



Ancestral Images

A Hong Kong Collection

Hugh Baker



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Foreword by Lady Youde



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Foreword

by Lady Youde

In these times of rapid change, every day sees another link with the past broken and it is not surprising if the newcomer to the city of Hong Kong, faced with its spectacular modern architecture looming over the busy harbour and surrounded by crowds of fashionable young people equipped with every latest electronic gadget, does not at first notice the ubiquitous but inconspicuous traces of the old ways. Perhaps at the back of a shop a small gold shrine gleams in the dim light of a tiny red bulb, a dark doorstep half hides a little figure beside a scrap of red paper, and gradually more and more puzzling glimpses of unfamiliar objects begin to reveal that many traditional practices are still observed even in the busy city.

As soon as visitors venture into Hong Kong's countryside in the New Territories, they will be struck by the fact that even though life there has changed dramatically in the fifty years since the material for this book was collected, a great deal still remains to be rediscovered by the interested observer. Professor Baker's rare understanding of Hong Kong and the New Territories life during the 1960s and 1970s comes from his unique experience of having lived for eighteen months in a traditional Chinese clan village studying their language, history and culture. There he had unprecedented access to a now rapidly vanishing vibrant and colourful way of life that he describes with sympathy and humour in these snapshots of everyday family life, taking the reader all the way from birth, through family duties and the preservation of traditions, religious ceremonies with their required food and clothing, and finally to death and the continuing obligations of looking after family members in the afterlife, many centuries after their departure. Even today hundreds of New Territories clan members who have migrated all over the world journey home every ten years to take part in the traditional and often spectacular clan celebrations held in honour of the memory of their venerated ancestors.

Here in more than a hundred lively and entertaining articles and photographs Professor Baker makes it possible to recognize what still remains of the architecture, agriculture and traditional dress of this historic area and also to understand something of the unique way of life followed

here for a thousand years that is now steadily giving way to urbanization and uniformity.

During the 1980s, in Government House, Sir Edward always recommended this book to our visitors as the most entertaining and scholarly insight into traditional Hong Kong life available at that time. This new version will be essential reading for everyone curious to discover something of what is still hidden behind the shining veneer of modern Hong Kong.

Pamela Youde
London, 2011

Preface

In 1975 I was asked to record a short programme on Chinese culture for Radio Television Hong Kong. While I was in the studio it was decided that I might as well make it three programmes. A week later I was asked to do another ten to turn it into a *Baker's Dozen*, the title under which the broadcasts went out. Once riding the tiger I found I could not get off, and I ended up doing four series, 52 programmes in all. No sooner had I managed to dismount in 1977 than Mr Robin Hutcheon, Editor of the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), rang to suggest doing a few articles for his paper along the same lines. These too ran away with me, expanding into a weekly column, and for 121 weeks appeared "From My Album", a thousand words around one of my photographs. I actually wrote only 120 articles — by mistake one of them was published twice on consecutive weeks. Rather depressingly, nobody seems to have noticed, and I assumed that there was no readership other than myself, but when the SCMP published all of them in three volumes as *Ancestral Images* in 1979, 1980 and 1981, sales were very encouraging until a policy decision took the *Post* out of book publishing. In 1990, 39 of the articles, plus two additional ones, were brought out by Hong Kong University Press under the title *Hong Kong Images*.

Now the Press have given me the chance to bring the original 120 articles together in one volume. I have changed one or two of the photographs and have revised the texts so that they are written from a present-day perspective: but the subject matter remains as before, Hong Kong's New Territories in the 1960s and 1970s for the most part, with the odd excursion into more general areas of Chinese history and culture.

The reader will not take long to discover that I have borrowed snippets from many earlier scholars and authors. I have given the exact references at the end of the text, and there is also a short annotated list of further reading, so that those who want to find out more can do so. Beware, though! It's a trap — once dipped into, many of these books will stick to your fingers and refuse to be put down. The hours I have spent lost inside De Groot's anecdote-packed *Religious System of China* ... the love-hate feelings I developed for Arthur Smith as I alternately nodded at the highly perceptive comments and seethed at the insufferable cultural arrogance of his *Chinese Characteristics* ... the fascination

of reading in *Lion and Dragon in Northern China* the first-hand experiences of Sir Reginald Johnston administering far-off Weihaiwei in the company of Sir James Haldane Stewart Lockhart ... the more recent purple-prose exploits in Hong Kong of Austin Coates in *Myself a Mandarin* Into traps like these it is a pleasure to fall.

As for the photographs, I make no claim to artistry and little to technical skill. I took most of them with quite primitive cameras, often without preparation or the chance to do more than fire off quickly in the hope of capturing something which had interested me. Some of them could not be taken again, because times have changed and because few people have the privilege of long-term access to a community such as I had while conducting anthropological fieldwork in a New Territories village. Some could still be taken by anyone, and doubtless most would make a better job of them, but with all these photographs it has been the personal attachment which has triggered my thoughts and stirred me to write and I do not apologize for the indifferent quality. I can even make a virtue of my incompetence — the poor focus of the wall in the article on “Mud” reflects the fading from sight of the institution with which it deals, and the fuzziness of the “Village” photograph underlines the significance of its being taken from a moving railway train. Just one of the photographs may not have been taken by me — over the years it has lost its reference sticker, and it is not impossible that it was given to me by someone else. If so that would certainly be reason for me to apologize to person unknown.

I have written Cantonese words according to the Sidney Lau romanization system, and place names in Hong Kong are spelled according to the standard Hong Kong SAR Government practice, the principal “bible” for which is the Government Printer’s 1961 *Gazetteer of Place Names in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories*. For dynastic titles and place names in China, I have used the official *Hanyu Pinyin* spellings. Some words (Kowloon, Hakka, Hong Kong, for instance) are so familiar in spellings that do not belong to any of these systems that it would be silly to try to change them. Chinese characters have been used wherever it has seemed useful.

Indirectly many people helped with this book, but I should acknowledge my gratitude in particular to Mr Robin Hutcheon and Mr Keith Jackson of the SCMP; to Dr Colin Day, Mr Michael Duckworth and Dr Chris Munn of

Hong Kong University Press; to President Robert Nield of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society; to Dr Elizabeth Sinn, Ms Yip Tin Pui and the staff of the Hong Kong Memory Project; and to the people of Sheung Shui who made this ignorant outsider welcome in their village and gave him a chance to be educated for life.

I have had a love affair with Hong Kong for more than half a century. I've lived in a village in the New Territories, in plush hotels, in a windowless, toiletless tiny flat, on the Peak, in Kowloon, in Mid-levels I return again and again, and I've enjoyed it all hugely. I've enjoyed the eating, and the walking, and the smells, and the buzz of human energy, and the sense of achievement, and above all the friendship and tolerant good humour of its people. I've enjoyed writing these pages, and I hope it shows.

H.D.R.B.

Somerset, March 2011



There are some things which trigger my camera shutter without my volition. Ancestor tablets and omega-shaped graves, for example, have me reaching for the release button as fast and instinctively as my foot goes to the brake pedal when something runs out in front of the car.

But nothing can compare with the devotion and thoroughness with which I photograph Earth Gods. I must make my confession: I am an Earth God addict! I sacrifice time, film, and cameras to pander to my lust. When I show my slides at home it is heartbreaking to hear my starving and rag-clad children cry "Oh Daddy, not another one!" while hollow-eyed my wife looks on and wonders under which letter Earth Gods Anonymous is entered in the *Yellow Pages*.

What's the attraction? The battered specimen shown here is not in itself an object of exceptional beauty, though I view it with affection as an honest and time-hallowed piece of functional architecture. It is, I think, what the Earth God symbolizes that holds my interest. It stands for a sense of stability, of security, of identity with fixed and immovable reference points, of community and of belonging.

Every New Territories village has its Earth God, and where the village is divided into hamlets or other recognized sections each of its parts has its own Earth God too. Almost it would be possible to do a sociological survey of a community just by plotting the positions of its shrines. "The people of this part of the village don't get on with the people of that part," you might say, "otherwise they'd share one Earth God, not have one each." And you could go on to investigate the reasons for the division: different surnames? An old quarrel? Separate branches of a clan?

Earth Gods operate not only at village and hamlet levels, but for buildings too. Their job is to protect the inhabitants and to act as registrars of birth, marriage and death on Heaven's behalf. De Groot tells how food is laid out in offering beside the corpse of a newly-dead man:

A petty offering ... is at the same time set out for the use of the local divinity of the Soil [the Earth God].... If properly propitiated in this way, this being is expected to safely pilot the soul through the regions of darkness, of which he has the control. It is the duty of one of the mourners to invite him to help himself; for this purpose the man makes a polite bow in front of the offerings, at the same time holding one or three burning incense sticks in his joined hands on a level with his head. Prudent and intelligent people take care to lay out only one chopstick for the use of the god, thoughtfully calculating that it must take him in this way a long time to consume his meal and so prevent him from hurrying off before the soul is properly prepared to follow him.¹

The wording of the oblong stone let into the back of the shrine here is very simple: "Seat of the god who is master of the earth of this village" (*boon-chuen to-jue ji san-wai* 本村土主之神位). The red papers pasted round the stone at New Year a day or so before this was taken have already become tattered, but the horizontal one clearly says "Protection," and down one side is "Protect the good fortune of the entire village".

In a little kitchen building next to the main ancestral hall of this same village is the Earth God of the hall. Here the wording is much more elaborate: "Seat of the god, the true god of good fortune and virtue, master of the earth,

who protects this ancestral hall". And the last time I saw them the red sidepapers read: "Controlling the good fortune of the whole village, protecting the sage spirits of the ancestral hall", with "Divine light" as the horizontal paper.

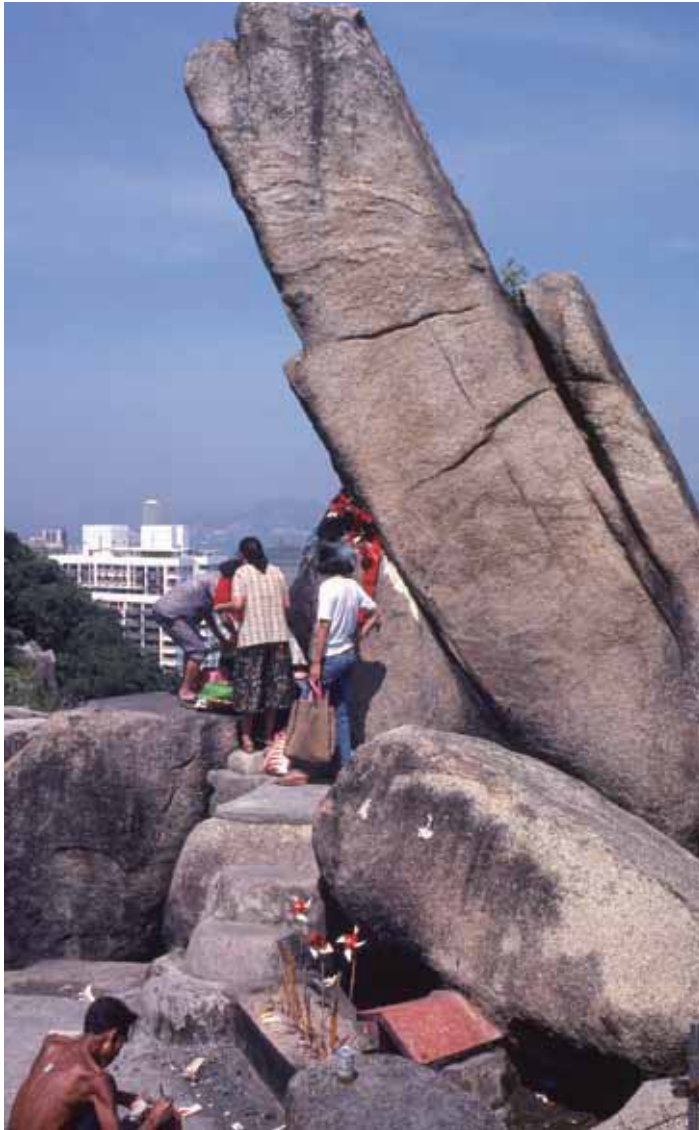
Even graves often have Earth Gods to protect them. The wording is mostly just "God of the earth" or sometimes "Seat of the god of the earth of the right hand" — the right being the inferior position, with the grave itself taking pride of place on the left.

What all these gods point to is a concern with the earth, with location and permanence. In the Chinese world of natural and man-made disasters, of precarious peace and fickle rulers, land was the traditional anchor. Come drought and hunger, come rapacious bandit or greedy mandarin, come fire or disease, with land there was always hope of rejuvenation and recuperation. So when a man made money, he invested it in land, and when a clan had excess income it too bought land. The return on investment was low, but it was safe, sure and perpetual. And the same craving for owning and belonging to land made it a shameful act to sell it. Of course some were forced to do so by necessity, but it was a last resort, like a craftsman's parting with his tools.

There was felt to be a moral duty to pass on inherited land to one's own descendants. If possible, then, rather than sell, the land would be mortgaged, consigning its use and fruits to the mortgagee until such (unspecified) time as redemption became possible. And that could be a long time. R. F. Johnston cites the case of a man who:

came to me very recently with the complaint that on his return from Manchuria he had found his land in the possession of a neighbour. "I went to Manchuria as my family had not enough to eat," he said. "I came home this year and wished to redeem the land I had mortgaged before I went away. But I found it had been already redeemed by my neighbour, a cousin, and he refuses to let me redeem it from him." On being asked when he had mortgaged his land and emigrated, he replied: "In Chia Ch'ing 3" — that is, in 1798. He was merely identifying himself with his own great-grandfather.²

Men come and men go, but the land goes on for ever. Earth Gods too, like men, decay. This one looks shaky and did in fact collapse in a typhoon during the wet and windy summer of 1964 a few months after this shot was taken. But within a week or two it had been rebuilt. Land must have its supernatural as well as its mortal master.



Bowen Road has a trick up its sleeve. Just when you think it has finished, it suddenly narrows to a single track and continues along the side of the Peak. Reaching a small public garden it again seems to have given up the ghost,

but no, it becomes yet slimmer, disguises itself as a footpath, and marches undeterred round the contour all the way to Stubbs Road.

For those who persevere with the walk there are pleasant views over Wanchai and Happy Valley, and at one point above the path can be seen looming a large, angular, tilted rock. The rock's Chinese name is Yan-yuen-sek (姻緣石) "Rock of Pre-ordained Marriage". In English it is usually called "Lovers' Rock", although, rather confusingly, it also goes under the name "Amah Rock" and so gets muddled up with the Amah Rock above Sha Tin Valley in the New Territories. Neither of them looks like an amah to me.

The Sha Tin Amah Rock does, however, bear a striking resemblance to a woman standing with a child on her back Chinese-style. Its name in Chinese is Mong-foo-sek (望夫石) "Watching for Husband Rock". Legend has it that a local man went off as a soldier to another part of China. His wife, concerned at his long absence, took to watching for his return from the hill which gave the best view; and she and her child eventually turned to stone when he failed to come back. In another version of the tale he did return, upon which the poor woman died of joy and was turned to stone — an unhappy ending to a romantic story if ever there was one!

Yet Chinese history has a knack of marking its women out for sticky ends, and this reflects, I'm sure, the position of women in society at large. Woman was born to be passive, to suffer, and to be moulded to the three men in her life — her father, her husband and her son. Death or separation did not alter her relationship with her husband: she was his and his alone for ever. (He, of course could happily have other wives.)

The character 貞 (*jing*) means "virginity" or "chastity", and it was in "preserving her chastity" (*sau-jing* 守貞) that a woman could best deserve the admiration and respect of Chinese men. The Emperor would sometimes order ceremonial arches to be built to the memory of women who came unsullied through long years of widowhood. Public suicide by young widows was greatly applauded, though neither expected nor common.

The only woman found worthy of inclusion in one New Territories clan genealogy I have read met her end as follows. Her husband was captured by pirates, who demanded ransom for his release. She got herself accepted as hostage for him while he went to arrange the ransom, then she jumped into the sea and drowned. At one leap she had saved chastity, husband and fortune:

her reward, four lines in a manuscript genealogy and a brief mention in the county gazetteer.

Well, the fate of the Sha Tin wife falls easily within the scope of what was considered worthy of traditional woman. What is rather odd is that she does not seem to have been deified: I have seen no trace of offerings or incense at her feet. Yet the Bowen Road rock is heavily worshipped. A group of women can be seen making offerings to it in the photograph, and a similar photograph could be taken on the 6th, 16th or 26th of any lunar month.

Burkhardt says in his *Chinese Creeds and Customs*:

The phallic implications of the shrine are obvious from its Chinese designation, the Yin Yang Shih, or Female and Male Principle Stone.³

He appears to have confused the name Yan-yuen-sek with Yam-yeung-sek (陰陽石), but he may none the less be correct. The stone bears no clear resemblance to any particular object, and could easily just be thought of as a massive phallic symbol. And then, of course, the purpose of its worship becomes clear — the women are praying for children, or for husbands, or for married happiness. Men come to pray here for these things too, I was told by some of the worshippers.

Alas! As seems nearly always to be the case, when I had come to this immaculate and very satisfactory explanation, a great tide of doubt nearly submerged it. I spoke to an old woman who makes a living by undertaking the complex rituals for worshippers who come to the rock — she surely must understand what it is about?

“Why do people come here to worship?” I asked artlessly and in full certainty of what the answer would be.

“Oh, to pray for wealth, of course,” she said, shattering my innocent faith.

And so they do, as well as to pray for husbands and children, for connubial bliss, for scholastic success (the little paper windmills visible in the picture are supposed to make school-children work harder), for curing of illness, and for relief from persistent ill-luck.



Three elders dressed in their long silk ceremonial gowns perform the kowtow before the altar in their clan ancestral hall. In the course of a ritual of ancestor worship lasting over an hour, they will be up and down on their knees many times: no joke for men who are getting on in years. But being the oldest men of the senior surviving generation of the clan, it is their duty and privilege to go through the arduous ceremony as the representatives of the whole group. The worship is thought to benefit both the ancestors and the living.

The Chinese have many ways of salutation and showing respect. At the most casual, a perfunctory nod of the head and a stereotyped greeting will do, but this would suit only very good friends or unimportant acquaintances. More respectful is the bowing of the head, hands together and held in front of the chest. Men do this with hands clasped, women with the hands laid flat against each other and preferably hidden in their sleeves.

The *guk-gung* (鞠躬) is yet more respectful and consists of bowing from the waist with the hands held down at the sides. This form of greeting is solemn enough that it can be used in worship, and I have noticed that younger people often perform it rather than the kowtow.

But it is the kowtow which is the most respectful of all. *Kau-tau* (叩頭) literally means “to knock the head” and, properly performed, the forehead should strike the ground fairly hard. As a sign of submission and obedience it could hardly be outdone.

A rather strange derivative of the kowtow can be seen any day anywhere in Hong Kong. When someone pours out tea for you in a restaurant or tea-house, the polite response is to tap the table with your middle finger. The tapping represents the knocking of the head, and means “Thank you”, although when you first meet with it a more obvious explanation would seem to be “Whoa, that’s enough!”

This trivial present-day custom gives no clue to the erstwhile importance of the kowtow — yet in some measure the fate of nations has hung upon it in the past. The kowtow was the required form of salute to the Chinese Emperor, and the Chinese reasonably enough considered that it should be performed by foreigners just as much as by natives.

When Lord Macartney arrived from Britain on an embassy to China in 1793, he was told that he could only have audience with the Emperor if he were willing to kowtow. This he refused to do on the grounds that he would not do it even to his own sovereign. He is said to have agreed to kowtow to the Emperor only if a Chinese official, his equal in rank, would do the same to a portrait of George III — a deal which the Chinese would not strike.

Despite his refusal, Macartney was eventually granted audience. But his embassy was a failure in all other respects, and the trade rights which he was principally interested in gaining for Britain were denied him in no uncertain terms. The Emperor began a message to George III as follows:

You, O King, from afar have yearned after the blessings of our civilization, and in your eagerness to come into touch with our converting influence have sent an Embassy across the sea bearing a memorial. I have already taken note of your respectful spirit of submission, have treated your mission with extreme favour and loaded it with gifts, besides issuing a mandate to you, O King, and honouring you with the bestowal of valuable presents. Thus has my indulgence been manifested.⁴

He went on to point out that since “our celestial Empire possesses all things in prolific abundance and lacks no product within its own borders” therefore the Chinese were not looking for trade.

In 1816 Britain tried again with an embassy headed by Lord Amherst, but on refusing to perform the kowtow he was sent packing without even an audience to his credit. It is just possible that if these embassies had been successful, Anglo-Chinese relations and the history of the 19th century might have been less bloody.

Yet, other nations' ambassadors had achieved no better results even with the kowtow. A Dutch embassy of 1655 is described by Wells Williams in *The Middle Kingdom*:

Their presents were received and others given in return; they prostrated themselves not only before the Emperor in person, but made the kowtow to his name, his letters, and his throne, doing everything in the way of humiliation and homage likely to please the new rulers. The only privilege their subserviency obtained was permission to send an embassy once in eight years, at which time they might come in four ships to trade.⁵

The kowtow issue was blown up by the foreigners probably because it symbolized their irritation at Chinese disdain rather than because it was in itself so important.

The result is that what to the Chinese was a serious and laudable kind of behaviour, for the British has come to be associated with unpleasantness. One of the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definitions of "kowtow" is "to act obsequiously".

The people in the photograph would not, I am sure, accept that they are acting obsequiously or in anything other than a respectful and dignified manner.



There are many different kinds of puppet show known in the world, and most of them seem to exist or to have existed in China. The origins of Chinese puppetry are lost in time, but one much-quoted account says that it began in the 3rd century B.C., just before the start of the Han (漢) dynasty. A “barbarian” chieftain, the Emperor of the Hsiung-nu people, had laid siege to a Chinese city. The Chinese knew that this man’s wife had a very jealous disposition, so they had a life-size wooden figure of a beautiful girl made, and then worked it so that it danced alluringly on the city wall. The jealous wife saw it, became worried that her husband would want to take the girl as a concubine if he conquered the city, and persuaded him to lift the siege. “A likely story!” as they say.

Wooden funeral figures, buried with the dead to act as servants and companions in the after-life, are another possible source of puppet theatre. And plays and puppets as a part of funeral rituals go back at least two thousand years.

Glove puppets and string puppets are as familiar to the Chinese as they are in the West. One unusual form which was known a thousand years ago in

the Song dynasty no longer survives: the so-called “gunpowder puppet” (*yeuk-faat faai-lui* 藥發傀儡). According to the Russian puppeteer Sergei Obratzov:

“Powder puppets” no longer exist, nor is there any extant description of their construction. These puppets were probably set in motion by some mechanical device, where the dynamic force was provided in the form of a powder explosion, i.e. something like the contemporary combustion engine. We ought therefore to describe these as “pyrotechnic” puppets.⁶

A very early tradition had created intricate models worked by water power, set pieces in which wooden figures went through routines such as dancing, juggling, and beating drums. In the course of time “water puppets” evolved, and a fascinating article on Chinese puppetry by William Dolby goes into some detail on these. The following is taken from his translation of a 17th-century description:

Water puppet plays use models, carved from light wood, of people and princes from all over the world, immortal sages, generals, soldiers, and others that I shall not list in detail. These are about two feet tall, and only possess that part of the body from the buttocks upwards, being without feet or legs A square pond, made of wood, lined with tin to prevent its leaking, and measuring ten feet or so deep, is filled seven tenths with water The people who control and operate the models are all situated behind the screen, and move to and fro, shifting and veering them from beneath the screen. Live fish, shrimps, crabs, water-snails, frogs, loaches, eels, water-weeds, and such things, are put in the water to swim or float around there The person in charge of the drum and bell music, who is on the south side of the screen, puts each of the characters, one after the other, on to the water to float on their bamboo strips, and to swim around, play, and fight.⁷

“Live puppets” or “flesh puppets” (*yuk-faai-lui* 肉傀儡) are frequently mentioned, but there is some disagreement among authorities as to what they were. One plausible explanation is that they were humans acting like puppets — a reversal of the norm — and it is possible that a kind of tableau using live children supported in apparently impossible positions by concealed rods is derived from this. These tableaux can still be seen nowadays in festival processions in the New Territories, and notably at the annual Bun Festival on Cheung Chau Island.

The puppets shown in the photograph are Cantonese stick puppets, and are operated by three rods. One is stuck up into the head, and the other

two operate the arms. The heads are beautifully made, and the clothes and trimmings are all of finest material. The puppeteers are here lovingly dressing the dolls backstage ready for a performance.

The “theatre” is actually a temporary shed of bamboo poles and matting, with a wooden plank floor which creaks and groans alarmingly. The audience, villagers attending a major religious ceremony, face a wide matting screen about 2½ metres high. The “stage” is a gap between the top of the screen and the matting roof of the shed. The puppeteers hold the dolls up over their heads to show above the screen.

It is hardly Punch and Judy — I counted as many as seven men working on the stage at once, and that means that full-blooded dramas can be performed, with large casts of puppets. In fact, there is very little difference between the repertoire of a puppet theatre and that of an opera troupe. Like the opera, the puppets perform to music, the orchestra sitting behind the screen to one side.

The pieces performed rarely deviate from the traditionally favoured themes. On this occasion the troupe were giving a play based on part of the historical *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三國志演義), the story of the struggles for power at the end of the Han dynasty. Other well-loved sources are *An Account of the Journey to the West* (西遊記, perhaps best known to Westerners as *Monkey*), and *The Water Margin* (水滸傳, shredded on television in a Japanese travesty series some years ago).

Not that the plots are all that important. As Cornelia Spencer has said in her charming and insightful book on Chinese culture, *Made in China*:

A Chinese audience does not go to the theatre to see the play itself (probably the story is well known and has been seen many times before) but to see how well the actors render it. Thus it does not matter much whether the people hear all that is said or not, except when a point which is considered a special test of an actor’s skill is reached. Then a sudden hush falls over the crowd, to be followed by loud applause if it is met with satisfaction.⁸

With these stick puppets there is an added element of subtlety. From behind the screen it is possible to see that the puppeteers do not merely make the dolls perform — they themselves go through all the actions at the same time, strutting, twirling, and posturing as though they were visible to the audience. The life that this imparts to the puppets is clearly felt and appreciated from the front of the house.

5

Scholar Stones



A heavily weathered inscription on one of these granite stones records that it was set up for a man placed 61st on the list of successful *gui-yan* (舉人) degree candidates at the examinations held in the *ding-mau* (丁卯) year of the Jia Qing (嘉慶) Emperor's reign (A.D. 1807). The examinations referred to are the old Imperial Chinese Civil Service examinations, the most ancient such institution in the whole world, dating back to at least 165 B.C. and in embryo form probably to as early as around 2200 B.C. No contemporary system of testing could match them in ferocity.

Candidates studied for the examinations in whatever way they could, usually by hiring a private tutor. The syllabus was open-ended, but a thorough knowledge of the Confucian classics was essential, and vast quantities of the material were actually learned by heart. Knowledge itself was not all-important, much stress being laid on good style in composition and good calligraphy in writing.

There was no age limit for the examinations and no limit to the number of times a failed candidate could re-sit. Dyer Ball's *Things Chinese*, always good value for a quotation, says:

No other country in the world presents the curious sight of grandfather, father, and even son, competing at the same time. Failures seem only to spur on to renewed trials, until, after many times having formed a unit amongst the annual two millions that pass through one or other of the ordeals of this gigantic examination scheme, the old man of seventy or eighty, who has been unfortunate enough not to appear among the small percentage of one or two out of a hundred that is allowed to pass, finally attracts Imperial notice, and, as an honour, and the meed of his untiring perseverance and indefatigable toil, receives the coveted reward.⁹

The basic system of the examinations was very simple. Candidates who felt themselves to be well enough prepared were tested by their District Magistrate and, if successful, given a certificate which allowed them to sit examinations at the Prefectural capital. Those who passed these latter examinations were given the title “licentiate” (*sau-choi* 秀才).

Once every three years *sau-choi* had the opportunity to sit the next higher degree at the Provincial capital, passing which gave the title *gui-yan* “Raised Fellow”. The following year, *gui-yan* could take an examination at the national capital to compete for the highest degree of *jun-si* (進士) “Entered Gentleman”. Only this highest degree carried with it anything like a guarantee of employment in the Civil Service; those with the lower degrees might never receive an appointment.

Anyone who finds present-day examinations gruelling will feel much sympathy with the old Civil Service examinees. At the Prefectural examination they were locked in a cell in the examination hall for a whole day from before dawn to dusk; and at the Provincial examination they were locked in for three sessions, each one lasting for a minimum of two days and a maximum of three, depending on the candidate’s speed at finishing the papers. They slept and ate in the cells, the breaks between the sessions lasting for less than 24 hours each.

After such efforts and with such stiff competition from tens of thousands of candidates, the prestige of those few who passed the examinations was enormous, regardless of whether they subsequently obtained a post or not. These “gentry” in traditional China were thus essentially a meritocracy, not a class defined solely in terms of wealth, land and heredity.

The written word was a vital factor in Chinese culture and society. It could be used all over the country, whereas the spoken word could not,

because of the many widely different languages and dialects. So we might say that the fundamental “Chineseness” of China lay in the written word. Those who had passed examinations and so were known to be masters of the written word shared in its importance. Chinese respect for scholarship was deep and universal.

The stones shown here are set up outside the house in a New Territories village where lived the man whose achievements are recorded on them. There were originally four of them, and they served as the base supports for flagpoles which carried the graduate’s proud banners of success. All who passed them were supposed to bow.

I have had the privilege of inspecting the ancestor tablet of this particular man. As with many of the tablets found in the ancestral halls of the New Territories, there is a hidden recess in the back containing a short biography, and with the kind permission of a descendant I was able to look at this.

It says that he was born at 4 p.m. on the 5th day of the 2nd lunar month in 1786, the second son in his family. “He was born wise, and by the age of one year could talk and make poetry.” By the time he was six he could cap the rhymes set by a family member who was already a graduate. At ten he was fully literate. He was placed second at the Prefectural examination, and then in 1807 passed 61st on the list at the Provincial examination in Canton. “Alas! He died on the 22nd day of the 10th month in the same year before he could go up to Beijing for the *jun-si* examinations.” (Oral history has it that he was poisoned by a jealous uncle.)

Today over two hundred years later his scholastic ability is still a matter for pride amongst his clan, and special rituals held annually before his tablet in the ancestral hall constantly reinforce his example to the young. Respect for scholarship is by no means a thing of the past.



This fearsome figure is over four metres high, and made of a lashed bamboo framework, covered with coloured papers and foils. The head is *papier mâché*. He is known to the people of Hong Kong as Daai Si (大士). But who is Daai Si?

One answer that is frequently given is that he is Yim Loh Wong (閻羅王), one of the kings of Hell. Hell (perhaps Purgatory would be a better word) is divided into ten halls, and Yim Loh Wong was originally the king of the First Hall. But he was too lenient with the souls of the dead who came to him for judgement and punishment, so he was downgraded to being king of the Fifth Hall. Some accounts say that he himself is subject to punishment, and three times a day molten copper is poured down his throat.

He has a nice armoury of punishments, as do the other kings. One is to tear out the heart of the sinner with an iron hook, then the heart is cut to pieces and fed to dogs. Another is much more subtle; the sinners, homesick for their life on earth, are allowed onto a special tower:

Those who are mounted on this tower can see and overhear all that is said about them in their native villages: old and young cursing and execrating them, their heirs quarrelling and having lawsuits over the legacy, transgressing their last will and counteracting their plans. By this means, the victims are brought to a due sense of their wickedness while they lived in the world of mortals.¹⁰

Another candidate for the identity of Daai Si is Dei Chong Wong (地藏王), the chief custodian of the underworld, Yim Loh Wong's superior. Dei Chong Wong is a very lenient god who has elected to rescue all the suffering souls from Hell. There is considerable confusion between these two kings, so that some people seem to mean one when they talk of the other, and nice, kindly Dei Chong Wong is branded as fierce and harsh.

I looked up the great "Sea of Words" dictionary (*Chi-hoi* 辭海). There, Daai Si has several meanings. It was the name of the post of prison governor in the Spring and Autumn Period (7th to 5th centuries B.C.). It was also the title of a high state ritual official in an even earlier period. Then it was a respectful title for men of great virtue. Finally it was used as an honorific name for the Bodhisattvas.

In Mahayana Buddhism, Bodhisattvas (*po-sat* 菩薩) are saints who decline Buddhahood in order to be able to save mortals. They remain in contact with the world, and through compassion and self-sacrifice give hope of enlightenment to ordinary people. Dei Chong Wong is a Bodhisattva.

The best known and best loved of the Bodhisattvas is Gwoon Yam (觀音), "the perceiver of the cries of the world", the Goddess of Mercy. Her temples abound, and many families keep a shrine to her with the ancestors in the home.

Now, interestingly, Daai Si is always represented with a little doll of Gwoon Yam perched on him somewhere. In this photograph she is sitting on his right knee. I have heard it said that she is there to temper the harshness with which he treats the souls of the dead.

More complex yet, a man who specializes in making these paper figures told me that Daai Si and Gwoon Yam are one and the same. Gwoon Yam was once an Indian Buddhist nun, he said. She attained enlightenment, but chose to remain in the world to save others. Unfortunately, her work brought her into contact with frightening and unpleasant ghosts, “some with head but no feet, others with feet but no head”. In order to control them she changed her appearance to the fierce Daai Si.

Daai Si is made for exorcism ceremonies. In this case it was the annual Hungry Ghosts Festival (Yue-lan-jit 盂蘭節), held in the middle of the 7th lunar month. Down the front of his apron he has the characters for “long life” written; flags on his back indicate a martial nature (emblem of his fierceness?); and in his right hand he holds a writing brush.

At the end of the festival he is paraded round the town or village, and is thought to write down the names of all the ghosts he meets. Then he is burned, which sends him back to Hell, taking with him the ghosts, so that the area is cleared of potential trouble-makers for the living.

Well, who Daai Si is, or whether he is an amalgam of all the above, perhaps doesn't matter too much. The one thing which is common to all of them is the ability to bring order and peace to the troubled world by pacifying ghosts. In a funny kind of way, all four of the dictionary definitions could apply to him.



The decline of the last dynasty of China, the Qing (清), makes sad reading. It had been founded in 1644 by belligerent Manchu horsemen who were let in through the Great Wall in a desperate attempt by loyalists to put down a rebellion against the Ming dynasty. Put it down they did, but they substituted themselves for the Ming and began nearly 270 years of rule.

The early Qing Emperors brought peace and prosperity to the country. The favourable foreign trade was confined to Canton (Guangzhou 廣州),

where by careful control the government could extract revenue from it. Other income came from land and poll taxes, and from the salt monopoly.

But gradually the Manchus lost their grip on affairs, corruption increased, rebellions broke out more and more frequently, opium imports changed the balance of trade, and the Western nations added the weight of their aggressions to the burdens the Emperors carried.

The middle of the 19th century brought financial disaster. To pay for the fight against the massive Taiping rebellion which lasted from 1851–1865 more income was needed. One rather odd response was for the government to get income by granting academic degrees by purchase as well as by examination. More important was the introduction of the *Likin* (*lei-gam* 釐金), a tax levied by provincial authorities on all goods being transported through their territories.

At the same time the foreign powers were forcing China to open more ports to trade, so that the collection of duty on imports and exports became more complicated and difficult. Worse still, China was being pressed to pay huge sums in indemnities to these same foreign powers for the trouble they had been to in attacking her.

On 12th July 1854 came into being the Chinese Maritime Customs Service charged with the collection and supervision of all taxes on foreign trade including the *Likin*. What was remarkable about this Service was that it was run for the Chinese government by a Board of Inspectors all of whom were foreigners — one British, one American and one French. The three men each swore an oath of service before the Consul of his own country:

I swear truly and honestly to discharge all the duties of my office as Inspector of Maritime Customs and faithfully to observe all the conditions of such appointment as these are clearly set forth in the Minute of Conference signed by H. E. Woo, Taotai, and the Consuls of the three treaty Powers. So help me God.¹¹

Shortly afterwards the Board was superseded by an Inspector General of Customs. Robert Hart began his long and distinguished career in the post in 1863, holding it until his death in 1911. He was not universally liked — Lord Redesdale said of him: “Sir Robert Hart was a good friend of Sir Robert Hart and of all those who, in his own interest, he chose to push on” — but he ran a much more efficient service than the Chinese had had before. A large part

of the extra revenue which came in through his efficiency went to the foreign powers in indemnity payments — perhaps the reason why Britain knighted Hart in 1882? By 1916 there were over 1,300 foreigners employed in the Customs Service.

To tax and to please, no more than to love and to be wise, is not given to men.

So said Edmund Burke, and it goes almost without saying that where there are taxes there will be tax evasion. L. C. Arlington was in the Service:

During my time in the Customs I naturally had many opportunities of observing the Chinese smuggler at his best; and, indeed, in the smuggling game he is supreme. Whenever a Chinaman travels he is bound — on principle as it were — to smuggle something, be it copper cash, copper cents, salt, opium, tobacco, silk, or any one of a thousand different commodities. It is his very life, it is in his nostrils; and nothing pleases him better than to get the best of a Customs officer — which he does nine times out of ten, if not the tenth time also.¹²

In the course of his career Arlington spent quite a lot of time on Cheung Chau Island where, before it came under British rule in 1898, there was a customs post under the Kowloon area office. He was not exactly enamoured of his posting:

The island contained a population of some 5,000 Chinese, most of whom were engaged in manufacturing shrimp sauce, the vile stench of which nearly drove us frantic. Added to this there were hundreds of salt-fish drying establishments which spread their fish all over the island and on every available rock and tree. Hundreds of junk loads of fresh or rotten fish were landed daily, and after being sorted out were set in the sun to dry; this, combined with the odious stench of the shrimp sauce, may be better imagined than described. It was six long years before I saw the last of the place.¹³

Customs posts were scattered around the coast to keep control of international trade, and they were particularly thick between Hong Kong and Macau. The photograph shows a stone marker erected when a new customs post was established on the island of Ma Wan near Lantau. “Kowloon Customs: laid on an auspicious day of the 7th month of the 23rd year of Guang Xu [光緒] [1897]” says the inscription. The post did not last long. Within two years the New Territories were leased to Britain and the Chinese customs men ousted — much to Arlington’s relief. Ma Wan Island is now the

site of one of the great towers of the suspension bridge carrying the road to the Chek Lap Kok airport.

The dynasty which could only collect its revenues with foreign help, and which lost slices of territory and authority to foreign nations, did not last long after. In 1911 the Manchus too were ousted.



The Ultimate of Ultimates (*taai-gik* 太極) is the origin of everything. When in a state of movement it gives rise to *Yang* (*yeung* 陽), at rest *Yin* (*yam* 陰), and the alternation of these two principles is present in both time and matter. Interaction between *Yang* and *Yin* produces the Five Elements: water, fire, wood, metal and earth (*sui, foh, muk, gam, to* 水火木金土). All things are made up of these elements, which themselves form an endless chain of production. Wood produces fire, fire produces earth, earth produces metal, metal produces water, water produces wood, and so on.

Associated with the elements are many other ideas, some of which are obviously connected, others not. It makes sense that with the element fire should be associated the colour red, the season summer, and the direction south; but it is not so clear why the virtue wisdom, the flavour bitter, or the internal organ lungs should fall within fire's sphere.

Wood's season is spring, and its colour green. It has the virtue benevolence, the flavour sour, the direction east, the number eight, the animal sheep, the internal organ spleen, and the planet Jupiter associated with it.

Trees are the element wood in physical and visible form. The character for wood (木) is actually derived from a picture of a tree, and the oldest form of the character which we have (𣏟) is clearly a tree with branches and roots. The tree in the photograph bears an almost uncanny resemblance to that pictograph, imagination supplying the roots.

Earth Gods of various kinds are commonly worshipped in the New Territories, and Water Spirits are sacrificed to as well; but fire and metal do not figure so directly in the ritual arena. Wood is ritually important in the form of Tree Gods.

In the shadow on the trunk of this tree can be seen a diamond-shaped red paper. It has been pasted there because there is a Tree God present. Round the other side an area of bark about 20 centimetres high by 30 centimetres broad has been stripped off to give access to the heart-wood of the tree, and in front of that has been laid a slab of stone on which to place offerings. A trough of sand serves as an incense burner. At New Year a little strip of red paper with the words *bo-woo* (保護) "protection" on it is stuck above the stripped patch.

Like all gods in the New Territories, Tree Gods are worshipped regularly at New Year and on the 1st and 15th days of the lunar month. It is thought that they can prevent illness, or cure it where it is present. For many villagers the traditional response to sickness was to embark on a graded series of treatments. The first line of attack was to worship the Tree God. If that failed they would go to a spirit medium, who through trance would prescribe a treatment. Only when this too had failed would the more expensive medical specialists be consulted.

The banyan tree (*yung-sue* 榕樹) is probably the one most often worshipped. Its trailing branches which take root give it a weird appearance, but they also convey the impression of "multiplication", and from there to

“fertility” is only a small step. Banyan tree gods are prayed to not only for health but also for children, and people getting married like to worship them for both these reasons. Large specimens can be seen spreading their shade at the centre of many settlements, and more than one New Territories village is named after its banyan tree.

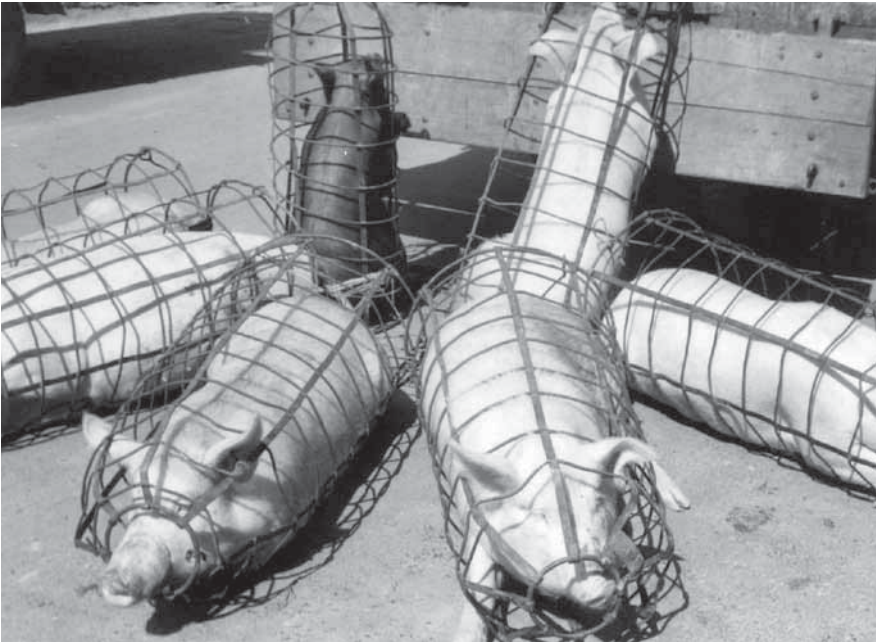
The pine tree (*chung-sue* 松樹) grows throughout China and is valued as a symbol of longevity and constancy because it lives to a great age, does not shed its leaves, and its wood is resistant to decay. The cypress (*baak-sue* 柏樹) shares these characteristics, and the two trees are often mentioned together as examples of true friendship enduring through adversity.

