1904 by Arnold Peter Møller with his father, Captain Peter Mærsk Møller, in Svendborg, Denmark, as a shipping company. In 1965, on the death of his father, Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller assumed the leadership of the A.P. Møller Group and the company developed into a major international enterprise. The Group consisted of Mærsk Line, Mærsk Tankers, Mærsk Drilling in the Danish part of the North Sea, Odense Steel Shipyard, Mærsk Container Industries, Mærsk Air, A/S Roulunds Fabriker for the production of fan belts and brake linings for European cars, Pharma-Plast for the production and sale of medical supplies, Mærsk Data for the supply and sale of data processing, Dansk Supermarked, the second largest supermarket chain in Denmark, and many more.

When Per Jorgensen, managing director of Messrs. A.P. Møller, arrived in Hong Kong in August 1977, he and Father immediately became good friends. By that time, the company already had three joint ventures with the Lee family: the Lee Gardens Hotel and the office towers One Hysan Avenue and Leighton Centre. Jorgensen said, at the time, his international corporate experience was limited,



and Father took him under his wings and introduced him to the sophisticated corporate life and its procedures in Hong Kong. Father offered friendship, guidance and goodwill, and Jorgensen appreciated Father's openness, dynamism and his modern and efficient way of handling matters.<sup>46</sup>

My parents visited Denmark in July 1982. Per Jorgensen and his wife spent a lot of time with them and Mr. Jorgensen told me that Father was a good tourist because he was inquisitive, interested and tireless. Apparently, he visited many castles and constantly asked questions. At the end of 1982, the chairman and CEO of A.P. Møller, Mr. Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller, accompanied by his daughter Ane Uggla, visited my family in Hong Kong.<sup>47</sup> Neville and I were in Hong Kong at the time and had the pleasure of having dinner with them.

A.P. Møller continued to be a great supporter of all Father's business undertakings as in the Hysan Development Company and the Garden Hotel Holdings (Hong Kong) Ltd. Per Jorgensen became one of the first directors of Hysan Development Company.

## A Shipping Company

Father had an indirect interest in Japan in connection with Grand Marine Holdings Ltd., a Hong Kong shipping company that built many of their cargo ships in Japan. The names of most of their ships started with the word "Grand," such as *Grand Eagle* and *Grand Jade*, the latter being named after Mother, whose Chinese name means jade.

Grand Marine was owned by Li Ping San, the father-in-law of my mother's niece Greta Li. Because of the family connection, Li asked Father to become the chairman of his company and Father helped the family to take the company public in the 1970s.

My parents went to the launching of many of their ships in Japan, and for a number of years, the company's profits soared. Unfortunately, Li became very ill. Just before he died, he asked to see Father and made him promise to look after his two sons who would be inheriting the company. Unfortunately, after Li died, the sons sold the company to Carrion, an investment group headed by Malaysian-born businessman George S.G. Tan, for what they believed to be a large

amount of money. Actually most of it was in the form of shares in the Carrion Group.

Since Father was not consulted, he decided to sever his ties with Grand Marine and sell all his shares in the company. This was fortunate, because the sale of Grand Marine eventually bankrupted the Li family. The original personal guarantees that the father, Li Ping San, had given to the banks were passed on to the sons even though the company had been sold.<sup>48</sup> In 1983, the collapse of the Carrion group became the biggest corporate scandal ever in Hong Kong, when Malaysian banker Lorrain Osman and Tan were found guilty of defrauding Bumiputra Malaysia Finance Ltd. (BMFL) of \$6 billion (US\$769 million). BMFL was a subsidiary of Bank Bumiputra, the second largest bank in Malaysia.<sup>49</sup>

## The Canadian Connection

In Father's speech in Frankfurt in June 1982, he said:

There is no doubt at all, in my mind, that Hong Kong can assist China in her oil exploration programme in many ways. The importance of Hong Kong to China is undeniable, but of course we all realize too that Hong Kong depends on China for her survival. Could the China offshore oil and gas tilt the balance of the industrial world one day?<sup>50</sup>

In the late 1970s, Ranger Oil of Calgary, Canada, approached Father to form a company for oil exploration in China. Father turned down the offer. The company then turned to the Hambros Bank of London, a merchant bank in England. Through Hambros' connection with Yao Kang, they tried to reach Father. The proposal was to set up an oil company that would have the rights to drill in the South China Sea, recognized to be rich with oil reserves. Yao thought it was a sound idea and called Father. The two men decided that this would be good for China.

Father called a meeting between the Hon. Victor Lampson, a partner of Cazenove & Co.<sup>51</sup> of London, accompanied by David Lewis, a director of Hambros Bank, at the Lee Hysan Estate Company board-

room at One Hysan Avenue. Father agreed to the proposal, and invested US\$1 million in the company. He became the chairman of Canada & Oriental Oil Limited (COOL) in 1981, and Yao Kang became one of the directors. There were many other investors, including some of Father's friends in Hong Kong.

Father believed that China had a rich oil reserve that had never been tapped. The drilling started in the South China Sea at the end of 1981 or the beginning of 1982. At that time, there were seven foreign oil companies drilling in the Yellow Sea, the South China Sea and near Hainan Island. Father described these developments as "one of the most important steps in the Four Modernisations of China."<sup>52</sup>

Between 1981 and 1984, thirty-five wells were drilled in the China Sea without success. Then the world oil prices collapsed. Between 1986 and 1987, Ranger Oil bought back the shares and sold all the rigs. In the end, the company was liquidated. As of June 1997, there has not been any successful drilling by any oil company in the South China Sea. The prospect of COOL was based on the original survey from Ranger Oil.<sup>53</sup>

By 1981, Hong Kong was already importing 20 per cent of its petroleum products from China. Father believed that when China's reserves came on stream, they would have a tremendous economic impact on the world.<sup>54</sup> Despite the lack of success of COOL up to the time of his death, Father continued to have faith in China's offshore oil reserves.

# 14

## The Freemason: A Lifetime Commitment

For as long as I lived at home, I always heard about Father going to Masonic meetings. These meetings were a mystery to me because freemasonry was a close-knit society for men, although, in later years, it became more open.

Freemasonry is a system of morality based on the principles of brotherly love and charity — not only of money but also of the mind — truth and personal integrity. It is entirely non-political; political discussions are forbidden in its premises.<sup>1</sup> It is a bond of fellowship that unites its members all over the world. Despite the general misconception in Hong Kong that only the rich and powerful are members, it is actually open to every honest, free man, over twenty-one years of age. A new mason is taught to be “exemplary in the discharge of his duties as a citizen of the world.”<sup>2</sup> Masons refer to one another as brothers, and freemasonry is proud of its philosophy of making good men better.

With its basic teaching of charity, Masonic philanthropy helps a great number of people worldwide. Masons run hospitals and look after the handicapped, the blind, the mentally ill and the crippled. They manage homes for seniors, provide scholarships and funds for research work, and perform public service for their communities.

Some scholars trace the origin of freemasonry as far back as the Garden of Eden, others to the Emperors of China and others still, to the Emperor of Japan. In the Far East, two aspects of the Oriental origin have been developed: the secret societies of China have many practices in common with masonry, and Confucian rituals performed by the Emperor of China to ensure continuance of the mandate of Heaven also bear a close relationship to its ceremonials.<sup>3</sup>

Present-day freemasonry originated with the stonemasons who built the great churches of Europe. They developed a society of masons, which took simple medieval legends based on the art of building, as well as stories from the Bible, and folklore, and developed them into complex rituals capable of universal appeal. The process was formalized by the creation of Grand Lodges, which spread rapidly throughout Europe and North America, and in just over forty years, reached the Far East. Freemasonry started in Hong Kong in the early 1800s. The Royal Sussex Lodge was established in 1845, and its daughter lodge, Zetland Lodge, was established eighteen months later.

Father's connection with the freemasons started during his years in England when he was introduced to it by his guardian, Mr. Churchill. The concept of brotherly love, charity and truth appealed to him. It was highly probable that he would have been initiated in Apollo University Lodge No. 357 if Grandfather had not suddenly passed away.<sup>4</sup>

In January 1929, Father was initiated into the University Lodge of Hong Kong Chapter No. 3666. Masonry has a system of so-called "higher" degrees, for which ordinary lodge members are qualified by experience. Father eventually became a member of every one of these that existed in Hong Kong before the Pacific War. His enthusiasm also led to a life-long commitment, culminating in his becoming the District Grand Master for Hong Kong and the Far East.

During the war, when we lived in Chongqing, Father was such an enthusiastic mason that he took part in the revival of the Lodge Star of Southern China No. 2013, which originally met in Guangzhou. He was also a visitor of Fortitude Lodge, which the Grand Lodge of California had temporarily set up in Chongqing. Although these two lodges were located in the same city and were only a couple of miles



apart, they were separated by the swift-flowing, bridgeless Yangtse River which could rise forty feet within a couple of hours. Attending a meeting could mean spending a day to get back home.<sup>5</sup>

After the war, Father continued to be active with the freemasons in Hong Kong. In 1950, he assumed the chairs of both the Lodge Star of Southern China (by then moved from Chongqing) and Concordia Mark Lodge. In 1951, he took the First Principal's chair of the University Lodge. Around the same time, Zetland Hall, at 1 Kennedy Road, was under construction. As the District Grand Superintendent of Works, a nominal office, Father took it seriously as he did everything else, and put his civil engineering training to work by making daily visits to the site.<sup>6</sup> The new Zetland Hall was located right across from the steps that lead to the lower entrance of my school, St. Paul's Co-educational College. I used to go there for lunch, and around noontime, there was always someone playing the bagpipes, a sound which I came to love.

In April 1961, Father was made the District Grand Master of Hong Kong and the Far East by the Grand Master of England, the Right Honorable the Earl of Scarborough. The district was formerly known as the District of Hong Kong and South China. The geographical jurisdiction was expanded to absorb the Masonic District of Japan, which had been reduced to one lodge, and which had been working as an unattached lodge answering directly to United Grand Lodge in London. (Masonic lodges were first established in Japan in the 1870s, and by the 1960s, the only one left was the Rising Sun Lodge.)

The moment Japan was under Father's district, he went to their installation in Kobe every January. Father was known to be at his mellowest at the festive boards that followed the Kobe installations, and his enthusiasm was so catching that his Masonic brothers started to join him for the trip from Hong Kong, despite the chilly January weather in Japan. After a few years, the wives were invited to join the trip. The number had increased to almost twenty by the time Father passed away, and the trip to Kobe had become a major annual event for the Hong Kong masons.<sup>7</sup> He also made the journey with the Scottish District Grand Master to consecrate beautiful Kirby Hall where the Kobe lodges meet.

In his new position, Father also inherited the difficult problem of the disposal of the Masonic hall and its grounds in Yokohama, Japan, a dilemma which would take the next twenty years to resolve. The land had been owned by six English constitution bodies which operated in Yokohama before the Pacific War, but had not been revived afterwards. Members of the Scottish lodge and new Masonic bodies, which had been started by the occupation forces in Japan, had used the hall and were deeply concerned at being left without a meeting place. However, they had no financial resources to purchase the property, even at a specially reduced price.

The matter was finally settled harmoniously in 1982. The site was sold to the City of Yokohama for a public park, and most of the funds were used to provide new premises, headed by the Scottish Lodge, Star in the East No. 640. The balance of the funds was to be administered by the English District for the Endowment of Freemasons' Research Fellowships at the University of Hong Kong and The Chinese University of Hong Kong.<sup>8</sup> With Father's interest in education, and his specially close relationship with the two universities, this solution was of great personal satisfaction to him.

Even though Father was a member of the English Craft, he was a regular visitor to other jurisdictions with lodges in Hong Kong. The Grand Master of Ireland conferred honorary past mastership of the constitution upon him, and the Grand Lodge of Scotland made him an Honorary Deputy District Grand Master.

As the District Grand Master for twenty-one years, Father served the freemasons with great dedication. There were fourteen lodges and four associated Chapters in Hong Kong, each one with an installation once a year and an annual general meeting. He attended all the installations and chaired all the annual general meetings without fail. These were usually scheduled between October and April, and the dates were picked either when he was in Hong Kong or when he could fly back from wherever he might be in the world.

George Todkill, who was Father's Director of Ceremonies for many years, told me that Father was easy to work with because he always knew what he wanted. Being a prompt person, Father always

entered the hall at exactly twenty minutes past six in the evening, and at six-thirty, he was in his chair giving orders and running the meeting. At exactly ten-twenty, Todkill was instructed to end the meeting, no matter who was speaking at the time. A farewell toast was made, and while all were standing, he would conduct Father out of the hall to his car, although members who wished to stay to talk could do so. Father was one for early evenings because he was an early riser.

Father may have hoped for the revival of freemasonry in mainland China. On several occasions, when he had friends and acquaintances visiting Hong Kong from China, he would invite them to private lunches at Zetland Hall. When asked, he would explain the non-political nature of the order and showed his guests the inside of the meeting rooms. In his travels in China, he visited four Masonic halls of former lodges in South China, being careful to avoid any suggestion that he was trying to claim them back. He also made sure that books on freemasonry which gave the correct view and history of the Craft were available to officials in Beijing.<sup>9</sup> Giving the correct view was very important, for in 1974 an alleged exposé of freemasonry was published for Chinese readers. The books described the Hong Kong lodges as foreigners' triad societies, and compared freemasonry to the Chinese secret triad societies. It attributed to freemasonry many of the failings of the triads, and called it the "white men's international triad society."<sup>10</sup>

After Father passed away, people wondered whether the Chinese government would allow freemasonry to continue in Hong Kong after the transfer of sovereignty in 1997. Yao Kang went to speak to the leaders in Beijing, stressing the fact that Father had been a mason all his life. He came away with confirmation from the Hong Kong-Macao Office that freemasonry would be allowed to continue after 1997, as long as it abided by the Basic Law. The meetings would continue to be conducted in English. However, the society would have to be more open, since it was perceived as a secret society. This openness would also apply to its social and charitable work. Since masons always swear allegiance to the existing government, as of July 1, 1997 the Chinese government is toasted instead of the British Crown.<sup>11</sup>

# 15

## A Look Into The Future

The early 1980s were years when the Sino-British discussions about the handover were under way. The economy was on a downswing and there was constant talk of emigration from Hong Kong because of a lack of confidence in the future of the colony. Many people left for countries such as Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. The talk of the town was, “We’ve been refugees once, we don’t want to be refugees again.” Emigration became such a hot topic that there were even special magazines catering to potential emigrants.<sup>1</sup>

Statistically, the picture looked brighter for both China and Hong Kong. Between 1977 and 1982, the import of Chinese products into Hong Kong increased by almost 32 per cent, at a value of \$29,510 million, and the export of products from Hong Kong to China increased by 187 per cent. The large increase in the latter was due to the electricity provided by China Light & Power Company to Guangdong province. The modest modernization program in China was already helping Hong Kong to re-emerge as an *entrépot*.<sup>2</sup>

In 1981, the Hong Kong government introduced district board elections which became the first phase of a move to a more representative style of government. Because the British government was preparing to negotiate the future of Hong Kong with the Chinese government, they felt a need for the people of Hong Kong to have a greater say in their own domestic affairs.

In my family, life went on as usual, and Father maintained his everlasting faith in Hong Kong and in China. His view on the idea of “one country, two systems” was:

... the event will signal a new approach to international relationship. The foundation of this relationship will be based on the mutual respect of the two governments with the interest of all parties, including that of the local population in mind.

His vision for the future, beyond July 1, 1997, was that:

Hong Kong, as far as China is concerned, has a role to play in her modernization for many more years to come, far beyond 1997, provided that free enterprise tempered with social justice remains and that we will not be crippled by the introduction of slothful work ethics.<sup>3</sup>

Father maintained that people in Hong Kong still made their living in the old-fashioned way — by working hard. He pointed out that even though people said China depended on Hong Kong for large amounts of foreign exchange, where would Hong Kong be without China?<sup>4</sup> Since Hong Kong depended on China for food and water, and a cheap labour force, he wondered why most people seemed oblivious to the fact that Hong Kong relied on China for its existence.

The biggest concern of the business community in Hong Kong after the change of sovereignty to China in 1997 was whether it would be overtaken by Shanghai as the leading business centre and the gateway to China. There has always been competition between Shanghai and Hong Kong as commercial ports, and historically, Shanghai was the most important centre in China for foreign trade until the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Father’s view was that:

With the absence of foreign exchange control and very low taxation, Hong Kong is also one of the important centres for capital formation.... In order to retain our advantage permanently over other localities, such as Shanghai, we



must devote all our resources to constantly upgrading our financial infrastructure and industrial technology.<sup>5</sup>

Father thought it preposterous that the delegation of British Members of Parliament led by Edward Du Cann, who visited Beijing at the invitation of the Chinese government in 1982, should even suggest that the Chinese government begin “negotiations” with London.<sup>6</sup> He thought it was totally unrealistic to expect China to renew treaties that were obviously unequal. And since the People’s Republic of China had never recognized the Treaty of Nanking of 1842, and the Conventions of Peking of 1860 and 1898, China had already claimed sovereignty over Kowloon and Hong Kong. This claim had never been formally rejected by the British. It was Father’s belief that both sides regarded Hong Kong as part of China under British management until July 1, 1997.<sup>7</sup>

Father believed that the future of Hong Kong would depend, in part, on the population. If they remained productive and could serve a unique economic function for China and the world, he believed that a practical and sensible solution could be reached through dialogue before 1997. The solution had to be formulated more on the basis of mutual economic interest rather than military power, political ideology or even international law. The most important factor was to perpetuate Hong Kong’s independent economic status so that it could serve as one of the financial centres of the world where modern technology and know-how could be transferred into China. In order to do so, laws and commercial practices in their existing forms needed to continue and the Hong Kong dollar had to remain freely convertible.<sup>8</sup>

Father ventured a few suggestions for the future government of Hong Kong:

... the Government of Hong Kong could perhaps be a modified form of the present system with a Governing Committee. Hong Kong would be an “Independent Special Zone” within China under the Chinese flag. The Headship of the Governing Committee to be taken in turn by a Chinese and a Briton, say, every three or four years. The modification should be introduced gradually before 1997 to prevent any shocks due to abrupt changes.... The Legislative

Council would continue with some appointed members as an interim measure for a few years, after which the entire Council could perhaps be elected.... The Civil Service could, with careful planning, remain much the same as at present.<sup>9</sup>

In legal matters, Father recommended that the existing laws of Hong Kong, recognized worldwide, should continue to be enforced after 1997 with the consent of China. The final appeal for court cases would not go to Beijing or to London, but to the final court of appeal created in Hong Kong, and special arrangements would be made for English judges who were members of the Privy Council to continue to assist Hong Kong with their services in a new capacity acceptable to China, United Kingdom and Hong Kong.<sup>10</sup>

In financial matters, Father believed that Hong Kong had learnt a lesson from the disaster caused by the Exchange Fund and General Reserves being tied to sterling under Colonial Regulations. Since the diversification of the fund in 1972, Hong Kong had become the world's third largest financial centre. He said in 1982 that:

This advantage should be maintained with full vigour. I think that is one of the points the Chinese leaders had in mind when they spoke about preserving Hong Kong's present status. When the year of 1997 arrives, the Exchange Fund must not be transferred to London or to Beijing but should be kept locally at all times or at any other place which Hong Kong itself may determine. This will perpetuate the independence of the Hong Kong dollar and continue to strengthen the confidence in Hong Kong by the international commercial community.<sup>11</sup>

### At Peace with Himself

In a letter written to Father on July 14, 1981, Lord Lawrence Kadoorie said:

When I look back to immediate post-war Hong Kong and see it today, I cannot fail to appreciate that it is due to the confidence and enterprise of people such as yourself and your family who have made this possible.

We hope you both enjoy good health, long life and every happiness and that our friendship may continue for many more years to come.

In 1982, Father decided that he no longer wanted to go out on the *Atalanta*. He gave the launch to our long-time coxswain, Ho Ning, so that he could sell it and use the money to retire.<sup>12</sup> Ho had been with our family for a very long time, and had watched us and all the grandchildren grow up.<sup>13</sup> On our visit to my parents that year, I couldn't believe that Father would ever give up his launch, which had been so dear to his heart for as long as I can remember. What I didn't know was that the doctor had told him that he was suffering from hardening of the arteries, and should no longer swim. It was just like Father to want to see Ho Ning happily retired during his own lifetime.

Father had always been proud of the fact that he had good genes from his own mother, Second Grandmother. I often heard him talking proudly of his mother's alertness at a great old age, and I do believe that he thought he would also live a very long time. In a letter to Horace Kadoorie on February 1, 1983, Father wrote:

It is most kind of you to have sent us the tangerines from your farm each year for the past many years.

My mother, who very soon will be 98, always looks forward in receiving your tangerines for her altar. She is a Buddhist and is in very good health. She plays 4 rounds of mahjong every day as exercise...

Mother saw Father smiling to himself early one morning in 1983. When she asked him why, he said that he had dreamt of Grandmother, and she was calling him to her.

In the early summer of 1983, Father's old friend Liao Chengzhi died. Father was the only person from Hong Kong invited to attend the funeral, which was held in Beijing. Since Liao was not only a good friend but someone Father had a great deal of respect for, he would not have missed the opportunity to pay his last respects.

On June 26, 1983, Fei Yiming saw Father on the top floor of the Beijing Hotel. Fei needed to write something down but did not have

a pen. He borrowed Father's and happened to mention how well the pen wrote. When they said goodbye, Fei had no idea that it was to be the last time they would see each other.<sup>14</sup>

Beijing was very hot that summer, the temperature was over 100°F. On the way back to Hong Kong, the plane was delayed for a few hours and there was no air-conditioning at the airport. Father was finding it difficult to breathe.

When Father returned from Beijing, he didn't feel well. He consulted his doctor who immediately sent him to St. Paul's Hospital. When he arrived at the admitting office, he was asked for an advance payment of \$2,000 as a deposit. Since Father didn't carry cash, he had to phone his secretary, Anna, to get the money from Mother, with the strictest order that no one was to be told, not even his brothers.<sup>15</sup> That day, all the Lee brothers at the Lee Hysan Estate office were wondering where Father was, because he had never missed a day of work in his life. Anna could say only that he was not coming in. However, when the head supervisor at the hospital, Sir Albert Rodrigues, made his rounds, he saw Father, and he told the Lee brothers. The following day, they scolded Anna for not telling them.

The doctor ordered Father to rest, an impossible task. Mother hired a private nurse for him, but he sent her away. He gave the order that very few people should be told, since he expected to be home soon. Mother wasn't even allowed to tell us, because he hated anyone making a fuss. Besides, he never took illness seriously. None of us knew that he had even been in hospital until after his death.

Of the very few visitors he had were Xinhua News Agency Director Xu Jiatur and his deputy, Li Chuwen, who went to see him on July 2. In the meantime, Father kept threatening to leave the hospital. Mother thought that Director Xu might have some influence and asked him to persuade Father to stay a few more days. Xu and Li found Father waiting in a chair to receive them when they entered his hospital room. Father said he was feeling fine, and that everyone worried too much.<sup>16</sup> After three days in hospital, he felt restless and wanted to leave. He gave his doctor an ultimatum: either he was to be discharged or he would check himself out of hospital, despite the fact that he was still being given oxygen. It was the morning of July 5.

A luncheon in honour of Director Tucker of the Water Department, who was retiring, was scheduled for that day at the Lee Gardens Hotel, and Father insisted on hosting it, even though arrangements had already been made for the secretary of the China Gas Company to take his place. Before the luncheon, he asked Anna to get ready all the cheques that needed to be signed and take them to the hotel. When Anna saw him, she thought he didn't look well, and noted that he was speaking more slowly than usual. When she told Aunt Violet, who was still working in the Lee Hysan Estate office, Aunt Violet said, "If he wanted to leave hospital, no one could stop him!"

Early on the morning of July 6, Father had his usual breakfast in the pantry. He got up from the table to get dressed for the office, and as he walked out of the pantry, he collapsed. An ambulance was called, but he was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital.

When Anna went to work that morning, she walked past Tower Court as usual because she lived opposite us. Our watchman/chauffeur, Ah Lay, said to Anna, "Mr. Lee is gone." Anna said, "Where did he go?" not realizing what Ah Lay meant. His eyes became red as he started to cry. Anna found it difficult to believe and was walking around in a daze when she bumped into Hon Chiu who had just come out of Caroline Mansion, diagonally opposite to Tower Court. She asked him what she should do, and he said, "Just go back to the office." Even months after, Anna could not accept Father's death, and still had the feeling that he would be back. She would look out the window expecting to see him coming back to the office after having his customary lunch at home.<sup>17</sup>

A friend got into a taxi the morning of July 6, and the taxi driver told her that Hong Kong had lost a very fine man that morning. She asked who it was and realized that it was Father who had passed away.