The Hong Kong area is not noted for its trees, man’s savage attacks having changed what was practically virgin forest a thousand years ago into the barren, eroded landscape of today. Happily, afforestation has reversed the trend in recent years. The dictates of geomancy have also provided some relief: to protect the backs of villages from malign influences groves of trees are left untouched and sacrosanct, and in these can be seen something of what the countryside used to be. The twigs, leaves and fruits of the trees are used in cooking, medicine and rituals.

The tree shown here is a camphor tree (*jeung-sue* 樟樹). But despite its god’s protective role it could not prevent the tree from being damaged by fire — “Physician, heal thyself!” When this happened to a tree in Weihaiwei:

the local sages rose to the occasion, for they declared that the tree-spirit had grown tired of the old tree and had moved into a smaller one a few yards further up the village-street. As for the fire, it was explained as being *t’ien huo* — fire from heaven — sent purposely at the instigation of the migrated tree-spirit in order to prevent people from worshipping the wrong tree.¹⁴

No such interpretation was put on this event, and offerings are still being made to the god.



A clutch of ill-starred pigs about to become sacrificial offerings to the ancestors. Slaughtered and cooked the spiritual essence of their bodies will be consumed on the altar table by the ancestral spirits. What is left the living descendants will finish up.

The pig is *the* Chinese meat, far outstripping other meats in importance. Indeed, the Chinese word for meat, *yuk* (肉), always means pork unless otherwise specified. Charles Lamb in his famous *Dissertation upon Roast Pig* credits the Chinese (albeit in ludicrous vein) with the discovery of the merits of roast pork. Certainly few Chinese would disagree with his heartfelt:

Pig — let me speak his praise — is no less provocative of the appetite than he is satisfactory to the criticalness of the censorious palate. The strong man may batten upon him, and the weakling refuseth not his mild juices He is all neighbours' fare.¹⁵

For the ancestors the pig is roasted whole until the skin is crisp and golden brown. Some New Territories people call this "Golden Pig" (*gam-jue*

金猪). It is laid out on a red tray with the head towards the altar and rosettes decorating it. After the ancestors have taken their fill, the coveted meat is cut up, the elders and influential receiving their shares in proportion to their age and status.

Another favourite is roast sucking pig. I once attended a New Territories sucking pig party which was almost an orgy, so luxurious was the pleasure of eating. We stood around eating with our fingers (in itself a sign of dissipation!) and dipping the tender morsels into sugar to accentuate their sweetness. I suspect that Lamb, along with many Chinese, would laugh to scorn our depraved Western taste for pig à la Sweet and Sour.

In Hong Kong the pig is allegedly only safe from the chopstick on two days a year — New Year's Day, when everyone is supposed to eat only vegetarian food, and the third day of the New Year, which is designated the pig's birthday.

Beef is eaten, but in the New Territories until recent years few villagers would touch it, on the grounds that the cow and the buffalo were their friends and servants who bore the brunt of the work in the fields and deserved a better fate than to be eaten. (And perhaps experience had shown that the meat might be a little tough?) There is a story that the Chinese do not like their cattle being photographed by Westerners — invasion of bovine privacy? — but my own experience is that it is the cattle who do not like it. Water buffalo in particular are camera-shy (or to be more accurate "camera-belligerent") and make threatening moves at me whenever I uncover my lens. I remember that the China novelist Pearl S. Buck makes a similar point about water buffalo and their hatred of Westerners in her autobiography.

The Cantonese do not generally eat lamb at all. Partly this must be because sheep are not well adapted to the area, partly there is no room to graze them, but whatever the reason the rank smell of the meat is found repulsive. None the less there are one or two superb ways of cooking it which have been developed by Southern Chinese, and anyone who has access to a Chiu Jau (潮州 Chaozhou) restaurant should make a point of trying a lamb dish there. Northern Chinese eat much more lamb, and still further north in Mongolia it becomes the staple meat.

Pigs used to have the run of villages in the New Territories, and were to be seen wandering around rooting in the rubbish and the open drains for food,

their hollow backs unable to support the weight of their convex bellies which dragged through the dust and the mud leaving a drunken trail behind. Some had leather straps tied around their bellies to hold them up off the ground. At nights they were shut up in the sties. Their diets were supplemented by household scraps and by greenery grown for them in the fields. They looked unappetizing — they tasted marvellous.

Pigs were highly valued not just for their meat, but for their droppings as well. Pig manure was a vital source of enrichment of the soil. Villages gained a communal income through leasing out the right to collect the scattered droppings, and competition for the concession was often keen.

Cornelius Osgood wrote of a West China village some years ago:

Our host, Li Fu, a man of thirty-one, told us that in the house lived his mother, one sister, four sisters-in-law with their children, eight pigs, a cat, a dog, and some chickens, besides the mule and the horse. He did not mention his wife nor, on the other hand, his four brothers¹⁶

Surely a wry commentary on the comparative importance of the pig and the spouse in his eyes?

The baskets in which these pigs are caged make their transport a simple matter. One man can move them around nowadays with the basket balanced on his bicycle. Alternatively a pole can be pushed through the cage lengthwise and two men can then easily carry the pig between them on their shoulders. The open nature of the baskets prevents overheating and suffocation.

In cases of adultery in the past, it was considered fitting that drowning should be the punishment for the offenders. There was a case in the New Territories as late as the 1960s where an unofficial village court decided to carry out such a sentence. The adulterous couple were placed in pig baskets just like these, and were only saved from the pond's murky waters by the timely arrival of a lorry-load of police, summoned on the telephone by a sensible citizen.



Anyone who has “done” the New Territories by road will know the village of Kat Hing Wai in Kam Tin. Its famous walls loom over the rows of houses inside, shutting out the light and shutting in the used air and the (euphemistically called) “country” smells. Needless to say, the walls were not built for the benefit of the tourists; they served a serious purpose for many years.

Nor is Kat Hing Wai the only walled village of the New Territories. There are many others. Some are still in a good state of repair, but many are now tumbledown and the moats are clogged up or filled in. Sometimes a clue to the former existence of a wall is provided by the name of the village — if it ends in *Wai* (圍), which means “an enclosure”, it almost certainly possessed a wall at some time.

The moat in the photograph serenely reflects the village of Sheung Shui Wai. It was over ten metres wide originally, and surrounded the village except for the narrow causeway leading to the front gate. The walls, which were five or six metres high, have largely disappeared, but it can be seen that the line of the walls has been followed by subsequent building, and the back gate of the village remains (centre left), protected by loop-holing above for small arms

fire. The walls used to be similarly loop-holed, and a ledge ran around the inside for the defenders to stand on.

Both the front and back gateways were wide enough for only one man to get through at a time, and it is still necessary to stand aside and wait if another person is passing through. In the 1960s a scavenging pig could block the gateway completely, but that hazard at least is no longer to be faced now that pigs have lost the freedom to roam. The gates are of heavy iron mail reinforced by stout wooden bars which slot into frames immediately behind them.

At the front of the village the walls dropped straight into the moat, but on the other sides, as here, a belt of land was interposed. On this grew lychee (荔枝) trees and a few vegetables, and stacks of rice-straw were piled up there after harvest.

The straw was used not for animal feed but for cooking. It burns fiercely and quickly, and is therefore very suitable for most Cantonese cooking. The speed and high heat demanded by this cuisine can be seen in any kitchen, though now the effect is usually achieved by gas rather than straw.

The back gate of the village, then, only leads onto this strip of land; it is not a way out of the settlement.

It is commonly supposed that the walling and moating of the villages of South China was a response to the constant state of feud between the great clans of the area. Indeed the safety in defence which walls provided did come to be an important element in feuding. But it is uncertain exactly when such strife began to be a serious factor in the maintenance of social order. It seems possible to me that the kind of balance-of-power politics which accompanied feuding may not have been historically constant and may not have fully developed until perhaps the 18th century.

In 1644 the Manchu tribesmen, who for years had been parading their military strength outside the Great Wall, were allowed through into China by a misguided general of the moribund Ming (明) dynasty. They quickly took over the country and set up their leader as Emperor of China. His dynasty, the Qing (清), was to last until October 1911.

Resistance to the Manchus was on the whole insubstantial, but fiercer in the South, where, as always, a more independent spirit prevailed (and where, perhaps, the terrain was less favourable to the horse-dependent Manchu armies?)

In the New Territories area, resistance appears to have been led by a man called Lei Maan Wing (李萬榮). He was finally captured by the Qing in 1656. Meanwhile his activities locally were such that the villagers, doubtless unaware of his high status as a “Ming loyalist”, had no hesitation in branding him “Bandit”; and it was to guard against his devastations that Sheung Shui Wai was walled in 1647. So at least says the genealogy of the Liu (廖) family, which owns the village; and the Dang (鄧) family genealogy of Kam Tin gives the same reason for walling villages there.

The villagers did not only have walls and moats to protect them. Many of the great clans maintained a constant state of readiness, with a “Village Watch” on duty night and day, and with armouries which included cannon as well as rifles and spears. Not a few of the cannon are still in existence, and I know of a village where one lies hidden still. It is covered in straw and sacking in an outhouse, and waits there for who knows what trial of strength? It was last used, as far as I know, in a feud with a neighbouring village in the mid-19th century.

Photographs do not lie, but they can certainly beautify. The moat which looks so clear here was decidedly unclean in fact. Since I took the shot in 1963 much of the moat has been filled in to create building and car-parking space, breaches in the wall line have been made so as to let in the fresh air, and the section of moat that remains has been cleared out and aerated. The historian sighs: the inhabitants breathe.

11 Anti-Corruption



Long life is something most of us crave, but there are always the exceptions who seek to cut short their time on this earth, and in Chinese tradition there is considerable respect for them. It was not unknown for widows to commit suicide rather than remarry or live on without their husbands. A defeated general, a ravaged woman, a slighted lover, anyone who felt ashamed for whatever reason was a potential suicide.

One of the most famous suicides of Chinese history was the poet and statesman Wat Yuen (屈原) who flourished about 300 years before Christ. His ruler chose not to heed his counsels, and Wat Yuen eventually drowned

himself in sorrowful protest ... and the waters of a river. The Dragon Boat Festival held annually on the 5th day of the 5th lunar month is supposed to have originated as a commemoration of his death and, according to which story you care to believe, the special rice-cakes eaten on that day represent either offerings made to his soul or food put out for the fish to stop them nibbling at his body.

Drowning was a favoured form of suicide, but hanging was also resorted to. Errant officials were sometimes sent a silken cord by the Emperor — the understood message was “Hang yourself with this or undergo the indignity of public execution.”

In recent centuries taking large quantities of opium was a common method, and there was another process known as “swallowing gold” (*tan-gam* 吞金). Some Chinese dictionaries claim that this is literally what happened, but others imply that “gold” is a euphemism for “poison”. Women rather favoured jumping down wells head-first, and there is a special term *tau-jeng* (投井) which in English can only be translated by the rather long-winded “to commit suicide by jumping down a well”.

Late 19th century sources estimated the suicide rate in China to be somewhere between 500,000 and 800,000 attempts a year, though some of them would have failed. The figures are complicated by the fact that the Chinese term *ji-saat* (自殺), which is normally translated as “to commit suicide”, really only means “to attempt suicide”. There was a headline in a Chinese newspaper a few years ago which appeared to say: “Film star who committed suicide yesterday gives press conference.” Bit spooky, that.

Well, for every suicide in China there were thousands who lived on, and longevity was much prized. From very early times philosophers began to look for “the elixir of life” and “the pill of immortality”. Life was thought to be the result of the correct balance of natural elements in the body, and death the failure to maintain that balance. The Taoist seeker after eternal life:

entered upon an impossible task. Refraining from cereals, meat and wine, he gradually restricted his diet until, in theory, he existed only on breath and saliva. He purified his body by never eating solid food, by performing gymnastics and by respiratory techniques by means of which he believed he could circulate the breath through all three “fields of cinnabar”. He sought for an interior vision which would enable him to see the gods within his body. By uniting the breath with semen in the lower “field of cinnabar” he formed “the mysterious embryo”

which, nourished on breath, developed a new and pure body within the old one, and this new body, released on death, was immortal.¹⁷

Death and decay of the body clearly went together, so it was not too illogical to assume that if the body's decay could be arrested then life could go on or, if life appeared to be extinct, there could at least be hope of resuscitation. Strangely this did not lead to the development of embalming techniques, but great attention was paid to finding decay-resistant wood for coffins, and wealthy people placed pieces of jade in the mouths of their dead:

The celestial sphere is unchangeable, indestructible, beyond the influences of decay, and the same qualities attach to its symbols. Hence jade and gold naturally endow with vitality all persons who swallow them, in other words, they intensify their souls or shen, which are, like the heavens, composed of Yang matter; and they hold at a distance from the dead corruption and decay, thus furthering the return to life.¹⁸

If by saintly behaviour or the influence of concentrations of celestial vitality the body could be preserved, a reversal of the logic of cause and effect would show that the body which did not corrupt belonged to a saintly person:

In China just as in the West nonputrefaction has been taken as evidence of sanctity. Mummified monks have been set up for worship like images or ancestor tablets. They are called "meat bodies" (肉身). Many are said to be several hundred years old. The oldest (and most famous) is that of the Sixth Patriarch of the Ch'an sect who died in 713 A.D.¹⁹

The photograph here is of just such a monk. The abbot Yuet Kai (月溪), founder of the Ten Thousand Buddhas Monastery (Maan-fat-si 萬佛寺) above Sha Tin in the New Territories, died in 1965. His body was placed in a seated posture in a wooden box and then buried. A colour brochure compiled by the abbot's disciples says:

On 9th December, 1965 after having been buried for 8 months the body of Rev. Yuet Kai was unearthed and found that it had not decayed, but turned the color of gold with his hair and beard intact. This is the result of self cultivation and strict discipline During his lifetime he wrote 96 books on Buddhism and preached on numberless occasions. After his death at 87 his Holy body has undergone no changes at all and still remains in the Amita Buddha Temple after having been gold gilded.²⁰

To get up to the temple is quite a walk in hot weather, but there is plenty to see there.



Long ago, we are told, Chinese men used to go raiding to find brides, capturing what women they could; but for many centuries until recently marriages in China were arranged by negotiation between families, and in this way it often happened that bride and groom had not even met before they were united in wedlock.

Defenders of the system point to the almost non-existent divorce rate in traditional China as evidence of the success of arranged marriages. Their argument is nonsensical, if only because the implications of divorce were so unpleasant as to make it an unrealistic alternative to marriage.

Critics of the practice, on the other hand, throw up their hands and bewail the cruelty of throwing together for life two people who may well turn out not even to like each other. Their attitude too needs careful examination. Martin C. Yang appraises things coolly:

The young couple's lack of knowledge of one another may make an early adjustment difficult, but it does not prevent successful marriage. When a husband and wife have worked together, raised children together, tried to build

up the prosperity of the family, shared happiness and sorrow, they feel that they have had a successful marriage, be it romantic or not. In a rural community such as Taitou, although a young couple may not know each other personally, their backgrounds, their attitudes toward life are so similar that there is no danger of conflicting ideologies or patterns of living. A marriage based on mutual attraction between young people of different standards and ways of thought often calls for greater mutual adaptation than in the case of the traditional Chinese marriage, which is arranged by the parents but in which the parties concerned know exactly what is expected of them, and have similar traditions and ambitions.²¹

Nowadays in Hong Kong arranged marriage is uncommon. Young people instead indulge in the practice of *paak-toh* (拍拖 “courting”). The term has acquired respectability, but on the tongue of an old-fashioned person it still seems to carry its slightly derisive basic meaning “dragging each other about by the hand”.

But even mates who select each other still get married, and the wedding ceremony as likely as not will be organized along traditional lines. A matchmaker is often called in to negotiate between the two parties, and the two sets of parents enter the lists as champions of their offspring. The major item to be discussed is the cost of the ceremonies.

Customarily the groom’s family pays “bride-price” in order to acquire the marital services of the bride. Not that this necessarily gives the girl’s parents a profit: they have to provide her with a dowry, as well as paying for a feast for their relations and friends. In many cases more will be spent than is received in bride-price. It has become more popular for some or all of the bride-price to take the form of the groom’s family paying for an agreed number of tables for the bride’s wedding feast.

The wedding at which I took this photograph was a “hand-dragged” one, but all kinds of traditional features were in evidence. At this point in the ceremony the groom was just arriving with three friends and the matchmaker to collect his bride. What did he find but a barrier of red-painted benches erected outside the door, and a gaggle of her girl-friends standing guard behind it.

I found myself pondering the words of Robert Louis Stevenson:

Marriage is a step so grave and decisive that it attracts light-headed, variable men by its very awfulness.²²

It was as if the girls were convinced that he must be “variable” and were insisting on his storming the barricades to prove his sincerity of purpose. He did not launch a physical assault, but stopped outside and politely asked to be let in. “We wouldn’t let the likes of you in,” said the impudent hussies with good-humoured rudeness. But the groom was a man of the world, and he offered them a few dollars to let him in. “A few dollars!” screamed the girls, “It’d have to be \$100,000.” Slowly in the hot sun the bargaining went on, the groom’s party getting sweatier and more uncomfortable in their best suits. By the end of an hour the girls were asking \$99.99, and a few minutes afterwards capitulated at around \$70. The besiegers gained admittance and were given food and drink to refresh themselves. From then on all was plain sailing. In another hour the party left with the bride on the groom’s arm. She was dressed in red, and was shielded from the sky by a red umbrella held by the matchmaker, who also carried a pair of red shoes for luck.

To the accompaniment of flute music she was helped into a car (the modern equivalent of the traditional sedan-chair), all decorated with coloured pompoms, red ribbons, and a doll on the bonnet. Well-wishers threw rice (for fertility), firecrackers added to the happy din of the occasion, and the last I saw of the bride as she was driven off she was crying into a red handkerchief, just as any self-respecting Chinese bride should be. A van containing the dowry goods followed.

Not perhaps as exciting as the practice of marriage-by-capture of which it is a degenerate form, but much less bloody and, yes, I think I can say it, rather more civilized.

13 Ancestral Trust



Traditionally the Chinese practised a system of marriage which insisted that it was desirable for the man to stay put and his wife to come to live with him. The result of this insistence was a society in which families were thought of as static groups of males, to which were attached the women who moved from the group in which they were born when they were married.

In this way, the more sons a family had the larger it grew, and by the time those sons had had sons, and the sons' sons had married and produced more sons, the group could become enormous. Of course, sons were not always forthcoming, or some might die young, some might be unable to afford wives, and some might be unwilling to stay in the family group, so that by no means all families grew to giant size.

The New Territories contains many examples of families which did grow very successfully. Few of these families ever remained for long in one household, however. They took *the village* as their base, and set up separate households within it. But they continued to practise the custom of exporting their daughters to other villages as wives, and importing daughters-in-law from those other villages.

These clans or lineages (*jung-juk* 宗族) dominated the political and economic life of the New Territories, and are still not without power. The largest and most influential of them are the many Dang (鄧) villages, but the Hau (侯) of Ho Sheung Heung, the Liu (廖) of Sheung Shui, the Man (文) of San Tin and Cha Hang, and the Pang (彭) of Fan Ling were important enough that, along with the Dang, they are known locally as the Five Great Clans (*ng-daai-juk* 五大族). And there are many other similar groups, large and small, as well.

Ancestor worship is the religion which helps to keep these clans together, and they all make much of the annual rites of worship of the men who first came to the area and from whom they descend in the direct male line. In the case of the oldest settled clans, that means that they are worshipping men who have been dead now for as much as a thousand years. The people of the New Territories live with history in a way that few other peoples of the world do.

But ancestor worship costs money. Each clan at some time in its history has set aside land and property in the name of its founding ancestor, and the income from the property of this “trust” (*jo-tong* 祖堂) is used to finance the ceremonies. There need be no fear that there will be insufficient pork, incense, or firecrackers to worship the ancestor in the manner to which his position entitles him.

As the centuries went by, other ancestors within the clan would be singled out as especially important for some reason — such as that they had been eminent scholars or very wealthy — and more trust land would be set aside to provide for their worship. Of course, not all members of the clan would be descended from these later ancestors, and those who were not descended from them would have no part in their worship. A man from a wealthy line of descent within the clan might belong to many such groups, while less advantaged members of the clan might belong to only one or two.

Some of the trusts are so wealthy that the income from their land is more than can be spent on the worship of the ancestor. In those cases the excess can be reinvested or put to other uses. One such trust that I know of grants a small sum of money and a complete school uniform to each of its children every year out of the surplus funds at its disposal.

Clear and Bright (Ching Ming 清明), a late spring festival, is the time when many ordinary families go to their ancestral graves to clean them up

and to worship. Ancestral trust groups seem more often to hold their grave rites in the early autumn around the time of the Double Yang Festival (Chung Yeung 重陽), which falls on the 9th day of the 9th lunar month. With most trusts, only the men take part in the worship, and this contrasts with the Ching Ming rites which are attended by all the family.

For those men who belong to a line rich in trusts, there might be two or three weeks of almost daily grave visiting, but the arduousness of the journeying and the ritual is offset by the pleasures of eating the rich offerings after the worship. Consumption of pork certainly rises steeply over this period.

The photograph shows members of an ancestral trust worshipping at the grave of their founder, who lived in the 16th century. A whole roast pig (just visible at the bottom of the picture) is being offered, as well as other cut meats, fruit, wine, tea and rice. White paper money to appease the evil spirits is liberally spent, and the ritual is carried out to the strident music of the *di-da* and the clash of cymbals. Dress is quite informal, as can be seen, though the ceremonies for the major ancestor of this clan require all principal participants to wear the long silk *cheung-saam* (長衫).



Ceremonies and rituals are important for most societies. They add significance to events which might otherwise not catch the individual's notice in a marked enough way. They give excitement, colour, enjoyment and relaxation to a life which for most of the time is drab and repetitive. The religious element heightens the impact of ceremonies, and the participation of gods in rituals is thought to bring benefits to both gods and men.

In the photograph an elaborately carved sedan-chair waits outside a New Territories temple ready to transport the temple gods to a festival several kilometres away. The gods on the altar inside are large clay figures, and they never leave the temple; but there are smaller light-weight replicas called “walking gods” (*haang-san* 行神) which can be moved, and they are about to be brought out to the chair.

A noisy procession, including gongs, drums, cymbals and *di-da* pipes, and with fire-crackers popping off on all sides, will escort the chair on its way. The tasselled ceremonial umbrella in the background will shade the gods from the sun, and the long-handled wooden fan leaning on the wall will be used to cool them.

At the head of the procession will go large red sign-boards reading “Stand aside” (*wooi-bei* 迴避) and “Silence” (*suk-jing* 肅靜), the same kind of boards as would have preceded imperial Chinese officials in their palanquins before the Republican revolution of 1911. In fact, the umbrellas of state, the fans, the sedan-chair and the procession are all reminiscent of traditional officialdom. The gods are accorded much the same kind of respect as were the officials, and like them must be treated with great care, are often appeased rather than trusted, and should perhaps be avoided except when custom or necessity dictates otherwise.

The chair belongs to the temple, and is only used for the two gods who reside here. On it is written “The two gods Yuen and Gwaan”, and on the hanging lanterns it says “Palace of the two gods Yuen and Gwaan”.

Gwaan is the god Gwaan Gung (關公), renowned God of War, patron god of the detectives of the Hong Kong Police Force, God of Bean-curd Sellers, sometimes also known as the God of Literature, and sometimes as God of Wealth. Gwaan was a real historical figure, Gwaan Yue (關羽), who lived in the last years of the Han dynasty (3rd century A.D.). He was one of three heroes who swore to live and die together as brothers, and whose exploits in fictionalized form are the backbone of the Chinese novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Saam-gwok-ji Yin-yi* 三國志演義). Gwaan had been a bean-curd seller in early life, and later became a great warrior. He is reputed to have been able to recite a very difficult Confucian text all through by heart, and hence his being worshipped as God of Literature. Why he appears as a God of Wealth I am not sure. He was officially deified during the Ming dynasty (A.D. 1368–1643), and is always shown with a very red face.

Yuen is less commonly found in the temples of Hong Kong. Indeed, there is a certain confusion of identity involved with him. Lau Bei (劉備), another of the three heroes, had Yuen as one of his alternative personal names, and it was suggested to me that this Yuen must be Lau Bei. But he is actually, I think, the god Yuen Tin Seung Dai (玄天上帝), the God of the Pole Star. He usually has a black face, because black is the colour associated with the direction North, just as blue-green stands for East, white for West, and red for South. Yuen and Gwaan, being black- and red-faced respectively, seem to make a fairly natural pair — like North and South.

But where there are gods there is also danger. Exposure to evil influences could anger the gods, and their wrath might turn on the very men who seek their blessings. In all kinds of rituals the observance of taboos and strict adherence to the proper forms are required.

I remember hearing stories of how in 1963 an adamant disbeliever from the Lam Tsuen Valley was punished by the gods. His village was holding a large ceremony during which everyone was required to eat only vegetarian food. But he decided that he would break the prohibition and eat meat. Just to rub it in, he insisted on eating it in front of the altar where the village gods were gathered to attend the ceremony. Two days later, so the story goes, having suffered dreadful stomach pains, he died in agony. The gods had had their revenge.

And so it is necessary to take all precautions against trouble. The man on the left of the picture is ritually purifying the whole chair with a smouldering bundle of sacred twigs. Inside and out the chair will be cleared of evil in this way before ever the two gods emerge from the temple to take their seats.

15 _____ Local Government



By the closing years of the 19th century, the Manchu Qing dynasty's grip on China had become almost non-existent, and the country was racked by rebellion and political disaster. Other countries gathered like wolves to exploit China's weakness, and the so-called Scramble for Concessions began. In quick succession leases on Chinese territory were extracted by Germany in Shandong province, by France in Guangdong, by Russia in Manchuria, by Britain in Weihaiwei ... and on 9th June 1898 the Convention of Peking gave Britain the lease for 99 years of the large peninsula behind Kowloon which came to be called quite simply the New Territories.

For a while nothing seemed to happen. A preliminary survey of the area was made, but there was no attempt to take control of it until 16th April 1899 when the Union Jack was raised on a hill near Tai Po. But in the interim the people of the leased territory had been very busy indeed. They felt — and who can blame them? — aggrieved at being arbitrarily transferred from China to Britain by the stroke of an alien ruler's pen, and they decided that they would resist where their government had basely submitted. They made preparations for war.

The result was that several thousand men gathered at Tai Po to oppose the take-over. They were equipped with muskets, mortars, small cannon and jingals (a kind of “two-man blunderbuss” fired by one man with the barrel resting on the other one’s shoulder). Gunnery from a British destroyer in Tolo Harbour and the superior arms and training of about 500 men of the Hong Kong Regiment (at that time a regiment of the Indian Army) soon drove off this force, which retreated up through the Lam Tsuen Valley and over to the Kam Tin area.

Next day a final stand was made at Sheung Tsuen by 2,600 men, but again it was easily broken by the well-disciplined regular troops. From official dispatches it appears that British casualties amounted to just three slightly wounded, and it was estimated that losses were light on the Chinese side too, perhaps no more than ten or so dead (though recent research indicates a casualty figure considerably higher). Within a few days, peace was secured and a start could be made on setting up a civil administration.

Now, this was an officially sanctioned take-over, and a small force of Chinese government troops had even been sent to Kowloon City to assist in an orderly transition to British rule; yet there was a sufficiently strong and organized unofficial leadership that it could manage the arming, deployment and supply of a considerable army contrary to the undertakings of its own government. How could this be?

The fact is that the local people had been to a large extent self-governing. Government officials were too thin on the ground and too ill-supplied with money and manpower to control effectively the district to which they were assigned. So a local leadership composed of unemployed gentry and rich, powerful men had emerged to fill the power vacuum, and it operated successfully enough that government intrusion in local affairs was neither necessary nor welcome. Used to self-reliance, it is small wonder that this leadership should try to protect local interests in its own way when it felt threatened.

It operated a three-tier system of government. Each *heung* (鄉 a village or group of neighbouring allied villages) looked after its own internal affairs, its leaders administering, mediating and punishing. The various *heungs* were grouped geographically into districts known as “caves” (*dung* 洞), each of which had a council composed of its *heung* leaders. And at Sham Chun (深圳 Shenzhen), just over the border from the New Territories, was the office of the

“Council of Peace for the Eastern Section” (Dung-ping-guk 東平局) under which came all the *dungs* of the New Territories.

The army of resistance had been organized by the Dung-ping-guk, and consisted mainly of villagers from the area under its control on both sides of the new border.

At the time of the lease a proclamation was issued to the inhabitants by the Governor, Sir Henry Blake, promising that “your commercial and landed interests will be safeguarded, and that your usages and good customs will not in any way be interfered with.” As if to prove the point, a local government system was instituted which was based on the old one. *Heung* elders were to form councils to sort out petty problems, and higher councils (rather like *dung* councils) were to be made up of the senior elders.

By 1926, official reports tell us, there was also a *guk*, called this time the Heung-yi-guk 鄉議局 “Rural Consultative Council”. The photograph shows their office in Tai Po (Where else would it be?), and shows also the date 1925 — could the official records be wrong?

Since 1946 the system has looked very much like the old pattern of councils of elders. At the bottom are the Village Representatives (*chuen-doi-biu* 村代表); they sit on higher councils called Rural Committees, and the leaders of the Rural Committees sit on the Rural Consultative Council, usually called the Heung Yee Kuk in English documents.

But there was a great difference between the unofficial leadership of pre-British times and the officially recognized system after 1899: the former operated in a power vacuum, the latter was expected to function as an auxiliary to “proper” government. This meant that the elders lost their authority because that of the officials could and did reach down to the remotest hamlet: the New Territories were in no sense allowed to be self-governing.

The Heung Yee Kuk is still with us, and in past decades has been noticeably more articulate and more active in New Territories affairs. It has tended to try to promote the interests of the indigenous inhabitants, rather as the *guk* did in the days of the new lease, only now it is faced not with an occupying foreign army but with a host of Chinese civilians migrating out from the cities in search of room to live and work and breathe.



Building graves, like building houses, requires an architect. For the traditionally-minded in Hong Kong, however, the architect is only one of the specialists needed — the other, the geomancer, is at least as important.

Geomancy in ancient Greece was divination by throwing earth down on the ground and interpreting the pattern formed, much as tea-leaf reading works in more modern times. Geomancy in China is quite different. It is the interpretation of the natural and artificial landscape in order to divine the effect on the fortunes of those living in it. The Chinese term is *fung-sui* (風水), which means literally “wind and water”.

It is believed that if a house is built on a “good” geomantic spot, the lives of those who live in it will be affected for the better; and if a grave is built on a “good” geomantic site, the descendants of the ancestor(s) buried in that grave will similarly be influenced. The trouble is that it is not easy to know what is a good site, and to go to the trouble and expense of building only to discover later that the *fung-sui* is poor would clearly be undesirable. So it is necessary to call upon the services of a professional, a man who has devoted his life to the

study and practice of geomancy, a geomancer (*fung-sui sin-saang* 風水先生). The picture here shows a geomancer at work on a grave site.

In this case the geomancer had spent some weeks searching the New Territories for a suitable site for the grave, finally deciding on a small island in Mirs Bay. He could hardly have found anywhere more inconvenient. To get there meant travelling to Sha Tau Kok through a Restricted Area, which required special permits, and then taking a long boat-ride out to the island. But for a good site the devotee will go far, and this site was considered superb.

After several day-long journeys over some weeks the grave had been laid out, dug, and mostly built, all to the geomancer's specifications. Now at last the finishing touches were to be put to it, but the geomancer was not going to allow any mistakes, and before the grave-stone was cemented into place he insisted on checking its alignment once again. Here he squats over his special geomancer's compass making sure that the grave faces in exactly the right direction. The grave-builders wait patiently for the word to carry on with the work.

Something of the complexity of geomancy can be seen from this example. It is not just the location of a site which is important: the way in which that site is used is also to be taken into account. *Fung-sui* sites are not all of the same size — some can accommodate huge graves holding dozens of bodies, while others can take only one set of bones. Again, should the grave or building face in the wrong direction the geomancy may be ruined or may produce the wrong effect. I once saw a grave demolished and rebuilt a matter of fifteen centimetres higher up a hillside, because the siting had not been nice enough and no good effects had been felt by the descendants.

The surroundings of a grave or house site are taken into account when the geomancy is being assessed. Quite often an attempt will be made to alter them if it will improve the *fung-sui*. There is a grave on a hill in the New Territories where a large mound has been raised about fifty metres to one side in order to block the view of (and therefore the bad effects of) a landscape feature which was considered to be spoiling the site.

It follows from this that where a site has good geomancy it can be ruined by interference with its surroundings. This leads to a peculiar form of feud known as "*fung-sui* fighting" (*dau fung-sui* 鬥風水). A successful family is liable to find suddenly that its fortunes begin to wane. Having no other reason for

failure, it looks to its buildings and graves and discovers that perhaps a tree has been chopped down or a stream diverted. Rectification is often quite a simple matter, but, if it is decided that this was a deliberate malicious act, vengeance on the tree-fellers or hydraulic tamperers is more difficult. What more fitting than to retaliate in like manner on one of their geomantic sites? And so a chain of attack and counter-attack is set up, much of it carried on in secret — indeed the protagonists may never meet or see each other, though they know who their enemies are.

The excellent site of the grave shown here was bound to produce all round good fortune according to the geomancer, but the gentleman whose grandparents were to be buried in it particularly wanted the benefit of descendants as neither of his sons had had children. So the geomancer had faced the grave in a direction especially favourable to the production of offspring. He was able to do this because the geomancer's compass has on it many concentric rings marked off in sections, and each section is associated with certain mystic signs the significance of which he can interpret. By taking a direction which cuts through the relevant sections he can hope to weight the benefits of the grave-site in favour of procreation. Hence his meticulous checking of direction here.

There is a tendency for some Chinese people to scoff at geomancy, and particularly to mock at geomancers as charlatans who will only promise results so far in the future that there can be no proof of their efficacy. Yet there are those who believe very deeply in *fung-sui*, and they include many geomancers. The geomancer in the photograph was certainly no charlatan, whether you believe in his science or not. And it is a fact well known to me that both the childless sons had fathered sons within a year of the completion of this grave.



I once saw some film of wholesale fur-buyers at a trade fair. They inspected each fur closely, picked it up, prodded it, rubbed it, turned it this way and that. The women in the photograph remind me of the fur-buyers. Clustered round the basket of ducks, they pull them out, prod them, inspect them, and take the matter not one whit less seriously than the men who were spending thousands of dollars per fur.

And to the Hong Kong housewife there is little more serious than the daily business of feeding her family. It is surely a mark of civilization when cuisine is paramount. We all have to eat — but only those with time, with minds freed from concern solely with survival, and with a stable culture around them can develop eating into an art form.

What are the women looking for? Signs of disease, value for money in meat and fat, and signs that the duck has laid eggs — once it begins to lay, the meat is said to be tougher and less pleasantly flavoured. The ducks are bought live, killed, plucked and prepared by the housewife just in time for the meal. The birds are not hung, and nor generally is any other game or meat.

Of course, not all meat is eaten as fresh as this, and ways of preserving have been developed by Chinese cooks. Chinese ham is delicious, and the fruity-flavoured Chinese sausage takes a lot of beating. If you find it a bit strong at first, try it steamed in a dumpling when you have a *dim-sam* (點心) lunch in winter time. The dish is called *laap-cheung-guen* (臘腸卷).

I once watched friends in a New Territories village prepare the preserved ducks (*laap-ngaap* 臘鴨) which hang outside provision shops looking as though they have been dropped from the top of the Bank of China building. The birds were plucked, pulled, then salted, and flattened by smashing on the breast-bone with the flat of a kitchen cleaver. They were hung up in the sun and dry winter wind to shrink to the waxy, salty, highly flavoured product which goes so well with a bowl of rice. Only the winter conditions of December and January seem to be suitable for the process.

No part of the duck is wasted. The feathers are used as fertilizer, the offal is all cooked and eaten in one form or another, the head is split open and considered a delicacy, and the feet come quite expensive in gourmet restaurant dishes. They are often served steamed in a garlic, black bean and red pepper sauce as *dim-sam*. You eat the webs off the bones, spitting the latter out. Properly cooked they are very good indeed.

Peking Duck is justly famous, the crisp skin, the meat, and the carcass all appearing as separate dishes at the same meal. If eaten too frequently I find it cloying, but once or twice a year it is really appetizing.

Most duck eaten is specially reared, and huge flocks (or should it be “herds”, or perhaps “divisions”?) of them inhabit the New Territories. The Canton region used to be famous for the duck-boats which patrolled the rivers. The ducks would be put ashore wherever there was sufficient food for them, then called back to the boat, rushing up the gang-plank to be moved to fresh pastures. One or two lucky ducks from each batch would be kept back when market day came, so that there were always some old hands amongst the new batches to lead them up the gang-plank when called.

Wild duck can also be had in China, and I was amused to come across the following account by Wells Williams:

Ducks are sometimes caught by persons who first cover their heads with a gourd pierced with holes, and then wade into the water where the birds are feeding; these, previously accustomed to empty calabashes floating about on the water, allow the fowler to approach, and are pulled under without difficulty.²³

English has made a term of endearment out of “ducks” (though not everyone finds it an attractive one). Chinese too equates love and ducks, but with rather sounder reason. The Mandarin Duck (*yuen-yeung* 鴛鴦) mates for life, and so has become a symbol of true love and of marital good faith. Wells Williams provides a nice illustration of:

the conjugal fidelity of these birds, the incidents of which occurred in Mr. Beale’s aviary at Macao. A drake was stolen one night, and the duck displayed the strongest marks of despair at her loss, retiring into a corner and refusing all nourishment, as if determined to starve herself to death from grief. Another drake undertook to comfort the disconsolate widow, but she declined his attentions, and was fast becoming a martyr to her attachment, when her mate was recovered and restored to her. Their reunion was celebrated by the noisiest demonstrations of joy, and the duck soon informed her lord of the gallant proposals made to her during his absence; in high dudgeon, he instantly attacked the luckless bird which would have supplanted him, and so maltreated him as to cause his death.²⁴



There are many reasons why Hong Kong is an exciting place to be, and one of them is because it is within easy reach of Macau. In the past the slow steamer ride was peaceful and spiced with the anticipation of arrival almost from the moment of departure. The early hydrofoils gave more immediate

thrill, and on a rough day were better than any Big Dipper for stomach-jerking lurches. Now the jet-foils and high-speed ferries and helicopters seem rather tame by comparison.

Pedicabs were a most satisfying way to go sight-seeing, though taxis have pretty well routed them now. And then there is the food, the Portuguese wine, the old cobbled streets, the comparative peace after Hong Kong, the churches, the museum, the Mediterranean architecture ... the gambling.

The crowned golden cylinder of the Lisboa Hotel, shown here in its opulent glory, is hideous or magnificent according to taste. What is not in dispute is that it houses one of the great attractions for the thousands who flock each week to the ex-Portuguese province, the casino.

Inside there are roulette, blackjack, *fan tan*, big and small, craps, baccarat, keno, and one-armed bandits. Elsewhere in Macau are dog-racing, jai alai, horse-racing, and pony-cart racing; and if that still leaves a thirst for gambling unsatiated, it is possible to gamble on snooker, mahjong, poker, Chinese dominoes or any other activity of which the outcome is doubtful.

Gambling by means of oranges is also greatly practised by the Cantonese. This takes place, as a rule, at fruit-stalls, but it is practised in private houses. A man bets that an orange contains a definite number of pips. The orange is then cut into pieces and the pips are counted. At a fruit-stall the fruiterer pays five cash to a lucky guesser for each cash he may have staked. An unfortunate speculator pays the value of the orange, and in addition²⁵

A long-standing favourite in South China is the "Pigeon Lottery" (*baak-gap-biu* 白鴿標). The gambler marks on a sheet of eighty characters the ten which take his fancy, and then stakes a bet that his ten will coincide with the ten marked by the organizers on their secret master sheet. If five do coincide he gets a small return, if six a larger return, and so on up to ten, the odds paid for which might be as high as 1,500 to one. Until the coming of Communism which banned all gambling, the little town of Sham Chun, just over the border from Hong Kong, was a major centre for *baak-gap-biu*, and draws were held there twice a day. After 1949 some of that business transferred into New Territories market towns, but whether it still goes on I don't know. In Macau the same system forms the basis of keno.

Fan tan (*faan-taan* 番攤) goes back at least to the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618–906). A heap of porcelain buttons (originally copper "cash" were used)

sits on the table in front of the croupier. He places a cup upside down into the pile and sets aside all the buttons not covered by it. The players then place bets on the numbers 1, 2, 3 or 4 or on combinations of them. When all bets have been made, the croupier lifts the cup, and proceeds to take buttons away from the uncovered pile four at a time. He uses a thin wand to do this, so that there is no possibility of sleight of hand or other trickery. Eventually there will be just one, or two, or three, or four buttons left, and that is what is being gambled on. Old hands at the game usually can count ahead of the croupier's deliberate movements, and they shout out the winning number long before the final group of four buttons have been taken away.

Fan tan used to be best watched not at the Lisboa Hotel but at the Macau Palace, a floating casino in the harbour. In Cantonese it went by the unflattering name of *Chaak-suen* (賊船 “Boat of Thieves”), though I have no reason to believe that the name had any real significance. The boat had two decks, with a large hole in the floor of the upper deck so that those upstairs could see down to the tables below; and they used to be able to gamble on the lower deck *fan tan* tables by lowering their bets down in little baskets — and their winnings if any were sent back up to them the same way.

Censorious Westerners have often ignored the beams in their own eyes and commented on the Chinese love of gambling. In 1907 the Rev. J. Macgowan had this to say:

Another very objectionable feature in Chinese life is the passion that everyone seems to have for gambling High and low, rich and poor, seem to have the gambling spirit in their very blood, and, like the craving in the opium smoker, that must be satisfied at all hazards, so the cards and the dice must be fingered to allay the passion that is burning within their hearts.²⁶

A visit to Macau will convince you that the word “passion” is true at least for many of those who gamble there. When the bank goes bust at blackjack, the chandeliers in the casino jangle with vibrations from the cheers of the happy gamblers; and when the banker is about to turn over the card which will decide her fate, it is not unusual to hear a mild-looking old lady scream “Kill! Kill!” in the hope of ruining the bank's luck.

Gamblers, like sailors and actors, are superstitious. Chinese gamblers ignore reading matter because the word for “book” (*sue* 書) sounds like the word for “lose” (*sue* 輸). They won't take a shower, because “to shower” (*chung-*

leung 冲凉) means “to be cleaned out”. And they hate to see bald-headed men because the word for “bald” is *gwong* (光) which also means “shiny”, i.e., washed clean.