At seven o'clock in the evening, of July 6, Yao Kang arrived at the airport from Los Angeles. He was in shock when his driver told him that Father had passed away. He said, "What am I going to do now? All my China connections are gone."<sup>18</sup>

After dinner on the evening of July 5, in Toronto,<sup>19</sup> I received a call from Seventh Uncle telling me that Father had passed away. I was



completely dumbfounded. We hadn't known that Father had been in hospital, and besides, everyone expected him to be around forever.

Telegrams poured in from all over the world. The ones from President Li Xiannian, Yang Shangkun, Xi Zhongxun, Gu Mu, Yu Qiuli, Ji Pengfei, Jing Puchun and Liao Mengxing were reported in the Chinese newspapers.

One day in July, three pens like the one Fei Yiming borrowed from Father at the Beijing Hotel arrived at Fei's office at *Ta Kung Pao*. He was very moved that Father, even though he was ill, had instructed his secretary to send them to him before his death.<sup>20</sup>

In honour of Father's position as District Grand Master of Hong Kong and the Far East, a memorial service was to be held by the masons for him on July 18 at St. John's Cathedral. Neville had to return to Toronto to attend to his patients, so our eldest son, Ashley, flew to Hong Kong in his father's place. For that particular service, Mother decided that all female family members had to be in black cheongsams, and all the grandsons in black suits. I don't know where our relatives found tailors to make them, but these garments were made to order within forty-eight hours.

The day of the memorial service was a very hot, sunny day, and the Cathedral was filled. The eulogy was given by the Honorable Mr. Justice Cons. In relating Father's life, he said that, charity, which was the distinguishing virtue of a freemason, was prominent in Father's life. One of his first acts as District Grand Master had been to reassess the existing practices for the collection and distribution of charity in the District, and place the responsibility in the hands of the District Board of Benevolence, an organization in which he took the keenest interest. Father, he said, was more than a very successful businessman and a man of many talents; he was, first and foremost, a philanthropist of great generosity who inspired others to contribute. Father's favourite scripture reading in Masonic ceremonies was St. Paul's paean to charity.<sup>21</sup> Father was described as a man of infinite charm who never failed to arouse an affectionate response in those with whom he came into contact. His leadership and quiet authority inspired confidence and enthusiasm in others. He was quick to praise, but he did not hesitate to criticize whenever he felt a

proper effort had not been made. However, he never lost his compassion for his fellow men.<sup>22</sup>

On October 8, another memorial service was held by the freemasons in Kobe, Japan, at St. Andrew's Chapel, the Flying Angel. A telegram of condolence from the mayor of Kobe, Tatsuo Miyazaki, was read. When Deputy District Grand Master Christopher Haffner gave the eulogy, he mentioned that Father had always looked upon Rising Sun Lodge in Kobe with special favour, for this was the lodge that first responded to his plea to endow medical research fellowships in celebration of the 250th anniversary of the Grand Lodge of England. Haffner mentioned Father's relationship to the leaders of China, and noted that he had been the first Hong Kong resident to be received by the new Chinese President, Li Xiannian. He said that Father's common sense approach to the practicalities of Hong Kong's 1997 problem would be sorely missed.<sup>23</sup>

Father's secretary, Anna, had a number of offers of well-paid positions because she had worked for Father for more than twelve years and presumably knew a great deal and had a lot of contacts, but she turned them all down. To her, Father was irreplaceable. She kept a small photograph of him smiling, which she said was his best, as well as some of his papers, a few of which were copies of the Chinese letters she had written on his behalf. She said these were souvenirs, and she very kindly handed them over to me to use as references for this book. Anna described Father as a man not without faults, but kind, honest, upright, and always a gentleman.

Father's death was covered widely in both Chinese and English newspapers, on television and on the radio. Father's sisters immediately disconnected Second Grandmother's television set, which she watched frequently, in order to keep the news from her, and told her that it was out of order. Since she was illiterate, she didn't read newspapers. She seldom went out in her later years, and the family and servants were instructed not to mention Father's death to her. For a number of years afterwards, whenever she asked why her eldest son didn't come to see her, Mother made some kind of excuse, and after a while, she stopped asking. We believe she knew, but didn't want to have her fears confirmed.

It was Father's wish that his ashes be scattered in the Hong Kong harbour, where he felt he belonged. Mother, in her old-fashioned way, refused to follow his wishes because she wanted to be buried next to him.

Father, always referred to by everyone respectfully in Chinese as "big brother," is greatly missed. During the writing of this book, I received great help and co-operation because there is still so much love and respect for him. He was referred to as a "great man," a "good friend" and even a "legend." Many remember him with gratitude and appreciation. Others lamented that his death was a blow to the Sino-British talks over the sovereignty of Hong Kong.

Even in death, as demonstrated by his funeral, Father built bridges for China and for Hong Kong, bringing peace and prosperity.



## EPILOGUE

In honour of Father, the widow of Premier Zhou Enlai, Deng Yingchao, nominated Mother as a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a representative from Hong Kong to China.

Mother often said, "Even though your father was such an impatient man, and so rigid in his ways, I really can't complain about him, because he treated me so well." She had always been regarded with great respect and importance in Father's life. In his tradition of great generosity, whenever he made an investment, he automatically put half in Mother's name. Since he was so honest and straightforward, she came to rely on him completely, and depended on him for all decisions, solutions to all problems, even looking after household bills and her travel arrangements. She had always assumed that she would die first, and was not only saddened, and completely lost when he died, but insulted that she was left behind. It took her months to be taken off sedatives, but at the age of seventy-four, she did her best to carry on.

As for me, I wish I had been able to spend more time with Father. I wish I had asked many more questions than I did, but then I too expected him to be around for a very long time. I learnt from the examples he set, and try to live up to his standard. The fact that he always made it known that he cared will be with me forever. I thank him for the good name he left me with, and I am very proud to be his daughter.



# Richard Charles Lee: A Career Summary

Graduated from Oxford University, B.A. 1927, M.A. 1932

Appointed Justice of the Peace, 1946

Rice Controller, 1946–48

Order of the British Empire, 1949

Delegate of Hong Kong at the 4th & 5th Sessions, Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, 1948, 1949

Leader of the Hong Kong Trade Mission to West Africa, 1960

Leader of the Hong Kong Trade Mission to Frankfurt, Germany, 1963

Commander of the British Empire, 1963

LL.D. University of Hong Kong, 1964

LL.D. Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1964

Order of the Sacred Treasure, Japan, 1969

## Member Of Hong Kong Government Councils And Committees:

Panel of Inland Revenue Board of Review, beginning in 1949

Urban Council, 1953–60

Salary Commission, beginning in 1953

Hong Kong Housing Authority, 1954–60

Public Service Commission, 1952–59

Building Regulation Committee, 1953–59

Air Transport Licensing Authority, beginning in 1955

Legislative Council, 1959–65

Executive Council, 1961–66

Advisory Commission on Corruption, 1962–65

Fisheries Development Loan Fund Committee, 1960–65

Board of Education, 1961–66

### Masonic Involvement:

President of the Board of Trustees, Hong Kong and South China  
Masonic Fund Corporation, 1961–83

District Grand Master of Hong Kong and the Far East, 1961–83

### The University Of Hong Kong:

Member of the Court, beginning in 1948

Member of the Council, beginning in 1954

### The Chinese University Of Hong Kong:

Vice-chairman of the Council, 1963–83

Chairman of the Campus Planning Committee, 1963–83

Chairman of the Tender Board, 1963–83

Member of the Nominating Committee for Honorary Degrees, 1963–83

### Chairman Of The Board Of Directors:

Associated Properties Ltd.

Canadian and Oriental Oil Ltd.

Duro Holdings Ltd.

Garden Hotels Holdings (Hong Kong) Ltd.

Gande Price Investment Co. Ltd.

Grand Marine Holdings Ltd.

Hong Kong & China Gas Co., Ltd.

Hong Kong Telephone Co. Ltd.

Hong Kong Tube & Metal Products Ltd.

Hysan Development Co. Ltd.

International Entertainment Enterprises Ltd.

Kowloon Taxicab & Transport Co. Ltd.

Kwong Lee Enterprises

Lee Gardens Hotel Ltd.

Lee Hysan Estate Co. Ltd.

RCL Semiconductor Ltd.

Western Trading Co. Ltd.

## Deputy Chairman:

N.M. Rothschild & Sons Hong Kong Ltd.  
Yamaichi International (Hong Kong) Ltd.

## Director:

Associated Bankers Insurance Co. Ltd.  
Bank of East Asia Ltd.  
Eastern Asia Navigation Co. Ltd.  
Hong Kong Building & Loan Agency Ltd.  
Hong Kong Land Investment & Agency Co. Ltd.  
Hong Kong Realty & Trust Co. Ltd.  
The Textile Corporation of Hong Kong  
Wheelock Marden & Co. Ltd.  
& other companies

## Other:

Chairman of the Hong Kong Association of Property Owners  
Chairman of the Hong Kong Country Club, 1963–1964  
Chairman of the South China Athletic Association  
Director and Honorary Lifetime Director of the Szeyup Business Association  
Director of the Wan Chai (Kaifong) Benevolent Association  
Honorary Member, Chinese Business Association  
Honorary Lifetime Member, College of Chinese Engineers  
Honorary Lifetime Member, Hong Kong Country Club  
Honorary Lifetime Member, Hong Kong Japanese Club  
Lifetime Director, Sunwui Business Association  
Member of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, 1960–1968  
Member of Permanent Board of Directors, Po Leung Kuk, 1959–1960  
Vice-president, Po Leung Kuk, 1960–1966

## List Of Richard Charles Lee's Siblings

- Second Uncle - Ming Hop
- Third Uncle - Harold, Hau Wo (Wing Gun)
- Fourth Uncle - Jung Sen (J.S.)
- Fifth Uncle - Wing Kit
- Sixth Uncle - Jung Kang (J.K.)
- Seventh Uncle - Wing Tat
- Second Aunt - Doris, Shun Wah
- Third Aunt - Ansie, Shun Ying
- Fourth Aunt - Joyce, Shun Kum
- Fifth Aunt - Dione, Shun Yin
- Sixth Aunt - Amy, Shun Ho
- Seventh Aunt - Diana, Shun Yee
- Eighth Aunt - Vivien, Shun Ngor

# MAP OF CHINA 中國地圖







MAP OF GUANGDONG PROVINCE 廣東省地圖



# ENDNOTES

## A Farewell

- 1 *Hong Kong Standard*, July 7, 1983.
- 2 *South China Morning Post*, July 7, July 12, 1983.

## Chapter 1

- 1 All Uncles and Aunts preceded by a number are siblings of Father.
- 2 A village in south China, it is also the Lee family's original ancestral village. Chinese tend to be very clannish, and I am sure Father was very proud that these two men were from the same area as our family.
- 3 *Zibao Xuexiao Nianbao (Zibao School Magazine)*, July 31, 1921, 5-7.
- 4 Letter from Percy O'Brien, Oxford, October 17, 1997.
- 5 V.H.H. Green, *A History of Oxford* (London, 1974), 188-189.
- 6 Letter from Percy O'Brien, Oxford, October 17, 1997.
- 7 Letter from Percy O'Brien, Oxford, October 30, 1997.
- 8 Letter from Percy O'Brien, Oxford, October 30, 1997.
- 9 Letter from Percy O'Brien, Oxford, October 17, 1997.
- 10 Konosuke Koike, article in *Yamabiko*, a bi-monthly newspaper published by Yamaichi Securities Co. Ltd., circulated only among the Yamaichi Group, Sept. 7, 1971, translated by Shinichi Shiraishi, Deputy President of Yamaichi Securities Co. Ltd.

## Chapter 2

- 1 Interview with Josephine Chiu and Jenny Hoo, Vancouver, April 1997.
- 2 Interview with Jenny Hoo, Vancouver, April 1997.
- 3 Zhang Lianjue (Lady Clara Hotung), *Mingshan Youji (Memories on Famous Mountains)* (Hong Kong, 1934), 105.
- 4 A photograph of Father supervising the workers was taken in 1931. Interview with George Todkill, who used to work for Whampoa Dockyard, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 5 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 6 Interview with Josephine Chiu and Jenny Hoo, Vancouver, April 1997.
- 7 Chungshee H. Liu, *Hainan, The Island and the People* (Shanghai, 1939).
- 8 Wang Shaoping, *Feidao Qiongya Yinxiang Ji (Philippines and Hainan Impressions)* (Hong Kong, 1939), 81. Wang was one of the investors in Father's company.
- 9 Wang Shaoping, *Feidao*, 66-7.
- 10 Wang Shaoping, *Feidao*, 69.
- 11 Wang Shaoping, *Feidao*, 81.

- 12 Wang Shaoping, *Feidao*, 89-90.
- 13 Interview with He Mingsi, former secretary of the Xinhua News Agency who often accompanied my parents during their travels in China, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 14 Names such as Shen Yi, who was Chairman of the Technology Department of Chinese Resources Committee (CRC) and Minister of Communications Bureau; Qian Changzhou, Vice-Chairman of the (CRC) and Jiang Pingbo, Purchasing Manager of the CRC. Interview with C.T.Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 15 He was well known for establishing precision for train schedules by using Omega equipment and was highly respected by Chiang Kaishek.
- 16 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 17 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 18 Phone interview with Sir Jack Cater in Hong Kong, June, 1997.
- 19 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 20 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Summer 1995.

### Chapter 3

- 1 Xie Yongguang, *Xianggang Kangri Fengyun Lu* (Hong Kong, 1995), 72-73.
- 2 Tim Carew, *The Fall of Hong Kong* (London, 1960), 26-27.
- 3 Xie Yongguang, *Xianggang Kangri Fengyun Lu*, 96.
- 4 Ted Ferguson, *Desperate Siege: The Battle of Hong Kong* (Toronto, 1980), 5.
- 5 Ferguson, *Desperate Siege*, 6-7.
- 6 Sir Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke, *Footprints: The Memoirs of Sir Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke* (Hong Kong, 1975), 58.
- 7 Interview with Jeanne Tam, who was then known as Tsui Ling Fai. She was one of the air-raid wardens. Toronto, January 1996.
- 8 Interview with Bill Poy, Toronto, November 1996.
- 9 Ferguson, *Desperate Siege*, 7.
- 10 Son of Liao Zhongkai, leader of the left-wing Nationalist party.
- 11 Interview with Lian Weilin, former Director of the Xinhua News Agency (New China News Agency, or NCNA), Hong Kong branch, Guangzhou, November 1996.
- 12 Interview with He Mingsi, former Secretary of the Xinhua News Agency, Hong Kong Branch, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 13 Selwyn-Clarke, *Footprints*, 64.
- 14 She was single and working under her maiden name, Elizabeth Teng.
- 15 Interview with Joseph Tam, Toronto, January 1996.
- 16 Interview with Joseph Tam, Toronto, January 1996.

- 17 David Faure, co-ordinator, and the members of the Oral History Project Team, Centre for East Asian Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, "Saikung, The Making of the District and its Experience During World War II," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Asiatic Society*, vol. 22, 1982, 184-185.
- 18 Interview with Bill Poy, Toronto, November 1996.
- 19 Selwyn-Clarke, *Footprints*, 65.
- 20 The entire story of the Poy family experience during the attack and surrender of Hong Kong was told by Bill Poy, Toronto, November 1996.
- 21 Interview with Joseph Tam, Toronto, January 1996.
- 22 He wanted to remain in Hong Kong to take care of the medical needs of the population. He was accused by some of being a collaborator and was later interned by the Japanese.
- 23 Interview with Joseph Tam, Toronto, January 1996.
- 24 Jiang Shui, "Husong He Xiangning, Liao Chengzhi Muziliang De Jingguo," *Huoyao Zai Xiang Jiang: Gangjiu Dadui Xigong Diqu Kangri Shi Lu (Anti-Japanese Activities of the Hong Kong-Kowloon Brigade in Saikung)*, ed. by Xu Yueqing (Hong Kong, 1993), 22-26.
- 25 Jiang Shiu, *Huoyao Zai Xiang Jiang*, 20-21.
- 26 Edwin Ride, B.A.A.G., *Hong Kong Resistance, 1942-1945* (Hong Kong, 1981), p. 27, footnote 2; p. 17; p.29, footnote 17.
- 27 Wang set up the puppet regime in Nanjing as an alternative to Chiang's in Chongqing.
- 28 Ride, B.A.A.G., 31-44.
- 29 Col. L.T. Ride, *Report on the Activities of a M.I.9/19 Organization in South China by Colonel L.T. Ride, lately Commandant B.A.A.G.*, written at Whitehall for the War Office, 1946, Public Record No. WO 208/3260, Section B.
- 30 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 31 Interview with Lian Weilin, Guangzhou, November 1996.
- 32 Interview with He Mingsi, Hong Kong, January 1996.

#### Chapter 4

- 1 Selwyn-Clarke, Sir Selwyn, *Footprints: The Memoirs of Sir Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke* (Hong Kong, 1975), 69.
- 2 Interview with Joseph Tam, Toronto, January 1996.
- 3 Interview with Raymand Lee, Vancouver, February 1997.
- 4 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, October 1996.
- 5 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, October 1996.
- 6 Interview with Bill Poy, Toronto, November 1996.
- 7 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.



- 8 Interview with Bill Poy, Toronto, November 1996.
- 9 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, October 1996.
- 10 They are filled with silk fibres instead of eiderdown and are very light and warm.
- 11 From Guizhou to Guilin.
- 12 Ling Hongxun, Shi Zhiren, Hou Jiayuan, Yuan Menghong.
- 13 Father never joined any political party.
- 14 The position was given to him by Cheng Goonshing who was married to Second Aunt. Yong Guang Coal Company was very profitable because of the need for coal for the railways and their sales were guaranteed. Tan Nailiang, Cheng's nephew, was the accountant. Tan and C.T. Wu lived in a bamboo-mud house right by the office of the Company.
- 15 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 16 C.T. Wu participated in the supervision of this building.
- 17 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 18 C.T. Wu was very happy to have a free economy railway pass. He was always welcomed by the railway staff because of his love of ping-pong. He said there really weren't too many forms of entertainment available during the war, and ping-pong was one of them. The games usually lasted much longer than the work supervision. Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 19 General Manager of Guo Hua Bank, and an influential person in financial circles, both in China and among overseas Chinese.
- 20 Chairman of the Overseas Union Bank of Singapore.
- 21 General Manager of the Overseas Union Bank of Singapore.
- 22 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 23 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 24 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 25 Third Uncle was a director.
- 26 Letter from Sing Sheng, Hong Kong, October 1997.
- 27 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 28 Interview with Josephine Chiu, Vancouver, April 1997.
- 29 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

## Chapter 5

- 1 Every five days, each person was allowed one catty and four taels of rice, one catty of flour and half a catty of green peas. 1 catty = 1.32 pounds; 1 tael = 1.33 ounces.
- 2 Reported in *Wah Kiu Yat Po* between 1946-48.
- 3 C.T. Wu expressed the opinion that if it had been anybody else who had that post, he would have made a fortune, but Father would not even think of a profit for himself. Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 4 Interview with Violet Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

- 5 Doctors with non-Commonwealth training were not allowed to practise in Hong Kong.
- 6 In 1963 Sing Sheng renewed his relationship with my family when he was offered a position as Director of Sales and Marketing for the Mandarin Hotel in Hong Kong. He married Dorothy's sister Grace.
- 7 Letter from Sing Sheng from Hong Kong, October 14, 1997.
- 8 *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, July 2, 7, 12, 23, 1951; August 9, 1951; November 5, 1951; February 23, 1952; April 1, 15, 27, 1952; June 16, 1952; July 12, 15, 16, 19, 20, 29, 1952; January 10, 16, 1953; March 15, 31, 1953; May 10, 17, 31, 1953.
- 9 *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, June 2, 1953.
- 10 *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, March 23, 1961.
- 11 In 1941 one-quarter of the workforce in Hong Kong was already engaged in industrial manufacturing.
- 12 At the time of the Japanese surrender, the population was at 500 thousand. In 1949, it reached 2 million.
- 13 A Communist college which recruited for the Party in China and Southeast Asia was closed in 1949. Very few schools were closed by the Hong Kong government until 1967, but schools were inspected regularly for "subversive" activities.
- 14 Alexander Grantham, *Via Port* (Hong Kong, 1965), 115.

## Chapter 6

- 1 Interview with Anna Li, Father's last secretary, Los Angeles, April 1995.
- 2 Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, April 1995.

## Chapter 7

- 1 Sue Heady, *The Hong Kong Country Club* (Hong Kong, 1992), 2.
- 2 Heady, *Hong Kong Country Club*, 13-14.
- 3 Heady, *Hong Kong Country Club*, 79.
- 4 Heady, *Hong Kong Country Club*, 16-17.
- 5 Heady, *Hong Kong Country Club*, 20.
- 6 *Hong Kong Standard*, December 14, 1972.
- 7 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

## Chapter 8

- 1 Interview with Violet Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 2 Interview with Violet Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 3 *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, July 31, 1956.
- 4 Interview with J.S. Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 5 Interview with Peter Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 6 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, November 1996.

- 7 Between 5 to 10 percent. Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, November 1996.
- 8 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, February 1997.
- 9 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, February 1997.
- 10 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, February 1997.
- 11 Interview with Violet Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 12 John Swire & Sons Limited was established in the United Kingdom in 1816. The company established Butterfield & Swire Co. in Shanghai on January 1, 1867, importing cotton and woolen fabrics and exporting tea and silk from China. In 1872, Swire established China Navigation Company (C.N.Co.). After the Second World War, the company's centre of business moved to Hong Kong. In July 1946, Swire and Maclaine Ltd. was established for import/export business. The company established Taikoo Wharf and Godown Company in June 1947. In 1948, it acquired a majority share of Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd. The company is also involved in manufacturing and engineering industries, beverages, properties, insurance, agriculture and retailing.
- 13 Registered in Hong Kong on October 19, 1948.
- 14 The company was founded in 1948.
- 15 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, February 1997. It was a major innovation in business practice and land law; the basis of much of Hong Kong's economic growth in subsequent decades.
- 16 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 17 I am sure its connection with the Shanghai Commercial Bank helped.
- 18 It was a wire (cable) commercial service in Hong Kong.
- 19 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 20 Interview with Raymond Lee, Vancouver February 1997.
- 21 In Hong Kong, bosses do not ride in delivery trucks. Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, November 1996.
- 22 This was subsequently sold by the family in the 1990s.
- 23 Note from Chien Lee, Hong Kong, January 1998.
- 24 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 25 Note from Chien Lee, Hong Kong, January 1998.
- 26 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, November 1996.
- 27 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 28 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 29 The Hong Kong stock market crashed in 1973, followed by a worldwide oil crisis, which brought economic recession until 1976.
- 30 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, November 1996.
- 31 The company was originally incorporated in October 1970 as a private limited company under the name of Hennessy Development Company

- Limited, and was a wholly owned subsidiary of Lee Hysan Estate which was incorporated in 1924.
- 32 The original board consisted of Father as the chairman, and directors David P. Chan, F.K. Hu, Michael Jebsen, Per Jorgensen, T.S. Kwok, Hon Chiu Lee, J.S. Lee, Quo Wai Lee, Ian Robert Anderson and Geoffrey M.T. Yeh.
  - 33 Total area of 80,881 sq. ft. Grandfather had originally bought this property in the names of Grandmother and his first four sons – Father, Second Uncle, Third Uncle and Fourth Uncle. To the credit of the Lee family, the property was given back to the family company, Lee Hysan Estate Co., for the benefit of all family members. In fact, it was also to the credit of Grandmother who turned over all the properties in her name to all the children during her life time.
  - 34 At the end of 1997, besides many other positions, Hon Chiu Lee was elected chairman of the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.
  - 35 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

## Chapter 9

- 1 A new airport was originally planned for Ping Shan in the New Territories. However, the colonial government realized that planes taking off and landing would have to circle over Chinese territories, and could be shot down. In fact, in the 1950s some civilian aircraft were shot down. The new runway in Kai Tak airport, which was capable of accommodating the largest jets, ran out into the sea at Kowloon Bay. It was completed at the end of the 1950s.
- 2 At present the chairman and CEO of the Bank of East Asia.
- 3 Notes from S. Shiraishi, Osaka, March 1997.
- 4 Since the 1970s, they were the ophthalmologists who looked after the eyes of the top leaders of China, including Deng Xiaoping.
- 5 Apparently this practice was only allowed to revive in 1978, after having been banned for twenty years.