“And how did you do at Macau?” “*Ho gon-jeng*” (好乾淨 “very clean”) comes the reply more often than not. Of course there is no need to ruin yourself at the casino. It is perfectly possible just to “flutter”, and to have all the thrill for very little outlay.

Constant practice at gambling can come in handy in everyday life, as the following story from William C. Hunter shows:

During the attack on Canton, an Old China Street porcelain merchant, named Cum-Chong, told us that as he was crossing the river in a passage-boat with many others, a round shot tore through it, killing several and wounding many, when, as he said, “My puttee head insi (inside) holo,” the chances being against another shot coming through the same place!²⁷

19 Protection



For the Chinese the family has always been the most important unit of society. The individual played a role subservient to the family, and lived in order to keep the group strong and vital. By contrast the Western family has developed in such a way that it exists in order to rear the individual to the point of independence — an important difference of emphasis.

The home was the base for family life, and the home therefore needed to be secure and happy. Rituals connected with its security were more strictly observed than any others: what was valued most was felt to be most vulnerable to disaster and so most in need of protection.

This photograph of a New Territories village house at New Year shows a whole battery of defences. But defences against what? Evil spirits, ghosts, devils — call them what you will — abound and swarm everywhere. They can't be seen usually, but their presence is known from the way in which undesirable things happen. Primarily it is these that need to be kept at bay, but there is also bad luck, and of course there are bad people. The last are the easiest to keep out — those doors are stout, there is a very solid wooden bar behind them, and there are no windows to give access elsewhere.

Bad luck is much more difficult to avert. Indeed it is perhaps not possible to avoid what is determined to happen. But in the same way that some poisons may be counteracted by applying equal and opposite poisons, so bad luck can be negated by acquiring suitable doses of good luck. The five pieces of gold-speckled red paper hanging from the lintel represent the Five Happinesses (*ng-fuk* 五福), and seek to bless the home with them. They are: Long Life, Wealth, Health and Peace, Love of Virtue, and Natural Death after a full span of years (*sau* 壽, *fu* 富, *hong-ning* 康寧, *yau-ho-dak* 攸好德, *haau-jung-ming* 考終命). Pasted on the granite lintel is the wish for “Abundant Happiness” and the matching couplet on the walls hopes for good fortune and fulfilment of desires. These are positive signs for good luck. The rest of the paraphernalia is directed against evil spirits.

The first line of defence cannot be seen in this picture — it is the so-called “spirit wall” (*ying-bik* 影壁), and I had my back to it as I took the photograph. Evil spirits are endearingly imperfect in some ways, and one of their prime failings is that they can only move in straight lines. So by building a wall across the front of the house they can be prevented from entering the doors. People, with minimal inconvenience, can walk round the wall and turn into the house; but those spirits which come along between the wall and the house are unable to change direction and have to continue on past the doorway.

Above the lintel is a small eight-sided motif among the decorative plasterwork. This is a *baat-gwa* (八卦) symbol. The *baat-gwa* are the eight diagrams made up of combinations of triple lines which represent the

interaction of the elements *Yin* (*yam* 陰) and *Yang* (*yeung* 陽) of which the universe and all in it is composed. The eight combinations are the basic material out of which the enigmatic *Classic of Changes* (*Yik-ging* 易經) is written. Few understand even a small part of the book, but the symbol is commonly, as here, used as a talisman against evil. Some New Territories people prefer to have a small mirror where the *baat-gwa* motif is, because evil spirits are considered to be very ugly and liable to be frightened away by the sight of their own faces.

But perhaps most effective of all are the two gods whose pictures in full colour are stuck on the doors. Fierce warriors, their task is to bar the way to any evil. There seem to have been gods associated with doors since very early times in China, but these two really date from the Tang (唐) dynasty. The Emperor Tai Zong (太宗) (A.D. 627–650) is said to have fallen ill, and in dreams felt himself threatened by evil spirits who had come to cause his death. Two of his generals volunteered to sit up with him in full battle-kit. C. A. S. Williams reports one of the generals as saying:

“Your servant has during his whole life killed men as he would split open a gourd and piled up carcasses as he would heap up ants; why should he be afraid of ghosts?”²⁸

The vigil worked and the Emperor slept untroubled. Eventually pictures were substituted for the real men and proved equally efficacious, evil spirits being as gullible as they are unmanoeuvrable. The gods must always face each other on the doors, otherwise bad luck and strife are thought likely to come to the house. A common Cantonese term for husband and wife quarrels is *tip-choh-moon-san* (貼錯門神) “The Door Gods are stuck on wrong”.

The house is well protected by all these gods and talismans, but they do not exhaust the defences. Inside the house are many more.



For many in Hong Kong, Macau is the one great place of escape, somewhere different enough from home to be exciting, but near enough to bring it within range of almost every pocket.

The Portuguese first came to the south coast of China in the second decade of the 16th century, and Macau was founded by them in about 1557, though it was not officially ceded to Portugal until a treaty of 1887.

This photograph of Macau was taken from the Fortaleza do Monte. The fort was built by the Jesuits in the early 17th century: not that they kept it long — a wily governor of Macau tricked them out of possession a few years afterwards. The Jesuits also built the Church of the Mother of God, better known as St. Paul's, the façade of which forms the centre of the picture. St. Paul's was the church of the "College of the Mother of God", founded originally in the 16th century, burned down in 1601, and rebuilt in wood over the next few years. The impressive façade was added in the 1620s. The labourers and stonemasons were mainly not Chinese but Japanese, Christian converts who had fled to Macau to escape Tokugawa persecution. The figures and decorations are remarkably well preserved.

In 1835 the College and its church burned down again, leaving the façade and the stone steps leading to it as memorials to what had been called “the greatest monument to Christianity in all the Eastern lands”. They are memorials too to the Jesuits, who by 1835 had long passed the zenith of their power in China.

The first Jesuit missionary came to Macau in 1580, and in 1582 (or thereabouts) came perhaps the most famous of them all, Matteo Ricci. Ricci seems to have had no doubts about the best course to pursue, and he set his sights on reaching the highest in the land. Over the years he slowly percolated upwards through China and Chinese society, finally reaching Beijing in 1601. The great Ming dynasty Emperor Shen Zong (神宗), whose reign period is known as Maan-lik (萬曆), Wan-li in Mandarin, was much impressed with him, and gave him a stipend to live at the capital. There Ricci and other Jesuits built churches and made converts. But their missionary efforts were hampered to some extent by persecution from Chinese officials, and even more, perhaps, by the positions they soon came to assume as Court scientists. Ricci wrote or translated into Chinese many scientific works, including books on geography, Euclid, memory cultivation, and the celestial sphere, as well as on religious matters.

He early came to realize that some compromise with native Chinese beliefs was likely to be more effective than absolute rejection, and this showed in his being prepared to allow the use in Catholicism of words for “God” which were already in use, even though what had been meant by the terms did not necessarily coincide well with Christian ideas of God.

In particular he compromised in allowing converts to continue their practice of ancestor worship, arguing that “respect for” not “worship of” ancestors was what was involved. In this he was helped by the Chinese word *baai* (拜), which can indeed mean either “worship” or “pay respects to”. My own observations of ancestor worship convince me that there is a large element of “worship” involved, so that Ricci may be said to have condoned heresy. His brilliance is undoubted but he has come in for much adverse criticism on this score. The following vitriolic assessment is quoted by Wells Williams in *The Middle Kingdom*:

Ricci was active, skilful, full of schemes, and endowed with all the talents necessary to render him agreeable to the great or to gain the favour of princes;

but ... it was sufficient to read his work on the true religion to be satisfied that he was ignorant of the first principles of theology. Being more a politician than a theologian, he discovered the secret of remaining peacefully in China. The kings found in him a man full of complaisance; the pagans a minister who accommodated himself to their superstitions; the mandarins a polite courtier skilled in all the trickery of courts; and the devil a faithful servant, who far from destroying, established his reign among the heathen, and even extended it to the Christians.²⁹

The “Rites Controversy”, as the argument over these matters has come to be known, raged for decades, ending in Papal denunciation of the Jesuit effort in China. It is perhaps fair to say that with the collapse of the Jesuit mission the already rather frail chance of success for Christianity in China was reduced to mere frail hope.

Ricci did not arouse Chinese passions in at all the same way. Here is the entry in a Chinese encyclopaedia under his Chinese name Lei Ma Dau (利瑪竇):

Italian Jesuit missionary; came to Guangdong in the 8th year of the Ming Maan-lik period (1580); adopted the Chinese name Lei Sai Taai (利西泰); later moved to Beijing, built a Catholic church, and carried on his mission. Well versed in both Chinese and Western writings, and the study of astronomy, geography and medicine. Emperor Shen Zong thought very highly of him, and senior officials of the time ... delighted in his company. Wrote and translated “A Treatise on Cosmography and Geography” in two volumes, and the “Works of Euclid” in six volumes. It was he who introduced Western astronomy into China.³⁰

When he died in 1610, the Emperor conferred the unprecedented favour of a grant of land near Beijing for his burial. The tomb can still be visited to this day.



I did not pose this photograph: there were no children around when I took my camera out. I was walking through a New Territories village, and had come to where a workman was demolishing an old house. There behind his wheelbarrow was a wooden board, and on the board a piece of red paper with the words *hing-gung-daai-gat* 興工大吉 (“May good luck attend the work”). The formula is a standard one and helps to protect the workman and the neighbours from any unpleasantness which might arise when gods or evil spirits are disturbed by building work. I thought I’d get a shot of it. The children appeared in front of the lens as suddenly as if they had been materialized ghosts — nonsense, of course, because reason tells me that the protective slogan would have driven off any ghosts from the area!

All that can be seen of the board are the words “good luck”, and I do indeed feel lucky to have got without effort such a beautiful group of smiling faces. But it is the child’s feet not the faces which sparked a train of thought in me

These clearly are not poor or starved children otherwise the bare feet could be taken as evidence of poverty. In fact, at that time many people, old

and young alike, preferred to walk around the villages barefoot. Amongst other advantages, it prevented the development of Athlete's Foot, or Hong Kong Foot (*heung-gong-geuk* 香港腳) as it is known locally. Athlete's Foot is not the most comfortable of conditions, and the village cure for it was about as uncomfortable as could be. Pine needles (*chung-mo* 松毛) were collected from a particular tree and boiled in salted water. The scalding liquid was then applied to the affected area.

It is not so long since little girls of this age would have been in the initial horribly painful stages of foot-binding. The Chinese male's love of tiny feet in his women developed into deliberate stunting of foot growth by binding probably around the 10th century, and the custom prevailed in some parts of the country well into the 1930s.

A bandage was wrapped around the four small toes and the heel in a figure 8 and then drawn tight, forcing the toes and the heel together, and in time breaking the arch of the foot. The aim was a foot no more than three or four inches (8–10 cms) long — the much coveted "Golden Lotus Foot" (*gam-lin* 金蓮). For this, women endured years of great pain, and a lifetime of near-immobility.

Howard S. Levy's standard work on foot-binding lists some of the customs which accompanied the practice:

One superstition associated the number five propitiously with the start of foot-binding. The folk explanation was that the word "five" sounded identical to a word meaning "to stop" (the foot from getting larger). Sometimes a five-year-old nominally started on New Year's Eve, which was also called the Fifth Night Watch, but did not really tightly bind the feet until the spring. Propitious days for starting foot-binding were recorded in various books which were consulted by the girl's family. An old lady who had enjoyed good fortune might be asked to give the first turn of the binding, or a shepherd or woodcutter might do this instead, signifying that the girl could later move about with agility. The young girl might bite the tip of a writing brush or grasp a water chestnut, both symbolizing a hope that the foot might become thin and pointed.³¹

When the Manchus conquered China in the 17th century, they tried hard to abolish foot-binding, passing harsh laws against the custom. But the Chinese were more successful in evading these laws than they had been in resisting invasion, and the decrees were withdrawn as useless after a short while. According to the Rev. Justus Doolittle:

The dominant race in the empire, the Manchu Tartars, do not allow their women to bind or cramp their feet. It unfits a beauty for entrance into the Imperial harem. The penalty is instant death should any small-footed female enter the Imperial palace at Peking — at least, such is the common saying.³²

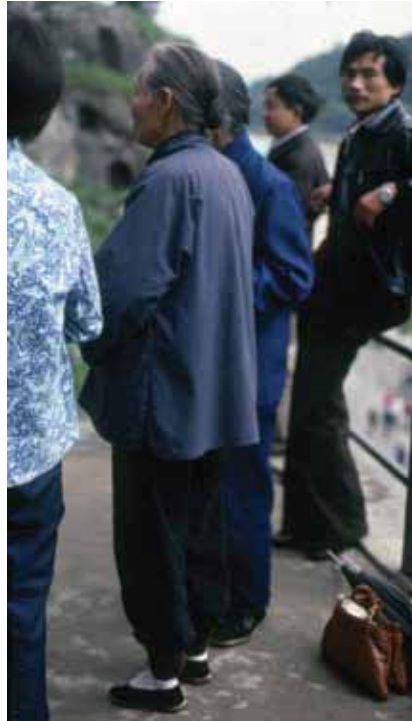
But, alas for the Manchus! Their own women became infected by the desire for small feet, and they invented a special stilted shoe which allowed a small lower “falsie” to peep out from the bottom of their long robes, looking just like a tiny Chinese bound foot.

By the end of the Manchu dynasty’s rule in 1911, anti-foot-binding movements were rapidly making inroads into tradition. Under the lead of urbanized and Westernized women, and with much support from Christian missionaries, Natural Feet Societies (Tin-juk-wooi 天足會) sprang up everywhere. A considerable literature survives.

In amongst tragic stories of feet rotting off and dreadful pain, there is the occasional flash of humour. I was reading recently Mrs. Archibald Little’s account of a visit to the powerful and famous statesman Li Hung-chang (Lei Hung Jeung 李鴻章) in Guangzhou in 1900. She asked him how he could bear to hear the pitiful cries of the girls of his family:

“No, I do not like to hear little children crying over having their feet bound,” grumbled out the genial Viceroy. “But then I never do hear them,” he hastened to add.³³

Easy for Li to ignore the problem, perhaps — he did not have to suffer the pain. But there must have been many girls through the ages who would gladly have changed places with the youngster in this photograph — or even have been happy to have nothing worse than Hong Kong Foot to put up with.





When I look at the photographs I've taken in the New Territories over the years, I am struck by how many of them are concerned with death. Not a photograph of a New Territories hillside but doesn't discover a grave or a burial urn somewhere; for burial procedures are elaborate and carried out over a protracted period of time, and graves are to be shown off and to take pride in, not to be hidden behind stone walls and screened by cypress trees. An indoor shot will show an altar to the ancestors; an outdoor one reveals charms and structures as protection against ghosts. The dead are always with the living in the form of ancestors or ghosts.

Death is in this way very much a part of everyday life for Chinese people, and the photographs are a faithful reflection of its presence rather than a proof of macabre interest on my part.

Here in an open space on the edge of a village a funeral is being conducted. The woman had died the previous evening. Her coffin is a traditional shape for this area. The end panels always have the grain of the wood running vertically, as it is thought that this withstands collapse better as the wood rots.

A popular Chinese saying goes:

Be born in Suzhou [蘇州];

Live in Hangzhou [杭州];

Eat in Guangzhou [廣州];

Die in Liuzhou [柳州].

Again the easy juxtaposition of life and death. Be born in Suzhou, because it has the most beautiful women; live in Hangzhou, because it has wonderful scenery; eat in Guangzhou, because it has the best cuisine; and die in Liuzhou, because the wood grown there makes stout coffins which are resistant to decay.

The mourners who surround the coffin are all close relatives of the woman. They wear white or undyed clothing. The Western emphasis on black for death belongs to a totally different scheme of colour symbolism.

The old imperial law books actually laid down rules for mourning the dead. The rules were known as the *ng-fuk* (五服), literally the Five Kinds of Mourning Dress. The most severe of the five consisted of a dress of unhemmed coarse hemp, a hemp headdress, grass sandals, and a mourning staff. It was to be worn for dead parents over a period of 27 months, and during that time the mourner had to abstain from meat, amusement, shaving, sexual intercourse, music, eating out of fine porcelain, and other pleasures. (Shaving?!!)

The other four kinds of dress were each less severe than the last, the fifth and least severe being a dress of plain silky hemp without special headgear or footwear. Fifth grade mourning was observed for quite distant relatives, such as one's great-grandfather's brother or sister, and the wife of one's father's brother's son, and it lasted only for three months.

There were penalties laid down for those who failed to observe these mourning requirements, but it seems very unlikely that they were much invoked. And while the law books insisted upon the correct degree of mourning to be observed for all kin whether of older, younger or the same generation as oneself, it seems that few Chinese ever observed mourning at all for anyone junior to themselves in the kinship hierarchy.

Here the kind of mourning dress being worn is certainly not in accordance with the old law books — but that does not make the mourning any less sincere. Indeed this had been a much loved woman. During the Japanese occupation, when food was hard to get, she and her husband supported many other people

in the village who were less well off. The heavy attendance at the funeral was confirmation of her popularity and the respect she had truly deserved.

The son of the dead woman can just be seen standing with his back to the camera (top left). He wears heavy mourning, but white plimsolls do duty for the more correct grass sandals. Nor did he mourn for 27 months — modern life and the demands of his duck farm allowed him just a few days.

If, as I have suggested, death is very much in evidence in Chinese everyday life, it is also true that in death life is not lost sight of. The coffin is draped with red crepe paper, because red is an auspicious colour and counteracts the evil influences of death. Each of the white-clad mourners has somewhere about him or her a touch of red for the same reason. In most cases they have little pieces of red wool tied round the mourning staffs.

When later I went to the funeral feast (at which the roast pig seen in the background figured on the menu) I was protected from evil by having a needle threaded with red cotton stuck in my lapel as I went through the door. The main mourners could not take part in the meal of course. Nor could they drink anything before the coffin was buried — it is said that if they had done so the belly of the corpse would have swollen up.



Water has never been far from the thoughts of the people of Hong Kong. The place was largely chosen, after all, because it had a good natural harbour for the extensive sea-trade which the British wanted to develop with China; and there was need for “a port whereat they may careen and refit their ships”, as the 1842 Treaty of Nanking said.

Sea water Hong Kong has a-plenty: it has always been fresh water which has been at a premium. The area has such denuded, steep-sided hills that run-off from rain is immediate and nearly total, streams dry up very quickly, and drought conditions can occur despite an annual rainfall which is more than adequate to meet all demands.

One of the attractions of Hong Kong Island to 19th-century sailors is said to have been this waterfall. Running through the old Dairy Farm and spilling into the sea here below Wah Fu Estate, it did not dry up, and so gave sure supplies of fresh water to the thirsty ships. I would not advise anyone to try drinking it now — it was filthy when I took this photograph.

Lo Hsiang-lin's (羅香林) *Hong Kong and Its External Communications before 1842* contains the following nugget, though as the punch-line indicates it is of fool's gold:

It was said that southwards from the estate of the Dairy Farm on Pokfulam Road there was formerly a stream with a sizeable waterfall, called Tu-ao Yang. The water there was pleasant to drink, so most of the boat people in the vicinity went to fetch their drinking water there; they called this stream Hsiang-chiang (the Fragrant River) and the mouth of the stream Hong Kong (Fragrant Port) later became the name of the island. This account is not acceptable, for the name Hsiang-chiang was little used and unheard of until recent years when Hong Kong had attained a certain measure of prosperity. Besides, according to the maps in the Hsin-an Hsien-chi, the place called Tu-ao Yang was situated south of T'a Men and was not on the present Hong Kong Island.³⁴

Earlier writings on Hong Kong were as concerned with the water problem as any contemporary accounts. Change a few of the names in Peplow and Barker's *Hongkong, Around and About* (written in 1931) and you have a statement which could have been made at almost any time in the 20th century:

The water-supply for the colony is provided by various reservoirs, most of which are among the hills on the south side of the island. The largest of these is Tytam Tuk, which lies close to the shore between Stanley and Shekko Further provision is being made by the building of a new system of waterworks in the island in the hills above Aberdeen, and by another on the mainland in the Shing Mun Valley, which supplies the island by means of a pipe line under the harbour. The continually increasing population of the colony and the possibility of another serious drought such as was experienced in 1929 make the problem of an adequate water supply both urgent and important.³⁵

Why had nothing been done about water supply before the British took over the island in 1842? Answer: because Hong Kong was virtually uninhabited. It was, in Lord Palmerston's disgusted and much misquoted words, "a barren island with hardly a house upon it".

The New Territories had a population of more than 80,000 when they were leased to Britain in 1898. Their water problems were mainly solved by well-digging, and even quite recently some villagers drank well water in preference to any piped water available to them.

For the villagers and for not a few town-dwelling Chinese, water was important in other ways too. It is one of the ingredients of the term *fung-sui* (風水) "wind and water", the science of geomancy. In *fung-shui* water indicates wealth, and the more of it the better.

I was present at the building of a geomantically sited grave some years ago. It was on an island hillside and faced across sea to the mainland New Territories. From the grave itself it looked as though the water was completely land-locked, because two ridges ran down into the sea on either side of the site, cutting off the view of open water beyond. From the *fung-sui* viewpoint that meant that all that wealth was being held stored for the use of the descendants of the grave's occupants. But, better still, two streams ran down the valleys on the near side of each of the flanking ridges, so that while more wealth was seen to be constantly added to the store, none could be seen to flow away.

Perhaps it is from geomancy that the Cantonese slang word for money comes. *Bong-sui* (磅水 "weigh out the water") means "hand over the money". A satirical Cantonese film of 1973 called *The 72 Tenants* (*Chat-sap-yi Ga Fong-haak* 七十二家房客) made a huge impact with a long humorous sequence on corruption in which the fire brigade would only supply water to put out the fire if the tenants would in turn give them "water".

Another slang word for money is *wai-ta-ming-M* (維他命M "Vitamin M"). Water is certainly as necessary as vitamins and Hong Kong knows it.

24 _____ Congratulations?



It doesn't do to ask too many questions of Chinese popular religion. It is so complex and is composed of so many different and often contradictory elements that to try to understand it as a system is to attempt what the man in the village never attempts.

For example, take the ancestor who Buddhism tells us is suffering bloody and excruciating tortures in Purgatory: I do not think that there is any logical explanation how he can at the same time be in a position to grant protection and blessings to his descendants who worship him as a god. Yet there seems little doubt that an ancestor is considered to be a god, even if of only limited powers. And how can an ancestor who has been reborn, as the Buddhists again believe, go on being worshipped?

But no-one seems too concerned with such questions, and Buddhist monks and nuns, sworn to celibacy, ensure their own after-world comfort by being worshipped as mock ancestors by their successor brothers and sisters in the faith substituting for the children they can never have.

Accounts of what happens to the soul after death differ from area to area of China and from person to person. Most traditionally-minded Chinese

believe that it goes to Purgatory to be judged and to suffer punishment for its crimes on this earth. The punishments are vicious and unending, and yet at the same time the soul seems to lead a normal life there with the same needs as it had when in this world. Some say that that normal life includes practising the same occupation as before — one report talks of an electrician here becoming an electrician there (the “sparks” of the fires of hell, perhaps?)

I was led to this line of thought by looking up the notes I made when I took this photograph. It was the occasion of the 71st birthday of an important man in the New Territories. At least, it would have been his 71st birthday if he had lived, but he had been dead for eleven years at the time. His family continued to celebrate every tenth anniversary, however, and intended in due course to observe his 81st birthday as well. After that, they said, he will have been reincarnated (*juen-lun tau-toi* 轉輪投胎) and to go on would be pointless.

But a man from Guangzhou who was present denied that reincarnation took place at 81, and said that where he was brought up birthdays were usually celebrated up to the age of 100. This set a rare old discussion going, and opinions of all sorts came out.

In particular I liked a story told by the Guangzhou man, who was a teacher. One of his old pupils, he said, never ate meat and gave the following reason. His father had been very friendly with a Buddhist priest in Beijing. One day the priest became aware that he was to die the next morning, and he told his friend that as a mark of his regard he would reincarnate as his son. A few hours after his death a telegram arrived for his sorrowing friend to say that his wife in Guangzhou had given birth to a boy at the exact time the priest had passed away. The boy turned out both to look like the priest and to have a natural antipathy to eating meat (Buddhists are vegetarian of course). The father called the boy by the same name as the priest. Reincarnation had been immediate. “Yes,” said the teacher, “I don’t believe it, yet it certainly was a very strange thing.”

The birthday celebration after death is known as the *daai-gei-yat* 大忌日. In this case a spirit medium had been requested to get in touch with the dead man’s soul to discover what he most needed. He had declared that transport was in short supply, and had asked for a horse each for himself and his two dead sons to ride, a crane (*hok* 鶴) for his dead daughter to fly on, and a car big enough for all four of them. Here the three paper horses complete with silver

stirrups can be seen, and in the background are sacks of gold and silver ingots (paper, imitation ones). There was also a big red paper trunk full of beautifully made paper clothes, basket-loads of candles, incense and paper money, the car, and a paper sedan-chair with two paper bearers in the shafts.

A large framed photograph of the man was set up by his family, and garlands of flowers were hung over it, while on a table in front were laid out a whole roast pig, fresh fruit, cut meats, cakes, sweets, a whole dressed chicken, bowls of rice, tea and wine, and a red paper address of birthday congratulations.

A red-clad Taoist priest conducted a short ceremony to a gong and flute accompaniment. With red threads tied in their hair or on their clothing for luck the family bowed and kowtowed and offered wine to their ancestor, and the goods were all addressed to him in clear handwriting before they were dispatched by means of fire to the other world. A string of firecrackers was let off to mark the end of the ritual, a bowl of rice was scattered in the smouldering remains of the offerings, and everyone settled down to a few rounds of mahjong before eating the birthday feast of pork, chicken, squid, bean-curd and vegetables.

If the proceedings seem a little too jolly for someone who is dead, it should be noted that the anniversary of a man's death can also be observed. That occasion is called *sei-gei-yat* (死忌日), and it is a sad affair.



In 1901 R. K. Douglas, Professor of Chinese at King's College, London, and an astute observer of Chinese life, wrote:

A feature in the workaday life of China is the number of itinerant craftsmen who earn their livelihood on the streets. Every domestic want, from the riveting of a broken saucer to shaving a man's head, is supplied by these useful peripatetics. If a man's jacket wants mending, or his shoes repairing, he summons a passing tailor and cobbler, and possibly, while waiting for his mended clothes, employs the services of a travelling barber to plait his queue, or it may be to clean his ears from accumulated wax.³⁶

This photograph was taken in Macau, but the wayside barber with his folding chair, portable mirror, and little case of tools, used to be a common sight everywhere. He specialized not only in hair-cutting and ear-cleaning, but in shaving and eyebrow and nasal-hair plucking. His prices were cheap because the overheads were almost nil. The Cantonese word for a barber is *fei-faat-lo* (飛髮佬) which means "chap who makes the hair fly away". Whether this was how the term originated or not, there is obviously going to be some hair flying when it is cut in the windy street.

Street traders used to be hard at work squeezing out every last spare copper cash that was to be had. There are fewer of them in Hong Kong now, but in the depths of the recession in the 1970s there was a massive gut-reaction resort to street trading as a means of survival. Shops with air-conditioning and neon-lit showcases might be modern and preferred, but came the crunch and the people of Hong Kong reverted to a well-trying tradition.

The Centre of Asian Studies in The University of Hong Kong began a "Street Cries Project" in 1975 with the aim of recording the great variety of peripatetic and stationary street-trading still surviving. The cries of the pedlars, the musical instruments which they used to advertise with, the extent of their wares, and the area which they covered in the course of their rounds were all to be recorded on tape, film and questionnaire. The results (as yet unpublished) should provide a lasting reminder of "the richness of the poor life", if that paradox is not too purple. There are plenty of prints and descriptions of pedlars from the 19th century in the world's libraries, and it will be interesting to see what changes have taken place over the last century or so.

Reading some of these older accounts often leaves one realizing that *plus c'est la même chose*. I found the following passage in the Rev. J. Macgowan's *Sidelights on Chinese Life*:

Sometimes when the peddler has had his pork watered there is great dissatisfaction, and no-one will buy from him unless he sells at a considerably reduced price. This watering is a vicious custom that prevails largely amongst all butchers, and is intended to make it possible to sell the meat at a lower rate to the very poor. The way it is managed is to pump a quantity of water down the main arteries of the animal immediately after it is killed until the whole animal is saturated with it. As this injection of water drives out the blood, the flesh has a pale anaemic look that tells the secret, and the aim of the peddler is to conceal this from the public by plastering the flesh over with the blood that flowed from the body when the animal was killed.³⁷

So the butchers who have been accused of this same practice in recent years in Hong Kong were also reverting to a well-trying tradition.

In the New Territories a constant procession of pedlars used to go round the villages, and they ranged from sellers of incense and ritual paraphernalia to jugglers, from broom-sellers to men who injected chickens with fattening hormones, from blind musicians to fresh fish hawkers. But whether in the

cities or the countryside, most evident and most colourful were the itinerant food-sellers.

The cooked meat stall, a heated trolley with steaming trays and pots of delicacies, was garish in its colours, the various types of meat being stained all shades of orange, red and brown. Heaps of goose intestines, of roast or steamed pig's intestines like lengths of salami, of cut up bright orange squid; pots of "beef bits" (tripe, skirt, etc.) ... the goods don't sound very appetizing, but reason insists that the Cantonese people, who have evolved the best cuisine in a land of gourmets, would not go on patronizing such foods if they were not good.

For those who preferred a softer entry to exotic street food, there was hot, comforting "congee" (rice porridge, called *juk* 粥) which came with various added ingredients such as pieces of meat or fish or "hundred year old eggs" (*pei-daan* 皮蛋). Particularly tasty were the stuffed green peppers which sizzled on pans on the barrows. For next to nothing a piece was yours, speared on a toothpick. Or there were the toothpick-speared pieces of fresh coconut eaten with pickled ginger slices.

Barbers have one advantage over other traders — they seem to have obtained special favour with the compilers of the Chinese Almanac (*tung-sing* 通勝). Every few days this work decrees a date to be good for hair-cutting, and only very rarely does it note a date as inauspicious in this way. Perhaps the barbers need some help, for they have traditionally not been considered of high status in China. Some accounts place them among the "mean people" (*jin-man* 賤民) who were not allowed to enter for the old Civil Service examinations because of their despised position in society. In Imperial China, when an Emperor died it was forbidden to shave for 100 days. The barbers at least must have mourned with real feeling.



The Vice-Chancellor of The University of Hong Kong has no easy job. Who would begrudge him this spacious home which goes with the position?

The university was founded in 1911, incorporating the old Hong Kong College of Medicine (where Sun Yat-sen studied) as one of its faculties. The need for the university is graphically set out in Sayers's *Hong Kong 1862–1919*:

Thus far, the Queen's College marked the high-water mark of educational facilities in Hong Kong, if we except the local College of Medicine — well enough for the small tradesman, the clerk, the shroff and the interpreter, passable perhaps for the elementary school teacher — but there were some at least to whom it occurred that a community so prosperous should not, for lack of facilities for higher study, lie under the imputation of condemning the great bulk of its members to remain indefinitely hewers of wood and drawers of water. There were some too who saw in a university in Hong Kong a unique opportunity for gently introducing to China the ways of the West both scientific and philosophical.³⁸

China did not really have universities before they were imported from the West. There was an institution at Beijing called the Imperial College (Gwok-ji-gaam 國子監), and a branch of it at Nanjing too, but only very few students could study there. During the Qing dynasty, payment of a large fee gave membership but did not necessarily entitle the member to attend the College.

The point of studying was to pass the Civil Service examinations and so to enter the prestigious ranks of the bureaucratic elite. The vast majority of men (women were not eligible to sit) studied under private tutors for as long as they felt necessary, and then took the examinations. The failure rate was enormous, and the stress and hardship endured through many hundreds of years by many hundreds of thousands of candidates hardly bears thinking about. Anyone who wishes to get an idea of the excesses of the system is recommended to read the Chinese satirical novel, *The Unofficial History of Officialdom* (Yue-lam Ngoi-si 儒林外史), available in translation under the title *The Scholars*.

The examination system was not abolished until 1905. Meanwhile the same principle of recruitment to government service through examination success had been adopted in Britain. The American Chinese scholar Teng Ssu-yü has examined the evidence in his article “Chinese Influences on the Western Examination System” and concludes that:

there can remain no doubt that the Chinese system of examinations for government positions was responsible for the introduction of similar systems into Western Europe. Less certainly can we claim influence from the Chinese for similarities in detail, such as the use of the “classics” for examinations. In any case, the examination was adapted by each individual government to fit national characteristics.³⁹

Even if evidence of influence is less clear, there is certainly a remarkable parallel between the Chinese examining of a large body of classical literature unrelated to the practical work of government and the British concentration upon a classical education in Latin and Greek as preparation for a practical bureaucratic career.

The West, of course, did not expect its students to study in solitary for examinations: colleges and universities were tied into the system. Now, in a modern version of old practice, university graduates from Hong Kong are more and more filling responsible posts in the Hong Kong government.

The Chinese term for a university is *daai-hok* (大學) “great learning”, and *bat-yip* (畢業) “to finish instruction” means “to graduate”. Entirely logically, a secondary school is *jung-hok* (中學) “middle learning”, and a primary school is *siu-hok* (小學) “small learning”. It is odd to Western ears, however, to discover that a Chinese “graduates” (*bat-yip*) from both these schools — he even “graduates” from kindergarten!

Daai-hok has only really come to mean “university” in the past hundred years or so. Before that it was best known as the title of one of the Four Books (*Sei-sue* 四書), the core of the Confucian classical literature. The book is only short, but deals with fundamentals:

By enquiring into all things, understanding is made complete; with complete understanding, thought is made sincere; when thought is sincere, the mind is as it should be; when the mind is as it should be, the individual is morally cultivated; when the individual is morally cultivated, the family is well regulated; when the family is well regulated, the state is properly governed; and when the state is properly governed, the world is at peace.⁴⁰

English has its own versions of this passage. We have “Knowledge is Power” (the motto of my own college), and “The pen is mightier than the sword”. The Vice-Chancellor of The University of Hong Kong no doubt believes in the same principles, but he also apparently believes in hedging his bets — the cannon in the photograph points straight at the Students’ Union.



Methods of counting time seem to be important to all peoples. They don't solve anything, but they appear to tame uncertain Nature and give a sense of security. In 1705 Edmund Halley worked out that the comet which bears his name was a regular 76-year visitor to our skies. Before that its appearance had been viewed with terror, and doubtless the English who saw it in 1066 were not surprised when the Battle of Hastings was lost. But now that it can be seen to be running to a timetable, who could be afraid of it?

Time counting can take many forms, and the Chinese have tried not a few. A very ancient one was the "sexagenary cycle", a series of 60 names which could be applied to sequences of time. Using the cycle it was possible to keep track of the days or years, but the trouble was that the 61st year had the same name as the first, the 62nd as the second, and so on. Very confusing, and tended to promote the idea that history repeated itself.

Another way of counting the years was by reference to the rulers of the country. "In the 9th year of the Dao Guang reign" (道光九年) is an accurate measurement of time, and any reference table will tell you that it was A.D. 1829. But unless you possess such a table (and the knowledge of the Western

time scale which starts at A.D. 1) it is necessary to be able to remember how many rulers have reigned since that year and for how long each ruled, then add them together to find out how long ago it was.

For the year itself the Chinese adopted a double measurement system. The lunar month was very attractive, because people could always feel safe and reassured when the full moon appeared to time on the 15th of the month. On the other hand the seasons did not keep in step with the lunar calendar, so a solar calendar was needed in order to be certain of planting and harvesting times.

Then came the problem of keeping the lunar and solar calendars together. To do this it was necessary to add a whole extra month to seven of the lunar years in every nineteen. Time was somewhat complicated.

Most festivals were held on lunar dates, but one or two important ones were fixed according to the solar calendar. Ching Ming (清明 “Clear and Bright”) was one of the 24 periods into which the solar year was divided, and it started on April 5th or 6th. On that day filial descendants went to visit their family graves.

The photograph shows a New Territories grave on 5th April 1964. The little group are cleaning up the grave site, hacking away the vegetation which has encroached during the past year, and spreading lime to discourage any further growth. A study in concentration, the boy at the top of the picture is repainting in red the inscription on the gravestone. When all is neat and tidy, the grave’s occupant will be offered sacrificial foods, money, incense, candles and wine, and will receive the respectful bows of the living.

Given the obvious differences in dress and custom, is this custom of “grave-sweeping” (*so-mo* 掃墓) so very far removed from the flower-bearing visits to a loved one’s grave in the West? Much heart-searching has gone on over this question. Some Christians have found the custom an entirely sympathetic and understandable one. Others have been convinced that there are pagan elements involved with which no believer in the One God should be associated. The Rev. James Thayer Addison published in 1925 a thorough and insightful study called *Chinese Ancestor Worship*. He considered whether rites such as “grave-sweeping” were merely ways of paying respect to the memory of a dead ancestor or whether they amounted to worship of the dead. He brought the argument to a head with one question:

Is there a *quid pro quo*?

The answer to this question depends on the value assigned to the mass of evidence in support of the conclusion that the Chinese perform the ceremonies of ancestor worship with the aim to avoid calamities and to secure worldly prosperity. *That evidence is ample enough to establish the fact that in popular ancestor worship the element of religion is so strong as to justify the term "worship".*⁴¹

I believe he was right in this conclusion. But that makes this photograph a particularly sad one. The man buried here had been an intelligent and able village leader. Alas, his two sons had both predeceased him, and in ancestor worship it is only sons who can properly carry on the rites for the dead. Of the four young people, one was not related to the dead man at all, and even though his daughter was present, she could be considered only a poor substitute. Sadder yet, the daughter too died only a few years afterwards. This grave will probably not have been "swept" for forty or more years. Ancestor worship carries with it a harsh message for the dead: where there are no descendants there can be no ancestors.



Sooner or later in conversation with Chinese people the subject of food always crops up. That does not mean that all Chinese are gastronomes (though very many are), but it does reflect a consuming (*sic*) cultural interest in food.

“If its back faces heaven you can eat it,” say the Cantonese; and they proceed to eat everything of which that is true. From cockroaches to dogs, from snakes to scaly-anteaters, from rice-maggots to sea slugs, they will try anything and will usually find a delectable method of cooking it.

Only man walks with his back not pointing to the sky and is therefore safe from the butcher’s knife. Even so, cannibalism is not unknown in Chinese society. It occurs in the novel *The Water Margin* (*Sui-woo-juen* 水滸傳); and the practice of using the blood of decapitated criminals as a medicine to treat TB continued until quite recent times.

To the squeamish Westerner many of the greater and rarer delicacies sound and look unattractive. A moment’s thought, however, will convince that a cuisine which can produce the great number of excellent dishes which the Westerner does enjoy probably knows what it is doing with regard to the more outlandish foods as well.

“Hundred Year Eggs” (*pei-daan* 皮蛋) look and smell rather disgusting. In fact they are much closer to a hundred *days* old, and they are delicious — I didn’t even find them a taste which I had to work at acquiring. The little Rice Birds (*woh-fa-jeuk* 禾花雀) which are eaten “skin, bones and all”, sent a friend of mine flying in distress from the table, but I still don’t see the difference between eating them and eating a chicken, except that they have a better flavour.

The list is endless. But to be honest, I think there are those Chinese who eat exotic foods for the thrill of being different rather than for the taste. Rice-maggots (*woh-chung* 禾虫), cooked in a kind of omelette and raved about by my Chinese fellow diners as being “very fragrant” (*ho-heung* 好香), I found insipid at best, and much more rewarding in the boasting of having eaten than in the eating itself. And I wonder how many of the thousands who lick their lips when dog is mentioned genuinely enjoy it as food rather than as an exotic and not too reprehensible way of flouting the law?

Food symbolism permeates the Chinese language. “You are breaking my rice bowl!” says the man whose livelihood is threatened. “She’s a hot chilli,” describes a vicious-tongued woman. “You are my heart and liver,” croons a man to his girl-friend. “A rotten egg” is a most unpleasant person.

The dead are always with the Chinese too, so it is not surprising that death and food come together frequently. This photograph was taken inside an ancestral hall in the New Territories. A feast has been laid out on the offering tables in front of the massed tablets of the ancestors. It includes whole roast pigs, a raw pig’s head (substituting for a sheep, I was told), dried eel, fresh fruit, preserved fruit, duck eggs, cakes, bean curd, cuts of pork and chicken, rice, tea and wine. Five sets of chopsticks and bowls are provided, not because there were only five ancestors to be fed, but because five is an important ritual number in Chinese culture. There were even cigarettes offered on this occasion, but they are out of picture.

These offerings of food seem to me to be the most important ones and the ones most meaningful to those who offer them. In the classical philosophical text *Mencius* there is a passage which runs:

Master Tseng provided for Tseng Shi and always had wine and meat. When he removed the food, he always asked to whom it should be given. If asked: “Is there some over?” he always said: “There is.” Tseng Shi died, and Tseng Yuan

provided for Master Tseng, and always had wine and meat. When he removed the food he didn't ask to whom it should be given. If asked: "Is there some over?" he said: "It is all gone," intending to serve it up again. This is what is called "providing for mouth and body". But as for Master Tseng's method, that may be called "providing for the soul". To serve one's parents as Master Tseng did is good.⁴²

I feel that the lavish spread here has much of that same feel to it. The ancestors are not only being spiritually fed, they are being reassured of the well-being of their descendants who can lay on such bounty. What is more, the descendants will eat up the food after it has been offered, and so will share the meal with the dead. Even in our much less food-conscious culture eating together is still of great symbolic importance and an emotional satisfaction of a high order.

In spring at the Ching Ming Festival, food and the dead come together for many families. Ching Ming is grave-visiting time. The graves are cleaned and tidied, offerings of food are made, and then comes a grave-side picnic for the living. What would perhaps be considered ghoulish and sick in the West, in a Chinese context is comprehensible and, I find, rather touching.



One of the features of Macau which used to make it so relaxing was the pedicab, the three-wheeled cycle transport shown here. Hong Kong had too much traffic, and too many hills for the pedicab, but in tiny flat Macau, it could trundle almost everywhere without hindrance, and the slow pace enabled the passenger to look around him better than in a taxi. The pedicab drivers could be very informative about the sights, though it helped if you understood Cantonese. And of course they were always happy to introduce you to outrageously expensive curio shops.

The word “pedicab” presumably refers to its propulsion by the feet. But there is another rather more interesting word used — “trishaw”. There is an obvious connection with “rickshaw”. Now, rickshaw is not an ancient term, nor even a Chinese word. It is in fact an abbreviation of the Japanese word *jinrikisha* (人力車), meaning “man-powered vehicle”. The jin has been left off, and the sha corrupted to shaw. Dyer Ball calls it “a cross between a bath-chair and a hansom cab”.⁴³

But the rickshaw was apparently not a Japanese invention. The most widely accepted version of its origin is that it was invented about 1870 by an American missionary in Japan, quickly became the main mode of transport there, and then spread to the treaty ports of the China coast, thence to Singapore, India, South Africa, and points west. Dyer Ball, writing at the turn of the 20th century, seemed confident that it would hit Europe before long. Well, “trishaw” takes the same corrupted word shaw and gives us “three wheeled vehicle”, which is exactly what *saam-lun-che* (三輪車), the Cantonese term for it, means.