## Chapter 10

- 1 Alexander Grantham, *Via Ports* (Hong Kong, 1965), 188-189.
- 2 Interview with He Mingsi, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 3 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 4 Letter from Ruth Hayhoe to her mother, July 17, 1967.
- 5 Appointed Director of the Institute of Education in Hong Kong in 1997, and simultaneously is Professor of Comparative Education at the Ontario Institute of Education, University of Toronto.
- 6 Letter from Ruth Hayhoe to her mother, October 28, 1967.

- 7 Interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997. The chairman, Sir Adrian Swire, was in Hong Kong at the time. Yao, as a junior manager, told Sir Adrian that since these were political riots, the chances were that the material damage would not be large, and besides, the company should not let their clients down just when they needed help most. With the powers delegated to the Hong Kong company, it had the right to make its own decisions. As a result, Swire maintained riot insurance for its clients, and in the end, not a cent was lost by the company, and Swire gained a lot of public confidence.
- 8 Interview with Violet Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 9 Interview with Lian Weilin, Guangzhou, November 1996; article by Fei Yiming, "Mian Huai Li Ming Ze" ("Remembering R.C. Lee"), *Ta Kung Pao*, July 16, 1983.
- 10 Interview with David K.P. Li, Hong Kong, November 1996.
- 11 Letter from Ruth Hayhoe to her mother, July 3, 1968.
- 12 Bernard Luk, "The Rise of a Civil Society in Hong Kong," presented at the Human Rights and Democracy in Asia Conference, Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, 16-17 May, 1997.
- 13 The word "Royal" was added to the Hong Kong Police Force only after the disturbances of 1967. Sir Jack Cater, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 14 Notes from Sir Jack Cater provided by Lady Cater, Hong Kong, August 1997.
- 15 Luk, "The Rise of a Civil Society in Hong Kong."
- 16 Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, April 1995.
- 17 *Ta Kung Pao*, January 29, 1977.
- 18 Interview with Dr. Chi Chao Chan, Baltimore, October 1997.
- 19 The population increased four fold between 1945 and 1949.
- 20 It became associated with Yale University.
- 21 Alice N.H. Lun Ng, editor, *The Quest for Excellence* (Hong Kong, 1994), 18.
- 22 Ng, *Quest for Excellence*, 20-21.
- 23 Ng, *Quest for Excellence*, 25.
- 24 Interview with Prof. Ma Lin, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 25 Interview with Prof. Ma Lin, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 26 Established in October 1951 by representatives of Protestant churches.
- 27 Minutes of the Campus Committee meetings from 1964 to 1983. Provided by Vincent W.S. Chen of the Campus Committee of The Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- 28 Interview with Prof. Ma Lin, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 29 Interview with Prof. Ma Lin, Hong Kong, June 1997.



## Chapter 11

- 1 Interview with Reiko Ogata, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 2 Interview with Reiko Ogata, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 3 Achievement Report from the Consulate-General of Japan sent to the Japanese government, 1968.
- 4 In 1969 a Japanese Chamber of Commerce was established, separate from the Club.
- 5 Interview with Y. Yoshioka, Secretary General of the Hong Kong Japanese Club, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 6 Notes from S. Shiraishi of Yamaichi Securities, Osaka, Japan, March 1997.
- 7 The latter was to move into the Lee Gardens Hotel podium upon its completion across the street.
- 8 Established on October 2, 1965.
- 9 In 1975, the Japanese School moved into its own building at 157 Blue Pool Road.
- 10 Special guests were Father, Consul-General of Japan Mr. Endo, Deputy Director of the Department of Education Sir Y.K.Kan as Chinese representative, and Sir Kenneth Fung Ping Fun who successfully persuaded the Hong Kong government to allow the Japanese School to teach pupils in accordance with the formal school curriculums laid down by the Japanese government.
- 11 Ichiro Fujita, *The Twentieth Anniversary Special Issue of the Hong Kong Japanese School*, May 10, 1986, 39, translated by Y. Yoshioka, Secretary General of the Hong Kong Japanese Club. The original article appeared in Phoenix Publication no. 13.
- 12 In 1994, it was demolished and rebuilt as part of Caroline Centre.
- 13 Fujita, *The Twentieth Anniversary Special Issue of the Hong Kong Japanese School*, 39.
- 14 It is associated with the sacred mirror and the string of gems with gold rays, which is only used for higher grades of decorations. Notes from Y. Yoshioka, Hong Kong, August 1997.
- 15 Christopher Haffner, *The Craft in the East* (Hong Kong, 1988), dedicated to Father, 424.
- 16 Interview with Sir Quo Wai Lee, October 1996.
- 17 That was when Project 704 (April 1970) in Hangzhou started construction. It was an underground military complex, built to withstand nuclear attack, covering fifty acres, with two beautiful above-ground buildings, one for Lin and the other for Mao. The project might not have been built with a plot in mind (to hold Mao hostage), but it could be used for that purpose. In August 1970 in Lushan, Mao shot down Lin's effort to declare him the "genius of the world" in another of Lin's repeated attempts to make

him into a figurehead. Lin knew that it was time to act and commenced Project 571, a homonym for “armed uprising.”

It is likely that the plot against Mao began in the spring of 1971 in Suzhou, when Lin Biao, his wife, Ye Qun, and their twenty-six-year-old son, Lin Ligu, were vacationing. The conspiracy was to be under the command of Lin Ligu. According to the official government version, the original plot was to feign an attack on Mao, and Lin Ligu would “rescue” him. Zhou Enlai, Jiang Qing, Kang Sheng and some other key military leaders would be neutralized. The plan was abandoned because Lin did not have enough manpower to carry it out.

They then planned to assassinate Mao on his special train during his tour of south and central China. Lin depended on the military where he had been gathering supporters ever since he replaced Peng Dehuai in 1959 as defence minister. The airforce was to be the main component of this coup. Mao got wind of the plot, changed his schedule and sped through Shanghai, arriving in Beijing on the morning of September 12.

On September 11, Lin Biao and Ye Qun were at the seaside resort of Beidaihe, approximately 130 miles east of Beijing, awaiting word. Late that evening, the telephone rang with the news. Ye Qun immediately packed her bag, taking with her two dictionaries: English-Chinese and Russian-Chinese. Around five o'clock the same day, their son, Lin Ligu, had flown in from Beijing in a Trident three-engine plane, number 256. The plane had been assigned for Lin Biao's personal use. A crew of three had been assigned to it on September 6, and was told to be ready to take off at seven the next morning.

On the evening of September 12, after postponing a meeting with a delegation from Japan, Zhou Enlai received a call from Security Unit 8341 that Lin Biao, Ye Qun and Lin Ligu appeared to be leaving the country. Within the next half hour, Zhou ordered all planes grounded in China, and specifically the Trident assigned to Lin. According to one account, Zhou telephoned the Lins at Beidaihe to inquire about their health. They realized that Mao and Zhou were too close on the trail. Around midnight, the three airmen were awakened to prepare for immediate take-off. Aside from the Lins, there were three others who boarded the plane.

Mao was at the Swimming Pool House at Zhongnanhai when Zhou burst in to tell him that the Trident had taken off. Zhou suggested shooting it down, since it would still be in China's air space. Mao is reported to have said, “Let nature take its course.”

Harrison E. Salisbury, *The New Emperors* (New York, 1993), 284-303.

18 Akira Okada, *Mizutori Gaiko Hiwa (The Secret Story of Mizutori's Diplomacy)* (Tokyo, 1983), 149-161. Translated into Chinese by the staff of the Hang Seng Bank, Hong Kong.

19 Interview with Sir Quo Wai Lee, October 1996.

20 Founded in 1897.

- 21 Notes from S. Shiraishi, March 1997. Shiraishi was the sales manager in Hong Kong under Shigeki Morishita when Yamaichi International (H.K.) opened.
- 22 Until September 1982, when Yamaichi International (H.K.) became wholly owned by Yamaichi.
- 23 Notes from S. Shiraishi, February 1997.
- 24 At the time of the writing of this book, he is deputy president of Yamaichi Securities Co. Ltd., one of the four largest securities companies in Japan.
- 25 Between 1971-73.
- 26 Notes from S. Shiraishi, Osaka, March 1997.
- 27 Notes from S. Shiraishi, Osaka, March 1997.
- 28 Interview with Reiko Ogata, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 29 Letter to Father from Shigeru Okada, president of Mitsukoshi Limited, September 3, 1981. Mitsukoshi was established in 1673 and incorporated in 1904.
- 30 *Asian Economic News*, December 22, 1997. Core Pacific is a group of engineering and securities companies led by Taiwanese businessman Tony Shen.
- 31 Letter from S. Shiraishi, January 11, 1998.
- 32 *Asian Economic News*, December 22, 1997.

## Chapter 12

- 1 Christopher Haffner, *The Craft in the East* (Hong Kong, 1988), 422.
- 2 Interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 3 At the same time, world-class reservoirs continued to be built, and desalinization of sea water was being carried out.
- 4 Interview with Lian Weilin, Guangzhou, November 1996.
- 5 *Ta Kung Pao*, May through June 1963.
- 6 *Ta Kung Pao*, May 31, 1963.
- 7 *Ta Kung Pao*, April 23, 1964.
- 8 *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, January 3, 1965.
- 9 1 cubic metre equals approximately 220 gallons.
- 10 *Ta Kung Pao*, April 21, 1965.
- 11 Interview with Lian Weilin, Guangzhou, November 1996.
- 12 *Hong Kong Standard*, June 28, 1967.
- 13 *Hong Kong Standard*, July 13, 1967.
- 14 1 cubic metre equals approx. 220 gallons.
- 15 *The Times*, July 8, 1983.
- 16 Interview with David K.P. Li, Hong Kong, November 1996.
- 17 Interview with Violet Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996. She remained a secretary in the family company, Lee Hysan Estate, until her retirement at

- the age of sixty-five. Father used to give her a ride home every day after work, and he would tell her about confidential matters which he would not repeat in his office.
- 18 Member of the Legislative Council, member of the Executive Council, member of the Advisory Committee on Corruption and member of the Fisheries Development Loan Fund Committee.
  - 19 *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, June 14, 1965.
  - 20 Interview with David K.P. Li, Hong Kong, November 1996.
  - 21 Fei Yiming, "Mian Huai Li Ming Ze" ("Remembering R.C. Lee"), *Ta Kung Pao*, July 16, 1983.
  - 22 Interview with Sir Quo Wai Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996. The person who divulged this information cannot be named because he is still living.
  - 23 Address given by Richard Charles Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China" at the International Conference on the Economic Opportunities in Hong Kong, held at the Gravenbruch-Kempinski Hotel, Frankfurt, June 14-15, 1982.
  - 24 Interview with Lian Weilin, Guangzhou, November 1996.
  - 25 *Celebrity Monthly*, January 1979, 24.
  - 26 *Ta Kung Pao*, January 11, 1978.
  - 27 Letter from Prof. Ma Lin, November 27, 1997.
  - 28 *Ta Kung Pao*, March 24, 1978.
  - 29 Interview with Prof. Ma Lin, Hong Kong, June 1997.
  - 30 Young Chinese tend to slur the distinction between the "n" and "l" sounds, and thus cause great confusion.
  - 31 Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, April 1995.
  - 32 Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, April 1995.
  - 33 Yao Kang joined the Shanghai office of Swire in 1948, straight out of university. He was sent to England to train in the cadet program. He was the first local to be picked for this program which was usually reserved for Oxbridge graduates. In 1951, when the Korean War started, Swire was no longer willing to send its specialists to China. Yao was asked if he would like to go back. In his early twenties, he became the manager for Swire's China insurance operations, based in Shanghai, with branch offices in Tianjin, Qingdao, Hankou, Xiamen and Shantou. In 1953 he recommended that Swire get out of China, because he felt there was no future. The company followed his advice and withdrew from China. Yao arrived in Hong Kong at Christmas 1953. By the time Yao retired, he was chairman of six Swire subsidiary companies.
  - 34 Interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997.
  - 35 CITIC is the best-regarded and the most international company owned by Beijing, with twenty subsidiaries in China and abroad and a total of 26,000 employees. Its assets total US\$5 billion. Abroad, the company

concentrates on development of natural resources and communications. An example is Citifor in Seattle, Washington, one of the major suppliers of timber in the northwest United States. Other business interests include China Light & Power, Dragon Air, Hong Kong Telecom, trading, distribution and property, mainly in Hong Kong, Macau and mainland China. It is a publicly traded company listed on the Hong Kong stock exchange. The friendship between Yao and Wei is, "The reason why Swire Pacific is so close to CITIC. They have many joint ventures." Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997.

- 36 Passengers could get on the train in Hong Kong and go through immigration in Guangzhou when they arrived, without being stopped at border check-points.
- 37 Director from 1978-82.
- 38 Interview with Wang Kuang, Guangzhou, November 1996.
- 39 Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."
- 40 Letter to Father from H.A. Washcheck, Senior Vice-President of the Bank of America, September 4, 1980.
- 41 Fei Yiming, "Mian Huai Li Ming Ze" ("Remembering R.C. Lee"), *Ta Kung Pao*, July 16, 1983.
- 42 Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."
- 43 The agreement stipulated that the ownership of the hotel revert to China after fifteen years. This was later extended to twenty years.
- 44 A Supplemental Agreement was signed on May 3, 1983.
- 45 Referred to as Garden Guest House in the Joint Venture Agreement.
- 46 Joint Venture Agreement on the Construction and Operation of Garden Guest House in Guangzhou between Guangzhou Lingnan Enterprises Company and Garden Hotels (Holdings) Limited, March 28, 1980.
- 47 Supplemental Agreement between Guangzhou Lingnan Enterprises Company and Garden Hotels (Holdings) Limited in respect of the joint venture for the construction and operation of the Garden Hotel, May 3, 1983.
- 48 *Ta Kung Pao*, December 27, 1980.
- 49 This apparently was insisted on by the Chinese side of the joint venture. Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 50 Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.
- 51 By its completion, there was a cost overrun of 80 per cent. At its completion, the cost was \$1.5 billion. Interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 52 She was therefore Vice-Chairman of the Board of the Garden Hotel, Guangzhou.
- 53 Interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 54 It was Father's plan to establish a liaison office in Tokyo which would be run by Reiko Ogata.



- 55 In 1997, the Japanese Consulate was still there, and even though the American Consulate has moved out, their Cultural Centre is still in the Garden Hotel complex. Interview with Reiko Ogata, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 56 \$700 million.
- 57 Chinese Government guest house in Beijing where senior government officials entertain V.I.P. guests. The name in Chinese depicts a platform where the Emperor did his fishing inside the inner palace.
- 58 Interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 59 Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, Spring 1995.

### Chapter 13

- 1 Berta Manson in the "Empire Builders," a series that appeared in the *South China Morning Post*, October 26, 1975.
- 2 *South China Morning Post*, October 26, 1975.
- 3 This was a new phenomenon in the early 1970s in Hong Kong, which culminated in the crash of 1973.
- 4 *Ta Kung Pao*, January 1, 1972.
- 5 *South China Morning Post*, October 26, 1975.
- 6 Address given by R.C. Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China" at the International Conference on the Economic Opportunities in Hong Kong, held at Gravenbruch-Kempinski Hotel, Frankfurt, June 14-15, 1982.
- 7 For Chinese New Year, homes are decorated with budding peach or plum trees, in the same way Christmas trees decorate the homes of Westerners. If the flowers open on New Year's Day, it is considered a sign of prosperity for that year.
- 8 Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, Spring 1995.
- 9 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, October 1996.
- 10 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, October 1996.
- 11 *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, April 1, 1960.
- 12 *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, March 19, 1963.
- 13 *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, March 19, 1963.
- 14 Opening speech of the Hong Kong Tube & Metal Products, Ltd.
- 15 Interview with Violet Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 16 *Ta Kung Pao*, August 20, 1964.
- 17 *Celebrity Monthly*, August 1979, 24.
- 18 *Ta Kung Pao*, 1955, 1956, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963.
- 19 *Ta Kung Pao*, January, February and April 1963.
- 20 Letter to Father from the secretary of Victoria City Development Co. Ltd., January 6, 1964.
- 21 *Ta Kung Pao*, June 24, 1965.

- 22 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 23 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 24 The Chinese government was not planning to let political unrest spill over from China to Hong Kong.
- 25 By 1997, the third cross-harbour tunnel was completed. Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 26 Fei Yiming, "Mian Huai Li Ming Ze" ("Remembering R.C. Lee"), *Ta Kung Pao*, July 16, 1983.
- 27 This was also the turning point in the urban history of Hong Kong, the change from two cities into one.
- 28 Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.
- 29 He was chairman until December 1975, when G.R. Ross took over.
- 30 *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, March 31, 1967.
- 31 Jardine Fleming & Company Limited is a restricted licence bank, owned jointly by Jardine Matheson Holdings Limited and Robert Fleming Holdings Limited. Established in 1970, it was the first merchant bank in Hong Kong.
- 32 Interview with David K. P. Lee, Hong Kong, November 1996.
- 33 *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, March 31, 1970.
- 34 During the 1950s and 1960s when telephone lines were in chronically short supply, bribery was rampant, probably even institutionalized.
- 35 Phone interview with Sir Jack Cater, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 36 Jack Cater went to Hong Kong right after the war as part of the postwar military administration. He met Father at that time and they became good friends. His term as Commissioner of ICAC actually started in October 1973 and lasted until October 1978, when he became Chief Secretary. He was subsequently knighted.
- 37 Fei, "Mian Huai Li Ming Ze."
- 38 *Ta Kung Pao*, July 29, 1975.
- 39 *Ta Kung Pao*, July and August 1975.
- 40 Note from Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, August 1997.
- 41 Robin Hutcheon, *The Blue Flame*, Hong Kong, 1987.
- 42 Fei "Mian Huai Li Ming Ze."
- 43 Hutcheon, *Blue Flame*, 128.
- 44 Letter from Sir Evelyn de Rothschild, London, June 11, 1997.
- 45 Letter to Father from Sir Evelyn de Rothschild, London, December 4, 1979.
- 46 Notes from Per Jorgensen, Copenhagen, June 1997.
- 47 Notes from Per Jorgensen, Copenhagen, June 1997.
- 48 Interview with Greta Li, Vancouver, April 1997.
- 49 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 8, 1993.

50 Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."

51 The company is based in London and is the only major securities business in the United Kingdom to have remained an independent partnership. In the past thirty years, the company has opened offices in eleven other financial centres. The one in Hong Kong was opened in 1974. Worldwide, the company has more than one thousand employees in three areas of business: corporate finance, institutional brokering and fund management. Yao Kang, Hong Kong, February 1998.

52 *Ta Kung Pao*, August 4, 1981.

53 Interview with Professor Paul Lin, who was the former Vice-chancellor of the University of East Asia in Macao during the 1980s, Vancouver, April 1997; interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997. Both Prof. Lin and Yao Kang were directors of COOL.

54 Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."

## Chapter 14

1 Christopher Haffner, *The Craft in the East*, rev. ed. (Hong Kong, 1988), 252.

2 Haffner, *Craft in the East*, Preface.

3 Haffner, *Craft in the East*, Preface.

4 Haffner, *Craft in the East*, 422.

5 Haffner, *Craft in the East*, 422.

6 Haffner, *Craft in the East*, 422.

7 Haffner, *Craft in the East*, 425.

8 Haffner, *Craft in the East*, 422.

9 Haffner, *Craft in the East*, 424.

10 Haffner, *Craft in the East*, 362-364.

11 District Grand Lodge of Hong Kong & the Far East, Spring Newsletter 1997, from the Deputy District Grand Master, W. Bro. Yao Kang.

## Chapter 15

1 The economic recession in North America in the early 1980s deterred potential emigrants. However, after 1986, with Xu Jiatur's opposition to elections in Hong Kong, and with economic upturn in North America, emigration became massive.

2 Address given by R.C. Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China," at the International Conference on the Economic Opportunities in Hong Kong, held at the Gravenbruch-Kempinski Hotel, Frankfurt, June 14-15, 1982.

3 Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."

4 Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."

5 Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."

- 6 The United Kingdom and People's Republic of China delegations agreed at the United Nations in 1971 to remove Hong Kong from United Nations' list of colonies. Talks on Hong Kong were to be carried out bilaterally.
- 7 Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."
- 8 Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."
- 9 Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."
- 10 Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."
- 11 Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."
- 12 I met the brother of the person who bought the *Atalanta* in June 1997, in Hong Kong. His name is Ah Ming and he is the coxswain of R. G. Ross, Chairman of Deacon & Co. I learnt that for a number of years, the *Atalanta* was available for hire for launch picnics. I also learnt that Ho Ning, in his later years, became the big brother for all the young men who wanted to work towards being coxswains for the wealthy.
- 13 By the time he came to work for us my older brother, Richard, and sister, Deanna, had already gone to England to study.
- 14 Fei Yiming, "Mian Huai Li Ming Ze" ("Remembering R.C. Lee"), *Ta Kung Pao*, July 16, 1983.
- 15 Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, Spring 1995.
- 16 Xu Jiatur, *Xu Jiatur Xianggang Huiyi Lu (Xu Jiatur's Hong Kong Memoirs)*, (Hong Kong, 1993), 43.
- 17 Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, Spring 1995.
- 18 Interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- 19 Hong Kong is twelve hours ahead of Toronto in the summer because of daylight saving time.
- 20 Fei, "Mian Huai Li Ming Ze."
- 21 Christopher Haffner, *The Craft in the East*, (Hong Kong, 1988) 424-5.
- 22 Haffner, *Craft in the East*, 424.
- 23 Haffner, *Craft in the East*, 424.

## Photos

- 1 The translation of the letter on pages 280-281:  
 Dear Mr. Lee,  
 Thank you so much for your hospitality and for the thoughtful arrangements you made during my visit to Hong Kong.  
 We returned to Beijing on February 5. I regret the delay in writing this thank you, but I have been very busy because of Lunar New Year.  
 I trust you had a very happy New Year.  
 Wishing you good health and long life.  
 Jiang Zemin, February 22  
 (The tone in the original Chinese indicated the esteem held by Jiang for Father. Jiang was then the Minister of Electronic Industries in Beijing.)

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PHOTOS 相片

Andri No 787



G. R.

EXTRACT OF AN ENTRY  
IN A REGISTER KEPT IN THE COLONY OF HONGKONG.  
IN TERMS OF ORDINANCE NO. 7 OF 1896.

No.	When and where born.	Name if any.	Sex.	Name and Surname of Father.	Maternal Surname.	Rank or profession of Father.	Signature and Residence of Informant.	When Registered.	Official Name and Title of Registrar.
128	17th March 1905 35, Borden Road W. Shen's Bldg.	利 鋸 津	男	Li W. Chan 利 熙 臣	Wang's Bldg. 張 開 喜	Business Clerk	W. Chan 利 熙 臣 W. Chan's Bldg. W. Chan's Bldg.	5th 1905 Registered under No. 57 of the Ordinance	Robert Brooks (Acting Registrar)

Extract from the Register of Births in the Colony of Hongkong this 3rd day of October 1919

True Copy

Per: Head of Sanitary Department.