What about another China coast word, “cumshaw”, then? Explanations for this are legion. Couling’s *Encyclopaedia Sinica* gives a good academic definition:

CUMSHAW, a present, sometimes used for “bucksheesh”. It is derived from “grateful thanks”, pronounced Kam sia in the Amoy dialect and Kam sau in Cantonese.⁴⁴

You don’t have to believe that: you could equally well understand it to be a corruption of “Come ashore!” shouted at sailors, who would be in the habit of throwing their money around (?). In any case, two things are clear: the *shaw* does not mean vehicle, and someone asking for “cumshaw” is hoping for money.

The list of words in standard English and Hong Kong English which come from China or Chinese is large. Some of them betray the history of trade relationships with the area. *Shroff*, meaning “cashier”, is a form of the Arabic word *saraf*, “a banker”, and came into English through trade with India — and it was the British East India Company that for a long time monopolized trade with China, which is how the word arrived in Hong Kong. *Godown*, meaning “a warehouse”, is another historical import, though dictionaries and other speculative works cannot decide whether it comes from Portuguese, Malay, or Tamil. *Junk*, for a large Chinese boat, is also in dispute. Hiroaki Kani quotes its origin as:

A long boat with some sails is called a junk. It is pronounced as “Chun 船” in Fukien dialect. The Indonesians borrowed the word and pronounced it as “Djong”. The Dutch picked it up as “Jonk”. The word is exported then to Europe to have different counterparts in different European languages.⁴⁵

I have seen Malay or Javanese given as the originating language too.

Compradore is a word which has changed over the years. It began as a Portuguese word meaning “to buy”, and was applied to the Chinese merchants who traded with or acted as agents for the Portuguese. Later it came to mean the chief Chinese servant in a Western household. Nowadays it is mostly used as a word for the small grocers and household stores which supply Western housewives in Hong Kong. Oddly enough, the Chinese word for such shops is *si-doh* (士多), a corruption of the English word “store”. It is as though the intermediate position between two cultures were recognized by both languages in the terms used.

Charles Leland in his *Pidgin-English Sing-song* draws attention to:

the native vocabularies published for the benefit of compradores and servants entering the service of English masters. One specimen of this class of work is a little volume of twelve or fifteen pages, and is entitled “A Vocabulary of Words in Use among the Red-haired People”.⁴⁶

Pidgin was an extraordinary form of English-cum-Chinese much used by Westerners and Chinese in their dealings with each other. Puzzle your mind a little over the meaning of the following Pidgin sentence: “He-larn-pidgin-talkie-that-complador-belongey-out-side-ko-hom-soon.” *

Pidgin has been dead for many years, though it is possible to find very old people who remember their elders using it. The trishaw drivers did not speak pidgin with you, but they would manage to conduct a lively bargaining session about the fare before you started your journey. I was brilliant at the bargaining, but would weaken by the end of the trip, and pay far more than was agreed at the start. I doubt if the boat-woman in the photograph will be as stupid as me.

* Translation: The apprentice says that the comprador has gone out and will be back soon.



When in 1911 the Manchu Qing dynasty was overthrown and a republic set up, a new national flag had to be devised. The Imperial five-clawed dragon on its yellow background was no longer suitable. Instead was adopted a plain flag of five horizontal stripes: red, yellow, blue, white and black (*chek, wong, cheng, baak, haak* 赤黃青白黑).

These colours are the five prime colours (*jing-sik* 正色) of the Chinese palette, and they were intended to represent the Five Peoples of China (*ng-juk* 五族). The yellow stripe stood for the Han (漢) Chinese, the red for the Manchus, the blue for the Mongols, the black for the Tibetans, and the white for the Mohammedans.

It has always puzzled me how the counting was done, for it is quite clear that there were then, as there are now, far more than just five peoples within China's boundaries — the Achang, the Chuang, the Ching-po, the Lolo, the Ha-ni, the Li, the Miao, the Yao, to name but a few, were apparently not considered at all.

The character *juk* (族) is a difficult one to define, and can range in meaning from clan, through tribe, to race and species, which is why I have translated

it by the almost equally all-encompassing word “people”. Were it not for this breadth of meaning the inclusion of Mohammedans in the Five Peoples would be rather odd, since it defines by religion rather than by language and geography.

The first Muslims came to China soon after the religion was founded. Some say that a mosque was built in Canton in the early 7th century by a maternal uncle of Mohammed himself. Throughout the Tang and Song dynasties Arab sea-traders came regularly to the coast, and merchants and mercenaries reached China overland, but:

It was during the Yuan dynasty that there was a large Muslim infiltration. Muslim scholars, traders and craftsmen were encouraged to make their home in China. Several distinguished officials of the dynasty were Muslims. They introduced Muslim science and proved particularly useful in astronomy and the preparation of the calendar. It is probably at this time that they got their distinctive Chinese name *Hui-hui*. They spread into every province, but especially into the western provinces of Kansu, Szechuan and Yunnan. In most areas they lived in their separate communities, often called *ying* or barracks, revealing their military origin. They were distinguished by their dress, food and customs.⁴⁷

The origin of the name *Hui-hui* (回回 *Wooi-wooi* in Cantonese) is now lost, but along with the alternative names of *Wooi-gaau* (回教) and *Ching-jan-gaau* (清真教) it is applied to all forms of Islam. The Chinese came to know Protestant and Catholic Christianity by quite separate terms, but a deep rift between adherents of the “old” and “new” sects of Islam has not resulted in different names. Eric Teichman wrote:

The various sects and classes seem to differ a good deal in the strictness of their observance of the tenets of their religion. Abstention from pork seems universal, and many abstain also from wine, opium and even tobacco. The Ramadan fast is carefully kept by the upper classes, but not so strictly by the lower. Every Moslem appears to have an Arabic as well as a Chinese name, but a knowledge of the former language is confined to a few Ahongs and scholars. The Koran is read in Arabic. All classes hold keenly to their religion, and their religious centres are visited from time to time by priests from Turkey, Arabia, and Central Asia. They keep aloof from the Chinese, whom they consider unclean, and do not usually frequent the Government schools. They occasionally take Chinese wives, but the latter have to be cleansed before marriage externally and internally by a course of baths and water drinking.⁴⁸

The Muslims' differing customs and geographical concentration in the north-western and south-western regions of China, allied to the fact that many of them in any case belonged to minority peoples, no doubt had much to do with their classification as one of the Five Peoples.

But the very fact that they were different and could be seen to be different was a problem in the orthodox Confucian empire. Time and again there were Muslim rebellions and savage persecutions by the imperial government, an alternating cycle of cause and effect, the one almost inevitably leading to the other. The numbers of casualties suffered by both sides in these troubles were enormous. According to one estimate, in the eight years between 1862 and 1870 a Muslim rebellion reduced the population of Gansu (甘肅) province from 15 millions to one million.

Yet while this slaughter was going on, we are told, 200,000 Muslims in Beijing remained quite unaffected, neither giving nor suffering any trouble. A traveller who visited a mosque in Ningbo (寧波) in the 1850s discovered one way in which Islam kept a "low profile":

Happening to see on the threshold a tablet, called *Lungpai* the "Dragon Tablet," similar to that found in any Chinese temple, with the inscription upon it — *Hwangti, wansui, wansui, wanwansui*, equivalent to "The Emperor, the Everliving," &c., — I pointed it out and asked him how, if he regarded the spot as consecrated to the worship of Alohó, — the name he gave to the One living and true God, — he could permit such a tablet to stand here. He protested that he did not and never would, pay religious homage to such a tablet or to any human sovereign. In evidence of the truth of his asseverations, he pointed to the low place given it on the ground floor, so far removed from the sacred seat. Further, he explained, that it was placed within the precincts of the mosque only for expediency's sake; for, if he and his disciples were charged by the enemies of Mohammedanism with disloyalty, they had only to appeal to the presence of the tablet.⁴⁹

The Tsim Sha Tsui mosque shown here was built at the end of the 19th century for Muslim soldiers of the British army, but came to serve all Kowloon. The 30,000 Muslims have no stripe on the Hong Kong flag, but then they have never suffered persecution either.

31 Fertility



The Chinese year contains many festivals and days of special observances. Ritual life is complex and full of anomalies, and there are really two different ritual cycles in operation.

The more important one is the lunar year, composed of twelve or thirteen months of 29 or 30 days each. By the lunar calendar (*yuet-lik* 月歷), sometimes called the “agrarian calendar” (*nung-lik* 農歷) are set the Dragon Boat Festival (5th day of 5th month), the Weaving Maiden Festival (7th day of 7th month), and of course Chinese New Year itself, the most important of all the festivals. The lunar year varies greatly in length according to the number of months, but it comes back into step with the more constant solar year once every nineteen years.

The solar calendar used by the Chinese has been the same as that used by the West for many years now; but there were Chinese solar calendars long before contact with the West. The solar year was divided into twenty-four periods (*hei* 氣) of fourteen to sixteen days, and each period had its own name. The names were associated with climatic or astronomical features: thus the period from approximately 21st January was known as “Great Cold” (Daai-

hon 大寒); that from 24th October as “Frost Falls” (Seung-gong 霜降); and that from around 21st March as “Vernal Equinox” (Chun-fan 春分). These solar periods are still noted in Chinese diaries and almanacs.

Two festivals of the solar calendar are commonly observed nowadays. “Clear and Bright” (Ching-ming 清明) falls on or about 5th April and is the occasion for worshipping the dead at their graves, with huge queues forming in Kowloon as people wait for transport to the cemeteries of the northern New Territories. “Winter Solstice” (Dung-ji 冬至), which of course falls just before Christmas, is a time for family feasting and worship of all gods and shrines.

In the New Territories a third solar period was until recently quite important. It is the period immediately before Vernal Equinox, and has the name “Awakening Insects” (Ging-jat 驚蟄). As the name implies, hibernating creatures and those which come to life only in the spring are believed to make their appearance at this time. Indeed, my diary for 5th March 1964, when I was living in a New Territories village, notes an increase in flies and mosquitoes, and an awareness on my part of the sounds of frogs and cicadas — either the system has high predictive value or I am very susceptible to suggestion!

For farming people the awakening of insects is not necessarily all good news, but it does symbolize the stirring of nature and the beginning of growth. So Awakening Insects has come to be associated with fertility, and prayers for fertility are made in the villages.

In this photograph the altar of the God of Soil and Grain (*Se-jik-san* 社稷神) is seen on the first day of the Awakening Insects period. All the women of the village come to the altar to pray on this day. From early morning there is a constant stream of worshippers. They burn incense, candles, and a special kind of paper money made for gods such as this. They scatter an inferior kind of paper money about for the evil spirits. Their prayers are written on sheets of yellow paper along with their names, and these are also burned in order to reach the eyes of the god.

As an advance return for the hoped for year of plenty, they offer tea and fresh vegetables, mainly lettuce, the Cantonese name for which is *saang-choi* (生菜), meaning “vegetable of life”. Then, something I have not seen in any other ceremony, they throw raw eggs at the God. The inset stone (middle of picture) on which his name is carved and in which he resides can be seen to be in rather a mess.

Another unusual feature is that the food offered on this altar is left there, although as a general rule offerings of food are never wasted in this way, the people finishing up what the gods have not consumed. The village pigs at any rate made sure that little was allowed to rot — there was hardly a scrap left by the evening.

Fertility of the fields was not all that the women were praying for. Mencius (孟子), the Confucian philosopher, said:

There are three kinds of unfilialness, and the worst of them is to be without posterity.⁵⁰

The continuation of the family line has always been an important factor in Chinese society, and the demands of ancestor worship reinforce the desire for children, and in particular for sons.

When couples are married they are always presented with a pair of red chopsticks. The red is for good luck. The chopsticks are given because the term for them (*faai-ji* 筷子) sounds exactly the same as words meaning “Have a son quickly” (*faai-ji* 快子).

So the women also pray to this god for their own fertility. They finish their worship by throwing handfuls of rice over the altar, and then over themselves — a symbolism which Westerners are familiar with from their own wedding customs.



Lanterns and sons are closely connected in New Territories thinking. In the heavy local dialect the word *dīng* (丁) “a son” is pronounced in almost exactly the same way as *dāng* (燈) “a lantern”.

The photograph shows an ornate lantern hanging in an ancestral hall on the occasion of a ceremony called *hoi-dāng* (開燈) “lighting the lantern”, which symbolically represents the birth of a son. Traditionally this ceremony was

held every year at the lunar New Year. On the 15th of the 1st month — that is, at the first full moon of the year — a lantern was put up by parents in the ancestral hall for each son born to them during the previous year. The lantern was left hanging there until the 2nd day of the 2nd month, which is To-dei-daan (土地誕) “the Earth God’s Birthday”. The Earth God is considered the heavenly registrar of births, marriages and deaths, so both ancestors and gods were formally notified of the births in this way.

But, as with ritual activity all over the world, there is a secular function to be observed in this ceremony. The ancestral hall was not only the clan’s “church”, it was also the headquarters of the clan elders and leaders. The lantern served to notify these men of the birth too, and their registration of it often took physical shape in a document which was as close as anything ever came in Chinese society to being a birth certificate.

Of course, registration demanded a registration fee. For the ancestors and gods the parents provided offerings of food and incense as well as the lantern. For the human registrars a feast had to be given. I have been told that poorer members of the clan were often forgiven this feast.

The gods and the ancestors had to be informed of the birth because the new son would need their protection throughout his life. The elders and leaders had to recognize the birth because the son was going to share in the common wealth of the clan of which they were the guardians.

Their recognition was not merely a formality. It was given only after they were satisfied that the son’s birth was fully verified. In most cases, it goes without saying, there could be no doubt of the authenticity of the claim to clan membership, but sometimes problems could arise. Many men had concubines, whom they often took with scant ceremony, and whom they could in practice if not in theory renounce with just as little trouble. Sons born to concubines were as entitled to full membership as were those born to wives, but their real position was somewhat precarious. “Lighting the lantern” gave the father the backing of clan protection against the concubine should she try to remove the son. It also gave the concubine new status as the mother of a clan member, and so gave her protection against any rejectionist whim of the father.

Registration was even more important in the case of adopted sons. Nearly all clans had strict rules about adoption procedures. Here, for example, is the written rule of one major New Territories clan:

Male children may not be given in adoption to families of another surname, nor may males of a different surname be taken in adoption. Anyone lacking an heir should adopt a son of one of his own brothers. If there should not be one to adopt, then he must choose a suitable male of the next generation and nearest collateral branch of the clan If even in the whole clan no heir can be found, the line should be marked "ended".⁵¹

By recognizing the adopted son the elders effectively prevented any future query about the legitimacy of the adoption.

In the village in which I lived, the lantern-lighting tradition began to die out at the beginning of the 20th century. A free-thinking and very influential member of the clan had refused to do it when his sons were born, and other people followed his lead. The elders were so alarmed at the trend that they offered to provide a pig out of clan funds every year, so reducing the cost of the feast to the parents. For a while their gambit worked, but the rigours of the Japanese occupation during the Pacific War put a stop to this and many other customs, and they were not revived when peace came.

Nowadays in that particular village "lighting the lantern" is only done in special circumstances. The one illustrated here was put up, if I remember rightly, to mark the birth of a son to a clan member working and living in England. By accepting the registration, the elders gave clan membership to the child which otherwise might have had great difficulty in proving its birth right. Another year a lantern was put up for a grown man adopted by a clan member who had returned heirless to the village after several decades working as a seaman.

Yet, in other villages the custom is still very much alive. I have seen rows and rows of little oil lamps in the hall of one major clan at New Year, each lamp representing one new-born son. And in another village, I know that the clan actually levies fines of pork on parents who neglect to "light the lantern".



Building a permanent grave is no light matter for the man who believes in geomancy. The costs are high, and great attention must be paid to detail.

The most difficult thing to do is to find a site in the first place. There are so many graves scattered around the hills of the New Territories that it is almost inevitable that all the prime sites were taken up decades if not centuries ago. In this case a long long search had been rewarded with a hitherto undiscovered spot on a remote island in Mirs Bay.

The geomancer, having found his site, took a specialist grave-builder out there and explained how he wanted the grave built. The grave-builder marked out the site and stuck in three wooden pegs round it. But the pegs had no constructional significance: on each was pasted a piece of red paper bearing the words *hing-gung-daai-gat* (興工大吉) “May good luck attend the work”. Builders of all kinds make use of this formula to avert any evil which might come their way because of disturbing the natural environment.

When the rough outlines of the grave had been carved out of the hillside, the geomancer returned and did the “fine tuning”, making sure that it faced in the right direction so that the maximum benefits of the site would come to the grave’s owner. The tuning was done with a magnetic compass and a red thread, crude instruments for something so important it would seem, but in fact quite adequate in the hands of the expert. The compass was housed in a box marked with a large number of concentric rings each divided into segments. In each segment were one or more mystic characters, the interpretation of which was the geomancer’s responsibility.

The red thread was stretched between pegs driven into the ground above and below the grave-site, and the pegs were adjusted time and again until the geomancer was positive that the thread cut precisely through the segments of the compass-surround that would give the desired benefits. The thread then served as a guideline for the final brick and cement construction, bisecting the grave and giving it direction.

Eight days later the grave was near enough completed. In a short ceremony the site was ritually purified, the two urns containing the bones of the owner’s grandfather and grandmother were buried in it, and the gravestone (framed in black and white at the bottom in the photograph) was set in place.

The final sealing and decoration could now be done, and this shot was taken at the ceremony held another six days later to mark the ‘grand opening’ of the grave. The two ancestors were worshipped, as were the Earth Gods which had been installed to protect the site. Offerings included three whole pigs — one roasted and two uncooked — plus the normal range of fruits, chicken, tea, wine, candles and incense. There was also a heap of buns called *cha-gwoh* (茶菓). These consist of a nut filling in a very sweet, chewy, rice-flour casing, the whole dyed a violent red colour. My heart sank when I saw them, because I knew they would be handed out after the ancestors had had their fill — and to say that I find them unappetizing is to do injustice to the strength of my feelings on the subject. Sure enough, a couple of them were pressed upon me and I manfully set to work on mastication. “I don’t know how you could eat those things,” said one of my Chinese friends, “I throw mine away.” Happily there is a saying: “When in Rome ...,” so I surreptitiously sidled over and dropped what I had left into the undergrowth (to join all the others that ungrateful guests had abandoned there).

In the background on a scaffolding can be seen a long string of firecrackers which were let off in order to “wake up” the Earth Gods and the dragon in the hills, so that they would get on with their job of protecting the grave. The string lasted for 4¾ minutes and must have cost about \$600 even in 1963.

A feast for all the participants was held in the owner’s ancestral hall, and after that all that remained was for the geomantic benefits to begin to flow. And they did: the grandsons which the grave had been aligned to produce were born within about a year. The cost, exclusive of firecrackers and feast, was probably somewhere between \$1,500–2,000, which in 1963 was quite a lot of money. The owner thought it well worth it, but somewhat ruefully told me that he had another ten unburied ancestors to worry about yet.

One detail which is not obvious to the observer concerns the writing carved on the gravestone. It was pointed out to me that no matter what it said it must be said in the correct number of characters per column. It works on the principle of the “Silk, satin, cotton, rags” or “Coach, carriage, wheelbarrow, dungcart” counting systems for cherry-stones left on your plate. The sequence consists of five characters 生老病死苦 “Birth, old age, sickness, death, hardship”. Of these only the first two are auspicious, so the number of characters in a column on the gravestone must be 6 or 7, 11 or 12, 16 or 17, etc. In this case it was 12, so “old age” was to be the lot of the owner. Here too the results seemed to justify the trouble taken — he remained youthful well past his “three score years and ten”.



Tai Po Market used to meet nine times each lunar month, as did several other markets of the New Territories. It was built on the sea, at the western end of Tolo Harbour, and as a meeting ground for land and sea dwellers it had its own special flavour. The interdependence of land and sea was clearly demonstrated: the boat people sold the fish the land dwellers needed, and the land dwellers sold the vegetables, rice and products the fishermen could not provide for themselves.

In this photograph taken on market day the distinctive woven hats of the boat people would be sufficient evidence of a fish stall even if their wares were not visible.

Over a thousand years ago Tolo Harbour was famous as a pearl-fishing ground. It was under state control, and a special force of pearl-fishers was maintained under strict military-style discipline. Successive Emperors exploited the beds so heavily that by the 17th century they had become unprofitable and were abandoned. The water people of the area were doubtless much relieved. Pearl-fishing was extremely hazardous, and it had often proved necessary to use forceful methods before the divers would risk their lives and health.

Such pearls as have been found since then have tended to be small and of little value as gems. But they have a market in the field of Chinese medicine: ground up to a powder they are believed to work as a sedative and expectorant.

Fish has always been an important item of diet for the Chinese, and many hundred different species of fresh- and salt-water fish are eaten.

Fresh-water farming of fish has been developed over the centuries to a fine art. Ponds may be stocked with many varieties of fish, each of which feeds at a different level or off different elements of the food-chain. It is possible, for instance, to rear common carp, the mud carp, the big-head carp, the black carp, the silver carp and the grass carp all in the same pond, while the surface could be used for rearing ducks or geese.

Salt-water fish farming is a comparatively recent innovation, but it has been taken up enthusiastically by some of the fishing communities round Hong Kong's shores. The somewhat "Heath-Robinson" accumulations of planks and oil-drums moored out in the bays are the surface indications of the teeming tanks and cages below.

It is not so many years since fish in Hong Kong was nearly all bought live. The over-fishing of local waters and the need to catch fish in larger quantities have meant that this guarantee of freshness is now a luxury. It is not easy to keep fish alive for long periods, and net-fishing frequently damages the fish so that they cannot be kept alive anyway. Fish caught for live sale have to be caught with hook and line, and that makes them expensive — where they used to be sold by the catty they are now sold by the ounce, but that does not disguise how costly they are.

Cantonese cuisine has a mastery of seafood which is surely unsurpassed in the world, and the prime examples of its art must be the many variants on one very basic recipe. The fresh fish is steamed in a light sauce made principally of oil, soy sauce, fresh ginger and green onions. It must never be over-cooked — the flesh should part with the backbone slightly reluctantly.

When the meat has been eaten from one side of the fish many Chinese will not turn the fish over. There is a superstition that this would cause the boat that caught it to capsize. So it is advisable to remove the bone with the chopsticks, or else to dig out the meat from underneath the bone.

Another belief ensures that at Chinese New Year no businessman neglects to have fish as part of his celebration meal. The Cantonese word for fish

(*yue* 魚) sounds just like the word for “surplus” (*yue* 餘), and surplus is what the businessman craves.

Various fish are common in Chinese folklore. The carp (*lei-yue* 鯉魚) is probably the best known. It is considered to be a symbol of success attained through perseverance, and is therefore associated with the passing of examinations. This explanation can be found in many sources, and is said to derive from the carp’s ability to swim against the current.

But the sources also say that it is really the Yellow River sturgeon which is meant, not the carp, because the sturgeon fights its way up the Dragon Gate (Lung-moon 龍門) rapids and is then transformed into a dragon. In much the same way the scholar wins new status through arduous study.

I have a new element to add to the confusion. On the roof of an ancestral hall in one New Territories village is a pair of very fine porcelain fish. The villagers told me that they were symbols of academic success and were called *ngo-yue* (鰲魚). My dictionary confirms that this creature is indeed associated with the highest examination honours — but it translates its name as “sea-tortoise”. Yet another take-over bid by the carp?



In societies dominated by witchcraft and magic, we are told, the failure of the practitioners of these arts to obtain the results they claim is taken as evidence that magic works, not as proof that it is useless. The reason is that the practices are so complex that an explanation for failure can be found in the neglect of some petty ritual detail, or in the existence of counter-magic. And

of course a belief in counter-magic is in itself a belief in magic — the man who believes that crossing his fingers will save him from baleful influences is admitting that he believes in those baleful influences.

Nor is this kind of thinking confined to exotic or “primitive” people. Does the Christian who sees his prayer unanswered cease to believe in God? No, he reasons either that his prayer was not in accordance with God’s purpose, or that someone else’s prayer conflicted with his (farmers pray for rain, while holiday-makers want sun), or perhaps that he has in some way not deserved the granting of his wishes. The system is complex and failure does not discredit it.

Chinese geomancy (*fung-sui* 風水 “wind and water”) is as complex as any belief system could be. Only the specialist geomancer can find his way through the mass of details which have to be considered when siting a building or grave. And even when he has done his work well there are so many things that can happen to mar his layout that failure is easily explained away.

A successfully exploited geomantic site can produce all-round benefits for those who live in it or who bury their dead in it. But often sites are chosen with some special purpose in mind — to get rich, say, or to make fertile a marriage which has failed to produce children.

Tales of *fung-sui* sites of tremendous potency are common. On a small island near Kat O in Mirs Bay there is a large rock cleft in two from top to bottom. Opposite on the mainland is a hill with a similar split in the top. A man from a nearby village told me that both the rock and the hill were whole until the Qing dynasty Qian Long period (A.D. 1736–1795). But then one of his ancestors was buried on the side of the hill in a *fung-sui* grave so superbly sited and aligned that the geomancer felt safe in prophesying that in a very few generations the family would become extremely powerful. The Emperor, the man said, got to hear of the grave, feared for the safety of his throne, and sent geomancers down to destroy its influence. This they did by making symbolic cuts over the site with a talismanic peach-wood sword (*to-muk-foo* 桃木符 or *to-muk-gim* 桃木劍), at the same time chanting certain spells. The mere waving of the sword not only ruined the grave’s *fung-sui*, it actually caused the splits in the rock and the hill-top as well. And no-one of that family had become notably powerful since.

Geomantic sites are not always spoiled deliberately, of course. Sometimes the spoiling is accidental or unavoidable. With modern developments in the

New Territories the building of roads or re-direction of water courses often causes *fung-sui* problems.

The photograph shows a pot of five magic charms (one for each of the Five Directions) written out on bamboo, part of the restorative magic made to repair a village's *fung-sui* after a new road had damaged it. A special ceremony called *dun-foo* (壘符) is held on these occasions.

The 1971 volume of the *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* contains accounts of two *dun-foo* ceremonies. One of them was "held on 23 March 1960 in front of the Tsui family ancestral hall at Sai Kung Market to protect the clan from the evil influences of widening Hiram's Highway". For the squeamish the accounts make reading to be avoided.

When the Shek Pik reservoir was being constructed on Lantau Island there were geomantic problems for the Government, as the *New Territories Annual Report 1959–60* makes clear:

"fung shui" objections from the villagers occasionally posed difficulties, most of which were satisfactorily solved The settlement of problems included payment for the holding of a number of "tun fu" ceremonies which the villagers considered would safeguard the villages lying under the catchwaters or adjacent to work sites where blasting of rocks was required.⁵²

Government and *fung-sui* have confronted each other on many occasions, and will doubtless continue to do so. But I suspect there will never be another case like the following one taken from the *Annual Report 1951–52*:

When [the District Officer] found himself faced with objections by one of the most litigious villages in the New Territories to proposals by a man from town to obtain white clay under permit from a hill near the coast, he felt he was on his mettle, and at the week-end went back to his old University, the University of Hong Kong, and borrowed from the library there several books on *fung shui*. When the hearing of the case continued after the week-end, he severely grilled the village's chief witness, their geomancer, who broke down under his examination. The outcome was that the objection by the village was overruled, and the village requested the District Officer to become their geomancer in the place of the discredited adviser.⁵³

The District Officer happened to be the only Chinese in the Administrative Service at that time. It is very unlikely that a British official could have coped in the same way.

36 _____ Lion-heads



Macau has so much life compressed into such a small space that it is very difficult not to stumble across something interesting every few yards. I was wandering through the streets with my camera one day when it suddenly began to pour with rain. I dashed under the nearest shelter, and there sat this gentleman, Mr. Yeung, happily performing lobotomies on *papier-mâché* lion-heads. There can be few third-generation *papier-mâché* lion-head makers alive, but I no longer am surprised at meeting such phenomena — in Macau anything can happen.

Mr. Yeung's grandfather started the business over a century ago in Hong Kong, I was told. At that time he made the lion-heads as children's toys, but a buyer imported some to Singapore, where customers started worshipping them as gods. In no time they became very popular, and still in 1978 Mr. Yeung was exporting most of his output to Southeast Asia, where in places as wide apart as Celebes and Kuala Lumpur they are hung up on walls and prayed to for good luck, and especially for wealth.

But why should the lion bring wealth? There is no obvious reason. China has no lions, and it is likely that they only came into the culture with the import

of Buddhism from India around the 1st century A.D. Buddhist symbolism gives them the role of guardians of the law and of temple buildings. Later they were adopted as “scare-demons”, because ghosts were thought to be afraid of their fierce appearance, and all kinds of buildings had them installed at the gates, including banks. The Hongkong and Shanghai Bank’s great lions are considered particularly lucky and, if you watch, you will see lots of people touching the brightly-rubbed paws as they walk by. Perhaps the connection between banks and lions explains the connection between lions and wealth-worship?

Lion-dancing (*mo-si-ji* 舞獅子) is a great favourite with Chinese festival crowds, and the noise of the drums and cymbals which accompany the dances is as much part of the excitement as are the athletic feats of the two- or three-man teams who roll and leap under the gaudy skins.

Bredon and Mitrophanow describe ritual activity in Beijing in the early years of the 20th century. Their comments nicely link in the lion-dancing with earlier Buddhist influences, and the dances sound very much like those which can still be seen in Hong Kong:

Each troupe is composed of two or three mountebanks with rude but picturesque properties. Their entertainment has been handed down from the Indian jugglers and itinerant animal trainers who first appeared in China under the T’ang dynasty. As live lions are not obtainable in this country, a cloth lion serves their purpose, being manipulated by two men under a skin, one carrying the cardboard head, the other the hind quarters. The dances ... were originally supposed to have the power of a demon-expelling ceremony, because the lion was an emblem of Buddha and protector of religion.⁵⁴

C. A. S. Williams points out one peculiarity of lions which I had never heard of before:

There is an ancient legend relating that the lion produces milk from its paws, and therefore hollow balls were placed in the hills by the country people, with the result that the lions, who enjoyed sporting with the balls, would leave some of their milk in them, which the people would secure.⁵⁵

He doesn’t say what the milk was required for, but I would guess that it would have been considered aphrodisiac — like so many other exotic or rare foods.

“Lion’s head” (*si-ji-tau* 獅子頭) is eaten in China, but it is neither aphrodisiac nor rare. It is in fact a rather fanciful name for the common-or-garden meat-ball made of minced pork and cabbage.

Mr. Yeung's lion-heads come in nine different sizes. He explained that most of his customers are gamblers. If the head they buy fails to repay their worship of it by bringing them luck at gambling, they burn it and buy another size, and if that fails they try another size, and so on.

"But surely they then become double losers?" I said. "They lose on the lion-heads as much as on the horses."

"Ah," said Mr. Yeung, "You must look at it the way they do. In a six-dog race, one must win — and with nine sizes of head to try, sooner or later they will get the result they pray for."

Whether he believed in this philosophy or not I was not told, but either way he at least comes out the winner — he said that he can sell as many as he can make.

I was reminded of Mr. Yeung and his thriving export business when I recently came across an item in a missionary book published in 1901:

One's blood runs cold to read of a certain firm in Birmingham which makes money out of idols manufactured for China. They have recently stated that "a member of the firm is at present in China, and the fruits of his visit, combined with the present period of dulness, will soon be seen in a fresh supply of Chinese idols more hideous in design and turned out in larger numbers than ever."⁵⁶

The Cantonese have a phrase *leung-tai* (兩睇) "there are two ways of looking at things" — Mr. Yeung's and the missionary writer's?

37 _____ Incantation



The ability of Buddhism to ward off evil is not questioned in rural Chinese religious belief. Buddhism may be only one element in a multi-faceted system, but it has powerful gods and charms. The Bodhisattva Gwoon Yam (觀音), Goddess of Mercy, is probably the most widely worshipped and universally efficacious of all Chinese gods. And the Amita Buddha, the

Buddha of Boundless Light, is almost as much invoked as Gwoon Yam. He is the ruler of the “Western Paradise” (Sai-tin 西天), the Chinese substitute for Nirvana, and has considerable power.

When the Monkey God was turning Heaven upside down with his mischief, the Jade Emperor sent more than 100,000 god warriors against him without success. Laotse (Lo-ji 老子), the founder of Taoism, was equally ineffective against the Monkey. Finally the Jade Emperor (Yuk-wong Daai-dai 玉皇大帝) called in the Buddha, who challenged Monkey that he couldn't jump out of his hand. Since the Buddha's hand was only 8 Chinese inches across, Monkey accepted, used his magic to jump 108,000 Chinese miles, and ... found himself still in Buddha's palm.

The incantation *Na-mo-a-mi-toh-faat*, “Homage to Amita Buddha”, if repeated often enough, is said to guarantee admission to the Western Paradise, and so is a good method of escaping from the cycle of rebirth and suffering.

In the New Territories, this incantation is most often met with carved on granite stones or concrete slabs like the one in this photograph. The characters are usually picked out in red paint. Wherever found, the stones mean the same thing — someone has met a violent or unnatural death at that place.

In this case the stone has been set up beside a village well into which a child had fallen and been drowned. The incantation seems to have a double function. Because of its saving power it brings peace to the soul of the dead child, but at the same time it is there to guard against the possibility of anyone else's falling down the well. These two are really one, in that it is usually assumed that someone who has died a death of this kind becomes an unquiet spirit whose one hope of release from suffering is to find a substitute. So the spirit tries always to lure the living to a death in the same manner.

De Groot says of these “water-spectres”:

Having spent some time in their wet abode in the bondage of the watergods, they may be redeemed from this servitude by substitution, and therefore they lie in ambush for victims to draw into the water and make them take their place. Thus they are a constant lurking danger for people on the waterside, fishers, boatmen and washerwomen. They blow hats into the water, or bleaching linen, or other articles, and while the owner exerts himself to recover his property, they treacherously keep the thing just outside his reach, until he loses his equilibrium and falls into a watery grave.⁵⁷

In similar vein, people who have fallen prey to tigers are considered to become slaves to the animal. Their first task after death is to undress their own corpse, so that the tiger can get at the meat better, and it is said that the clothes of a tiger's victim are often found neatly folded beside the bones. The usual way to escape from this slavery is to find a substitute, so that a tiger which has once killed a human is led to kill again and again by successive victims. A more subtle way for the spirit to escape is to lead its tiger into a trap so that it gets killed.

In Hong Kong no tiger has been seen since the 1940s, so there is little to fear from this type of spirit.

Suicides also are thought to haunt the world to find substitutes, and a chain of suicides is thus created. For this reason it is often hard to let or sell premises in which there has been a suicide — but then, would you be eager?

The deliberate committing of suicide on the doorstep of someone who has wronged you ensures an eventual revenge, and Chinese folk tales frequently come back to this theme.

De Groot tells a very sad tale of a man who noticed someone trying to get over the wall into a neighbour's house. He went in to warn them, and they searched for the burglar, but found instead a woman of the family about to hang herself — the intruder had been a suicide-ghost looking for a victim. The man went home very pleased with himself for frustrating the ghost's designs. When he told his wife, she asked him to demonstrate how it had happened. He stood on a chair, slung a rope from the rafters, and put it round his neck to show the position the woman had been in when discovered in the nick of time. Suddenly the chair fell over, and "swung him into eternity with a broken neck. Thus the rancorous spectre had its victim, and its vengeance in addition."⁵⁸

Anyone driving round the New Territories with his eyes open can see many of these stone incantations to the Buddha. Wherever there has been a fatal road accident, local people tend to put them up beside the road. I noticed one on Coloane Island in Macau at a spot where the road came down to the sea. Presumably a car had driven straight into the water.

But in case all this talk of ghosts should be misleading, let me note that when the stone in the photograph was put up, the villagers also installed a cover for the well. Gods, even perhaps Buddhas, are prone to lapses from perfection, and it does no harm to have extra protection.



The old Supreme Court building shown here is one of the few “old” (early 20th-century) buildings of Hong Kong. It has no particular significance for me as a building, but it symbolizes by its existence and its central position the importance of the law. Without problems of international law there might conceivably never have been a Hong Kong at all.

When the British began to trade with China in the 18th century, they ran into many problems, not the least of them being that China did not really want to indulge in the trade.

The Chinese legal system was a particular bone of contention, because it was founded on completely different principles from Western law. Foreigners who had the misfortune to fall foul of it were exposed to treatment which they considered quite unjust. Mutual responsibility was a major tenet of the law. Arthur Smith in *Chinese Characteristics* cites a case in 1873 when:

a Chinese was accused and convicted of having broken open the grave of a relative of the Imperial family, in order to rob the coffin of certain gold, silver, and jade ornaments which had been buried in it. The entire family of the criminal, consisting of four generations, from a man more than ninety years of age to a female infant only a few months old, was exterminated. Thus eleven

persons suffered death for the offence of one. And there was no evidence to show that any of them were parties to, or were even aware of, his crime.⁵⁹

In another case, a soldier who had stolen a few boxes of bullets was beaten and banished to the frontier. His immediate superior was beaten and dismissed, the lieutenant in charge was cashiered, and there were requests for the commanding general to be punished too. When this approach was applied to foreigners there was bound to be an outcry. Take the following case from Wells Williams's *The Middle Kingdom*:

In 1784 a native was killed by a ball left in a gun when firing a salute, and the Chinese, on the principle of requiring life for life, demanded the man who had fired the gun. Knowing that the English were not likely to give him up, the police seized Mr. Smith, the supercargo of the vessel, and carried him a prisoner into the city. On the seizure of this gentleman the ships' boats were ordered up from Whampoa with armed crews to defend the factories. A messenger from the Chinese, however, declared that their purpose in seizing Smith was simply to examine him on the affair, to which statement the captive himself added a request that the gunner should be sent up to the authorities and submit to their questions. Trusting too much to their promises, the man was allowed to go alone before the officials within the city walls, when Mr. Smith was immediately liberated and the unhappy gunner strangled, after some six weeks' confinement, by direct orders of the Emperor. The man, probably, underwent no form of trial intelligible to himself ...⁶⁰

Torture was regularly used in magistrates' courts to extract confessions, and plaintiffs, witnesses and accused were all equally liable to suffer finger-squeezing, ankle-squeezing or beating in the course of a trial.

The Chinese had always attempted to keep foreigners at arm's length, confining them to trading at Canton (Guangzhou) only; and for the most part they were in practice not unwilling to leave disciplinary procedures to the leaders of the "long-nosed devils" themselves. By the Treaty of Nanking of 1842 the Chinese government conceded to the British in China the right to be subject to their own laws and to be tried by their own consuls. It was a major issue which the British had long wanted settled. That the Treaty also ceded the small island of Hong Kong to Britain was at the time perhaps a rather more trivial matter.

The principle of independently applied law for the British was soon demanded by other nations, and Extraterritoriality (as it is usually known)

became the accepted standard. Abuses were not long in appearing. In 1856 the "Arrow incident" occurred and lit the fuse to the second Anglo-Chinese War. McAleavy in his *Modern History of China* has a suitably cool appraisal of the justice of the British cause for complaint:

In October 1856, police at Canton boarded the sailing vessel Arrow and arrested twelve members of her Chinese crew on charges of piracy and smuggling. The ship's owner was Chinese, but she had been registered in Hong Kong, had a British captain and was flying the British flag. True the registration had expired, but it was decided to pursue the incident to the bitter end⁶¹

But for a catalogue of abuses it would be hard to beat the fascinating writings of Carl Crow, an 'Old China Hand' from Shanghai, a man of considerable charm and perspicacity. In his *Foreign Devils in the Flowery Kingdom* he points out some of the consequences of having the many different systems of law practised at the same time:

With the laws of a dozen countries administered by as many different courts, it was not to be expected that the scales of justice would follow the same model or use the same weights and the idea that justice was blind was placed in the same category as a belief in Santa Claus One of the early tangles the judges ran into was the fact that witnesses of nationalities other than their own were completely outside their control. An American testifying in a British court might commit the most flagrant and obvious perjury, and the most the British judge could do was to scold him. The judge could not even fine him or send him to jail for contempt.⁶²

So confident did foreigners become in their invulnerability to Chinese law that the more adventurous travelled wherever they wanted and took advantage of local officials who were uncertain as to what powers they had in their own territories.

I have always found it amazing that Britain and the United States did not formally relinquish their extraterritorial rights until 1943.

Meanwhile, back in Hong Kong, extraterritoriality was hardly an issue. The Colony came to be governed under British law, with Chinese customary law applying where it did not seriously run counter to the principles of the former. The Supreme Court was at the centre of *all* the Colony's law.



China was and still largely is a land of villages, and village life has always been quiet. Before the introduction of machinery, farm-work was not a noisy affair, and for the solitary weeder in the fields as much as for the housebound wife there can have been little distraction for the ear. Is that, I wonder, why festivals, rituals and entertainments are attended by such an excess of din? to make up for too little noise in normal times?

Rural landscape was drab. The land was tilled and planted to uniform patterns, and almost every house in a village was built of the same material, to the same design, and faced the same way. Colour there was, but it was subtle and muted — greens in the fields, greys in the villages — and the blacks and dark blues of peasant clothing did little to brighten the scene. Is that why festivals, rituals and entertainments are riots of garishness?

This photograph was taken at a ten-yearly *da-jiu* (打醮) festival at the village of Ha Tsuen in the New Territories. The silver, green and pink 65-metre long dragon flashes brightly in the sun as it prances through the equally colourful ceremonial arch. The trousers of the men who dance it are

lurid pinks and yellows and blues and greens, adding to the rainbow scene. Drums, cymbals and gongs thunder and clash, matched only by the shouts and shrieks of dancers and crowd.

The total effect is dazzlingly exciting — I was wrong to use the word “garishness”, it is far too mealy-mouthed for the atmosphere of gaiety and relaxation which is generated on these occasions.

The dragon motif is echoed on the pillar of the arch, and it is really the arch which catches my eye in this shot. It was erected specially for the festival and has no practical function. In large characters over the top it says “Purification rituals for peace”, the full name of the *da-jiu* festival. Above the dragon’s head is the wish “May the country be prosperous and the people at peace”. And most interesting of all, across the lintel it says “Congratulations from the Ha Tsuen villagers living in Britain”.

Like so many other villages of the New Territories, Ha Tsuen has sent large numbers of its sons to Europe to work in restaurants and hotels. More and more of them have made permanent homes in the West, but ties to their native village are strong. On this occasion more than a hundred made the expensive journey back so as to be present at the ceremonies.

I asked a young restaurant worker from Holland how he knew when it was time to come home for the *da-jiu*. He’d been written to, he said, and his father had been fairly insistent on it. Besides, there was another reason: he’d been born in a year when there’d been a *da-jiu*, so he had been given the name Jiu Fong (醮方), and with *jiu* in his name how could he forget or ignore the ceremony? — it came round on his 10th, 20th, 30th, etc. year.