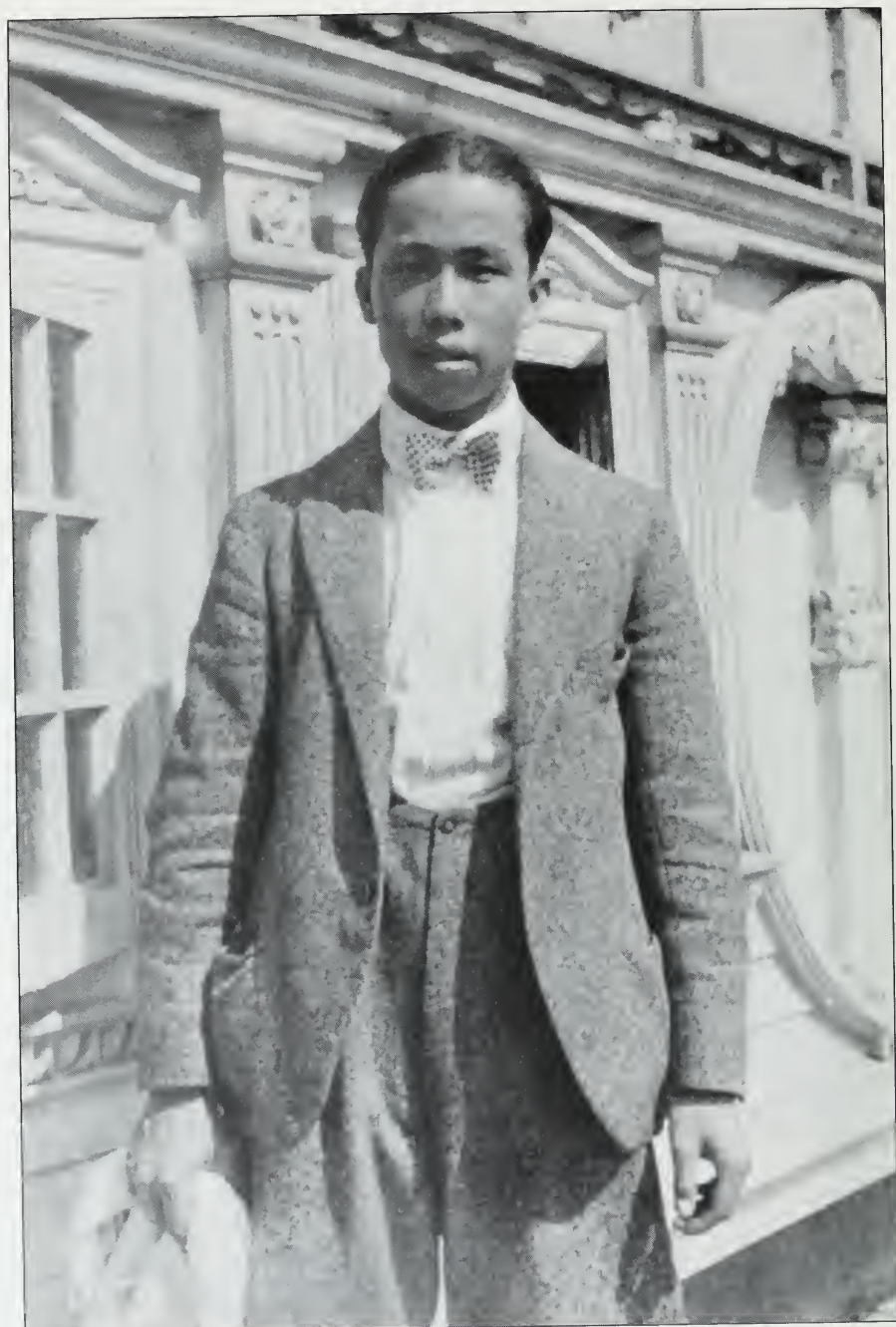
The Registers of Births in Hongkong which have occurred in the Colony of Hongkong since the 1st October 1896, are kept in the Sanitary Department, and the same are open for inspection at any time by any person who may desire to inspect the same. The Registers of Births are also open for inspection at any time by any person who may desire to inspect the same. The Registers of Births are also open for inspection at any time by any person who may desire to inspect the same. The Registers of Births are also open for inspection at any time by any person who may desire to inspect the same.

Father's birth certificate.  
父親的出生紙



Father and Grandfather, circa 1909.  
父親與祖父，約於一九〇九年。





Father as a student at Oxford, 1923–27.  
1923年至1927年，牛津大學學生時期的父親。

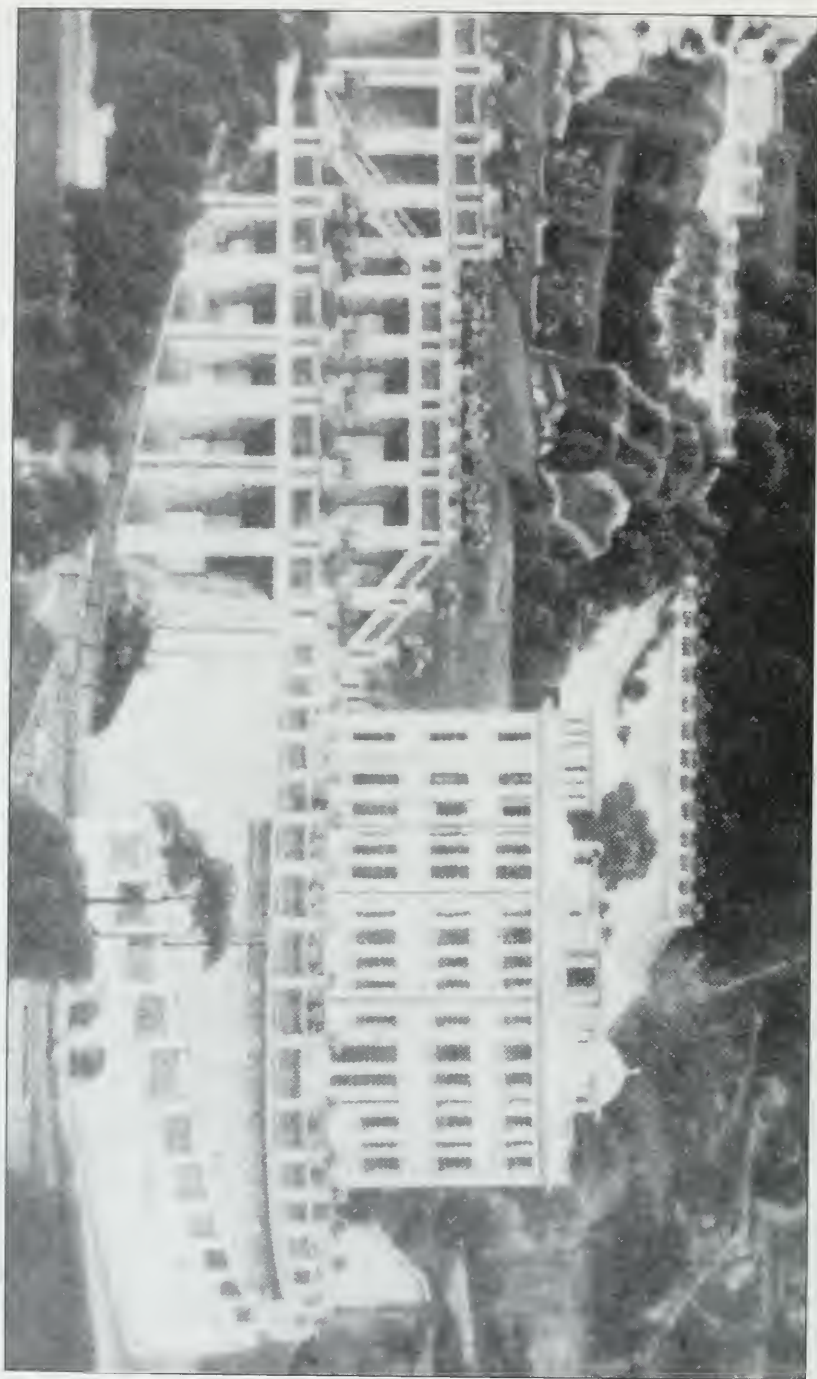
England, 1923-27  
英國，1923年至1927年



Father driving his friends.  
父親駕車接載朋友



Father riding.  
父親騎馬



The Big House, 1920.  
大屋，1920年





The Wong clan, 1921.  
黃氏家族攝於1921年



My parents' wedding, February 28, 1928, at St. John's Cathedral.  
父母親於1928年2月28日在香港聖約翰大教堂結婚





Friends and family at home in Conghua, 1935. Mother and Father on left.  
1935年父母親〔左一、左二〕和親友攝於從化寓所



In Conghua with Mother's family, 1935. Mother and Father on left.  
1935年父母親〔左一、左二〕和母親家人攝於從化

Hainan Island, 1935-37  
海南島，1935年至1937年



Father at plantation.  
父親於牧場



Father on a tractor.  
父親駕駛農耕機

# Li aborigines in Hainan Island, 1935-37

海南島原住民黎人，1935年至1937年



## Hainan Island, 1935-37

海南島，1935年至1937年



Father with friends.

父親與友人



Primitive transportation.

原始的交通工具



Mango fork and knife designed  
and crafted by Father.

父親設計製造的芒果刀叉





Family in Yishan, 1943. Left to right: Richard, Father, Deanna, Mother, and me.

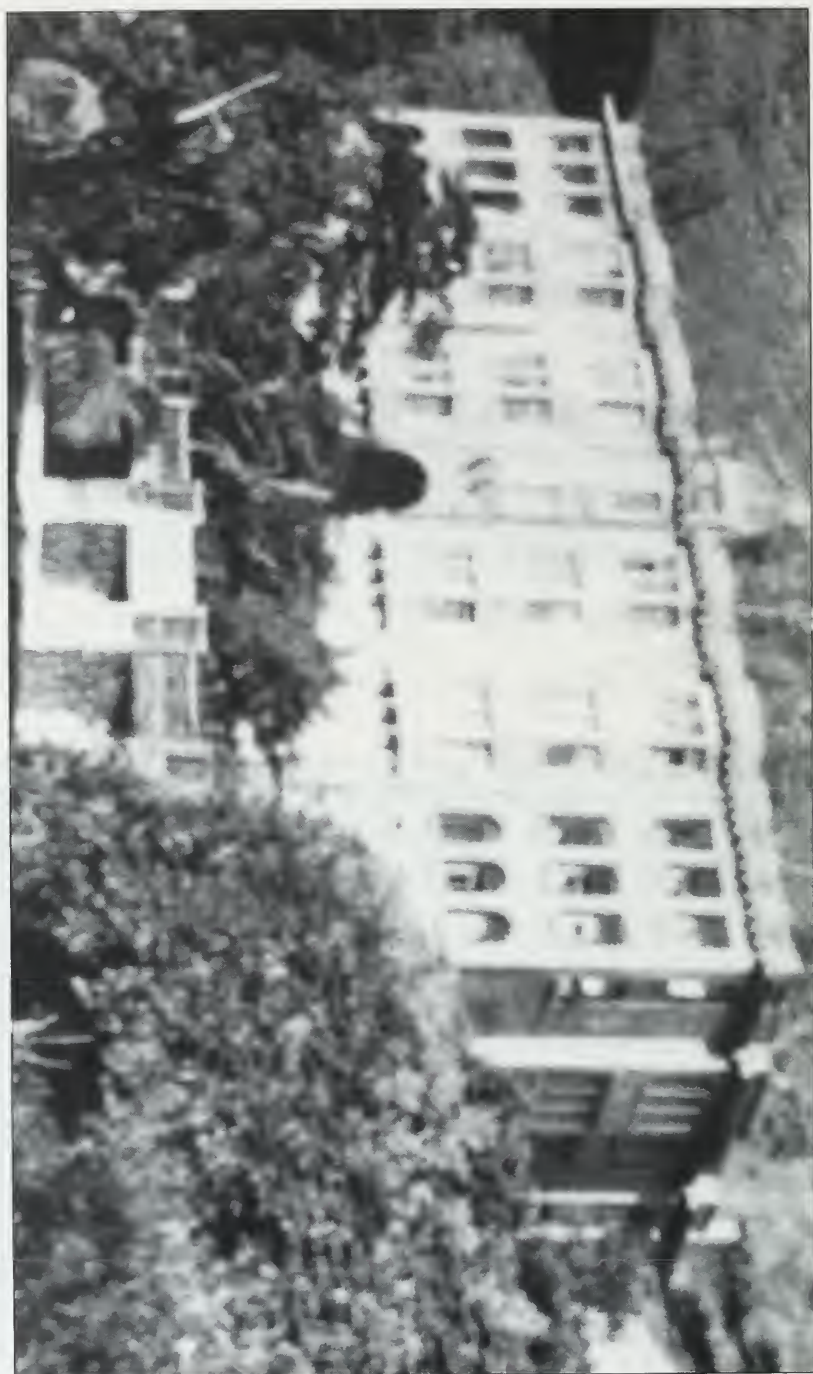
1943年全家在宜山，左起：哥哥、父親、姐姐、母親及我。



Family in Chongqing, 1945. Left to right: Mother, Deanna, Richard, me and Father.