But not everyone could take leave or throw up a job in order to get back, and those villagers in Britain who could not get away clubbed together to buy the arch — it cost some HK\$8,000, no small sum in 1975.

The ceremonial gateway or arch (*paai-lau* 牌樓) has a long tradition in China. In particular it was used to show respect for worthy people, and the Emperor would occasionally order the erection of one to commemorate achievements of unusual merit such as extraordinary loyalty to the throne, great charitable works, keeping a family undivided for five generations, or reaching the venerable age of a hundred.

Most common of all, probably, were the arches erected to the memory of widows who had remained chaste, and to those who chose to commit suicide

in order to accompany their deceased husbands into the after-life. There are some sickening accounts in the literature of the public ceremonies with which such women elected to make their exits from this life. Inevitably the stories end with a mention of the erection of a congratulatory arch.

De Groot gives some examples of arches awarded for acts of great filial piety:

to children who had saved their father or mother from a great danger at peril or the cost of their own lives;- to spinsters and widows who worked hard for the maintenance of their parents or parents-in-law, obstinately refusing to marry or re-marry, lest they should be compelled to abandon those relations, going so far even as to cut off their hair, in order to avoid all marriage-proposals;- to children who, in order to cure their sick parents or parents-in-law, gave them to eat, properly roasted, boiled, or otherwise prepared, a piece of their own flesh from the thigh, buttock, breast or arm, or a finger, or a dose of their blood, etc. etc.⁶³

It seems, however, that the Emperor's munificence was not boundless, for De Groot goes on to point out that the standard sum paid out by the treasury was only thirty taels of silver, "hardly sufficient to pay for the foundation stone". Perhaps it didn't matter too much — he also notes that only the wealthiest families could afford the enormous expense of a public hanging ceremony for their widows.

Who said it's always "the rich wot gets the gravy"?

40 _____ Tablets



Chinese religion is a complex affair, and a confusing farrago to peoples brought up in monotheistic faiths. Over the millennia of their long history the Chinese have adopted religions from abroad to add to their own native beliefs.

While at times there has been religious intolerance, the eventual outcome has usually been one of compromise and melding of beliefs into a total all-embracing system. Those religions which refused to compromise (and Protestant Christianity was one) have not fared well under this system.

Buddhism, an import from India around the 1st century A.D., is often considered to be *the* religion of China. Yet the number of true Buddhists must always have been very small. Most people acquired some measure of Buddhist faith, but at the same time believed in Taoism, animism, and other religious elements.

Of all the beliefs ancestor worship was probably the most deep-seated and important. It certainly goes back to pre-historic times, for the earliest records already mention the power of the ancestors as gods.

When a man (or woman) died, the relationship which he had had with his son was thought to continue, and the mutual regard and service which each had paid to the other during his life took on new forms. The dead man became a god who could bring his spiritual powers to the aid of his living son. In return the son kept up a constant stream of sacrificial offerings, which pleased and provided for the god in the harsh after-world in which he now dwelt.

When the son in turn died, his son would not only be required to worship him but to take over the worship which had been his responsibility before. In this way the living had heaped upon their shoulders the upkeep of generations of ancestors.

A daughter was not really part of this system, because she was normally married out to someone else's family, where she joined with her husband in the worship of his ancestors.

One of the features of this worship was that it made a church of the family, because the tablets at which the ancestors' souls could be worshipped were kept in the home and were the gods of the family. Naturally this church was a very exclusive one, with membership granted by birth or marriage or adoption into the family, and with no possibility of missionary effort. Ancestor worship was, in fact, an entirely appropriate religion for a society which laid such heavy stress on the importance of the family unit as did the Chinese.

But the family was a unit of variable size, and could be as small as just two or three members or as large as several hundred. And particularly in south-eastern China, of which the New Territories is a part, the family could grow over centuries into a huge lineage (clan) of many thousand people. In the New Territories can be found plenty of villages which until recently were inhabited exclusively by members of one family in this way.

For those great families too ancestor worship was important. It is not surprising that as a general rule the number of ancestors worshipped increased with the size of the family unit doing the worshipping.

In the home, only a few generations-worth of ancestors were usually worshipped; but the clans continued to worship ancestors from many generations and hundreds of years back. They built huge halls in which to house the ancestor tablets, and they held major ceremonies at which the lineage expressed its faith and begged the help of its ancestors in its quest for prosperity, peace and continued strength.

Again, in the home the ancestors were worshipped as individuals who had been known to the living members of the family, at least by hearing their parents and grandparents talk of their exploits. But in the lineage halls there were so many ancestors from so many generations past that no-one alive could think of them all as individuals. So the altars banked high with tablets were the focus of a kind of composite ancestral spirit which was worshipped by the clan elders on behalf of the whole lineage.

In the photograph the interior of one such hall is shown. The altar is only one of three in this hall, and so the tablets visible are only some of those worshipped there.

Ancestor worship has not died out. These tablets receive offerings of tea and incense every day from the caretaker of the hall, and on special occasions, such as the anniversary of the first ancestor's birth, vast quantities of food are laid out on tables before the altars.

The black stand (bottom right) supports a saucer of oil with a wick floating in it. This is the everlasting lamp that is supposed to burn before the ancestors day and night. (In this case, inexplicably, it was not alight.) Many halls have installed little electric bulbs which, of course, do not need constant attention.

Ruined temples and shrines there are in the New Territories, but for the time being at least it seems that ancestral halls are almost all being kept up. The sense of family unity at all levels of Chinese society is still strong.



A piece of clean-looking modern engineering framed by a ramshackle old-fashioned contraption in the foreground. The bridge is the first one linking Macau with its islands of Coloane and Taipa, photographed in 1973 a few months before completion. The other construction looks like a launching ramp for human cannonballs, complete with safety net (and the sea if that fails). It isn't of course, it's a fishing stake-net (*jang-pang* 罾棚).

By letting out wires running over pulleys, the net is lowered right down into the sea, where it remains until the fisherman thinks he may have fish swimming above it. Then he quickly winds in the wires, the edges of the net rise out of the water, as here, and the fish (if there are any) are trapped in the bottom of it. After that all the man has to do is to “walk the plank” to the position above the net, and there dip out the catch with a long-handled net.

For me it used to be one of the attractions of Macau, and I could sit there in the sun for hours watching the net fail to catch anything. It was particularly recommended as a source of free entertainment in the long waiting period

between being cleaned out at the Casino and the departure of the cheap ferry back to Hong Kong. For all I know, the fishermen may have been paid by the Casino for this very purpose — it is hard to see how they could make a living otherwise.

Of course, stake-netting does not have to be carried on only in the muddied waters of Macau's harbour. Nor is it by any means the most important way of making a living from the sea. The stake-nets seem to have been operated exclusively by land-dwellers, the boat people having nothing to do with them.

There are two main groups of boat-dwellers. The larger one is known to the Cantonese as the *Daan-ga* (蛋家), "Egg Families", usually spelled "*Tanka*" by Westerners. The name is much resented by the people themselves, who prefer the term *sui-seung-yan* (水上人), "People who live on the water". Their resentment is understandable, as the word *daan* (蛋 "egg") figures in a number of Chinese swear-words, and one common local word for a prostitute is *daan-ga-mooi* (蛋家妹), "*Tanka* girl".

The *sui-seung-yan* speak Cantonese, though as might be expected their vocabulary differs considerably from that of landlubbers. There is a tradition among the latter that the *sui-seung-yan* were not originally Chinese at all, and as evidence they point to these vocabulary differences and to certain physical differences observable in the boat-dwellers — darker skins, lighter-coloured hair, less developed leg muscles, greater shoulders, etc. — but all these features can be explained by the exposure to a sea-bound environment and the nature of their work. Again, the *sui-seung-yan* resent the inference and are convinced of their own Chineseness.

The other group of boat people are known as either *Fuk-lo* or *Hok-lo*. These are variant pronunciations of the term *fuk-lo* 福佬, which means "Fellows from Fujian". Fujian (福建) is the province higher up the Chinese sea-board opposite Taiwan, and boat people who speak its language are to be found in pockets on many parts of the coast right down to Hainan (海南) Island. The *Hok-lo* are said by some to be an aboriginal people who have acquired Chineseness over the course of the centuries. The probability is that all the boat peoples are of mixed blood, certainly mixtures of different Chinese sub-cultures and perhaps of aboriginal stocks as well, but the same probability applies to many of the land dwellers too.

All the boat people are supposed to suffer from “land-sickness” when they come ashore, and perhaps it is not to be wondered at, when virtually every hour of their lives is spent on an unsteady boat. The boats vary enormously in size. The great deep-sea junks have crews of up to sixty people, and may be at sea for a fortnight or more at a time. The smallest boats may have just one couple, perhaps with their young children, and they stay always within sight of land.

Many different fishing systems are employed, from catching fish on hooks and lines to trapping them in baited pots on the sea bed; and from trawling between two junks to various kinds of “seining”, in which a weighted and floated net is laid out in a circle to trap fish. As late as the 1950s it was still possible to see small boats fishing with cormorants. The birds had rings round their necks to prevent their swallowing the catch. The most tedious and most expensive method in terms of manpower is known as “long-lining”, where large numbers of hooks are spaced out along main lines run out from the boat. Each hook has to be baited separately. The advantage is that the fish are caught undamaged, and can be brought back live to serve the valuable gourmet market.

At certain times of the year, stake-nets used to be very profitable on the Hong Kong coasts. The main seasons were in the spring and summer, and a good shoal could give rich harvests.

I watched a massive stake-net in operation on the south side of Hong Kong Island in February some years ago. There was no plank out to the net: the fishermen rowed out to it in a small dinghy. They were catching a lot of good-sized fish and a fair number of “crabs” — it was obvious that they were not boat people.



The Chinese Almanac (*lik-sue* 曆書 or *tung-sue* 通書 or *tung-sing* 通勝) is chock full of information on how to order your life so as not to run foul of men or gods.

On the worldly side, there are guides to palm-reading and physiognomy which help in judging other men's characters; quotations from Confucian moral works which help to make you a good neighbour and an inoffensive member of society; practical information such as how to convert Chinese characters into four-figure codes for telegraphic purpose; a complete list of the surnames of China; and a vocabulary list of everyday terms in English with built-in pronunciation guide (*do-laa-ma-si-lam* 都拉孖士林 "dried mushroom"; *ha-si-pang* 蝦士朋 "husband", etc.).

The aids to a better accommodation with the spiritual world include lucky charms which can be copied out to preserve you from various hazards such as stomach ache, attack by wild animals, and accidents while travelling. Then there are lists of things to avoid if born at a particular time, fortune-telling poems, astrological charts, and guides to the interpretation of phenomena like a buzzing in the ears, or a dog barking at you, or your clothes catching on a bush.

The Almanac's mixture of practicalities and unworldliness is a reflection of popular attitudes. C. K. Yang summed it up with striking clarity:

The images of gods and spirits came to vivid life in stories told among adults as well as in nursery tales for children, so that in the popular mind the world of spirits intermingled intimately with the world of man. Even many agnostic modern Chinese intellectuals retain a childhood memory of sensing the realistic presence of the ancestors' spirits in front of the shadowy ancestral altar on a dark night. And many a southern boy, before urinating in a dark street corner at night, would announce in a low voice, "I am going to urinate. Please stand aside," so that some carelessly wandering spirit would not be splashed unawares.⁶⁴

Life has never been easy for the great mass of the Chinese people. R. H. Tawney described it in 1932:

There are districts in which the position of the rural population is that of a man standing permanently up to the neck in water, so that even a ripple is sufficient to drown him.⁶⁵

In such conditions it is not surprising that men should look for explanations of the frequent disasters and of the random and unreasonable selection of victims. Evil spirits constitute one kind of explanation: they swarm over the world, making trouble for the living whenever offended, and dangerous even when not provoked.

The Almanac gives help with the control of evil spirits. In particular it lays down which days are most auspicious for their worship and appeasement. The 1st and 15th days of the lunar month (that is, the new moon and full moon) are always good for ritual activity, but other days, perhaps two or three a month, are specially designated for worship, and then New Territories women can be seen doing the rounds of the village gods and making offerings to the spirits.

After New Year, often in the second lunar month, it is the custom to take advantage of one of these special ritual days to perform the *jok-fuk* (作福 "creating blessings") ceremony. Women go round to the places where evil spirits are known to congregate and pray there for a year's freedom from harassment for members of their family.

The photograph shows the aftermath of *jok-fuk* at one such dangerous place. There is marsh in the foreground, and women have been buying off the spirits with incense and with paper and bamboo "lotus flowers" which

are left sticking in the mud. Failure to perform the ceremony would mean the possibility of the unappeased spirits dragging people into the muck and stinking wetness of it.

A horror of marsh and quicksand is not confined to the people of the New Territories, of course, as anyone who has read his Sherlock Holmes stories will know. Nor is Chinese fiction less capable of exploring that horror than English. The bandit heroes of China's most popular novel, *The Water Margin* (*Sui-woo* 水滸), sheltered behind the trackless, reed-grown waters of a marshy lake, the secrets of which were known to only a few local men. In Chapter 19 of the book, a punitive government force is attacked by the bandits using fire-boats and their knowledge of the marsh:

The heat became so intense that the soldiers jumped off their boats and on to the bank to escape; but they were surrounded by reeds and watery wilderness with no solid ground. Then the flames began to crackle towards them through the reeds, and the "bandit catchers" were themselves trapped. The wind was strong and the fire fierce, and they could only escape burning by standing in the mud. Out of the flames shot a small boat, with one man sculling at the stern, and seated in the bow a Taoist priest bearing a gleaming magic sword. "Let not one man escape!" he shouted The soldiers perished in the flames and the mud.⁶⁶

That marsh would certainly be a haunt of evil spirits thereafter, but I confess to being puzzled about the one shown here. You see, the path which leads in from top left of picture goes only to the marsh, and the only purpose in using the path is this worship — so why bother to worship? I could get no satisfactory answer.

43 Beam-raising



The Almanac used to be a state publication in Imperial China, and there were severe sanctions against anyone who produced an unauthorized edition. The state monopoly no longer exists, but a new edition of the Almanac regularly appears each year in Hong Kong. In the villages of the New Territories at least, it continues to guide people through the ritual and secular intricacies of daily life. It lays down the times of each day which are likely to be the luckiest, and the times when misfortune is most likely to strike. It tells what activities are in harmony with the day, and what activities should be avoided.

“Beam-raising” (*seung-leung* 上樑) is frequently mentioned. Indeed, to take just one example, in the 10th lunar month 2010 no fewer than 14 of the 30 days have been designated as good for raising beams. The beam concerned is the ridge-pole of a house. It is always painted red for luck, and when it is placed in position a “topping out” ceremony is held.

The photograph shows the ridge-poles of a row of village houses. But where are the houses? Let me say at once that this is not evidence of a revolutionary building technique which starts at the top and builds downwards.

The explanation lies in the Almanac, according to which a superb day for raising the top beams happened to fall inconveniently early for the builders. In order not to lose the benefits of putting up the beams at the best time, they erected the rough trestles and ceremoniously raised the beams as though they were indeed topping-out. The houses were then built up to the beams and the trestles removed. Such is the Almanac's power.

For the Chinese the family has always been the most important institution in their society. No individual was supposed to consider his own interests before those of the family, and even the interests of the state used to be considered less vital than family solidarity. It follows that the home in which the family lives is of great importance, and every effort has to be made to ensure that it is protected from evil and blessed with good. Housewives spend much time and no little money constantly worshipping the protective deities with which the house is set about.

The purpose of the topping-out ceremony is to bless the house at the earliest possible moment. The scattering of rice as a symbol of fertility and prosperity forms part of the ceremony, and little bags of grain are often hung from the ridge-pole for the same purpose — one can be seen on the right of the picture. But the bag of grain is only one of a number of devices which festoon the pole.

Clearly visible in the middle of the picture hanging down is a bamboo sieve. It is there because it has many holes, and I was told that meant that many children would be born in the house. But I have seen it suggested elsewhere that the sieve actually is to prevent evil from entering the house — only good can pass through the mesh. Both reasons are credible.

The paper lanterns hung on the beams certainly do have a connection with offspring. The word for "lantern" (*dang* 燈) and the word for "son" (*ding* 丁) are similarly pronounced *dang* in the heavy New Territories accent, so the lantern is a punning wish for male children to be born in the house.

A pair of trousers is usually hung over the beam too, and this represents wealth — another pun, because "trousers" (褲) and "wealth" (富) are both pronounced *foo*. Sometimes the trousers are merely passed round the beam

during the ceremony, and I have once seen this happen with the trousers incongruously wrapped round a live chicken.

Chinese ritual is full of puns, as is the Chinese language in general. The reason is not hard to find. Unlike English with its great range of sounds, Chinese makes do with a very limited number of different sounds. Since Chinese needs to say just as many things as does English, these few sounds have got to do duty over and over again. Even in English we cannot avoid using the same sound more than once with different meanings (think of *to*, *two* and *too*, or *beer* and *bier*), and Chinese has the same phenomenon much aggravated.

The Almanac itself has become victim to the pun. The standard term for it in Chinese is *lik-sue* (曆書) meaning “calendar book”, but the Cantonese have evolved a slightly different term *tung-sue* (通書) “all-knowing book”. Unfortunately, by means of a pun, *tung-sue* sounds like words meaning “to lose on all fronts” *tung-sue* (通輸). For the gambling-addicted Cantonese this would never do, so the Almanac is more usually known as the *tung-sing* (通勝), meaning “to win on all fronts”. Far less inauspicious.



They say that “Walls have ears”. For those trained to listen they also have tongues. This undistinguished-looking specimen has little voice left, but it is singing a song of freedom.

The villages of the great clans of the New Territories are built in a mixture of styles and materials. There are huge ancestral halls (*chi-tong* 祠堂), with long blue bricks and granite pillars; high-sided “tea-bucket houses” (*cha-tung-*

uk 茶桶屋), dark and cool inside; poky, incense-smoke-blackened temples (*miu* 廟) to favoured gods; low, brick-built houses with a wooden cockloft as an extra half-floor at the back; a rash of modern three-story Spanish-style terrace houses dwarfing the original lower buildings; wooden sheds for pigs and ducks and chickens; and still, where they survive, the mud-brick hovels of the *sai-man* (細民), sometimes called *ha-fu* (下夫), the hereditary servants who were kept to minister to the needs and status of their powerful masters.

This mud-brick wall, propped up by a much more substantial building, was all that was left of one such hovel in May 1978. The tea-pot? That belongs to a workman who was about to knock down the crumbling remains. This is a record of the wall's last song.

Sai-man came about in this way. A young boy would be bought from a poor family and brought up as a household servant-cum-general-dogsbody-cum-study-companion for his master's sons (if he were lucky). When he had grown up he would be found a wife at his master's expense, given a house (albeit an inferior mud-brick one) and some land to till for a livelihood. So far so good — he had certainly become much better off economically than if he had not been purchased in the first place. He may even have been better off than some of the poorer members of the clan which he served.

But there was of course a catch. By marrying him his wife had also become a servant, and any children they might have would be servants too. Their daughters could eventually be married off to free men, probably as concubines (secondary wives), but their sons were perpetual servants in the same way as the father, and so on for generation after generation.

The *sai-man* was normally employed by the particular family which had bought him but, in addition, at important clan ceremonies he was expected to do all the dirty work, carrying the heavy sacrificial pigs around, washing dishes, humping sedan-chairs, and so on. And all members of the clan could and did make use of his services, though sometimes they had the grace to give a little "tea-money" (*cha-chin* 茶錢) in return.

Some old men told me that they remembered when the generation senior to them used to treat the *sai-man* very badly, swearing at them, addressing them by insulting names, and taking advantage of their wives and daughters. The poor *sai-man* women were supposed to gain Face by receiving the attentions of men of the master clan, said the old men; but they told me it with a snigger,

and I suspect that even their fathers would not really have believed such transparent rationalization.

Sai-man sometimes ran away, forfeiting house and land and assured income in return for freedom and dignity. If they were caught they returned to a good beating. Some *sai-man* did not have to run away — they were either set free voluntarily or were able to buy their freedom with hoarded tea-money. Some were able to salvage their dignity and win respect and good treatment from their masters, even while still in bondage.

By the 1930s the political and economic climate had changed, and the *sai-man* as an institution disappeared. But the people themselves did not necessarily disappear. To this day it is possible to find families of *sai-man* descendants in the New Territories. Some of them still live in the villages which knew their shame — over the generations they had come to think of nowhere else as home.

One school in Kam Tin bears plaques showing that it benefited by donations from *sai-man* families when it was built some years ago. Clearly it was possible both for the freed servants to make good and for them to feel not unkindly towards the village where they had been in such an inferior position.

Another clan actually adopted its *sai-man* into the clan, ending the differential status at a stroke. The gesture was perhaps not quite as disinterested as it appears: the clan in question had been in some danger of dying out for lack of reproductive power, and the infusion of fresh blood was doubtless more than welcome.

On the other hand, some *sai-man* moved away when they were released from servitude in order to escape the stigma. Like mud had they been treated, and their houses were built of an appropriate material. Well, happily, by this time the mud walls seen here, like the misery they once sheltered, have gone.



When a Chinese is born, careful note is taken of the Eight Characters (*baat-ji* 八字) which pinpoint the year, month, day and hour of the birth. In later life these Eight Characters will be needed to compare with those of the boy or girl to whom marriage is proposed, and the wedding will not go ahead unless the two sets of figures, his and hers, are judged compatible by a fortune-teller.

On the first anniversary of the child's birthday there used to be a little ceremony which was supposed to give a clue to its future prospects:

The child is made to sit in a large flat basket which is placed on a table. All sorts of articles are put in the basket within easy reach of the baby's hand, such things as pen, ink, ink-slab, a shoe of silver, and an official seal for a boy, with needle-work requisites added for a girl. While the child sits in the basket, he puts out his hand and takes hold of one of the articles, and whatever he takes hold of indicates what he will be in later life. Thus a pen would indicate that he will be a scholar; the shoe of silver, that he will be wealthy; if he takes hold of the official seal he will be an official. If the girl baby takes hold of any of these things, it means that her husband will be what the article indicates.⁶⁷

I have not heard that this custom still survives in Hong Kong, but would not be surprised to be told it did.

After that first anniversary, birthdays seem to be forgotten. In fact the individual birthday is swallowed up in a communal birthday, for everyone adds a year onto his age at the lunar New Year, not on his birth date. This practice leads to some odd results. For a start, everyone is born one year (*sui* 歲) old, because the ten (lunar) months in the womb are counted. Then at the first New Year he becomes two *sui*, so a child born on the last day of the old year is two *sui* old before his Western counterpart has got to one. When it is a short lunar year, it is even possible for a child to be three *sui* before a full solar year has passed.

When a man or woman gets older and occupies an important position in the family, then birthday anniversaries are once more celebrated. In particular the ages of 51, 61, 71 and 81 are singled out for attention. A little elementary mathematics will show that 51 is usually the same as Western 50, 61 is 60, etc., and Westerners too rather favour these round figures.

The photograph was taken in 1965 inside the house in which I lived in a New Territories village. My next-door neighbour was celebrating his birthday, and his wife (back to the camera) had asked me the day before if she could do all the food preparation at my place where there was more room. Of course I had no objection.

But there was a catch. She left all the ingredients in my house overnight, including a live chicken in a basket. Well, I thought it was a chicken until just after 4.30 a.m. when it proved itself to be a cockerel. With fiendish cunning it had been planted there to make sure that I was awake to let the cooking-brigade in nice and early.

The feast was to be elaborate and costly, and a dozen women and a couple of men were involved in the cooking. Much of the initial effort went into making *cha-gwoh* (茶菓). Glutinous rice flour, sugar and water were kneaded into a paste, small lumps of which were hollowed out and filled with either a sweet peanut paste or a savoury onion and bean mixture. The opening was pinched over, the ball flattened at the bottom into a bun shape and then steamed. When cooked it was placed on a fresh green leaf and was ready for eating. Not a dish which I myself like, but indispensable on big occasions.

As with so many ceremonial affairs, presents for the host consisted largely of money given in lucky red envelopes (*hung-baau* 紅包). But one or two

people gave him bolts of cloth with auspicious sayings cut out of paper and pinned on them.

As can be seen, the women all dressed up in their fanciest head-bands, and pinned gold ornaments and lucky red threads into their hair. Everyone enjoyed the birthday feast except my neighbour himself — an accident of dental bookings had left him without teeth on this of all days. But then it was the occasion rather than the eating which was important for him.

Later I was surprised to discover that the birthday being celebrated was not his 51st but his 52nd. By the pricking of my thumbs I knew I had stumbled on something sociologically significant and exciting.

“Why are you holding the party on your 52nd birthday?” I asked penetratingly.

“Oh, in our family we always celebrate ‘two,’” said my neighbour casually. “You know, 52, 62, 72 and so on.”

And that was that. Significant and exciting indeed!



This strange-looking figure appears at major exorcism festivals in the New Territories, notably at the *da jiu* (打醮), ceremonies which are held by villages at periodic intervals, usually once every ten years. He is about four metres high and made over a bamboo framework, with *papier-mâché* hands and face.

He is the God of Wealth. Or at least he is one of the many different gods of wealth worshipped by the Chinese. His hat reads: "One look and you'll get rich".

The photograph was taken in 1964 at a *da jiu* in the village of Ha Tsuen in Yuen Long district. Ten years later in 1974 Ha Tsuen again held the *da jiu*. This time the God of Wealth looked different — he did not have that rather unpleasant length of protruding tongue. I asked the man who had made him, "Why not?" His reply was unequivocal:

"The real God of Wealth doesn't have that long tongue. The tongue you saw ten years ago must have been added later, or perhaps the craftsman put it on by mistake. If he had a long tongue like that he wouldn't be the God of Wealth, he'd be a ghost. When someone is hanged the tongue sticks out like that. The God of Wealth wasn't hanged."

QED. Then I asked about the god's dress — why was he in mourning?

"The story about this God of Wealth is that he was originally a very bad son, but later he had a change of heart and became very filial towards his mother. He was so filial that he cried till the tears flowed."

Presumably he was crying because his mother had died, for the white dress, hemp neck-band, and white stick are all signs of mourning. Well, who was this god? I was told that he was one of the "Twenty-four Examples of Filial Piety" (*yi-sap-sei-haau* 二十四孝), but none of the twenty-four seems to have been originally bad, though two or three of them were apparently adept at bursting into tears at the slightest thought of their parents.

One of the twenty-four, a man called Ng Mang (吳猛), lived in the 4th century A.D. and once crossed a river against the wind by waving a white fan. His claim to filial fame was that he allowed mosquitoes to harry him undisturbed, reasoning that it would keep them off his parents. Only the fan could connect him with this figure, and even then Ng Mang's fan was supposed to be a white feather one.

Another of the twenty-four was Jang Sam (曾參), one of the best known disciples of Confucius. Mayers, in his *Chinese Reader's Manual*, says of him:

He is conspicuously noted among the examples of filial piety, and numerous incidents are recounted in illustration of this virtuous trait in his character. Thus it is related that when a boy he was away from home gathering firewood in the hills, when his mother suddenly required his presence. Unable to make

him hear her call, she bit her finger, whereupon a sympathetic twinge of pain at once announced the fact to the youth, and he bent his steps homeward. After the death of his parents, he wept whenever he read the rites of mourning.⁶⁸

Neither Jang Sam nor Ng Mang has any obvious connection with wealth. But Gwok Gui (郭巨), who lived in the 2nd century A.D., has. Mayers says that he:

had an aged mother to support, beside his own wife and children. Finding that he had not food sufficient for all, he proposed to his wife that they should bury their infant child in order to have more for their mother's wants; and this devotedness was rewarded by his discovering, while engaged in digging a pit for this purpose, a bar of solid gold which placed him above the reach of poverty.⁶⁹

Just to complicate the identification, other sources call this figure the "Unpredictable Ghost" or "a personification of the Buddhist doctrine of impermanency". His name is Mo Seung Gwai (無常鬼), which might perhaps best translate as "Inconstant Ghost".

There are actually two Mo Seung Gwai according to myth. This one with the white dress is the male, and there is also a female who is dressed in black. They are messengers of Yim Loh Wong, one of the kings of Hell, and one of their jobs is to escort the souls of the dead down to Hades.

That at least explains the god's presence at the *da jiu* festival, because there he stands opposite the figure of Daai Si (大士), who is often identified with Yim Loh Wong and is the ghost-catcher supreme.

What is not explained is why he should have those words on his hat and so be considered a God of Wealth. Confusion between theory and practice, and between written and oral myth is always likely, and with a culture as old, as rich and as complex as that of China it is almost inevitable.



The word “pagoda” (from Persian via Hindi and Portuguese) means a holy building, and properly should be used of a Buddhist temple, under which sacred relics were often preserved. But English has chosen to use pagoda as the name for the high, storied towers which stud the Chinese landscape, and

many of those towers have no connection with Buddhism, even though they undoubtedly owe their presence in China to the spread of the Buddhist faith.

The towers are usually eight-sided and solidly built, tapering as they go upwards. Commentators all remark on the necessity for an odd number of stories, odd numbers being *Yang* and more auspicious than even, and one or two have been known with as many as thirteen stories.

Some of the pagodas have built-in staircases of more or less dangerous design, but some have no obvious means of climbing to the top. Dyer Ball's *Things Chinese* tells how it was done:

As to the modes of ascent they may be divided into two categories; none, or some. In the former case, none being provided by the builders, the inhabitants in the neighbourhood appear with a long plank ready to assist, for a remuneration of course, the aspirant to giddy heights. This long plank is thrown from the windows of a lower storey to those of the next, and once crossed, it is pulled across and the further end raised again to the next higher storey. Thus slowly, stage by stage, the traveller ascends, crossing his improvised bridge, while a slip, or a fall of brickwork, would precipitate him to the foot of the hollow tower. A trick with the Chinese in the olden days was, when half-way up, or when the top had been reached, to take possession of the plank and refuse to place it in position for the descent until their rapacity had been satisfied by the bestowal of some coin, thus cruelly extorted by them. A steady brain is required in such a mode of ascent, as well as when a staircase winds round the interior of the structure without any railing or protection whatever.⁷⁰

Curiously enough, having lost their original purpose as Buddhist architecture, the pagodas acquired a different and natively Chinese non-material function — they came to be of great importance in geomancy.

Geomancy talks of the physical landscape and its effect upon man's life. Features such as hills, streams, trees and rocks, as well as man-made structures like graves and houses, all can influence the lives of those who live within sight of them. And something as striking as a pagoda could hardly be ignored.

The city of Canton, according to geomantic specialists, prospered because its two great pagodas were like the masts of a junk, symbolizing the wealth which overseas trading could bring, while, being fixed, they ensured that the prosperity would not go away.

But pagodas did not always have the desired effect on the geomancy of an area. A few hundred metres out in the fields near Sheung Shui village in

the New Territories there was the concrete base of an old pagoda. It was built many years ago to a height of about 10 metres and was sited by a geomancer.

Its purpose was to act as a “geomantic bird-table”. An outcrop of rock three or four kilometres away looked much like an open eagle’s beak (indeed it still does), and it was thought that this was the cause of a marked failure of the inhabitants of the exposed part of the village to produce sons. If the pagoda were interposed, the eagle would eat off it and not destroy the reproductive powers of the villagers.

Well, after a fashion it worked, but at the same time it seemed to be having an incredibly good effect on another nearby village, which suddenly began to produce a succession of brilliant and precocious children. Weighing up the pros and cons, the Sheung Shui people decided that they would rather put up with their former poor reproduction rate than see a rival village prosper. So they tore the pagoda down again.

It was explained to me how the plan had misfired. When the geomancer laid out the site, he had marked the correct spot with a stone. That night a goose-herd had unthinkingly moved the stone to serve as a seat, so that when building started next day it was in slightly the wrong place, and that is why the unlooked-for effects had come about.

The pagoda in the photograph does not seem to have caused any ill fortune for anyone, despite the fact that it has ten (i.e., an even number) stories. On the other hand it was not sited by a geomancer. It was built by Sir William Chambers in about 1763 and it stands in Kew Gardens within sight of the River Thames.



Learning a foreign language is not enough to make you at home with the people and culture where it is spoken. There is so much more than just words and grammar to be mastered. Gesture, for example, can be quite different: some cultures shake their heads for “Yes” and nod them for “No”.

To beckon someone over, a Chinese holds his hand palm downwards and moves all four fingers. To point to himself he points at his face not his chest. To offer a cigarette or a name-card he uses both hands. To indicate the number 6 he holds up the thumb and little finger of one hand. The list of differences is endless, and very few of them are to be found mentioned in language textbooks.

Some things which seem to be linguistically simple turn out to be otherwise. The common word for “red” is *hung* (紅), but when you overdo the sunbathing and turn scarlet your Chinese friends will remark how “black” (*haak* 黑) you have become. While you turn “white” with fear, they turn *cheng* 青, which your textbook usually insists means “greenish-blue” or “blue-green”.

Colours are particularly difficult. That same word *cheng* is a translator's nightmare. It can mean "blue", "green", "azure", "black", "pale yellow" and the "white" of an egg.

Then there is the problem of "brown", for which there does not seem to be an obvious equivalent Chinese term at all. Instead you have to learn to divide browns into "red-browns" and "yellow-browns". Your dark-tan shoes are "red" (*hung*), while the elocutionist's "brown cow" is "yellow" (*wong* 黃). Of recent years coffee has stepped into the breach and it is quite common to use "coffee-coloured" (*ga-fe-sik* 咖啡色) to indicate "brown" — not that it is likely to help those of us who believe that coffee is taken either "black" or "white".

And colours carry a different code of meanings. The colour of mourning is black in the West but white in China. It is quite alright for a man in the West to wear a hat of any colour, but "to wear a green hat" (*daai-luk-mo* 戴綠帽) means "to be cuckolded" in Cantonese, and no man would be seen dead in one. Western brides like to wear white, but Chinese brides have always worn red.

Red is *the* Chinese colour. It symbolizes happiness, good luck, safety, virtue and wealth. Ritual occasions dazzle with redness. The incense is red, the candles are red, the cakes offered to gods are red, the altar-cloths are red, the auspicious writings pasted up are red or are written on a red background, and the very floor used to be covered in red litter from firecrackers in the now bygone days when it was allowed to set them off.

This photograph was taken at a wedding in Kowloon. The bride, groom and match-maker are being given "lucky money" (*lai-si* 利是) by the bride's mother. Red is everywhere. The bride's dress is red, the groom and the match-maker have red badges on, and the mother's hair is tied with red thread. That the *lai-si* is given in red envelopes (*hung-baau* 紅包) goes without saying.

Marriage is such a serious matter that it is necessary to call for as much aid from fortune and the gods as can be extracted. Worship of the gods of the household and the neighbourhood, of ancestors and temple deities, was as much part of the traditional wedding as was the paying of respects to the groom's parents and senior kin.

Nor was the wedding ceremony the first time that the gods were involved with the match. Prudent families cleared it with the supernatural authorities at an early stage. Preliminary checking would ensure that the couple were not

of the same surname, and that other obvious bars to successful marriage were not present. For example:

if the boy's surname had the character for water in it, and the girl's the character for fire, it is good; but should the reverse be the case, it is quite unsuitable, as water can quench fire. Again, if the boy's surname has fire in it and the girl's wood, that is alright; on the contrary, if the girl's has fire and the boy's wood, that is all wrong. So there is much to be done and considered by the diviner before he can say that the match is suitable.⁷¹

Then the Eight Characters (*baat-ji* 八字) showing the year, month, day, and hour of birth of the bride would be written down on red paper and put on the ancestral altar for several days alongside the Eight Characters of the groom. Supernatural approval of the match was understood if nothing unpleasant or inauspicious occurred in that time. Such practices still exist in Hong Kong today.

A wedding is known as "a red event" (*hung-si* 紅事). Here at least Western and Chinese colours coincide, for only the most cynical would not recognize the occasion of their wedding as a "red-letter day".



This little Earth God was found basking in the sunshine in an alley in Macau. From his niche in the wall he can see everything that goes on in the alley, which is the area over which he has jurisdiction.

The name Earth God has been used for many years by Westerners as a translation of the Chinese term *To-dei-gung* (土地公), but it would better describe his functions if he were called Territory God. Basically his task is to oversee and protect all the people who live within his territory.

The size of that territory can vary considerably. At its smallest it might be a one-roomed house or shop; at its largest a major hamlet or section of a village or town. This means that there is not just one Earth God, but rather a whole hierarchy of Earth Gods, those with larger territories being superior to those with smaller — the Earth God of a house is necessarily a deity of lesser importance than the Earth God of the hamlet in which the house stands. In traditional times, above all Earth Gods sat the City God.

The City God (*Sing-wong* 城隍) was the spiritual running-mate of the old Imperial bureaucrat. When an official took up a new post he always made offerings to the City God of his administrative capital. This was not an act of homage on the part of the official: it was more a matter of formal courtesy. The two of them were considered to be of equal rank but with different spheres of interest. Indeed, if anything the god was inferior to the official, whose job it was to see that the deity's spiritual duty was properly done. Rainfall was within the spiritual sphere, and in case of drought the magistrate would remind the City God of his obligation to call down a sufficient supply. If the reminder failed, the god would be taken outside to sit in the scorching sun and contemplate the advisability of making it rain; and there are stories of magistrates actually having the City God beaten to punish him for failure.

Between them these two, man and god, controlled the secular and spiritual life of the city and of the administrative district of which the city was the centre. The human official had his subordinate officials responsible for lesser areas; and the City God had his subordinates too — the Earth Gods. Not surprisingly the areas covered by the Earth Gods tended to be the same as those covered by minor units of administration, notably the village, the village ward and the household.

To-dei-gung is not the only name by which an Earth God can be known. There are many other names in popular usage. Among the Southeast Asian Chinese he is frequently known as *Daai Baak Gung* (大伯公), which might be translated (not too facetiously) as Universal Uncle. In Hong Kong he is quite commonly called *Fuk Dak Jing San* (福德正神), True God of Good Fortune and Virtue. Earth Gods each belong to one of the five different spiritual divisions named after the Five Directions (North, East, South, West and Centre), and because of this there are also Earth Gods with names like Dragon God of the Five Directions and Five Soils (*Ng-fong-ng-to-lung-san* 五

方五土龍神). Deserving men were thought to be appointed to the post of *to-dei-gung* on death, and like their secular counterparts, the magistrates, they could be impeached and replaced if they did not do their duty properly. E. T. C. Werner's *Dictionary of Chinese Mythology*, a rich source of religious detail, mentions that a famous man of the 3rd century B.C. was made City God of Suzhou (蘇州 Soochow) after his death, only to be demoted later to a mere Earth God.⁷² Official life for gods was no more secure than it was for men.

The City God can be found in Hong Kong — the popular Hollywood Road Temple houses his image on a side altar, for instance — and I assume that there was a City God of Kowloon when it was a minor Chinese administrative centre during the 19th century.

Earth Gods abound. Not all of them are as well made and housed as the one shown here. Few in Hong Kong even take the form of a statue. It is much more common in the New Territories to see brick-built, armchair-shaped altars, and let into the back of them is a stone on which the name of the god is inscribed. The stone is the god. Some villages have even more rudimentary altars, sometimes just a rough shelter of rocks with the name of the god written on a piece of red paper stuck on a stone. As a general rule, the lower down the hierarchy the god the less elaborate is his altar, and in the home the Earth God is likely to be just a red paper one stuck on the wall with a pot of incense placed in front.

For most villagers it is the neighbourhood Earth God, such as the one shown here, who is considered important. As the representative of the City God's authority he is charged with reporting on the people in his care. So all births and deaths in his area are formally announced to him by the inhabitants, and a bridegroom may be seen on his wedding day dressed in best suit and red sash, worshipping the neighbourhood Earth God and telling him of the impending arrival of a new parishioner, the bride. The Earth God receives from his flock offerings of food and drink, fruit, incense and so on on all these special occasions, as well as on the 1st and 15th days of every lunar month (always auspicious for ritual), and at festival times like New Year and Ching Ming. He is well looked after. Perhaps that is why this one looks so contented.

50 Flower Boards



Walking through the streets of Hong Kong it is hard to miss noticing the massive “flower boards” (*fa-paai* 花牌) outside restaurants. The flowers are paper ones, garishly coloured, and stuck onto a bamboo framework to make striking patterns and designs.

The most common reason for putting up the boards is to announce the holding of a wedding feast inside. As well as standardized greetings, the boards usually show the surnames of the two families which are being joined together, and the formula runs something like “Wong and Chan uniting in marriage”. Reading the boards, guests at the wedding banquet can be sure that they have come to the right place, and of course the public display helps to blazon forth the marriage, the equivalent of placing a notice in the local newspaper.

When a new shop or business is opened, it is common to see the pavement in front of it piled high with baskets of real or artificial flowers, all of them bearing congratulatory messages and wishes for the success of the venture. Friends and relatives of the proprietor send them, as do his bank and his creditors. And I am told that sometimes the proprietor himself will pay for some of them so as to have a good show and appear better endowed

with well-wishers. Sending mirrors with congratulations painted on in red is another regular feature, and they still hang fly-blown in the shop years afterwards.

Red predominates in both boards and baskets, because it is the colour for good luck, and virtually all ceremonies are carried out in a glowing red ambience. Until they were banned as a result of the riots in 1967, firecrackers were an ever-present accompaniment. The smoke and deafening roar and distinctive smell were part of the excitement, and the red paper litter that they left behind used to make a colourful carpet which added to the glow.

The flower boards shown here are erected in front of a massive “matshed” in a New Territories village. The matshed (an out-of-date term, because no “mats” are used now, the bamboo framework being covered with thin metal sheets instead) has been put up to house an opera performance for the benefit of the villagers and village gods alike at a ten-yearly *da jiu* (打醮) ceremony.

The boards feature designs of dragons, lucky animals for an auspicious ceremony. Down the middle of each is written *taai-ping ching-jiu* (太平清醮), which is the full name of the *da-jiu*, and can be translated as something like “Purification rituals for peace”. Then across each board is written “Ten-yearly ceremony in gratitude for divine blessings on the Ha Tsuen villages. Congratulations.”

Why “Congratulations”? Because each of the flower boards has been presented to the village by a different organization. And the names of the organizations are clearly written across the boards for all to see.

Decorative effect is therefore not the only function of the boards. They are a public display of relationships, a bolstering of mutual esteem and co-operation. And they are not cheap. Each is made up specially for the festival, and cannot be used again in the same form, though I am certain that the framework and some of the decorative motifs can be and are re-used afterwards.

This *da-jiu* was held in January 1975, and was a very costly business. The chairman of the organizing committee told me that they had spent HK\$1,400,000, and that did not include the cost of hiring the opera troupe, who performed for five days. With an outlay of that magnitude, the villagers would of course want to get as much mileage out of the ceremony as possible. The sharing of pleasure enhances it, and the exhibition of money spent (conspicuous consumption) is a universal feature.

So one day of the *da-jiu* was set aside as a visitors' day. People came from miles around to take part in the festivities and to watch the entertainment — dragon, lion and unicorn dances, puppet shows, pop singing, and so on. They were met by a formal reception committee dressed in long gowns, and were offered refreshments in the ancestral hall.

The excitement of the occasion, the milling crowds, colourful costumes, and incessant noise of drums, gongs and cymbals all contributed to the enjoyment of the hosts and of the visitors, and the money spent by each group was a source of satisfaction to both — the world could not be going too badly if there was such surplus available to spend.

Strangely enough there is another and rather alien sign of affluence in the picture. Propped against the oil drum is a notice reading “No entry for vehicles”. In the more than 200 years' history of this *da-jiu* I doubt whether it has ever before been necessary to put up such a prohibition.



The island of Ma Wan has few claims to fame, but it does produce a small amount of shrimp paste, and that doubtless gives it, in the opinions of the nasally sensitive at least, a claim to infamy.

There is no doubt that shrimp paste smells, though I'm happy to say I don't find it too offensive. Not so poor L. C. Arlington who was stationed on Cheung Chau Island at the end of the 19th century. He spoke with horror of the local "shrimp sauce, the vile stench of which nearly drove us frantic." I detect a note of exaggeration in this statement, rather like the frustrated swimmer who once told me that Hong Kong had a population at that time of 4 million, of whom 5 million could be found on Repulse Bay beach on a Sunday.

The shrimps are salted and fermented down, then laid out on baskets to dry in the sun, as in the photograph. When ready the paste is formed into large balls for transporting to wholesalers. It is used for its powerful flavour in cooking, and is said to be highly nutritious.

The Cantonese word for shrimp is *ha* (蝦), but the same word covers all sizes from the smallest up to the great king prawns. And a "dragon shrimp" (*lung-ha* 龍蝦) is a lobster.

One never-to-be-forgotten evening I was having a drink (or two) with a group of Chinese friends. As so often happens we talked of food, and someone mentioned the Japanese delicacy called *odori-zushi* (“dancing sea-food”). “Live prawns are dunked in alcohol and eaten straightaway,” he said. Well, by that stage of the evening we were not in the mood to be upstaged by Japanese cuisine, so we went at once to our favourite sea-food restaurant and ordered a catty of prawns from the tank: “Bring them live to the table!”

The waiter produced them on a large plate covered with a tea-cloth, rather as toast comes to the table in hotels. When we unwrapped them, sure enough they were alive and kicking.

At this point we came to the conclusion that the Japanese way was for wimps. Real gourmets would not get their prawns inebriated first, they would take them neat. So we did, wrenching the heads off, de-shucking and swallowing fast ... but not only did the prawns obstinately refuse to “dance” their topless way down our alimentary canals, they were completely tasteless. After three each we decided that we had given it a reasonable go, and sent the rest back for cooking. When the plate re-appeared it contained the delicate brownish-pink prawns plain-steamed to be dipped in chilli-tinged soy and eaten with the fingers. These *baak-cheuk-ha* (白灼蝦) make as fine a start to a meal as anything I know.

It all made sense really: if prawns had been good to eat raw, Chinese culture would have known about it. We were stupid to have thought of trying. Prawns, as far as I am concerned, are definitely not for dancing.

The implication of Arlington’s remark on Cheung Chau seems to be that Chinese noses are insensitive to bad smells. It’s not so, but cultures tolerate what they need to. The smell of shrimps digesting themselves in brine is acceptable because of the end product. To the British farmer the “muck” he spreads on his fields is “a good healthy smell”.

Cantonese is a language which delights in “muck” — well, it can certainly be very earthy and call a spade a spade. “Fatty” (*fei-jai* 肥仔) you’ll be called if fat you are. “Water-melon scraper” (*sai-gwa-paau* 西瓜刨) is your nickname if you have protruding teeth. But there is a time and a place for earthiness, and sometimes politeness brings out extremes of language which English does not know. To be polite a Cantonese refers to someone else’s daughter as his *chin-gam* (千金) “thousand pieces of gold”, while his own daughter is relegated to

the other end of the value scale under the name *sit-boon-foh* (策本貨) “goods on which I lose my capital investment”.

“What is your precious name?” (*Gwai-sing-a?* 貴姓呀?), he asks the stranger, “my insignificant name (*siu-sing* 小姓) is ...” It all sounds funny to English ears; a fact which made the name of Ernest Bramah. Here are the opening lines of his *Kai Lung Beneath the Mulberry-tree*:

In order to appreciate more fully the various involvements concerned in the legendary tale which a scrupulous and uninventive recorder of actual facts has selected for recital on this gratifying occasion, it is necessary to take into account the usages and conditions of primitive simplicity existing in the State of Yin at that distant era of what has been aptly termed “our celestial and richly-embroidered country’s crudely-chiselled narrative.”⁷³

Clearly this is meant to make gentle fun, yet in style it is not too far from the Chinese, where it doesn’t sound funny at all. The trouble is it does not translate, because there are no direct equivalents in English. The accurate translation of *gwai-sing-a* is “Excuse me, may I know your name?” and of “*siu-sing* ..” is “My name is ...”.

Arthur Smith tells a Chinese story which might have been the prototype for Kai Lung’s style. A visitor awaiting his host gets his best clothes covered in oil when a rat knocks a jar off a beam above him:

Just as the face of the guest was purple with rage at this disaster, the host entered, when the proper salutations were performed, after which the guest proceeded to explain the situation. “As I entered your honourable apartment and seated myself under your honourable beam, I inadvertently terrified your honourable rat, which fled and upset your honourable oil-jar upon my mean and insignificant clothing, which is the reason of my contemptible appearance in your honourable presence.”⁷⁴

What has all this to do with prawns? Easy — I have proof that the Cantonese:

- (a) have a sense of smell,
- (b) do not always talk in convoluted Kai-Lungisms, and
- (c) can be earthy.

One of the words for a baby is *so-ha-jai* (臊蝦仔) “rank-smelling shrimp”.



The *Classics* tell us that after hearing a particular piece of music Confucius abstained from meat for three months, exclaiming:

“I did not imagine that music could be made so perfect.”⁷⁵

What that music was like we now have no idea, because music, along with musical instruments and other symbols of refinement, was destroyed in the great book-burning that accompanied the accession to power in 221 B.C. of the First Emperor, Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇).

I beg leave to doubt whether many Chinese since that time have similarly abstained. Perhaps priorities have changed? Or perhaps the quality of music has gone down? J. Dyer Ball in his *Things Chinese* certainly seems to think the latter, because he says:

The knowledge of this ancient music is lost. If the descriptions of it are true to the reality, no one who has heard Chinese music of the present day will have any hesitation in accepting the statement of its being unknown now, for it has

been remarked, in a comic strain, that the music of the Chinese is “deliciously horrible” like cats trying to sing bass with sore throats.⁷⁶

Music in China has been much associated with ritual, as it has all over the world, and its power for evil as well as good is illustrated by the following quotation from Arthur Waley’s introduction to his translation of *The Analects of Confucius* (論語):

Everyone familiar with early Chinese books knows the story, existing in countless variants, of Duke P’ing of Chin and the baleful music — how drawn by the magic of an evil tune eight huge black birds swooped from the south and danced on his terrace, black clouds blotted out the sky, a tempest tore down the hangings of his palace, broke the ritual vessels, hurled down the tiles from the roof; the king fell sick, and for three years no blade of grass grew in Chin, no tree bore fruit.⁷⁷

Certainly no major ceremony in the New Territories is complete without music.

The most commonly met with in the villages is the clarionet-like instrument seen here being played at a major ancestor worship ceremony at the graveside. This *soh-na* (鎖呐), or *di-da* (啲打) as it is often called locally, gives a sharp, reedy, penetrating sound well calculated to wake the attention of the gods. It is played in short bursts rather than in long tuneful passages. The *di-da* can be heard at weddings and funerals, at ancestor worship in ancestral halls and at gravesides, and indeed at almost any religious ceremony. Sometimes a flute is used as well.

Otherwise it is the percussion instruments that dominate. Great drums, on wheeled trolleys or carried on poles between two men, follow the dragon and the lion around as they dance, the drummer banging and rolling furiously, with sweat pouring down his face. Cymbals contribute to the rhythm. The Chinese term used to describe the happy excitement of a big occasion is *yit-naau* (熱鬧), which translated literally means “hot and noisy”. The drummer typifies the feeling. Gongs large and small are popular in processional music and in other ceremonies.

One of the really exciting sounds is the massed clacking of sticks when the fierce Chiu Jau (潮州 Chaozhou) dance troupes perform in big processions. They need no other music than the sticks and the hoarse shouts with which they punctuate their strenuousness.

Priests, both Taoist and Buddhist, use a small, hollow, wooden sounding-block, called a “wooden fish” (*muk-yue* 木魚), which they strike with a stick to make a “clap-clap” noise as accompaniment to chanted scriptures. A small tinny hand gong is often used by the Taoist priest at ceremonies for the same purpose.

There is a whole range of stringed, reeded, wooden, stone, bamboo, skin, and metal instruments, but mostly they are only to be found in the orchestras of the various opera troupes, or in the rather rare private performances in the city. Blind (and sighted) beggars tend to favour the two-stringed Chinese fiddle, because it is easily transportable and can make a very plaintive sound.

The general lack of orchestration or sustained programming in the music at ceremonies leads one to suspect that it is perhaps more the noise than the music which is important. Before they were banned as a result of the 1967 riots, firecrackers used to be used very much as interval markers in ceremonies, the noise serving to point the beginning and end of the rituals as well as the completion of major sections within the total ceremony. Explanations that the noise frightens away evil spirits or draws the attention of the gods to the ceremony doubtless have much truth in them, but it is also the case that the noise acts like a punctuation mark, and quite simply that the Cantonese relish din.

Mahjong tables and tiles are deliberately noise-producing, and the crashing down of the discard tile contributes to the emotions and enjoyment of the player who throws it. Mahjong can be played equally well with special playing cards, but it is not enjoyed this way because it is too quiet. Chinese society has perforce made a virtue of togetherness, and togetherness means noise. Silence implies loneliness, social aberration, and the danger associated with isolation from the group. There is a clear indication of this in the resonant nature of the décor of a Chinese restaurant — compare it with the sound-absorbing soft-furnishings of a Western one.

The vogue for large and noisy Chinese funerals seems to have passed, but not so long ago it was quite common to see funeral processions passing through the streets of Hong Kong with *di-da* braying in competition with one or more Western-style brass bands which would be engaged in shredding well-known hymn tunes. Nor was the New Territories immune from the practice. Again, the quantity of noise seems to have been the important thing. Why

funerals in particular should be so open to cultural mixing it is hard to say. For other ceremonies, as for the one shown here, traditional music is found perfectly satisfactory.



This little scene could have been shot almost anywhere in Hong Kong, for trays of ritual offerings are not uncommon. Fresh fruits, rice, tea, wine, candles and incense are all visible, and if you look closely you will see chopsticks laid out too. The plastic flowers emphasize the “Hong Kong connection”. The tiny potted cumquat tree is there because its name *gat* (桔) sounds like the word for “good luck” *gat* (吉). Its presence helps to date the scene at the lunar

New Year, the time when auspicious symbols abound. Red is the colour of happiness and good fortune, and the tray is covered with red paper.

In fact the photograph was taken in a New Territories village house at New Year 1964. The offerings are meant for Heaven (*tin* 天), and the table is set out in the small section of the house which is open to the sky. Appropriately this space is known as the *tin-jeng* (天井), “the heavenly well”.

What does Heaven mean in the Chinese context? In the earliest records so far discovered in China we find that the kings of the Shang (Seung 商) dynasty, who ruled from approximately 1550 to 1050 B.C., worshipped their own ancestors as powerful gods, and the most powerful of all was the first ancestor, known as Shang-di (Seung-dai 上帝). He was sacrificed to in order to ensure the success of his descendants and the prosperity of the country they ruled.

In the course of time the Shang dynasty gave way to the Zhou (周), but as has happened repeatedly through Chinese history the newcomers chose to retain much of what was already in existence, and Shang-di continued to be worshipped by the new kings. Of course, there was one real difference — they were not descended from him. He had become the most powerful god in the heavens not just an ancestor in his own right, as it were.

Perhaps it was this fact which led to a swing away from the term Shang-di. Within a century or two Shang-di had been transformed into “Heaven” (*tin* 天). And Heaven as time went on became more and more an impersonal moral force rather than a god. If man conformed to the high standards expected of him, Heaven would grant peace and good harvests, but if man should fail to keep those standards, Heaven would release war, famine, plague and misery.

In one respect Heaven and Shang-di were treated alike. Since Shang-di was originally an ancestor, it made sense that only his descendants should worship him — the Chinese have never worshipped the dead indiscriminately, only the dead that belong to them. This meant that the Shang kings had had a monopoly of the worship of the most powerful god — no mean advantage in a harsh world. The Zhou throne in taking over Shang-di also continued the monopoly of his worship, and even when Shang-di became Heaven the king still kept to himself the privilege of worshipping it. By a slightly illogical but very understandable device he re-established the ancestor worship symbolism

by calling himself *tin-ji* (天子) “Son of Heaven”. Emperors of China bore the same title until the collapse of the Imperial system in 1911.

Rights and obligations went hand in hand in China as elsewhere. If the Emperors had the privilege of sole access to the highest supernatural force, they also had to shoulder the responsibility for the well-being of the entire nation. When Heaven showed its dissatisfaction with man, it was construed as dissatisfaction with man’s spokesman and leader, the Son of Heaven.

Was there a drought? — It must be that the Emperor’s morals were at fault. Did barbarians break through the Great Wall? — The Emperor must be to blame. Is society crumbling? — The man on the throne cannot be the true Son of Heaven, because not even Heaven could treat a son that way. Very well, the people may revolt. The monopoly of Heaven was indeed a mixed blessing, a two-edged sword.

The notion of the Mandate of Heaven (*tin-ming* 天命) by which the Emperor held the throne was nicely in tune with these sentiments. The man who could not keep the throne had no right to be there, and rebellion against his rule was therefore justifiable. Successful rebellion was always proven legitimate, because Heaven would not permit success if it did not approve it — the Mandate had been transferred.

So, what is an offering to Heaven doing in a New Territories house? Certainly the occupants would not dream of claiming to be descendants of the Emperor. When I asked why they worshipped Heaven, I was told that it was a general offering for all things supernatural lest the worship of other specific gods should have given offence to those missed out.

I don’t know if Heaven was worshipped here when the Emperor still had the monopoly, but I’m pretty sure that it was. What the Emperor didn’t see he couldn’t grieve over.

54 *Double Yang*



The ninth day of the ninth lunar month has been an important one for the Chinese for many centuries. On it they observe the custom of “climbing high” (*dang-go* 登高), and the Peak Tram does its best trade of the year. The reason for the upward surge is contained in an old legend:

It tells of a soothsayer who warned a virtuous scholar of a terrible calamity impending. “Hasten!” said he to his friend, “with your kith and kin, climb to the shelter of the mountains, till there is nothing between you and the sky, and take with you food and drink.” The scholar thanked his counsellor and followed his advice, carrying with him a paper bag containing food and a jug of chrysanthemum-wine. Returning at the end of the day, he found his cattle and poultry had died a violent death. “That,” said he to his family “would probably have been our fate, but for the warning.”⁷⁸

The same day is also a favourite one for flying kites. Doolittle reports on the custom at Fuzhou (福州) in the 19th century:

the air is full of kites, of all sizes and of a large variety of shapes. Some are in the shape of spectacles; others represent a kind of fish; others are like an eel, or some similar-looking animal, being from ten to thirty feet long, and of

proportionate size; others are like various kinds of birds, or bugs, or butterflies, or quadrupeds. Some resemble men sailing through the air; others are eight-sided, in imitation of the eight diagrams, invented by one of the earliest Chinese emperors.⁷⁹

All very colourful and pleasant, we imagine, but read on a paragraph and we come to:

Every year there is an especial proclamation issued by a city officer with reference to this kite-flying, warning against tumult on the ninth day of the ninth month on the Black Rock Hill. A petty mandarin, with a large staff of policemen or constables, is annually stationed on the hill, on the arrival of the day, for the purpose of keeping the peace and quelling the disturbance, should any arise.

Why should there be a disturbance? Well, if kite-flying then was as it is now, there was a large element of competition involved, and nothing seems to give more pleasure to the kite-pilot than crossing the taut string of a rival's line and causing it to part. Kite-strings today are sold on their combined cutting ability and resistance to being cut.

Another name for the ninth of the ninth is Chung Yeung (重陽), which might be translated as "Double Yang". Now Yang (*yeung* is the Cantonese pronunciation of it) is the male principle which combines with Yin, the female, to create and transmute all things in time and space. The course of the year is controlled by a constant ebb and flow of the Yang and Yin forces, Yang being at its most powerful in summer and Yin in winter. But that very fact has until now always puzzled me. The ninth month is well on its way from the Yang time of year towards the Yin, so how could the ninth of the ninth be "Double Yang"? The answer is simple and takes up one line in the *Chi Hoi* (辭海) dictionary: "Nine is the Yang number, so when day and month are both nine it is called Double Yang."

For the great clans of the New Territories Chung Yeung means yet another custom. It is the day on which they go to visit and worship at the graves of their most important ancestors. The photograph was taken on 25th October 1963, which was the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, at the grave of the founding ancestor of the Liu (廖) clan of Sheung Shui.

A long walk through hot streets and dusty paths had brought 400–500 members of the clan to the grave. The elders, dressed in long silk gowns, had

performed the major ceremonies, kneeling, kowtowing and making offerings. Then had come the rich and influential men of the clan, Western-suited, bowing and making offerings with self-conscious dignity. Now it is the turn of the youngsters, neat in their school uniforms. On the left of the picture their music teacher leads the school band in an appropriate musical offering.

But please don't think it is the band's playing hurting the ears of the two boys in the foreground. They are covering up against the noise of a great string of firecrackers which is going off out of picture. Worse was to come: the grass was tinder-dry and the whole hillside caught fire from the firecrackers.

After the long walk, the long service, and the effort of putting out the hill-fire, everyone was ready for the grave-side feast. In the top right can be seen men preparing the picnic of cooked meats and vegetables which rounded off the day. I need hardly add that it was delicious.



When rice was the major crop as well as the staple food of the New Territories, drought was more to be feared than bandits, pirates or plague. Hence Rain Gods. I don't know how many of them are to be found in the area, but this one sits on the table top of a hill near Sheung Shui. The stone tablet is inscribed with the words "The God who causes the clouds to form and the rain to fall" (*Hing-wan-gong-yue-ji-san* 興雲降雨之神), and on the sides of the tablet are recorded the date of its erection (1839) and the name of the scholar from the Liu clan of Sheung Shui who placed it there.

Praying for rain (*kau yue* 求雨) has a long tradition in China, as it must in a culture so heavily agrarian. In the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, edited by Confucius himself, different procedures for praying for rain are given for each of the four seasons of the year.

As with so many Chinese religious features, there is great confusion about the Rain God. Pictures of a god standing on a cloud and pouring rain out of a watering-can are often called "Master of the Rain" (*yue-si* 雨師), but this is more the title than the name of the god, and various different identifications

of him are to be found. The one which catches my imagination is to be found in Doré's monumental *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*: there we read that the Rain God is actually Sheung Yeung (商羊), a fabulous bird which has only one leg, can vary its shape at will, and can dry up whole sections of the sea. This bird sucks up water in its beak and then blows it into the air to fall as rain.⁸⁰ Whoever the Rain God is, he is singularly unafraid to delegate, because it is well known that dragons can control rain, and the City God also is responsible for an adequate water supply for his territory. The Rain God shown here was said by some villagers to be actually a goddess by the name of Third Sister Lau (Lau Saam Mooi 劉三妹).

Specialist gods, like specialist doctors, tend only to be consulted when problems arise. This Rain God is certainly untroubled by petitions normally. To the best of my knowledge he (or she) was last worshipped in 1963, which was a very dry year indeed, I remember. I have a cutting from a Chinese language newspaper of June 1963 which contains their reporter's first-hand account of the ceremony. The headline runs:

Several Hundred Sheung Shui Village Women Pray for Rain on Mountain:
result of supplication using most ancient ritual is more than an hour's rainfall
in New Territories.

The women planned, the article says, to stay on the hilltop for seven days and nights, they would be unprotected from the weather, and the men of the village would haul supplies of food up to them. The ritual included the planting of a green bamboo branch in front of the god, and the offering of sacrificial food, of fruit, and of six buckets of fresh water. To the sound of gongs and drums the women continuously prayed and gesticulated to heaven, from time to time taking mouthfuls of the water which they alternately swallowed and spat out. At 3.50 p.m. the sky clouded over and it began to rain. At this point the reporter ran into trouble, because he asked if someone would lend him an umbrella ... and was put firmly in his place by the women, who said that no protection was allowed. He had to stick it out for over an hour before the sky cleared again. Clearly from his tone the ritual convinced even if it discomfited him.

The version which, some five months after the event, I heard from the villagers themselves had already begun to acquire legendary embroidery. The ritual had lasted, I was told, three days and three nights, during which time

the women were not allowed to have protection either from sun or rain by umbrella or hat or shelter. The men told me that the women had worked themselves into a state of trance by concentrated praying and wailing, so that they were unconscious of the discomfort of their situation.

On the first day a swarm of centipedes appeared, a manifestation of the dragon. Despite warnings not to touch them, two small boys who were there to watch the ceremony trod on some and were thrown down the hillside by some mysterious force. On the second day there was at first a plague of snakes, but the women told them to go away. Then the first rain of the year fell, and after the full three days quite a lot more rain came. The ritual had, as always, been successful.

I was taken up to see the Rain God on 19th April 1964, which is when I took this photograph. It was a still, hot, sunny day with a few clouds around. As I stepped onto the flat top of the hill where the god is, I was met by a blast of scorching hot air. Almost immediately afterwards it rained for a few moments. As far as I know the only people in all Hong Kong who felt rain that day were myself and the old man who took me up to see the god. I was neither discomfited nor convinced, but



How soon one accepts! When I first set foot in Hong Kong one of the first marvels that registered with me was bamboo scaffolding. On close inspection it could be seen to be held together only by short lashings of reed, and when the workmen moved around on it the flimsy poles creaked alarmingly. How could it rise so high and remain so strong? Yet, a short while later I was showing a newly arrived friend around, and I walked straight past

some scaffolding without thinking to comment. It was only when he stopped to wonder that I even noticed.

This photograph serves to remind me of that occasion. It shows clearly the rickety appearance of the scaffolding, yet with complete confidence in his material the scaffolder works at the outside edge of the framework. His supply of dampened reed lashings can be seen worn sword-like at the belt.

Bamboo grows so easily and widely in China, comes in so many varieties, and has so many uses that it is almost surprising that the Chinese ever bothered to develop other materials at all. Here is just part of a list given by Dyer Ball:

Chairs, tables, stools, couches, ornaments, stands, images, lantern-handles, canes, instruments of torture, handles of spears, cages for birds, hen-coops, musical instruments (such as flutes and fifes and fiddles, etc.), pillows, dutch-wives, ladders, lattice-work, bars of doors and windows, primitive-looking lamps and lanterns, nutmeg-graters, pepper-dusters, floats, watering-wheels, rafts, bridges, watch-towers, tobacco and opium-pipes, ropes, window-blinds, curtains, brooms, brushes, baskets of all and every kind, cricket-traps, snares to catch game, combs, tallies for checking cargo, summonses for secret society meetings, the framework and handles of fans, are all of this cane.⁸¹

The roots of the bamboo can be used for wood-carving. The shoots (*juk-sun* 竹筍) can be eaten, and are prized as much for their consistency as for their flavour. (Bamboo chopsticks may be used to eat them with too.) The pith and the outer skin of the canes are used in medicine. The leaves make fans, rain-hats and rain-cloaks. The entire plant gives shade, and wind-break, and inexhaustible subject matter for artists.

One of the names for “firecracker” is *baau-juk* (爆竹) “exploding bamboo”. It is likely that before the invention of gunpowder, pieces of bamboo were set alight for the crackling noise they made. The concept of noise is not an unpleasant one in a Chinese context, and in this case the noise would have been used as a means of frightening away evil spirits. Later, firecrackers not only gave out a similar sound, they were made something in the shape of a joint of bamboo — hence the name.

The connection of bamboo with literature is long and honourable. Some of the earliest writings were done on thin strips of bamboo, and I suppose it is possible that it was the heavenward growth of the bamboo which suggested its use in the vertical position as a writing material, and so the development of the Chinese script which goes from top to bottom rather than from side to side.

In later years, bamboo came to be used for making paper. One-year-old shoots were cut down, the outside sheaths peeled off, and the inner parts split into thin strips which were left to dry in the sun for two or three months. Then they were immersed in limewater to soften for three months. A further drying for two months, then washing in clean water, and finally they were ground to a pulp. This was mixed with cactus and other vegetable products to make the thick solution from which paper emerged when the water was pressed out. It goes almost without saying that the brush with which to write on the paper had a handle made of bamboo.

Literary men favoured the bamboo as an emblem of nature, and it was particularly admired by Taoists who liked its flexibility: they too believed in bending before the wind. Perhaps the most famous literary club of China was the one known as the “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Groves” (Juk-lam Chat-yin 竹林七賢) in the 3rd century A.D. The seven men would meet in bamboo plantations rather than in urban surroundings, and there they would carouse, and versify, and philosophize, unfettered by “artificialities”. One of them, particularly committed to an “eat, drink and be merry” view, is said to have ordered a grave-digger to follow him everywhere so that when he did finally keel over he could be disposed of on the spot without bother or ceremonial.

Another unconventional member of the group managed to stay drunk continuously for sixty days, so contriving to avoid an unpleasant discussion with his disliked sovereign.

Botanists class bamboos as grasses, though the layman probably considers them as woods. The Chinese are quite certain that bamboo is not wood, and they make a clear distinction between the two categories, as is shown in the proverb extolling the merit of marrying within one’s own social class: “Let wooden gates match with wooden gates, and bamboo doors with bamboo doors!”



Incense comes in many sizes and fills the temples of Hong Kong with sweet smoke. It has been common for many years to call the sticks “joss-sticks”, and the temples used to be known as “joss-houses”. Both these words derive from a word which has fallen into disuse — a “joss” was a Chinese idol, a god. If it doesn’t sound like a Chinese word that’s because it isn’t, it’s a corruption of the Portuguese word *deos* “god”.

It would be odd if there were no Portuguese influence on the language of the China coast — they have been trading in the area for well over four hundred years, and Macau predated Hong Kong as a foreign settlement by almost three centuries.

After 1757 there was a rule that the city of Canton (Guangzhou, the only city in all China where foreign trade was permitted) was closed to foreigners during the winter and spring, and traders, British as well as Portuguese, would then withdraw to Macau. For most of them that must have been a relief, for the Canton quarters were very restricted, and foreign women were never allowed there at all.

It was during this time that another kind of smoke began to pollute the Chinese air. It was imported through Macau and Canton, but was neither so sweet nor so cheap as joss-stick. Opium had been known in China for about a thousand years and from the 12th century had been used in medicine as a treatment for bowel complaints. The smoking of opium did not begin until the early 18th century and was probably a practice imported from Indonesia via Dutch connections with the island of Taiwan. In 1729 the Emperor issued an edict prohibiting the smoking of opium, though the quantities involved at that stage were small — a mere 200 chests a year shipped from Goa. The edict had no effect. Until 1773 the Portuguese monopolized the trade, but then the British East India Company got in on the act and stepped up imports drastically, feeding an ever-growing demand. By 1821 5,000 chests a year were coming in, and by 1839 40,000. The Chinese government made several attempts to stop or at least control the traffic, but prohibition merely drove it underground, and it was almost impossible to get officials to prosecute smokers when most of them were themselves active as dealers and/or consumers.

The social effects of the drug were worry enough, but it soon became clear that the economic effects were even more devastating. Silver flowed out to the pockets of the foreigners, and only a small proportion of it was coming back in exchange for the silks and tea and porcelain which China was producing for export. The entire economy was in a state of collapse.

In 1839 an official called Lin Zexu (Lam Jak Chui 林則徐) was appointed to bring an end to the opium problem. He was a forceful and upright man who passionately detested the smoking of opium, and he went straight to the heart of the problem. He confined the foreign traders to their Canton quarters,

withdrew their Chinese labour force, and demanded the handing over of all stocks of the drug. There was no choice. 26,183 chests were surrendered and publicly destroyed.

Commissioner Lin was energetic and enlightened above many of his countrymen, but he was inexperienced in dealing with the foreigners. He believed, for instance, that by preventing the export of Chinese rhubarb the British would collapse though mass constipation. He said:

Take tea and rhubarb, for example; the foreign countries cannot get along for a single day without them.

That sentence occurs in a strong letter which he wrote to Queen Victoria ordering her to control her subjects' trade behaviour better:

The kings of your honourable country by a tradition handed down from generation to generation have always been noted for their politeness and submissiveness. We have read your successive tributary memorials But after a long period of commercial intercourse, there appear among the crowd of barbarians both good persons and bad, unevenly. Consequently there are those who smuggle opium to seduce the Chinese people and so cause the spread of the poison to all provinces Even though the barbarians may not necessarily intend to do us harm, yet in coveting profit to an extreme, they have no regard for injuring others. Let us ask, where is your conscience? I have heard that the smoking of opium is very strictly forbidden by your country; that is because the harm caused by opium is clearly understood. Since it is not permitted to do harm to your own country, then even less should you let it be passed on to the harm of other countries — how much less to China! Of all that China exports to foreign countries, there is not a single thing which is not beneficial to people⁸²

Sadly, Lin was ill-supported by other officials, and all his efforts were in the end to no avail. They sparked off a victorious British military campaign known to history as the Opium War; he was disgraced and exiled; Hong Kong was ceded to Britain; and opium cascaded into China as never before. By 1900 estimates of between 25 and 40 million addicts were current, and the city of Fuzhou alone had 1,000 registered opium dens.

And the drugs problem is with us still. The opium trade was indeed "bad joss".

58 Offerings



The earliest known writings of the Chinese are records of divination sessions which have survived from the Shang dynasty (approximately 1550–1050 B.C.).

The method of divination was ingenious, though not unknown in other areas of the world. Tortoise shells or the blade bones of oxen were heated over fire until they cracked. The diviner would then interpret the meaning of the cracks. What makes these “oracle bones”, or “dragon bones” as they are

called, unique and valuable is that the questions asked of the oracle and the answers obtained from interpreting the cracks were often inscribed on them in a primitive form of the script from which modern Chinese writing derives.

From these inscriptions we know that the Shang considered that their dead kings became gods, and very powerful gods at that:

The activities of these spirit ancestors are not altogether unlike those of the Greek gods. They were not, it seems, either omnipotent or omniscient, yet in practice they were very nearly so. Success in hunting, agriculture, war and other activities was theirs to give or to withhold. Famine, defeat, sickness and death were the penalties which they could hurl at any who had the temerity to displease them.⁸³

Ancestor worship, therefore, has a very long history in China.

We know from some of the exciting if gruesome archaeological finds made in recent decades that a great deal of elaborate ceremonial and vast expense accompanied burials of important persons from earliest times. Whole retinues of servants, teams of horses, dogs, chariots, jewellery and household implements, as well as food and other goods, were sacrificed and buried with the dead aristocrat.

By the time of Confucius (孔子) (551–479 B.C.) such practices had apparently long ceased. Mencius, a famous Confucian philosopher, quotes Confucius as saying:

“May he who first made wooden images to bury with the dead be without descendants!”⁸⁴

It seems that Confucius, lacking the archaeological evidence, had got the cart before the horse, and assumed that sacrifice of real people derived from the practice of burying the images, where in fact it is now clear that the images were a substitute for the barbarous massacre of dependants and animals.

The basic notion that the dead are translated to another world which has similarities to this one remains to this day, though it has become very much more complicated under the influence of the Buddhist and Taoist religions.

The Shang kings felt that they needed their servants and their material goods in the nether world, and in much the same way the Chinese have ever since attempted to provide their dead with the comforts which they enjoyed in this life. Basic requirements for the living are food, clothing, shelter, money and transport, and for the dead these are also important.

Ancestor worship, then, is an arrangement between the living and their forebears, whereby the ancestors give their spiritual assistance to the living in return for the provision of these daily necessities.

Burning is the method of transferring material goods from this world to the regions where the dead undergo judgment and punishment for their sins and crimes on earth. This photograph, taken during a ceremony to mark the end of a period of mourning, shows a very fine paper and bamboo replica of a New Territories village house. It has just been set on fire, and within a few seconds will be reduced to a small heap of ashes. Paper clothes and a paper sedan chair have also been burned. Money, as necessary in the after-world as in this, has been burned in large quantities. It is not real paper money, but specially printed paper currency not negotiable in this life.

The ancestors are fed in a different way. Instead of the food's being burned in paper replica form, real food is laid out at a place where the ancestor's spirit can have access to it — usually in front of a soul-tablet or at the grave. After it has remained there for a while, the food is removed and may be eaten by the living. The “spiritual essence” of the food is thought to be taken by the ancestors but that does not detract from its value as nourishment and enjoyment for the descendants, and it means that it is not wasted.

Paper money, paper houses, paper sedan chairs (and nowadays paper cars, aircraft and bicycles) are a far cry from the following description of Shang burial practice, where:

a holocaust of human victims accompanied the burials in the huge cruciform pits, credibly held to be royal tombs, which lay outside the city The principal occupant had been placed in a large wooden coffin lying over a small pit containing the remains of a dog. From two or from all sides of the pit, beginning at the level of the tops of the coffins, gently sloping ramps led to the surface, each 15 or 20 metres long. On the ramps and around the coffin were laid the bodies of scores of slaughtered human victims and horses, the retinue doomed to accompany the buried king to the nether world.⁸⁵

A latter-day Confucius might feel some disquiet at the fact that inside the paper house burning here were the paper figures of two servants.



I have lamented before the obliteration of the traditional landscape of the New Territories. This view of the northern part of the Sheung Shui-Fanling Plain has now changed out of all recognition, thanks to the massive development of the market town of Shek Wu Hui. In the centre here lies the large village of Sheung Shui, the home of the powerful Liu (廖) clan for 400 years. Until the second half of the 20th century it sat isolated in the midst of its extensive landholdings, but this photograph shows how already in 1964 it had begun to merge into Shek Wu Hui, and the railway station there even presumes to call itself Sheung Shui.

The Chinese word for “landscape” is *saan-sui* (山水), “hills and water”, and it is these two features which dominate most New Territories scenes. Here we are looking westward to the silted waters of the inappropriately named Deep Bay in the distance. The plain is ringed by typical barren hills rising straight from the fields. Villagers would cut the grass and low scrub regularly for use as fuel in their cooking stoves, periodic hill fires kept down heavier growth, and the only other use for the hills was as burial ground for the village dead — in this part of China valuable agricultural land was not taken up by graves.

The river in the foreground bears the even more inappropriate name of “Indus”, a legacy of the survey teams from India who mapped the New Territories in the early 1900s — there is a River Ganges in the area too.

No detailed cadastral maps had existed before the 1898 lease. Some plots of land had never been registered with the Chinese authorities, and many had changed hands or been divided up without formal registration at the county yamen (*nga-moon* 衙門) in Nam Tau. One of the first tasks of the new rulers was to try to regularize the situation. On the basis of the survey and of an enforced registration of titles, the Block Crown Lease was drawn up, and the land tax fixed for payment to the government. Those records are still in existence and provide excellent insight into the pattern of land ownership, though they were doubtless less than 100% accurate.

In this area immediately around Sheung Shui Village there were about 635 acres all in Liu ownership. The majority of the acreage was owned by small family units, but 42% of it was held by ancestral trusts, perpetual endowments designed to provide an income for the worship of the souls of important Liu ancestors. The trust land was rented out to families without enough land of their own to till.

The plain is well watered, as can be seen, and the rice fields were of high fertility, only 35% of this area consisting of the less productive, third class land, according to the records. Here lies the prime source of Liu power, their control over rich homelands.

But what comes out clearly from the survey and from this photograph is the “patchwork quilt” appearance of the landscape. The 635 acres were composed of over 2,700 separate plots of various shapes and sizes! The patchwork effect was common all over China, but how did it come about? In part it was caused by the elementary fact of life that water runs downhill. Rice-fields need to be flooded and left under water, and any degree of slope in a field will of course mean more water at the bottom than at the top. The larger the field the greater the problem, so that, except in completely level areas, it is necessary to have just small patches behind water-retaining earth walls, sometimes referred to as bunds.

But at least as much to blame is the Chinese inheritance system. In pre-modern China, when a man died, his estate was not disposed of according to his desires as expressed in a will. Instead, a simple rule applied: all the man’s

sons would inherit his estate in equal shares. His daughters did not share in the estate, though it is reasonable to reckon that the dowry of goods and money which each took with her on marriage was a form of inheritance. If a man had one field and three sons, that field would have to be divided into three equal portions. If he had three equally large fields and three sons, each of the plots would still in most cases be divided into three, because no two fields were considered equally well positioned or equally fertile. After only a few generations the land will have been cut down into minute plots.

The third reason for the patchwork is a more obvious one — some people are incompetent farmers, or unfortunate, or grow old and infirm, or gamble too bravely, and they have to sell off or mortgage portions of their land holdings to those who are better able to manage.

Such fragmentation of the land is not economically desirable, for a man would often find himself with an estate composed of tiny plots scattered over a wide area, so that he would waste a great deal of time and effort moving from one to another. In attempts to rationalize the situation, complicated schemes of leasing between farmers were devised. By renting out fields in one area and renting in fields in another it was possible to create larger holdings in one place. In this way many men were landlords and tenants at the same time.

To end up where I began — lamenting. Much of the land seen here was lying idle even before the enlargement of Shek Wu Hui: not because of urban encroachment, but because of the difficulty of making farming pay in the face of cheaper foods from overseas.



The minutiae of ritual concerned with death, burial and mourning in traditional China would fill volumes — indeed they have done so. De Groot describes the apparently simple process of washing the corpse, for example. It was actually set about with complicated procedures:

All the sons and grandsons, even those who are scarcely able to walk, silently repair to some well in the vicinity, the eldest carrying a bucket in his hand. On their way they mournfully droop their heads, so that their eyes behold nothing but the pavement of the street. Arrived at the well, the eldest son throws a few coppers as an offering to the water-ghost, who does not like to be deprived of a part of his property without being paid for it; then the son draws some water and takes the bucket home, all his brothers in the rear keeping up the same kind of lamentations and death dirges which the family chant and wail at the moment of the decease. As soon as the females, who have staid at home, become aware of their approach, they join in the melancholy concert.⁸⁶

Not all members of the deceased's family would necessarily be allowed to take part in the "water-buying" (*maai-sui* 買水), because complex rules of number-affinities meant that people of certain ages were thought to be harmed

by or harmful to the ritual. Participation in the process was not always at the same level either, as De Groot goes on to make clear:

The ceremony described, which has for its object the procuring of water for washing the dead, is at Amoy called 乞水, “to beg for water.” If the family is of some standing, the “water-beggars” are accompanied by a servant who carries the bucket and draws the water, it being incompatible with high-life to perform any coarse labour whatever. But, while the dipping of the bucket is done by the servant, the sons loosely grasp the end of the rope, to take at least the appearance of doing the work themselves.

Mourning is the process by which the living adjust to the new circumstances now that someone who was important to them has gone. It allows grief to be expressed and gives a breathing space before everyday life is taken up again. Until the 20th century the Chinese law stipulated how that mourning should be carried out, by whom, and for how long; and punishments were prescribed for failure to mourn accordingly.

The laws are known as the Five Mourning Grades (*ng-fuk* 五服), though a more literal translation would be “the five kinds of mourning dress”. The five in order of severity were (1) a dress of undyed, unhemmed, coarse hemp, with head-dress of hemp, grass sandals and mourning staff; (2) a dress of undyed, hemmed, coarse hemp, hemp head-dress and shoes, and mourning staff; (3) a dress of coarse cloth; (4) a dress of medium-coarse cloth; (5) a dress of plain silky hemp. The periods of mourning associated with each grade were (1) 27 months, (2) one year, (3) nine months, (4) five months, (5) three months.

But the mourning grades did not only deal with behaviour at *death*: they carefully laid down which relationships should be more and which less important in *life*. The people for whom you were required to observe Grade 1 mourning (your parents and your husband) were therefore the most important to you. Next were those with whom you were in Grade 2 relationship — your wife, paternal grandparents, brothers and sisters, paternal uncles and aunts, sons and daughters — and so on down to the remote relationships such as those with your great-grandfather’s brother’s son’s son’s son, which were Grade 5.

The combined list of people who fell into these five grades made up for you an important circle of kin. It was incest to marry or have sexual relationships within this circle. To reinforce family solidarity and authority the law carefully

graded offences committed against other members of the circle according to whether they were carried out by an inferior to a superior or vice versa. A father could beat his son unmercifully without risk of punishment, but a son who so much as laid a finger on his father was liable to be executed.

Since the people inside the mourning circle were more important to you than those outside, it stood to reason that it was a greater offence to do harm to insiders than to outsiders. Murder was in all cases a crime punishable by death, but the murder of someone within your mourning circle was more severely punished than murder of an outsider. Happily (if that's the word) there were graded forms of capital punishment which allowed for subtle distinctions in your demise, ranging from strangulation at the lenient end to death by slicing for the most serious crime (patricide).

Theft worked the other way round. As the family was considered to be a mutual responsibility group and all its property to be held in common, it was difficult to conceive of theft from another member of your family. So theft from an outsider was *more* serious than theft within the circle, and was punished more severely.

The mourners in the photograph are mainly dressed in undyed cloth, though the niceties of grade cannot be picked out because they were not observed. The shot was taken at a New Territories ceremony to mark the end of mourning, despite the fact that it was only a few days after the funeral. The law no longer maintains the authority of the mourning grade hierarchy. All in all the resemblance to a pre-20th-century scene is superficial: the grief remains, however, and with it the need to mourn.

61 _____ Wedding Party



In the narrow alleys between the terraces of village houses two or three people make a crowd. Here, with a real crowd, the effect is of noise and chaos.

I remember Peter Ustinov once saying that in crowded places like Hong Kong you can walk along a street without ever touching a soul, whereas in empty places like the outback of Australia you are bound to trip over someone's foot. He had a point. Despite the apparent chaos, the people in the photograph have a purpose and are calmly getting on with the business of the day — a wedding.

The scene is the outside of the bridegroom's house, and the party which will go to collect the bride is assembling. Red, the lucky colour, is the order of the day. The musicians in the foreground have red cloaks; the women have red thread tied in their hair; red flags on long poles can be seen further down the alley; the doorway of the nuptial house has new, red-paper lucky couplets posted round it; the sedan-chair in which the bride will be carried is red; the bride's wedding dress is red; the groom wears a red sash; and so on.

To get to this stage a lot of work has been done. The actual wedding ceremony is probably less important than the betrothal and the long negotiations which traditionally led up to the betrothal.

Marriage used always to be arranged between families, and was not decided for themselves by the couple who were to be married. The services of a go-between were essential so that the families could negotiate terms without having to argue with each other face to face.