1945年全家在重慶，左起：母親、姐姐、哥哥、我及父親。





The Lee Building, 1945.  
利行，1945年



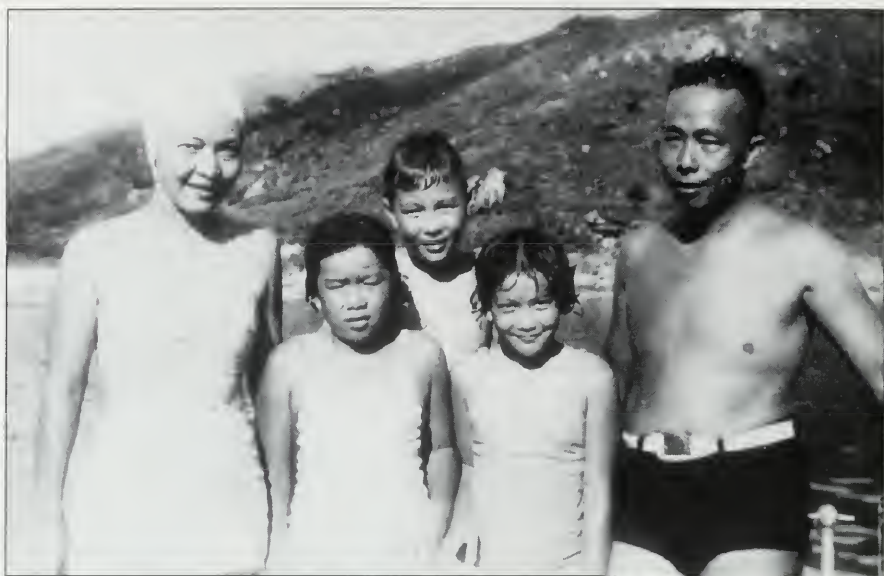
Admiral Sir Cecil Harcourt, governor of postwar military government of Hong Kong, with Mother (immediate right) and Fourth Aunt (immediate left), April 11, 1946.

1946年4月11日母親〔右二〕、四姑姐〔左二〕與  
戰後香港軍政府總督Sir Cecil Harcourt 合影。



Sir Alexander and Lady Grantham with my parents (on right),  
Hong Kong, 1950.

1950年父母親〔右〕和香港總督葛量洪夫婦攝於香港



On our first launch, 1947. Left to right: Mother, Deanna, Richard, me and Father.

1947年全家首次出海，左起：母親、姐姐、哥哥、我及父親。



Family picture, 1949. Left to right in front row: Deanna, Richard, Christopher and me. Second Row: my parents.

1949年的全家福，前排左起：姐姐、哥哥、弟弟及我，  
後排為父母親。





Mother at the opening of Sir Robert Hotung's Princess Theatre. Father (second from left) and Sir Robert Hotung (seated) look on, December 1952.  
1952年12月母親為何東爵士〔坐者〕的樂宮戲院開幕剪綵，  
左二為父親



Launch picnic, 1955.  
1955年出海野餐



Father, 1952.  
父親，1952年





Mother, 1952.  
母親，1952年



Father presenting ancient Chinese wine cup to President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, 1960.

1960年父親致贈中國古酒杯給加納總理



Father, leader of the Hong Kong Trade Mission to West Africa, 1960.  
1960年父親率領貿易訪問團赴西非考察





Father at Michael Jebsen's Farm in Elsholm, near Aabenraa, Denmark, 1963.  
1963年父親攝於丹麥友人農莊



Father swimming with Michael Jebsen in Als Fjord, 1963.  
1963年父親與友人在丹麥內海海峽游泳

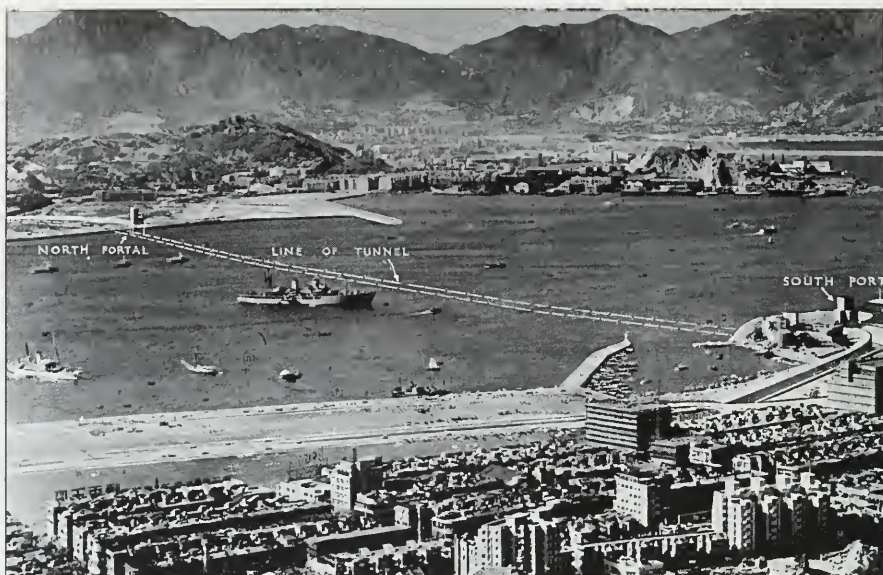


Father with Her Royal Highness Princess Alexandra.  
父親與英國亞歷山大公主



Father with Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret.  
父親與英國瑪嘉烈公主





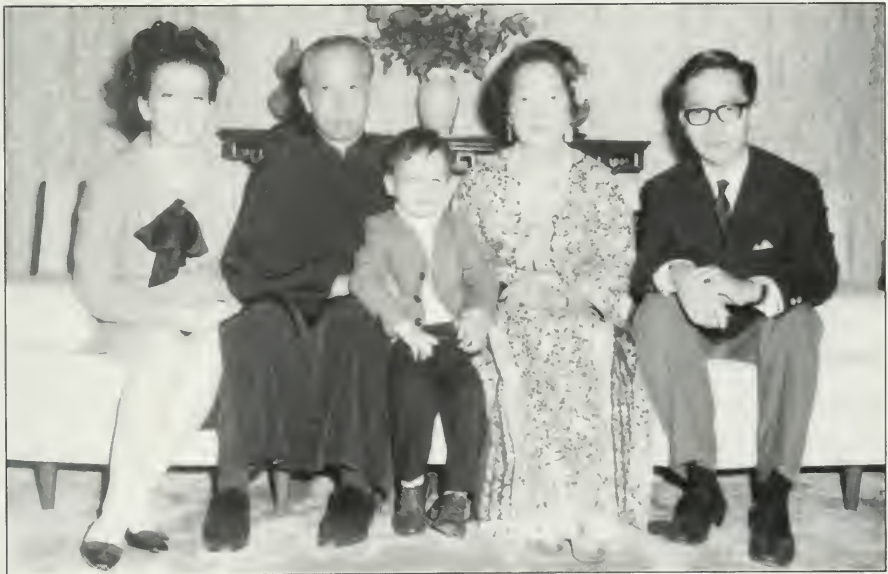
Proposed layout and alignment of the two-lane tunnel, January 1964.  
1964年1月雙車道海底隧道計劃圖及預定路線



Chinese dinner party after signing of the Cross Harbour Tunnel contract,  
Father (second from left), June 26, 1969.  
1969年6月26日海底隧道合約簽署後的中式慶祝晚宴，  
左二為父親。



I posed with my parents just before Mother and I left for Canada,  
August 1959.  
1959年8月母親送我赴加拿大讀書，行前與父母親攝於機場。



Neville and me on either side of my parents and Ashley,  
Hong Kong, 1968.  
1968年我與衛權同長子偉雄回港時與父母親合照



The Freemason. Father as the Grand Master of Hong Kong and the Far East, circa 1964.  
父親佩掛共濟會香港及遠東區區總監的配飾，約於1964年。





My parents, 1968.  
父母親，1968年



The Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon.  
日本瑞寶勳章



Father (on far right) awarded The Order of the Sacred Treasure,  
March 12, 1969.  
1969年3月12日父親〔後排右一〕攝於瑞寶勳章授勳典禮





The establishment of Yamaichi International (Hong Kong) Ltd.,  
Hong Kong, July 5, 1972. Father on the far left.  
1972年7月5日山一國際〔香港〕有限公司成立，左一為父親。



Father (far left) with Konosuke Koike next to him, circa 1980.  
父親〔左一〕和小池厚之助〔左二〕，約於1980年。



Mother at the launching.  
大玉號下水典禮中的母親



Launching of M.V. Grand Jade, (named after Mother, whose Chinese name means "Jade"), a 30,000 DWT Bulker, at Koyo Dockyard on June 30, 1973.  
1973年6月30日以母親命名〔璧為玉的通稱〕的三萬噸大玉號  
新貨輪在日本正式下水



Launching of M.V. Grand Jade, 1973.  
1973年新船大玉號下水慶典



Mother dancing.  
母親跳舞



Father.  
父親





Father and me in Toronto, 1974.  
1974年父親和我攝於加拿大多倫多市



Father swimming at the Hong Kong Country Club, October 1975.  
1975年10月父親在香港鄉村俱樂部晨泳

# Visit to Xinjiang Autonomous Region, 1977.

1977年訪問新疆維吾爾自治區



With village leaders.  
父親與自治區領袖



Father and village head.  
父親與自治區領袖



My parents.  
父母親





From left to right: I.M. Pei, Father, W. Szeto, Hon Chiu. Architects Pei and Szeto show Sunning Plaza model, 1977.  
1977年〔由左至右〕貝聿銘、父親、司徒惠及利漢釗與新寧大廈模型合影，新寧大廈為貝聿銘和司徒惠合作設計。



Second Grandmother (in centre), on her 90th birthday, 1976.  
1976年二祖母〔正中〕九十大慶



My parents' Golden Wedding Anniversary, February 28, 1978,  
at the Lee Gardens Hotel.

1978年2月28日父母親金婚紀念日攝於香港利園酒店





Father with our son Ashley at ancestral graveyard in Sunwui, January 1979.  
1979年1月父親和作者長子偉雄攝於廣東省新會縣祖墳



Guangzhou-Kowloon Through Train ceremony, 1979. Centre: Governor Sir Murray Maclehoze.

Front row: fourth from right, Father; second from right, Mother; fifth from left, Lian Weilin.

麥理浩〔正中〕、父親〔右四〕、母親〔右二〕及梁威林〔左五〕攝於1979年廣州至

九龍直通車通車典禮。





紀念宋慶齡國家名譽主席  
基金會

理事聘書

茲敬請 利銘澤先生 為  
紀念宋慶齡國家名譽主席基金會理事  
特此敦聘

名譽主席 鄧小平  
顧問 廖承志  
主席 康克清

聘証字第 0000031 號

一九八二年八月 日

Formal letter inviting Father to be administrator of the Song Qingling Foundation from the honorary chairman Deng Xiaoping, 1982.

1982年父親的聘書

Letter from Jiang Zemin to Father, 1981.<sup>1</sup> See endnotes (p. 237)

江澤民在1981年給父親的信函

中華人民共和國電子工業部

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銘澤先生大鑒：

此次应邀訪港，承蒙  
周到安排和熱情接待，  
不勝感謝之至。我們已于二月  
五日返回北京。由於臨近春節，  
未克及時修函向候，殊以  
為歉。遙想閣下春節愉快

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中华人民共和国电子工业部

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快，诸事顺遂。谨祝

健康长寿！

江泽民  
二月廿二日

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Father with President Li Xiannian, circa 1982.  
父親與中國國家主席李先念，約於1982年。



Father with leaders of China, circa 1982. Far left: Yang Shangkun next to Father. Third from right: Jiang Zemin.  
父親〔左二〕與中國政要，楊尚昆〔左一〕，江澤民〔右三〕，約於1982年。





Father with Gu Mu, Vice-Premier, circa 1982.  
父親與中國國務院副總理谷牧，約於1982年。



Father welcomes the most Worshipful The Grand Master His Royal Highness The Duke of Kent, October 28, 1982. Courtesy of Zetland Hall.  
1982年10月28日父親以共濟會香港及遠東區區總監身份，歡迎最高總監根德公爵來訪。相片由香港共濟會泄蘭分會提供



Mother with Cai Chang, Chairwoman of the All China Women's Federation.  
母親與中國婦聯會主席蔡暢



Mother with Deng Yingchao, widow of Zhou Enlai.  
母親與周恩來遺孀鄧穎超



Mother with President Yang Shangkun, 1989.  
1989年母親和中國國家主席楊尚昆



I revisited Chongqing, 1996. Photo taken by the Yangtse River.  
1996年我回重慶攝於長江江畔



My parents, 1981.  
父母親，1981年



加港文獻館惠存

德董心

九八





# 築木橋

利銘澤的生平與時代

香港：一九零五年至一九八三年

VIVIENNE POY