The go-between had to get agreement on the amount of "bride-price" (*lai-gam* 禮金) which the groom's family would pay to the bride's. The bride-price was not necessarily in the form of cash, in most cases it was paid partly at least in kind.

In the course of a survey of the customs of one New Territories village, I gathered some information on bride-price. The amounts paid varied considerably according to the wealth of the families involved. At one marriage in 1911 the bride-price was \$200 cash; while at another marriage in the same year \$80, 16 man-loads of cakes, 40 catties of rice, and 120 catties of pork had changed hands. (1 catty (*gan* 斤) = approximately half a kilogram.) One 1927 wedding had involved a bride-price of \$600, two man-loads of wine, and 20 live chickens in a basket. Prawns and large fish often were included too.

But perhaps most interesting was the fact that many couples were unable to tell me how much bride-price had passed at their own marriage. Their parents would have known, but they themselves had not been concerned with the arrangements; they were merely the bridal pair, puppets rather than actors in the play.

Although comparatively few marriages now are "arranged", the old forms are often still observed, with a go-between, and even with bride-price being paid. The modern form that at least part of the bride-price takes tends to be the groom's family meeting the cost of feeding an agreed number of guests at a wedding banquet to be held by the bride's family.

When matters have all been settled, the wedding itself can take place. On the appointed day, the groom's family sends a procession to collect the bride. It is led by musicians and flag-bearers; then come the go-between, gifts for the bride's family, and the bridal sedan-chair.

The whole procession has something of the appearance of a "raiding party", and has led folklore specialists to see Chinese wedding customs as a

survival of “marriage-by-capture”. The following excerpt I have translated from a 1936 account in Chinese of the marriage customs of Dung Gwoon (東莞 Dongguan) County, a district very close to the New Territories. The bride has been collected from her home:

The sedan-chair gets out of the village, but out on the path through the fields many small boys lie in ambush, their pockets filled with stones, as if an enemy were approaching. When the musicians have gone by, the flag-bearers come along, and then the boys take out all their stones and let loose wholesale at the flag-bearers, who by no means show cowardice, but also are provided with stones and lumps of mud which they throw back. The running battle only stops when the chair is a long way on its road.⁸⁷

The wedding shown here was interesting because the groom was absent for most of the proceedings. He was due to take an examination on the day, and after he had gone through some early morning worship of the village gods to inform them of his imminent change of status, he took a train into Kowloon and left the ceremony to the family. No-one found his absence remarkable.



One of the problems posed by ancestor worship is that it is precisely that — worship of ancestors. Now, logic insists that ancestors are only ancestors because they have descendants, and reason tells us that not everyone who dies can become an ancestor, because some people die young or unmarried or childless. If the Chinese were “dead worshippers” as opposed to “ancestor worshippers” there would be no problem; but they aren’t, and the result is that the souls of those who die childless (or whose children neglect to worship them) are thought to suffer from hunger and lack of care in the after-life. And hungry and uncared for souls become angry, vengeful and likely to make trouble in this world by coming up to haunt it. Fortunately, Buddhism and Taoism step into the breach here. They both specialize in the treatment of other people’s dead, where ancestor worship can only look after one’s own dead. Taoism has developed rituals of exorcism, and Buddhism very early on in its history in China began to hold masses for the unquiet dead.

In this photograph a group of Buddhist nuns are holding a mass at a temporary altar put up especially for a thanksgiving ceremony in a New

Territories market town. The mass aims both to secure the release of souls from the rigorous tortures to which they have been condemned in Purgatory and to feed them with offerings, and so it is a two-pronged management tool applied to those ghosts most likely to cause trouble for the living.

On initiation Buddhist nuns shave their heads and undergo a painful process of burning of the scalp. A series of burn marks are inflicted, some say with lighted cigarettes or incense sticks, but probably most often with smouldering cones of moxa, which is made from the plant *Artemisia*. The nuns take a vow of chastity, and of course, being Buddhists, they forswear the taking of life and the eating of meat. Their duties in the convent or temple where they live include regular daily prayer, assistance in ritual activities for patrons who visit their institution, visits to the sick and the poor, and performance of rites at funerals.

I was most surprised one day in the New Territories to see a nun I knew buying meat in the market. I was too embarrassed to ask her why she did it, but a friend explained to me quite seriously that it was indeed against the nun's vows to eat meat, but that it was "better for health to do so", and that all the nuns from that temple had meat occasionally.

It reminded me of a passage in Lin Yutang's (林語堂) famous *My Country and My People*:

The Chinese Doctrine of the Golden Mean has encouraged the people in the consumption of pork as an inevitable evil and on the plea that the pig is a less useful animal than the cow as food. But it has driven home to the Chinese consciousness the idea that butchery is inhuman and displeasing to the gods Mencius was conscious of this cruelty, but being unwilling to forgo meat entirely, he fought his way out by giving the formula that "the gentleman keeps away from the kitchen." The fact that one does not see what happens in the kitchen eases the Confucian conscience Many a Chinese grandmother, wishing to please Buddha and not willing to forgo meat entirely, would apply the Doctrine of the Golden Mean in a different fashion by turning vegetarian for a definite period from a single day to three years.⁸⁸

Nuns take orders usually as young girls, but there seems to be no bar to leaving the worldly life at a later age. For many, becoming a nun seems to have been more a means of escape from greater evils than a positive desire for the peace and holiness of religious orders. Escape from a threatened arranged marriage with someone inimical was often found in this way. The favourite

concubine of an Emperor of the 10th century A.D. shaved her head and became a nun on his death, devoting the rest of her life to praying for his soul.

Of course, for a people as pragmatic and irreverent as the Chinese, the notion of chastity in a nun or monk is an open invitation to sceptical disbelief. Chinese literature and folk-tale is full of tales of the immoral goings-on of these celibates, and it is likely that at least some of the stories were well founded. The Rev. Justus Doolittle says of Foochow (Fuzhou):

Thirty odd years ago there were comparatively a large number of priestesses or nuns of the Buddhist religion dwelling in convents or nunneries at this place. But these were summarily suppressed about twenty-eight or thirty years ago, on account of the dissolute character of their inmates, by a provincial treasurer. About the middle of the reign of the grandfather of the present emperor, as the treasurer was passing by a certain nunnery in the city during the evening, his attention was arrested by the numerous lights connected with the establishment, and the manifest proof that it was improperly visited by men. After making ample inquiries in regard to the dissolute life of the nuns, he determined to suppress the nunneries in the city, and oblige the inmates to marry or leave the section of the country. Very many gladly changed their state of single blessedness for the state of matrimony, a sufficient number of unmarried men being found to marry them.⁸⁹

I can't resist quoting Lin Yutang again. He says:

In 1934 a nun actually had the audacity to sue a monk for infidelity in a Shanghai court.⁹⁰

I cannot say that I have seen any evidence of such junketings in Hong Kong's temples.

It is interesting that Buddhist nuns seem to believe in ancestor worship as firmly as any layman. They have ancestral shrines in the temples, where they worship former nuns as "ancestresses", and where in the course of time they themselves will be worshipped by their successors acting as "descendants".



Fish is excellent food, tasty and nutritious, but it perishes quickly. One of the minor tragedies of recent life in Hong Kong has been the decline in availability of cheap live fish. With over-exploited local waters and so many mouths to feed, it is not possible to take the catch with the care needed to keep it alive for the table, and fresh fish has become a luxury to be sold by the ounce (*leung* 兩) rather than by the catty (*gan* 斤).

Not all fish used to be eaten fresh, though. Preservation through salting and drying was very popular, and it was actually more rather than less nutritious that way. Plenty of this salted fish (*haam-yue* 鹹魚) is still eaten, and a whole area of Western District on Hong Kong Island is dedicated to its sale. The flavour is very strong and takes a little cultivating, but it's worth the trouble.

Chinese people who visit Macau are expected to bring back gifts of food for their families. Crabs, egg rolls and salted fish top the list of favourite presents. The photograph shows some of the fish drying in the January sunshine on Macau waterfront.

But not only fish: there are snakes too. And snakes can also be eaten. As the Cantonese say, "If its back faces Heaven it's eatable." Snake soup (*se-gang*

蛇羹) is a favourite winter dish, as many as five different kinds of snake being boiled up with chicken meat, and eaten garnished with chrysanthemum petals. It's excellent and so warming that you feel quite flushed for two or three hours afterwards. Definitely not to be taken in summer.

Rather like pretentious Western cuisine, gourmet Chinese food tends to take on fancy names. No restaurant serves "chicken's feet", for example, they always call them on menus "phoenix claws" (*fung-jau* 鳳爪). "Pigeon" is usually billed as "sucking dove" (*yue-gap* 乳鴿) in blatant defiance of the natural law which excludes birds from the category of mammals.

The most famous snake dish is called by the resounding title "Dragon, Tiger and Phoenix" (*lung-foo-fung* 龍虎鳳). Dragon is a fancy name for snake, based on the belief that the two are related animals. Tiger stands for cat, and I'm told that old cat is preferable to young. Phoenix is again chicken. I've never tried this mixture, and have never met anyone who claims to have done so, but it is so well known that I have no doubt of its authenticity.

Scattered around the older parts of Kowloon and Hong Kong are little snake shops full of close-mesh wire cages in which the wares are coiled sleepily. Snake gall (*se-daam* 蛇膽) is the speciality here, the gall bladder being cut from the living snake and emptied into Chinese wine to be drunk by eager customers. It is said to be good for rheumatism sufferers, and also to have a most beneficial effect on waning virility — but then so many foods are credited with aphrodisiac qualities that something as outlandish as snake gall could hardly escape inclusion on the list. On the one occasion that I tried it, I did not have rheumatism or the other problem, so I cannot vouch for its effectiveness, but I can say that the wine changes to a lurid dark green colour and the mixture is very unpleasantly bitter-tasting.

Other than as food, snakes are not terribly popular with the Chinese, any more than they are in Western culture. They represent cunning, hypocrisy and evil. A "soft-skinned snake" (*yuen-pei-se* 軟皮蛇) is someone who is too slippery and cunning to be liked. A "king of snakes" (*se-wong* 蛇王) is someone who is bone idle.

"Snake's legs" (*se-juk* 蛇足) means useless or superfluous. The expression comes from a passage in the *Intrigues of the Warring States* (*Jingwok-chaak* 戰國策), a book written over two thousand years ago in the Han dynasty:

A man of the state of Choh had been sacrificing, and afterwards offered the ritual wine to his guests. They decided among themselves that there was not enough for all of them but there would be plenty and to spare for just one. "Let's all draw snakes in the dust, and the first to finish can have the wine." The man who finished drawing his snake first took the wine and got ready to drink it, but with the flask in his left hand he set about his snake again with the right, saying: "I can give it some legs." Before he'd done that, another man finished his drawing, and snatched the flask away with the words: "Snakes don't have legs, so how can you draw them?" Then he drank the wine and the leg-drawer had to go without.⁹¹

One man in history did benefit from a snake according to another Han dynasty book, the *San-ju* (新序):

When Suen Suk Ngo was a boy he saw a two-headed snake when he was out playing. He killed and buried it, and went home in tears. His mother asked why, and he said: "I've heard that anyone who sees a two-headed snake will die. I saw one just now and I'm frightened that I must leave you and die." "Where is the snake now?" she asked. "I was afraid someone else would see it, so I killed it and buried it." "Well, I've been told," said his mother "that Heaven rewards those who do good deeds in secret. You won't die." When he grew up he became prime minister of Choh, and everyone believed in his merit even before he took office.⁹²

I don't think there is any risk involved in looking at the sea-snakes in this photograph. As far as I can make out, a budding prime minister has done the decent thing already.



Pretty well every village in the New Territories has its quota of one or more temples, but not many of these are to be found much more than a stone's throw away from the settlements. This one in the photograph is at least a kilometre away from the village to which it belongs, and it is also slightly unusual in the shape of its architecture.

The gods worshipped in temples are numerous and vary considerably in different parts of China. Some of the gods are universally worshipped. The Goddess of Mercy Gwoon Yam (觀音, often written Guan Yin or Kuan Yin from the Mandarin pronunciation) is found all over China, for example, though in some parts "she" is a "he".

But even with such ubiquitous gods there is no "Church" in the sense that there is a Methodist Church or The Church of England. The many temples are each set up independently by local people, and there is no central body to control or unite them, no head of the Gwoon Yam believers, no hierarchy of Gwoon Yam priests or devotees. A temple may have a resident complement of nuns or priests, but they do not necessarily belong to an "order" which maintains links between establishments.

In fact, religious belief and practice at this level reflect quite faithfully (as one might expect) the secular organization of Chinese society. It seems to me that a great deal of the history of China, much of what has been bad, and something also of its unique charm and kaleidoscopic interest, has stemmed from the tendency of the country to be composed of “cells of localism” which have not readily united with each other or even co-operated with each other. In general, then, a temple serves its local community, but holds little or no interest for anyone outside the area. There are exceptions, of course, and they sometimes become centres of pilgrimage with a catchment area of faithful which could even be nationwide.

Another feature which is common to most temples is the profusion of gods which can be found in any one of them. A temple may be known as the Gwoon Yam Temple, and that name may be inscribed in large characters over the door; but inside, Gwoon Yam is likely to be only one, albeit the most important, of several gods.

In one temple in the Restricted Area of the New Territories bordering the Chinese Mainland, I found the principal goddess, the Empress of Heaven, Tin Hau (天后), flanked on either side by two minor gods bearing the names “Sea Watcher” (Mong-hoi 望海) and “Hill Facer” (Jiu-gong 朝崗). There was an “ancestral” shrine to the late chief nun of the temple. Then there was a god called “Good Fortune and Virtue” (Fuk-dak 福德) who appears under one name or another as the protective god of territory or Earth God. Finally there was a god called “God of the Year” (Taai-sui 太歲).

Taai-sui might have been created just to bear out what I said above about “cells of localism”. Werner’s *Dictionary of Chinese Mythology* has this to say of him:

The object of the worship is to avoid calamities, Tai Sui being a dangerous spirit who can do injury to palaces and cottages, to people in their houses as well as to travellers on the road. But he has this peculiarity, that he injures persons and things not in the district in which he himself is, but in those districts which adjoin it. Thus, if some constructive work is undertaken in a region where Tai Sui happens to be, the inhabitants of the neighbouring districts take precautions against his evil influence.⁹³

The temple shown here is called the Temple of Literary Brilliance (Man-ming-miu 文明廟). From this distance it is impressive but, close to, it can be

seen to be barely standing. Inside, the gods are badly damaged, and rubble and dirt are everywhere.

The battered gods on the altar are identifiable as Lau Bei (劉備) and Gwaan Yue (關羽), blood-brother heroes of the Three Kingdoms period of Chinese history (A.D. 220–264). Apparently one god is missing, because the third sworn brother, Jeung Fei (張飛), would normally be where the other two are.

Lau Bei and Gwaan Yue were best known as martial heroes — which makes the “literary” title of the temple something of a mystery, though Gwaan Yue did have some pretension to learning. However, there is a curious interior design to the building, so that by walking through side chambers a small altar behind the main altar is revealed. I was unable to find out which god it was whose broken remains stand there, but I suspect that he must have had a literary purpose.

The villagers no longer go to the temple to worship. They say it is haunted. Certainly in this late afternoon light it has a brooding sadness about it which gives rise to ghostly thoughts.



This beautiful old lady is a Hakka from one of the villages on the north side of Tolo Harbour.

The New Territories were settled partly by Hakka people and partly by Cantonese, and as a rule of thumb we can say that the Cantonese took the large areas of fertile plain on the west side of the New Territories, while the Hakka took the hillier and smaller patches of land on the east.

China we now think of as belonging to the Chinese, but 3,000 years ago the Chinese occupied only a small area in the basin of the Yellow River far to the north. By the time of Christ they had spread their influence over much of what we now know as China; however, they had by no means taken up all the land, and large stretches of country, especially in the south, were inhabited by aboriginal Tai peoples. Some of these seem to have been slash-and-burn agriculturalists, others were settled rice growers, but in culture and organization they could not compete with the Chinese. They were gradually ousted from the best land, and nowadays are found mainly in pockets in the more mountainous regions.

The Chinese presence in the Hong Kong area was minimal until about 1,000 years ago during the Song dynasty, but from then on the land became heavily settled, and such eminent clans as the Dang (鄧) and the Hau (侯) can show continuous history in the locality. The aboriginals must have been either driven out or assimilated, and only very uncertain traces of them are now to be found. K. M. A. Barnett has said:

Here and there in the hills an aboriginal element betrays itself to the discerning eye in un-Chinese physiognomy and stature, striking dark red complexions, and ancient animist observances, but even then the prevailing sentiment is Chinese and Chinese-sounding genealogies (often showing royal descent) are produced in proof of Chinese origin, just as they are among the tribes of Kwangsi and Yunnan. These feelings must be respected.⁹⁴

This is not very convincing scholarship, and despite his producing some rather more credible linguistic evidence for survivals of non-Chinese peoples, it is difficult to accept such impressionistic arguments.

I have heard people say that the Hakka prefer to farm high and difficult terrain, and that this is proof of their aboriginal past — that is, that they are not Chinese at all. This is nonsense. The reason why they settled the less productive land in the New Territories is that they arrived on the scene later than did the Cantonese, and the best land was already occupied.

The Cantonese people are known as *boon-dei-yan* (本地人), meaning “indigenous people” and usually romanized as “Punti”; and the spelling “*Hakka*” comes from the words *haak-ga* (客家), meaning “guest people”. The implications are clear enough surely? As for the alleged aboriginal past, let me quote Mantaro J. Hashimoto. The Hakka, he says:

identify themselves as originally from the Central Plains of China — an indication of their proud ethnic origin that Hakka intellectuals sought with unusual zeal at the beginning of the modern period and which is largely supported by various historical as well as linguistic evidence. The hardships the newcomers had to endure among the southern “natives” kept the cultural as well as linguistic unity of this group very sound, and it is fairly conspicuous even nowadays that they readily identify themselves as Hakkas regardless of their present circumstances The Hakka dialects constitute one of the five major dialect groups of modern Chinese.⁹⁵

Hakka and Punti generally kept themselves apart, with little intermarriage and a great deal of hostility. There were widespread and very bloody Hakka-

Punti wars in southern China during the 19th century, though the New Territories peoples do not seem to have been much involved.

What were the differences between the two groups? Clearly language was one. Despite a certain amount of borrowing from Cantonese, Hakka is very different, and the two are mutually unintelligible.

Hakka women, we are told, never went in for foot-binding, whereas there certainly were Cantonese women with bound feet. Hakka women wore woven coloured bands and tassels on their hats and aprons: the woman in the photograph has her head-cloth held down by one. This head-cloth is worn by Hakka, but not by Punti. The cane hat with black cloth curtain fringes at the perimeter is often called a Hakka hat, but its use is not in fact confined to Hakka. Hakka dead tended to have a different kind of ancestor tablet from Punti dead.

The differences were on the whole small, but they were made greater by language problems and inequalities in wealth and (formerly) in social status too. Other differences were probably based more on rumour than fact. For instance, Hakka men, according to the Cantonese, were idle and left the women to do all the work in the fields (“which is why they couldn’t bind their feet” Q.E.D.). Hakka people had flat heads at the back, because of the kind of cradle they were rocked in as babies — said the Cantonese.

Hakka food is distinctive, and it is worth looking for a specialist restaurant in the city; but for a really authentic meal go out to Tai Po in the New Territories. Salted chicken, roast intestine, and pork with preserved vegetables are just three of the best typical dishes.

Of recent years Hakka-Punti differences have been disappearing: the old clear-cut pattern of settlement has been swamped by the many immigrants, the old hostility has faded, intermarriage has taken place, and many people wear Westernized clothing which does not draw attention to sub-cultural differences.

One rather strange discrepancy remains. The New Territories Punti speak Cantonese with a strong country accent. The Hakka people learn their Cantonese from school-teachers and from the radio, and the result is that they tend to speak standard Cantonese. So, when in the New Territories you meet someone who speaks clear, regular Cantonese, the chances are either that he was not born there or that he is a Hakka. Paradoxically, the man who

speaks Cantonese with a barbarous thick accent ... is probably an indigenous Cantonese!



The old Chinese Empire was vast, and it was run by a pitifully sparse administration. The south of China was notoriously difficult to control, partly because of the great distance from the central government in Beijing, partly because of the difficulty of communication across its mountain-seeded terrain, and partly perhaps because of the volatile and fiercely independent nature of its inhabitants.

One obvious answer to such problems of control would have been to station large bodies of troops in the south. But troops were needed in the north to guard the frontiers across which China's traditional enemies lay; besides, to deploy ill-paid troops in the remote south where they were cut off from headquarters would have been to invite them to stage a rebellion.

In the circumstances Chinese governments chose to garrison key administrative cities and in effect to leave the countryside to sort out its own affairs:

From his *yamen* the magistrate collected the taxes imposed by the state and supervised the maintenance of public order. These were his chief responsibilities.

Provided enough taxes came forward and there was no breach of the peace of which he chose to take notice there was little reason for him to interfere in the government of local communities. He could be appealed to as a judicial person and so become involved in disputes within and between local communities, but the theory of government informing the system within which he worked encouraged him to meddle as little as possible in local affairs. In accounts of the relations between the bureaucracy and the local community considerable stress is put upon official "do-nothingism".⁹⁶

One supremely effective way in which rural communities conducted their affairs was through the development of clan organization. Whole villages were settled, owned and controlled by single clans. Particularly wealthy and powerful clan villages could have as many as 10,000 or more inhabitants, and the problems of internal control were as great as with a small town.

Theoretically control over clan members was easy. The Five Human Relationships (*ng-lun* 五倫) taught that those of a senior generation were superior to those of a later generation, that older people were superior to younger people of the same generation, and that males were superior to females. Since everyone in a clan village was related to everyone else, it was always possible to tell who was superior (and to be obeyed) and who was inferior (and to be ordered around). Obviously the oldest man in the senior surviving generation was top dog. He was given the title *juk-jeung* (族長) "Clan Head". Next to him in importance was the second oldest man in his generation, the *yi-juk* (二族), "Second in the Clan", and so on.

There were two rather awkward problems about a leadership of this kind. First, by the time a man became Clan Head he might well be in his dotage, or of course he could have been weak and stupid all his life, and therefore have been incapable of giving the necessary effective lead. Second, by a process which need not be detailed here, it commonly happened that the Clan Heads came from the poorest, least advantaged families of the clan, and they carried little authority accordingly. In fact it quite often was the case that these elders were leaders in name only.

The real power lay with members of the clan whose qualifications were the more practical ones of good education, strong muscles, or wealth, and such men could be of any age or seniority:

As a matter of fact, they are always from the so-called strong branches of the clan, that is, those composed of the largest number of families and individuals.

And they themselves are supposed to be “rich and reliable”, “learned and rational.”⁹⁷

This account goes on to point out some of the abuses of power which these leaders indulged in:

All the incomes of the clan ... come under the management and control of the clan treasurer or the accountant Too many clan treasurers never publish a detailed account. Often some of the rent from clan land is used to pay the land tax of the private families in control of the clan finances The vast sum of clan incomes, representing the fruit of the labour of the multitudes, is quietly passing into the possession of a relatively few people.

Harsh judgment in one sense at least — for if peculation of this kind did go on (and reports of it are commonplace) it probably made the leaders stronger and more able to maintain their clan’s interests effectively in the outside world.

This photograph was taken in 1964 and shows worship at the grave of a New Territories clan ancestor. Kneeling down in their long silk robes are the titular leaders of the clan. The Clan Head in the dark robe is offering a cup of wine while the official in the white robe reads an address to the ancestor from a red paper.

Standing in line behind the elders are the men who actually run the clan’s affairs. They include two headmasters, several successful businessmen, and others who have made their mark in public life. They will come forward to worship when the elders have finished. (Let me hasten to say that there is no suggestion here of misuse of clan funds.)

Government in the New Territories today is effective down to village level to an extent that it never was in Imperial times. Villages need no longer be so self-reliant, and clans have lost much of their former power. Still they exist, and the photograph gives a clear picture of the way in which the dual leadership system continues.

67 Yearly Blessings



New Year is a time for looking back and a time for looking forward, a time for optimists and for changes in luck.

Years are dominated by twelve animals which follow each other in rotation — the Rat, the Ox, the Tiger, the Hare or Rabbit, the Dragon, the Snake, the Horse, the Sheep or Goat, the Monkey, the Fowl or Cock, the Dog, and the Pig. Each animal has different characteristics which are thought to affect the tide of events, and in particular each reacts in varying ways with people born under other animal signs. For example, I am told that the year of the Horse is not very good for those born under the Rat, the Snake, the Pig, and, oddly enough, for those themselves born under the Horse. For Oxen, Dragons, Goats, Monkeys and Cocks, however, the forecast is good.

Of course the animal signs provide only very general guides to the year's fortunes, and many Chinese are intent on knowing their personal luck at this crucial time of change. So fortune-tellers of many kinds do a roaring trade.

At New Year all Chinese seem to become cautious optimists — there is a feeling that the year starts with a clean slate of good luck. Unfortunately it is a very fragile slate, and the effort involved in keeping it clean and undamaged

is too great for ordinary men. None the less, New Year's Day sees everyone taking precautions. No knives or scissors are used on that day, and no brooms or dusters are wielded, so nothing seen or unseen in the house can be injured. Animals are not slaughtered, and meat and fish should not be eaten. Only the poor oyster is not safe. He has no soul, it is said, and even the Bodhisattva Gwoon Yam (a vegetarian, it goes without saying) could eat him.

Bad temper and evil thoughts are avoided too, and note what Lin Yueh-hwa says of a family in *The Golden Wing*:

They talked of pleasant things and behaved as properly as possible, to be sure of entering the New Year in the proper spirit. The children were specially warned not to use dirty language and unlucky words. If they did, the grown-ups wiped their mouths out with toilet paper, to rid them of whatever ill omens they had uttered.⁹⁸

What better way to test the fledgling year's luck than by gambling? Mahjong and other gambling games are understandably popular over the festival. In eighteen months living in a New Territories village I never saw the woman who lived next door relax, except once at New Year, when she played a brief hand or two of cards.

Both fortune-telling and gambling are ways of manipulating or at least understanding Fate. Religion too is important at New Year. The ancestors are worshipped and offered rich foods; the other gods of the household, the Door Gods, the Earth God, and so on are all worshipped; and the Kitchen God is welcomed back on return from his annual trip to Heaven to report on the doings of the family in the previous year. Outside the house, careful attention is paid to worshipping the Well God, the Tree God, the Earth God of the village, and the gods of the local temples.

Even before the New Year, the ritual observances begin. No country family would omit thanking the gods for blessings conferred in the previous year. So during the lunar Twelfth Month on any days which the Almanac says are good for worshipping, the housewife goes all around to show her appreciation with appropriate offerings. This worship is known as *chau-san* (酬神) "thanking the gods". To balance *chau-san* there is *jok-fuk* (作福 "creating blessings"). *Jok-fuk* is performed on good days early in the New Year, and asks for favours of the gods for the next twelve or thirteen months. Some villages hold communal *jok-fuk* ceremonies with hired Taoist priests and elders in long robes going round

to all the shrines of the village territory. These ceremonies are in addition to the housewives' individual worship on behalf of their own families.

But *chau-san* and *jok-fuk* are not intended for gods alone. They are also directed at another category of supernatural being — the hordes of ghosts and evil spirits which haunt this world and try to make trouble for the living. The photograph shows two women performing *jok-fuk* for evil spirits. As well as food, drink, candles and incense, they offer cone-shaped paper and bamboo flowers, which are stuck in the ground. The offerings, prayers for freedom from trouble, are made at spots known to be favoured by evil spirits, especially dangerous places.

The location shown is certainly hazardous. In the background is the unfenced railway track which used to cross the road by level-crossing to the left of the picture. And to take the photograph I am standing on a bridge over a particularly nasty and evil-smelling stream which carried the effluent from nearby tanneries. The women are trying to ensure that the spirits do not cause any members of their families to fall under a train or off the bridge.

On the same day I noticed a number of women performing *jok-fuk* in the forecourt of a petrol station sited at a very busy crossroads. The lighted candles and incense must have been at least as dangerous as what they were designed to prevent.

Another spot much worshipped was the village school. Mothers with children studying there blocked the gateways with their offerings, which may have appeased the evil spirits, but it brought down on them the wrath of the headmaster and of the caretaker who had to clean up the mess afterwards.



Hong Kong has no more colourful spectacle than a dancing dragon. As it processes through the open fields of the New Territories plains, the dragon is like a ribbon of colour threaded through the green uniformity of the crops.

The dragon is made of light wooden barrel-like sections, each of which is attached to a carrying stick. Over this is draped the cloth body, highly coloured and sewn with foil "scales" of gold or silver. The one shown here had 38 of the sections plus a massive tail and the ornate and heavy head section, and was about 65 metres long altogether. Horns, whiskers, a movable tongue, and eyes which light up from battery power add to the effect. The dragon cost over HK\$7,000 in 1974.

Dancing the dragon is hard work, especially for the men charged with manoeuvring the head and tail sections around. For each section there are three men, who take turns at carrying. They duck in and out of the skin spelling each other as it goes along, their coloured silk trousers being all that show, so that it looks like an 80-legged monster, except when the frequent changeovers double the number temporarily.

By swinging the carrying sticks from side to side or moving them up and down, the dragon can be made to sway and undulate, and its dances are really a series of formalized patterns determined by the man who carries the “pearl” on a stick which the dragon always faithfully follows.

As the photograph shows, it is not much like a pearl to look at, and Chinese sources are in some disagreement about what it is supposed to represent. Some say a ball, some a ruby, and I have seen it suggested that it is a spider which is trying to enmesh the dragon. Another explanation is that it represents the sun, but usually there are other devices which are carried on sticks swarming round the dragon, and one of them has the character for “sun” (日) written on it. The moon (月) is another, and then there is a large green fish, and also a couple of balls on either end of a rope like a South American bolas. It does not seem likely that two suns are intended. I favour the “pearl” theory.

There are various different kinds of dragon in Chinese mythology, and the functions they perform and the ways in which they are represented differ from place to place. Here is a contrast from North China:

The rain dragon is paraded through the streets, a dozen coolies acting as living vertebrae under a blue cloth skin painted to look like scales and illuminated by lanterns. Such a monster, undulating in life-like fashion, is most impressive, even terrifying, especially as pandemonium attends his passage. Gongs clang, crackers pop, and bonfires of paper money blaze, while people sprinkle him with water to show what is expected. As the dragon zigzags through the grey old city gate, children scream with terror and delight, and women desirous of sons crowd to pick up the burned-out candle-ends that drop from his body, believing them talismans.⁹⁹

This leaves no doubt but that the dragon’s task is to bring rain, and it is true that water is supposed to be the dragon’s special province — each ocean, lake and river is ruled by its own dragon. But rain-making and flood control are not the only jobs which these normally benevolent monsters perform.

The dragon shown here was being danced round the villages of the Ha Tsuen area in the north-west of the New Territories during a ten-yearly *da-jiu* ceremony. Since the week-long ceremony was held in late December and early January in the dry winter monsoon, there was no question of rain or flood. What then was its purpose? I asked one of the dancers. He said, “The dragon goes to lots of villages, and as it passes through it destroys evil so that the village will have good luck.”

On its good luck mission the dragon visits all the villages and hamlets which come within the political, ritual and economic area of influence of Ha Tsuen, which is one of the strongholds of the Dang clan. So the dragon (owned and danced by clan members) performs a ten-yearly “beating the bounds”, not only bringing ritual benefits, but symbolically re-asserting Dang political control too. A parish in Britain, of course, is also only partly a religious area.

The account quoted above goes on:

The gaudy show does not last long. An hour after dark and all is over, the last light extinguished, the gongs silent, the crowd dispersed. The tattered dragon-skin on its bent bamboo frame-work is stored away in some dusty guild-house, neglected till next year when it will be patched up, freshly painted and paraded again.

When New Territories dragons are brought out after disuse they take a deal of awakening. Local notables (pre-1997 it was often rather embarrassed British District Officers) have to be called in to “dot” (*dim* 點) the eyes and tongue with red paint, and even then the dragon can only walk sedately until it is fed with fresh green saplings. Once fed, there is a great shout, the drum rolls furiously, and the dancers leap into action.



In the middle of Macau is a spacious old house with an ornate pillared front bearing a blue board on which are the characters 國父紀念館 (Gwok-foo Gei-nim-gwoon, “Memorial Hall to the Father of the State”). Near the door is another board which says: “Please do not enter unless neatly dressed”.

The Father of the State is the honorific title by which Sun Yat-sen is known to posterity, and this was his house when he lived in Macau. After the imposing entrance it is rather disappointing inside. There is little to be seen other than a few sticks of furniture and a series of fly-blown old photographs: and unless you can read Chinese there is not much in the way of explanation of even these few exhibits.

It is, fortunately, not Sun's only memorial. After he died in 1925 work was begun on the most impressive of all, a massive mausoleum near Nanjing (南京) on the Yangtze River. Four years later, escorted by foreign ambassadors and the cream of China's public life, his remains were carried to their permanent resting place in a marble chamber there.

The blue-roofed mausoleum has been lovingly kept and is today a place of pilgrimage for all Chinese. It is set in magnificent wooded scenery and stands on the side of a hill at the top of a great flight of 392 steps. The approach is by way of a ceremonial arch, a long formal avenue, and a huge lodge building. Statues of Sun, carved reminders of his political principles, fresh wreaths of flowers — it is a far cry from the hall in Macau.

Sun was born in Heung Saan (香山, the county in which Macau was situated) in 1866, the son of a farming family. His personal name was Man (文), but he also used the style Yat-sin (逸仙) from which comes the name Sun Yat-sen by which he is known in the West.

Chinese generally call him by neither of these names. At one stage in his life Sun lived in exile in Japan, and while there he adopted the Japanese surname Nakayama (中山). It stuck to him and in its Chinese reading Jung Saan eventually became attached to his proper surname as a personal name. It is as Suen Jung Saan (孫中山) that he is most often referred to nowadays. So much a part of him was it that when he died his home county changed its name from Heung Saan to Jung Saan as a mark of respect. It retains the name still.

Sun studied medicine in Guangzhou and Hong Kong. He was one of the first graduates of the Hong Kong College of Medicine, a college which was to become a part of the University of Hong Kong. He practised for a while in Macau, but then found his mission in life to be the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty which had ruled China since 1644.

He spent years roaming the world seeking money and support for his revolution. The Chinese government put an enormous price on his head, but

only on one occasion did it come close to being paid: in 1896 he was captured in London by staff of the Chinese embassy and locked up awaiting repatriation. He managed to get a message out and delivered to Dr. James Cantlie who had been one of his teachers in Hong Kong. Cantlie (still known to the Chinese by the name Hong Dak Lei 康德理) drummed up enough diplomatic pressure to secure his release.

At the end of 1911 Sun's revolution finally succeeded and he was elected Temporary President of the Chinese Republic. But triumph eluded him. He resigned in February 1912 to avoid factional problems, and the rest of his life was passed trying (with little success) to reconcile the many conflicting interests which were pulling the new state apart. He died of cancer in Beijing, a visionary respected by all but incapable of holding the power which he had done so much to win.

In 1918 he wrote a rather sad, hopeful but hopeless book, *Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary*, which begins:

For thirty-one years I have toiled hard for the welfare of the Chinese people. My life has been consecrated to the Chinese people, and my devotion to the tasks I set myself has remained unchanged during this long period. Neither the might of the Manchu dynasty nor all the misfortunes of my life availed to turn me aside from the aims I placed before me. I strove for what I aspired to: and the more failures I experienced, the more I yearned for the struggle.¹⁰⁰

"Consecrated", "devotion", these are the words of a man of peace and love, not of fire and war. The picture is confirmed in the biography of the swashbuckling General Morris Abraham "Two-gun" Cohen (Ma Kwan 馬坤), for many years Sun's bodyguard:

If the day had been easy and he [Sun] still felt energetic, he'd sit down with his brush and stone ink jar and write out Chinese proverbs. Calligraphy is one of the highest forms of art in China; the principal ornament in a room is often one of those long narrow scrolls with a few characters written by some famous man.

The Doctor received countless requests for an inscription by himself. He kept a list of these and on a good evening he'd send for it and knock off forty or fifty at one go.¹⁰¹

One of his favourite maxims was "Bo ai" (博愛 Cantonese *bok ngoi*), which means "Universal love," and hanging on the wall in the Macau house is

just such a scroll, shown here in the photograph. In smaller script at the side is the signature *Suen Man* (孫文).



This ancient contraption was once a New Territories village's fire pump. Made specially for the village, as the metal plate attests, by a firm in Canton, it has rusted out much of its time in front of the Village Council Chamber (*chuen-gung-soh* 村公所). Just 2 kilometres away is a modern fire

station, well equipped, professionally staffed, and capable of rushing in a couple of minutes an efficient fire engine along metalled roads to any outbreak in the village. The old pump is not needed, but it is more than an outmoded and clumsy piece of out-dated technology. It is a symbol of a kind of social life which is fast vanishing, a symbol of the independence and self-sufficiency of the village.

Rural China, and in many ways urban China too, was traditionally “under-governed” in that the hand of the central government rested but lightly upon it. Local government was effectively controlled by local people without official recognition from the capital, and the result was a large measure of local self-help, often through means which, had it known about them, the central government would not have approved.

Writing *Village and Town Life in China*, two early Chinese sociologists, Leong and Tao, remarked:

how little have the people to do with the government officials, except for judicial purposes, and how vital are the private organizations for our social life We may mention here first of all the public fire brigade, which is organized entirely by the people. Pumps are bought from the subscribed funds, but no permanent staff of firemen is kept. At the signal of fire — it will be given from one station to the other at a very fast rate — most of the men near the station turn out and run with the antiquated pumps to the fire; the workmen leave their work, and the small traders even their stalls. They are only volunteers; they are not paid, not even one penny. The only benefit they can get is in the form of cakes, presented to them by the relieved as a token of gratitude. Watching the hustling crowd of the fire men whose courage and devotedness are neither prompted by self-interest nor by personal esteem, but by an altruism, pure and simple, one can but wonder how under certain circumstances people can help themselves without the least interference from the State or any authority.¹⁰²

I suspect the authors here of being somewhat disingenuous in their account of the altruism of the firemen.

Responsibility for fire-fighting was only one small element in the “civil aid” functions of the men who served their communities in the Village Watch (*ji-wai-dui* 自衛隊). They also kept a constant guard against floods, wild animals, thieves, bandits, and marauding clans. They were the first line of defence against trouble, and were expected to be active and vigilant at all times after dark when the rest of the village was abed.

No doubt the method of selection of the watchmen varied from area to area and from village to village, but what I describe here is probably typical of many villages. Once a year the village elders would call for tenders from men interested in becoming watchmen. Those dozen or so who tendered most money would be selected — the money going into village funds (and some of it perhaps into the elders' pockets).

The watchmen recouped their investment and made a living by charging a set fee to all households in the village. For the protection of a house so much, for a water buffalo so much, for a field of rice so much, for a patch of sweet potatoes so much ... and in this way the better off paid more than the poorer. Payment, as in so much of pre-modern Chinese society, was in kind — husked or unhusked rice — rather than cash.

Every night the watch would patrol the village and its surrounding fields, sounding gongs or rattles to warn off evil-doers. When crops were ripe, they would be especially watchful of the fields. According to villagers I have talked to, the patrols were always careful to vary their times and routes, so that no-one could predict their movements. In this they were "so much better than the police, who follow set paths and have to sign books at certain times and fixed points, so that everyone knows when they are coming", I was told.

One crime prevention measure I heard about showed the advantage of the informal, extra-legal approach. In the 1930s there was a known, compulsive thief, an opium smoker who persistently slipped out at night to steal from other villages, and so got his fellow villagers a bad name. In the end the watch took to sealing up his door at night, and checking it frequently. If the seals were found to be broken, they were able to mobilize and catch him before he could get up to mischief, so it is said.

If property were stolen, the Watch were supposed to pay compensation to the owner. If a wrong-doer were caught, they would haul him in front of the village elders for punishment. And punishment could be severe. Without any official backing, elders seem to have been able to get away with passing sentences ranging from a simple fine, through heavy beatings, expulsion from the village with forfeiture of all property, even to death in some cases.

Crime was rare in villages, and almost to a man, villagers I have spoken to have linked the severity of punishment with the low incidence of offences. I one day had a conversation about government in Hong Kong with my next-

door neighbour in the village where I lived. I extolled what I considered the virtues of a comparatively lenient and enlightened British rule. "Huh!" said my neighbour. "Nothing like as good as the Japanese during the war. They knew how to govern. One wrong move and they chopped your head off." He wasn't being sarcastic either!

The days of the Village Watch are not yet ended. A number of New Territories villages still maintain their patrols, and probably this accounts in part for the still low crime rate in rural areas.



A troupe of Taoist priests performing at a major village ceremony. The brilliant reds, greens and blues of their robes, and the entertaining histrionics of their ritual dances and movements make them a fascinating spectacle. Only the mesmeric monotony of their long rhythmic scripture-chantings seems to spoil the effect.

I have heard cynical laymen say that the chanting comes out as a mumble because the priests do not actually know the words, and on one occasion I was assured that they were not chanting scriptures at all but merely repeating over and over “Hurry up and pay us our fee! Hurry up and pay us our fee!”

Well, I don't believe either of these unkind interpretations, but it would be idle to pretend that even in the most traditional of Chinese communities there isn't a great deal of cynicism. Chinese men in particular seem happy to make fun of religious practices, while at the same time they would doubtless be furious if their women-folk were to cease their regular worship, and they themselves are always well to the fore at the most important and exciting rituals.

Not all practising Taoist priests are full-time, and they may not be well versed in their art, but the professionals undergo long training, often by getting themselves “adopted” by a master priest and serving an apprenticeship as his “son”. They need to learn and understand complicated rituals, long passages of scripture, magic charms, secret tongue and hand movements and symbols, sexual control mechanisms, dance steps, breath and diet control, and meditation techniques. Some of them perform acrobatics or fire-walking, and manage to perfect the ability to walk or sit on sharp sword-blades.

I once watched a fire-walking performance by some Taoist priests at a festival held at Stanley on Hong Kong Island. A large area about 4 metres long by 2 metres wide was covered with a layer of glowing charcoal to a depth of more than 5 centimetres. The priests ran, walked, and scuffed through the charcoal barefoot, and one of them, wearing only a pair of trousers, turned a somersault through the pit. Red sparks flew in all directions — it was late evening and dark — but the priest had not a mark on him, neither on his bare back nor his feet.

The priests need all these techniques, because they are required to perform many functions. They act as intermediaries between men and gods, they exorcise ghosts, cure sickness, and perform magic rituals bringing peace and prosperity. They conduct funeral ceremonies, house-blessing ceremonies, fertility ceremonies, ghost-pacification ceremonies, and often act as spirit mediums as well, falling into trance and talking with ghosts and gods.

Taoism began as a philosophy, and is usually considered to have originated with Laotse (Lo-ji 老子 “the old one”), who, if he existed at all, lived somewhere around the 5th century B.C., a near contemporary of Confucius. Legend says that the two actually met, and there are various stories of the confrontation, stories which end in triumph for whichever gentleman the story-teller supports.

The *Tao* 道 (of Taoism) is usually translated “The Way”, but it is not easy to say what that Way is. Indeed, the central work of Taoism, the *Do-dak-ging* (道德經), which is attributed to the pen of Laotse himself, begins with the words “The Way that can be told is not the constant Way”, and every statement in the book is just about as discouraging. The *Tao* existed before the universe, that is clear, but in that case does “The myriad creatures in the world are born from Something, and Something from Nothing” mean that the *Tao* is

Nothing? For those who wish to pursue the matter, I recommend D. C. Lau's (劉殿爵) translation and commentary, *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching*.

To achieve harmony with the *Tao* became the quest of the Taoists, and in general that meant “going back to Nature”, since everything invented or developed by man had necessarily moved away from the *Tao* (which existed before man). The best way to avoid departing from the *Tao*, then, was to do nothing positive, and “taking no action” (*mo-wai* 無為) became a central doctrine.

The *Tao* is indestructible and infinite, so Taoists, in order to harmonize with it, wished to become likewise. It did not take long for the search after immortality to take the form of alchemy and the development of magic techniques, and in these was the seed of divergence between Taoism the philosophy and Taoism the religion.

In the 2nd century A.D. religious Taoism arrived with a bang. Taoists who had achieved some degree of success with their various techniques began to preach that sickness and disquiet could be cured by attention to health and expiation of sin — sin presumably being departure from the *Tao*. Since then it has taken features from Buddhism and from other religious beliefs, and heaven and hell, saviour saints, and a host of gods of many kinds have all become part of its system. The mystic *Tao* now seems far from central to this most popular of religions.

So it is not surprising to note from this photograph that the chief priest (facing the camera) is sitting in a Buddhist posture, is surrounded by Buddhist symbols, and is officiating at a ceremony designed to bring a measure of peace to the souls of the dead in the Buddhist-inspired underworld where they suffer for their sins in this life.



There I was on a peaceful afternoon stroll through the New Territories countryside, when suddenly this chilling sight met my eyes.

Had I disturbed grave-robbers at their work? Well, there's no doubt that in ancient times important people were buried with valuable goods around them, and many of the graves were opened and stripped. But this grave was less than ten years old, and it seemed unlikely that even the most optimistic villain could expect to find a suit of jade or a hoard of gold jewellery inside it.

He would know that it would contain very little of value: perhaps a few old copper coins put there as part of the purification ceremony in the hope of attracting wealth to the descendants of the dead man. Otherwise there would only be a few cheap pots containing a couple of handfuls of grain, and maybe a scattering of iron nails to ensure the continuation of the family line (because the word *ding* 釘 “nail” sounds like the word *ding* 丁 “son”.)

So the grave-robbler explanation wasn't very convincing. Other possibilities were less mundane. I thought of a passage I had read in De Groot:

As soon as the last breath has been drawn, the family at once manifest a great anxiety to transfer all the house cats to the neighbours, or, at least, to tie them fast and not release them again in their own house until the coffining is over. In fact, if Pussy were not secured, it might occur to her to leap or walk over the death-bed, and so cause the corpse to rise up at once. A long pole would, in this case, be required to push it down into its former position, or a piece of furniture would have to be used as a projectile, though nothing can serve the purpose so well as a broom. The handle, namely, renders it eminently fit for being grasped with the hands, so that the corpse, frantic with rage, will pull the broom at once against its breast to cool its wrath upon it, and by this vehement motion sink down into its inert state. That it is far from advisable to expose one's self to the danger of being seized instead of the broom, we need not say: a horrible death in a ferocious embrace would be the inevitable consequence.¹⁰³

But surely a cat could not have affected an already long-buried corpse?

Could there (horror of horrors!) have been a *geung-si* in the grave? A *geung-si* (僵屍) is a “zombie”, a corpse which does not decay, and which can rise from the grave to stalk human prey. Like a vampire it sucks out the blood and life from its victims, and so can prolong its own vile existence.

A Chinese book on geomancy had prepared me for such things with the following case history. A certain family suddenly began to lose all its male children. Either they would be still-born or they would be born weak and die before reaching the age of one. Geomancers scratched their heads about the problem for years before one particularly able man came up with the theory that the grave of the father of the family head had been built on a “corpse-nourishing site” (*yeung-si ji dei* 養屍之地), and that as a result of this the corpse could not rot, but was drawing sustenance from its own descendants and killing them in the process. The solution was simple — dig up the grave and bury the corpse elsewhere. But not so fast! All that a corpse of this kind

needs is a glimpse of sun and a breath of fresh-air to become a walking menace to all mankind. Precautions had to be taken:

Before the coffin was fully exposed, the grave-diggers stuck in the ground about 20 or 30 feet directly in front of it a life-size straw-man. It was dressed in paper clothes and hat, and its arms were outstretched to block the way. Apparently this was done in case by any chance the corpse should become a zombie when the coffin was opened. If it did it would stand bolt upright and walk straight forward, and it could only be brought down if there was something for it to bump into and seize in its arms. That is what the straw-man was for.¹⁰⁴

With great care the coffin was finally opened, and everyone retired to a safe distance to watch what would happen. It was alright, the corpse did not walk. But it wasn't a pretty sight:

Not only was its face like that of a living person, but its hair and beard had grown long and, most frightening of all, from beneath the lower lip had sprung great white teeth When it was reburied, the straw-man was put on top of the coffin, because it bore an amulet which could suppress the evil and prevent the corpse from ever becoming a zombie.

Nice thoughts on a sunny afternoon! I walked on over a plank bridge, and heard a splashing in the stream below me. There was an old man cheerfully cleaning up the bones which he'd taken from the grave. Had I escaped from a *zombie* only to meet a *ghoul*? No, he was merely doing his job: when clean and purified over incense the bones would be carefully housed in an urn for safe-keeping. It was all a quite normal part of the traditional burial process.



A very ordinary scene in a New Territories market town, and one that seemingly could be repeated in almost any street in urban Hong Kong. Vegetables are weighed on a steelyard, reading from the graduated scale on which the weight is hung. But the New Territories markets were not like street markets in Hong Kong, and this scene is not quite as ordinary as it looks.

The market system of the New Territories was traditionally part of a complex organization that ensured the flow of goods throughout the Chinese Empire.

Virtually every village of any size had a small morning and evening market when fresh vegetables, meat, fish and other perishables were on sale. All these would be produced locally for local consumption. The market was held twice a day so that housewives could buy fresh for every main meal. No-one in the world can be as fussy as the New Territories villager, even today, about the absolute, just-picked freshness of his vegetables. Urban Hong Kongers pride themselves (and with reason) on their gastronomic good taste, but they have to put up with vegetables which a New Territories farmer would spurn as fit only for pigs.

Sham Chun, the town just over the border in China, used to be the major market centre for the New Territories. But, like many similar markets, it was not operative every day. The market was actually held nine times a lunar month. Lunar months have 29 or 30 days, and Sham Chun market met on the 2nd, 5th, 8th; 12th, 15th, 18th; 22nd, 25th and 28th days — that is, on the days ending in 2, 5 and 8. This 2-5-8 schedule was fixed and unvarying. In Sham Chun on those days could be found for sale all kinds of exotic produce from other parts of China, and local produce from the New Territories could be taken there to be sold for export through trade channels throughout the country.

Other markets existed in the New Territories at Yuen Long, at Sha Tau Kok, at Tai Po, and at Shek Wu Hui (Sheung Shui), but these were not as important as the Sham Chun market. In fact they were satellite markets, the capillaries of the country-wide system of which Sham Chun was a vein. The exotic produce available in Sham Chun was bought by pedlars and tradesmen and then resold in the satellite markets, and in turn their surplus was taken to Sham Chun for sale. Since the pedlars could not be in two places at once, this meant that the New Territories markets could not meet on the 2-5-8 days when Sham Chun met, so they met on either 1-4-7 schedules (Sha Tau Kok and Shek Wu Hui) or 3-6-9 (Yuen Long and Tai Po).

So, for the villager of the New Territories, economic activity had a regular pulse. Nine times a month the local market provided him with nearly everything he needed. If he wanted extra excitement or something which was unavailable in his local market he could travel up to Sham Chun on one of the nine days when that was operating.

The local market days were days of great activity, and everyone with produce to sell flocked in from surrounding villages. Services also could be sold, and there would be professional letter-writers, fortune-tellers, tinkers, and many others available. Much match-making went on through the good offices of respected stall-holders who knew everyone in the area from which the market drew its custom. Yet on the days when the market was not held there might be little or nothing to see on the site — the resident population of Shek Wu Hui in 1911 was only 43 people, for instance.

Market sites were often owned by influential local families. The Sheung Shui Liu clan owned Shek Wu Hui. Yuen long market used to be owned by

the great Dang clan, and the Tai Po Tau branch of that clan owned Tai Po Old Market till it was supplanted in 1893 by the New Market, founded by a consortium of seven local villages called the Tai Po Chat Yeuk (大埔七約), which met where the modern town of Tai Po stands now. Owning market sites was of great importance because of the revenue generated and because of the opportunities to gain advantage in preferential treatment over price and quality of goods. Revenue came from a tax on all transactions in the market. Sometimes this was on a sliding scale and fixed according to the value of the sale, but in most cases there was a standard charge. The tax was assessed and levied in a manner ingeniously simple — only the accredited agents of the market owners were allowed to have weighing scales, so that all goods had to be weighed on these public scales, and the charge for weighing was the tax. Needless to say, in the course of a busy market day the income from this tax could be considerable.

Today the markets of Shek Wu Hui, Tai Po and Yuen Long have all grown into huge towns with permanent shops open every day. Yet their market schedules were still observed well into the 1970s and on those days the streets were choked with pedlars, and with local farmers bringing in their vegetables, ducks, chickens, pigs, dogs and so on. From 6.30 or 7 o'clock in the morning until about 11 a.m. the bustle went on, but by lunch time it was all over.

The market scene shown here, then, is more complex than it looks. We are seeing not just a trader, his assistant and a customer, but a trader, a customer, and one of the market weighing officials. The photograph was taken in Shek Wu Hui on 4th October 1976, which was the 11th day of the intercalary 8th month on the lunar calendar — and Shek Wu Hui market met on the 1-4-7 schedule.



Photographs of Chinese people worshipping their gods all look rather similar. Offerings of food and various kinds of paper money, incense, candles, tea, wine, rice and flowers are made in much the same way at all kinds of shrines and temples.

The scene here does not look so very different. Flowers, candles and incense are there, and a whole and succulence-radiating roast pig — one look at the way that crackling has split on his back and my mouth waters. What is quite out of the ordinary is the man's face: it is heavily made up. He is in fact an actor, and the photograph was taken back-stage at an opera performance in the New Territories. Stage props line the wall in the background.

Like members of their profession elsewhere, Chinese actors have their superstitions. Some of them will not speak of their dreams because the word "dream" is part of the name of one of their patron gods and is therefore taboo. There seems also to have been a strange belief that an actor must only accept work after asking his mother's permission.

The little shrine at the back of the stage here houses two tiny figures, patron gods of the actors. They are worshipped before performances to

ensure success. The pig has been presented to the troupe by the organizers of the festival, and it is offered to the gods before being divided up among the actors, the male lead getting the choice cuts. There is some doubt about the identity of the patron gods. In Beijing the actors' guild used to worship the Tang dynasty Emperor Ming Huang as their patron. Ming Huang is traditionally credited with the invention of the drama. He is supposed to have thought up the idea as a means of entertaining the beautiful concubine with whom he was besotted.

Yet Doolittle in *Social Life of the Chinese* says of Fujian province that:

Nguong Sau, a god of play-acting, wrestling, music, etc., is represented to be the third son of "the Pearly Emperor Supreme Ruler." Play-actors, both apprentices and journeymen, worship him regularly, for the purpose of securing his aid in enabling them to remember their parts, and to perform them in the established manner, and to the acceptance of their patrons. Those who engage in sham-fights, fencing, wrestling, and similar athletic sports, for recreation or amusement, or who set themselves up as teachers of these, also worship this god, depending upon him for protection against making false movements, and against injuring the life or maiming the person of others.¹⁰⁵

He mentions that sometimes this god is dressed half in military uniform and half in civilian clothing. Perhaps the two figures here represent a similar dual function.

Another god, called Chief Marshal Tin (田都元帥), is also known as a patron of actors. He is usually depicted with a crab painted on his face. Keith G. Stevens discusses this god in the *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, and points out that he can appear either as a civil or a military figure, the latter doubling as a "potent God of epidemics and a demon dispeller".¹⁰⁶

Patron gods were a common feature of the professions and trades of China, and some of them may still be met with in Hong Kong today. Police and detectives worship the fierce red-faced God of War, Gwaan Gung (關公), as their patron, and no police station is complete without his altar. Even the Village Watch of a New Territories community are likely to have the same god posted at their headquarters. Gwaan Gung is also patron of bean-curd sellers, and is generally regarded as a God of Wealth. He may be seen as such in many restaurants and shops, a little red electric lamp burning constantly before him.

Some villages are dedicated to a patron god. In one that I have visited near

Sai Kung, every household has an altar to the Goddess of Mercy, Gwoon Yam (觀音), under whose special protection the inhabitants live.

C. B. Day goes to town on the patron gods of the silk industry. He says the most important is the god Wa Gwong 華光大帝, followed by the goddess who protects mulberry trees growing outside city walls, then by the Five Patrons of the Tree-tops, the Five Patrons of the Silkworm Larvae, the King of Silkworms, the General of the Incubating Room, the Five Patrons of the Cocoon, and so on.¹⁰⁷

In a now classic book, *The Guilds of Peking*, J. S. Burgess lists all kinds of patron gods:

Wu Tao Chen Jen lived in the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618–905) and was called the Sage of Painters. He was specially famous for the painting of Buddhist gods. It is said that when he was putting the finishing touches to the eyes of a dragon he was painting, the dragon flapped his tail and walked out of the canvas. The painters who do the decorative work worship this famous artist.¹⁰⁸

So they ought!

This photograph was taken during the opera performance at a *da-jiu* (打醮) festival. The stage not only had this little altar behind it, but in front of it was a massive shed full of all the gods from the surrounding area, and the performance was put on at least partly for their benefit. In the New Territories drama and religion are still intimately connected.



Who Hop Shek in the New Territories is the site of the largest of Hong Kong's cemeteries. Whole hillsides are covered with tier upon tier of graves, the granite headstones winding round the contours like strings of pearls round green throats.

In late spring after the Ching Ming grave-sweeping festival, the vast extent of the cemetery can be clearly seen, but by the end of the summer, vegetation

has grown again and the area looks from a distance as green and unspoiled as any other hillside.

Here and there the orderly lines are broken by the omega shape of a large traditional grave dating from long before the city's dead had to seek space in the countryside. But the stone in the photograph is neither ancient nor like the other modern graves. It stands alone, unique in Wo Hop Shek in marking the last resting place of Westerner and Chinese together. The head-stone reads:

Grave of Ship's Master Mr. I. L. Price and of fifteen crew members, victims of the wreck of the Hongkong-Macau ferry SS Fat Shan. This memorial was set up by the Tai Tak Hing Shipping Co. Ltd. on an auspicious day, May 1972.

The *Fat Shan* [佛山] had been caught by Typhoon Rose in August 1971. Captain Price had run for the cover of Lantau Island, but the erratic course of the storm made illusion of that shelter, and the ferry sank there with the loss of 88 of the 92 people aboard.

Hong Kong has known many typhoons, and Rose was not a particularly big one, but she proved disastrous for shipping, 28 ocean-going ships and hundreds of smaller vessels were sunk or wrecked. At the height of the storm a gust of 150 knots was recorded at Tai Mo Shan, and the wind-speed measuring device broke shortly afterwards. For those who are intrigued by records, the annual government report *Hong Kong 1971* has horrifying photographs and details of the damage.

It is comparatively easy to romanticize typhoons. Weather-men always used to give them girls' names to personalize them, and we laughed at the unpredictability of the skittish young ladies. Joseph Conrad, who knew the sea, wrote in *Typhoon* what is still probably the best description of one of these South China Sea menaces. The story is full of nightmare and awe, but romance underlies it all, and Conrad too personifies his typhoon:

The hurricane, with its power to madden the seas, to sink ships, to uproot trees, to overturn strong walls and dash the very birds of the air to the ground, had found this taciturn man in its path and, doing its utmost, had managed to wring out a few words. Before the renewed wrath of winds swooped on his ship, Captain MacWhirr was moved to declare, in a tone of vexation, as it were, "I wouldn't like to lose her."

He was spared that annoyance.¹⁰⁹

Nor do we have to look to fiction for typhoon romance. L. Forster in 1933 published a little book of sardonic personal anecdote called *Echoes of Hong Kong and Beyond*. He catches the comfortable mood of the survivor very well:

It is the desire of most foreign residents in the Far East to be able to say they have experienced the full force of a typhoon in the open sea, and to be able, in retrospect, to dwell on the various aspects of the experience, the movements of the vessel, the magnitude of the waves, the intensity of the wind, all the accompanying noises which more than anything play the leading part, and finally the emotional state of themselves and of fellow passengers as far as can be judged by their external behaviour.

The passengers on the “Empress of Russia” on a certain trip from Hong Kong to Shanghai are extremely fortunate in that they can now indulge in the luxury of calling attention to themselves in company, by retailing their personal experiences of a typhoon which was indeed very severe.¹¹⁰

For ocean-going ships typhoons are severe enough, but it has always been the small fishing boats and local craft which have borne the brunt of the damage. A terrible typhoon in 1874 led to plans for the first typhoon-shelter which was built at Causeway Bay during the 1880s. Typhoon shelters help, but they are not a complete answer, as has often been shown at great cost. Peplow and Barker reported on a violent storm of 1906:

When the typhoon began it had been considered that the Police Camber (a dock) would be a haven for sampans and small craft, and in order to admit them willing hands set to work to open the massive draw-bridge. It was a difficult task, but after considerable trouble it was done, and the small boats in the neighbourhood passed into the calmer water within. The Camber, however, proved to be a death-trap, for when the gale increased, the bridge was swept away, the sampans were destroyed, and so great was the wreckage that it was possible to walk on it across the Camber.¹¹¹

That 1906 typhoon struck Hong Kong with only half an hour’s warning. Now at least the approach of trouble is usually signalled well in advance. But gravestones such as this are a sobering reminder that typhoons are romantic only for those at a distance in space or time.



Deserted and overgrown this path winds through the fields in the north of the New Territories. The granite slabs are worn smooth and shiny by generations of feet. They are uneven and wobbly, and in places they have disappeared altogether, but to walk along the path is to feel history soaking up through the soles of your shoes, for this used to be the main road from Canton (Guangzhou) to Kowloon City, the alternative to the sea route down the Pearl River and round the coast. Not much like a main road to look at of course, but that in itself says something about the communications system.

In the north of China the horse and even the camel were available for transport of men and goods. In the cities and in the flat plains of North and Central China, bullock or mule carts struggled along roads which were wide enough to accommodate them. They were usually two-wheeled and unsprung. The wheelbarrow was an early invention of the Chinese. The wheel was very large and in the middle rather than at the front end of the barrow. Passengers and/or luggage were placed on boards on either side of the wheel, the operator taking some of the weight on a strap over his shoulders, and pushing the barrow in front of him. Sometimes a second man would pull the barrow from

the front by means of a rope; and some barrows could actually hoist sails to help them along in a favourable wind.

But in the south the land was more mountainous, and horses and mules were almost unknown. With no draught animals there were no carts, and virtually the only known transport was human transport. Men of course take up little room, so the roads of South China tended to be like this one — narrow footpaths about a metre wide.

A lone man managed by dividing his load into two and hanging it from both ends of the split bamboo pole he bore on his shoulder. He went along at a kind of swinging trot, his steps harmonizing with the flexure of the bouncing pole. Two men could carry heavy loads slung between them on a shoulder pole, and since they walked in Indian style the narrow path was still adequate. No really satisfactory way of using more than two men was devised, and to this fact the Cantonese language probably owes its proverb which is the equivalent of “Too many cooks spoil the broth”. It runs something like: “One priest carries water on a shoulder pole; two priests carry water between them on a pole; three priests go thirsty” (一個和尚擔水食，兩個和尚抬水食，三個和尚冇水食).

Passenger transport was almost non-existent, because wheelbarrows were not suitable for this kind of track, and the terrain was usually too hilly for them anyway. But manpower could be used to carry sedan chairs since this required two men walking in single file. Sedan chairs were still in use on Hong Kong's Lantau Island until the 1960s — it was not possible to get up to the Ngong Ping Monastery by bus at that time. And special sedan chairs, known as “flower chairs” (*fa-giu* 花轎), are still occasionally used in the New Territories to carry the bride from her parents' home to her new life in her husband's village.

With the advent of the British to the New Territories the old track was doomed. The very need for it had gone, because Kowloon City was no longer an effective part of the Chinese administration. It is true that arguments as to whether Kowloon City was or was not part of the New Territories lease went on up to recent times, but after the lease no officials were stationed there and no official traffic needed to pass that way. The Kowloon-Canton Railway was begun in 1905, only seven years after the signing of the lease: the British section of it was completed in 1910, and the Chinese section in 1912. The

railway became the main route between Hong Kong and Canton and the rest of China, though it faced much competition from the steamers which made the trip up the Pearl River.

Later a start was made on road building in the New Territories. Significantly, the emphasis of the new road system (completed in 1920) was a circular route all round the New Territories, linking the countryside firmly with the urban centres of Kowloon and Hong Kong, and drawing the sights of the New Territories people away from China and towards the senior districts of the then Colony of which they were now a part. In the early years this hopeful layout of the communications system seems to have had little effect. The people of the northern New Territories continued to look over the open border to China, and the market town of Sham Chun (Shenzhen) not the city markets of Kowloon still attracted their trade. Gradually the balance changed, and of course by 1949 when China became inaccessible the Hong Kong orientation of the network suddenly made considerable sense.

So now what remains of the granite path sees only the occasional traveller, and he is as likely to be pushing a bicycle as he is to be bouncing his shoulder pole. Since this photo was taken in the 1960s most of the stones have been taken away or buried under roads and new buildings. But still a few remain as a reminder of history and as a tribute to the sweat of the men who carried them on their poles from quarries miles distant — there was no other way to move them.



Despite her vast size, geographical diversity, long history and manic concern with food, China has not been naturally endowed with so great a variety of plants that she has wanted to reject new species from abroad. Over the course of several thousand years many food plants have been imported

and naturalized to the Chinese diet. Early on came wheat, then coriander, the cucumber, the grape, the onion, peas, the pomegranate, sesame and the walnut. And the peanut and the sweet potato, both now fully naturalized, came only late — within the last four hundred years or so.

Some have credited the sweet potato with China's enormous population increase in the 18th century. Certainly it was associated with the increase. Historian Ho Ping-ti (何炳棣) wrote:

By about 1800 sweet potatoes, in the southeast as well as in the north, had become the poor man's staple. Along the rocky Shantung coast sweet potatoes often accounted for nearly half a year's food for the poor. The selling of roasted and boiled sweet potatoes in shops and by peddlers became a familiar practice in many large northern cities, particularly Peking, a phenomenon which deeply impressed a Korean official who was instrumental in stimulating sweet-potato cultivation in Korea. In 1931–1937 China, excluding Manchuria, with an average annual output of 18,500,000 metric tons, was easily the world's largest producer of sweet potatoes. Next to rice and wheat, the sweet potato is now the most important source of food for the Chinese.¹¹²

One plant which the Chinese have not had to import is the soybean: it has been cultivated in China from earliest times. The bean in its natural state is difficult to use, being rather indigestible, but that has not prevented its development into a vast range of products. It can be used in cooking instead of other oils; it makes various kinds of pickles and bean-pastes for flavouring; it can be used as fertilizer for fields or feed for cattle and pigs; it is used in the manufacture of soap; and sweetened and flavoured "soya-bean milk" makes a pleasant change from other fizzy or acidic soft drinks.

Bean-curd is a familiar food to anyone who has "eaten Chinese", though the English name for it is rather more attractive than the Chinese term *dau-foo* (豆腐) which means "beans gone rotten". Bean-curd makers require little equipment or space, and many of them operate from tiny wooden shacks, the whole family helping with the work. To make it the soybeans are soaked for several hours in water, then ground to a juice between heavy mill-stones. The liquid is strained through cloth (the solid matter being used as animal feed) and then boiled. Lime and starch are added to it and it is allowed to set in moulds. In various stages of dryness it can be fried, or stuffed, or put into soups; and the hardened skin which forms is used in some dishes to bundle together other ingredients.

To the Westerner no doubt soy sauce is the best known product of the bean. The photograph was taken in a soy sauce factory and shows the large, lidded, earthenware jars in which the sauce is made and stored. Bottles are being filled by hand by means of a dipper and funnel.

The manufacturing process requires few ingredients but a great deal of time and trouble. The beans are boiled for several hours until they are soft. The water is drained off, the beans are mixed with flour, and the mixture is left in a warm room to ferment. The fermented beans are then put in the large jars and covered with heavily salted water. After about three weeks the liquid is drawn off and filtered. Further lots of water can be added to the same fermented mixture, each soaking producing a poorer quality sauce than the previous one. The very black, strong sauce is made by heating ordinary soy sauce with molasses, and then allowing the mixture to mature for many weeks in jars.

The English word “soy”, incidentally, comes not from Chinese but from the Japanese word *shōyu* meaning “soy sauce”.

A fascinating book edited by K. C. Chang and called *Food in Chinese Culture* contains a paragraph which nicely rounds off a discussion of the soya bean. Talking of the use of the curd skin to make imitation meat dishes for vegetarian Buddhists, Eugene and Marja Anderson say:

Credible imitations (very good tasting, if not always tasting quite like the originals) are made for chicken, abalone, and other white meats, and even beef and pork. The West has picked up on the idea and developed it much further, climaxing in the production of textured vegetable protein (TVP), but has — characteristically! — ignored the problem of making the result taste good. The ideal in the West seems to be to make it tasteless. (Cynical Chinese readers will not be surprised at this redefinition of goals!)¹¹³



One girl.
Two gods.

Three sticks of incense.

The girl is a schoolgirl. The gods are the Civil and Military Gods of the Hollywood Road Man Mo Temple, and the offering table bears the words “Palace of the Two Emperors” in reference to them. Incense is almost always offered three sticks at a time in temples.

It is the Civil God Man Cheung (文昌) who is being principally worshipped here. He is one of the Gods of Literature, and oddly enough, his temple-mate the Military God Gwaan Dai (關帝) is another.

Man Cheung is usually accompanied by the strange little figure of Fooi Sing (魁星), described in Werner’s *Dictionary of Chinese Mythology* as follows:

He is represented as of diminutive stature, with the visage of a demon, holding a writing-brush in his right hand and a 斗 [dau] (bushel measure) in his left, one of his legs kicking up behind — the figure being obviously intended as an impersonation of the character 魁. He is regarded as the distributor of literary

degrees, and was invoked above all in order to obtain success at the competitive examinations.¹¹⁴

The character 魁 actually means “great” or “chief”, and was used formerly as an honorific term for examination passers, so it is not too surprising that it should have been “personified” and deified in this way.

Another God of Literature is Jue Yi 朱衣 “the red-coat god”. He is well worth worshipping because he specializes in obtaining passes for examination candidates who are too weak in their studies to get through on their own merits.

Topping all these gods, I suppose, is Confucius. When he was alive (551–479 B.C.) many disciples flocked to his feet to listen to his teachings. School fees in those days were minimal — a bundle of dried meat sufficed. After he died, his role as a teacher was perpetuated:

Confucius ... was the actual founder of learning, the teacher not for one age or country but for all time and all the Empire. So the titles and honours of Former Sage and Former Teacher were transferred to him, and scholars and officials were required to do him homage. In process of time the rank of Prince or King, was conferred on him, and the worship offered to him then took the character of that offered to a feudal chief of the time at which the sage lived. It is not as a king, however, but as their great teacher and pattern, that the Chinese worship their Sage. The idea involved in the ceremonies is to forget for the time that he is dead and to treat him as though he were present in the flesh. Even to the schoolmaster now, the scholar kneels and prostrates himself and at stated times reverently presents certain articles of food.¹¹⁵

Until the 20th century an altar to Confucius was to be found in every schoolroom. When students came into class, they would first bow to Confucius and then to their teacher.

Not that all teachers were necessarily respected as wholeheartedly as Confucius was. Many of them were very poor and downtrodden:

The majority of teachers have been unsuccessful candidates for literary degrees, who having spent the prime of their days in fruitless attempts to attain office, are unfit for manual labour, and unable to enter on mercantile life. In Canton, a teacher of twenty boys receives from half a dollar to a dollar per month from each pupil; in country villages, three, four or five dollars a year are given, with the addition, in most cases, of a small present of eatables from each scholar three or four times a year.¹¹⁶

And the Cantonese, with typical ambivalent cynicism, still are apt to refer to a teacher as “man’s undoing” (*yan ji waan* 人之患), a partial quotation from Mencius: “*Yan ji waan zoi ho wai yan si.*” (人之患在好為人師 “Man’s undoing lies in loving to teach others.”)¹¹⁷

China has always been held together as a state by the unifying genius of its written language. Numberless different spoken versions of Chinese, many of them mutually unintelligible, have worked to fragment society, but the Chinese characters have remained universally applicable, the medium for high culture and centralized bureaucracy.

No wonder that charitable men would pay scavengers to rescue the written word from the mud of city streets. Such important and sacred material should not be suffered to be trodden underfoot — it deserved respectful burning or burial. No wonder that the men who passed written examinations should be given such prestige and such power and influence in the realm. And no wonder that when faced with the immense labour and application which study demanded, men should turn to religion for the strength to tackle the task.

This photograph was taken in September 1978, more than seventy years after the collapse of the Civil Service examinations and of the traditional education system. A schoolgirl prays for success in her studies, still a vital and onerous undertaking — *plus c’est la même chose.*

But the Civil Service examinations were closed to females, and only the tiniest percentage of girls received any education at all before the end of the 19th century, so that scenes like this one could only be comparatively modern — *plus ça change?*

79 _____ New Year Biscuits



Lunar New Year approaches, and excitement rises with it. For the Chinese it is a family festival in the same way that Christmas is a family festival for Westerners. But unlike Christmas, which falls every 365 or 366 days, Chinese New Year comes at irregular intervals, because the lunar year is of variable length. In order to keep roughly in line with the solar year, seven lunar years in every nineteen have a whole extra month. These thirteen-month years can be as long as 384 days.

In the country districts the approach of New Year was signalled by the *thump thump* of the rice pounders. Each village house had its pounder, a heavy wooden beam pivoted like a see-saw over a raised stone towards one end. By standing on the short end the housewife raised the long end, then she stepped off, and the long end crashed down into a groove in the floor where the glutinous rice grains had been placed. It was probably a very inefficient way to make flour, but the regular ground-shaking thumps continuing far into the night were as much a part of the festival build-up of excitement as are carols before Christmas.

Glutinous rice flour, then as now, is used for making New Year Biscuits (*chau-mai-beng* 炒米餅). Into wooden moulds is tipped a layer of flour, then a layer of filling — crushed roast peanuts is a favourite — and finally another layer of flour. Wooden mallets compound the sandwich to a flat disc, which is turned out onto a large metal tray. When the tray is full it is placed on top of the ever-useful conical cooking pan, the *wok* (鑊), which is filled with sand to give a dry constant heat. A wooden cover completes the oven. When baked, the biscuits are rock hard.

The *clap clap* of the mallets into the moulds is another evocative New Year sound. As the photograph shows, the biscuit-making is not necessarily only for the women, the children can get plenty of fun out of it too. But the children need watching, for the biscuits are not cheap. In 1965, when this picture was taken, I was told that it cost over a hundred Hong Kong dollars for enough ingredients for only fifty or so of the best biscuits — a lot of money in those days.

Many housewives treat the biscuit-making as a co-operative affair. Groups of them take turns to help each other. Housewife A buys her ingredients and invites her group of friends, neighbours and relatives in to help her. As a reward for their assistance they are given a good dinner. Another day it will be Housewife B's turn to bake, and A will become a helper. I was puzzled once when I met a neighbour carrying home a duck and he told me it was for his wife's *chau-mai-beng*. People don't put duck into the biscuits. What he meant was that it was destined for the helpers' dinner, not that it was an ingredient for the product.

The wooden moulds come in sets, and by combining their various sets the housewives can have many different designs of biscuit. All of the biscuits are round, but the motifs and lucky sayings which are transferred from the moulds to the biscuits are infinite in variety. The following mottoes were found on the biscuits made on this occasion:

Peace; Long life; Wealth; Peace for mankind; May wealth multiply; May sons and wealth be ours; Peace for old and young; Harmony and prosperity; World peace; May wealth increase daily; Harmony for 1,000 years; Tranquillity; Foundation of wealth; Heaven helps a good man.

New Year's Day is a time for staying at home with the immediate family. The young greet the old and wish them long life and happiness. Everyone

wishes everyone else the traditional *Gung-hei-faat-choi* (恭喜發財) “Best wishes and get rich!” Young married couples are sometimes greeted with *Gung-hei-tim-ding* (恭喜添丁) “Best wishes and have sons!”

Married people are expected to give their unmarried relatives and any children of their acquaintance *lai-si* (利是), red paper envelopes with money in. The red colour predominates at New Year as it is considered to be lucky. The giving of *lai-si* is not quite so ruinous a custom as it appears: the envelopes often have only a few cents in. Little one-cent notes issued by the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank used to come in very handy at this time of year.

There is a constant round of visiting at New Year. At any time of the year it is the custom always to take a gift when going visiting. Fancy tins of biscuits or chocolates, packaged brandies, fresh fruits, or local delicacies are standard offerings. At New Year the streets are alive with families off visiting with their carrier-bags full of gifts, amongst which are often little packets of *chau-mai-beng*.



I was driving through the New Territories one day looking for that ubiquitous gentleman Dan Ger. Few people in Hong Kong can have failed to notice the red signs bearing his name. He is apparently a “gentleman of the road”, for it is nearly always near road-works that he betrays his presence. Sometimes he appears in disguise as DANGER, but I for one am not fooled by that.

Well, there I was stopped at a temporary traffic light when the sign illustrated here presented itself to my lens. It refers, I have no doubt, to the peculiar absence of Dan from the scene — there have been dire deeds (trecherous work) perpetrated.

Funny shop signs and indigestible misprints on menus are part of the joy of Hong Kong, and we all have our own favourites. I have a large collection taken from examination papers written by Chinese candidates, and my knowledge has been greatly deepened as a result.

I have learned, for instance, that “China was the first country to invent firewood” (he must have meant “firecrackers”, surely?); that “Chinese women

had blind fleet”; that “the fresh is weak” (well, at least the opposite might be true — the stale is often strong); that “Sun Yat-sen turned China from monocracy to demoncrazy”; that the same gentleman “became the first Temporary Pedestrian of China”; and that he “was born in Chung Shan in his adult life”.

I now know that “the Manchus forced the Chinese to have long hair and the Chinese girl to have feet”; that “Japan was the country which had the most war fairs with China”; that “wherever the Tai Pings went they would loop and ripe the people”; and (probably the most esoteric piece of information in my files) that “there is a drift of million million steel of bax glods which become the income of England”.

Talking of large numbers, did you know that “the Long March covered about two hundred and five thousand million miles”? And that before that “the Chinese Communist Party was found by Mao Tse Tung in 1921. It based on the doctrine of the persons of Maxi and Linen”? Did you realize that “the Boxers believed that they would not die against bullets and briefs”? or that “they played the Boxing with an anthleum”?

The following couples were happily married by candidates in one exam: “the gloom and bride”, “the blide-goom”, “the bride-bloom”, “the bride and bridge”, and “the becholar and sprinder”.

The term “mind-blowing” has only made sense to me since I began to read such things as “My father is a Chinese: I’m his brother”; “Yuan Shih-kai, the first king of the Republic of China”; “he was killed and died subsequently”; “I shall not kill my father, for that will break his heart”; “there was a pig raiser who loved pigs very much, so he reared a large number of dogs”; “a man of Chu was sailing on a liver”.

Make sense if you can of the following offering: “His eye was shanky a little bite, then had a strange feeling from his face. I was attrached for a cup of mintues.” Pure poetry!

Many of the items in my collection are highly obscene, and I’m sure that any selection of howlers committed by non-Chinese in their efforts at Cantonese would be equally so. Some years ago in all innocence I asked a hotel maid to go to bed with me — I *thought* I was asking her to open my room door for me. Luckily she was a lady of advanced years and sound common sense, so there was no unpleasantness.

The communication problem used to be solved through Pidgin, but this peculiar language has now died out. Instead there are large numbers of English-speaking Chinese people, most of whom are *not* guilty of the kind of errors I've noted here.

One survival of early days is the use of "English words Chinese-style". For example, *ba-si* means "bus"; *si-dik* means "stick"; *si-dam* is a "stamp"; *si-doh* is a "store"; "*bob-si*" is "the boss"; *fei-lo* is "to fail"; and *tip-si* are "tips" (for the waiter or for the gambler). *Saan-ai-tip-si* are "cyanide tips", that is, tips as a result of which you do not win money.

You need never starve in Hong Kong through failure to communicate your desire for food. *Doh-si* means "toast"; *hak-gik* is "hot cake"; *ban-gik* is "pancake"; *bo-din* is "pudding"; *saam-man-ji* means "sandwich". Rather a stodgy diet, but you could always add some *sa-lut* "salad" and wash it all down with *bat-laan-dei* "brandy".

Every now and then you meet someone who can't communicate in any language. The chap who wrote this sign is one of them. Not only can't he spell "trench", he has got one of his Chinese characters wrong too. I expect that after



disposing of poor old Dan his eye had got a bite shanky and his writing brush must have become attached for a cup of mintues. Well, it would, wouldn't it?

81 Charity



The Chinese have believed since earliest times that when men die their souls are kept “alive” through the ministrations of their living descendants — the dead continue to draw sustenance from the living. In theory it is probably sufficient for a man to communicate with his ancestors by holding rites of worship of them, but in practice this worship takes the form of physical offerings of food, money, clothing, housing and means of transport.

However, there are bound to be some dead who are not so fortunate as others:

If the offerings to, and worship of, the dead ancestors are discontinued because the living descendants are unfilial or because there are no more descendants, then the deceased ancestors become hungry and angry, and vengeful, and inflict much pain and harm upon the descendants and on other people. In short, they become demons.¹¹⁸

Thrashing around on the verge of extinction for lack of material support, these hungry ghosts (*ngoh-gwai* 餓鬼) are a menace to the world, much as the hungry and dispossessed in this life are perceived as a threat to the rest of society.

Buddhism supplied the answer to the problem. It devised a special ceremony to appease and feed ghosts of this type, a kind of exercise in spiritual charity. The Festival of the Hungry Ghosts, “All Souls’ Day” as some Western sources call it, Yue Lan Jit (盂蘭節) to give it its Chinese name (a transliteration of the Sanskrit term *Ullambana*), is held annually on the 14th day of the 7th lunar month.

It is by definition a festival concerned with other people’s neglected dead, that is, with the “public dead”, and it is accordingly one which is held in public by the community as a whole. Donations of money for the ceremony are all carefully recorded on great red sheets of paper which are pasted up all round the festival site. In this way both living and dead can know who the benefactors are.

Individual families bring offerings of paper clothing by the trunkful, sackfuls of imitation gold and silver ingots, food (including fish, birds and other shapes made out of rice flour), and other necessities for other-world survival, all of which help to pacify the hungry and uncared-for ghosts. Huge sticks of incense smoulder away in front of temporary matshed temples, lion dance teams perform for the entertainment of living and dead, and at set times through the day priests perform complicated rituals.

The last time I attended one of these festivals the priests were all Taoists, despite the Buddhist origin of the occasion, and I suspect that this take-over by the Taoists is pretty well standard all over the Hong Kong area.

Out of the donated funds is purchased a huge coloured-paper and bamboo image of Daai Si (大士). There is no clear agreement as to who Daai Si is, but he seems most often to be identified with Dei Chong Wong (地藏王), the chief custodian of the underworld, and therefore in charge of the very souls the festival is held to placate.

Daai Si is present throughout the ceremonies, and at the end he is paraded round the community. In his right hand he holds a writing brush with which he notes down the names of all the ghosts he meets. Then he is burned, which sends him back down to Purgatory along with the now captive ghosts.

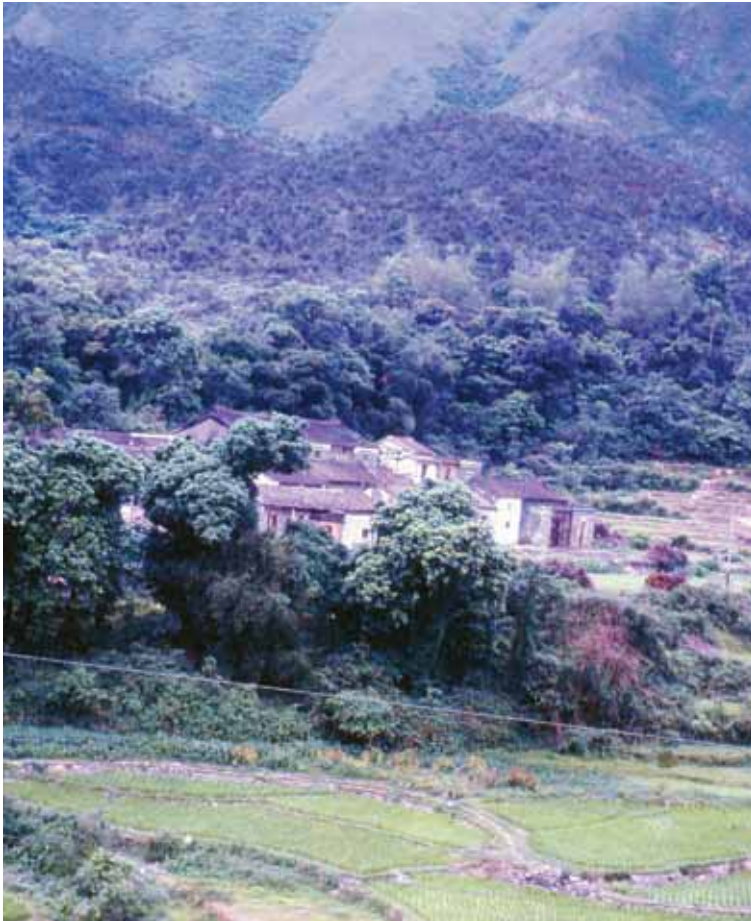
The entertainment is designed to please both the ghosts and the living, and this same double-barrelled purpose can be seen in other aspects of the ceremony. Feeding hungry ghosts is paralleled by feeding poor and hungry people. The photograph shows the “charity stall” at a Yue Lan Jit in the New

Territories. Over a thousand bags of rice and noodles were handed out in the evening from this stall to deserving cases.

Later, after dark, was to come the burning of Daai Si, and that too is a time for the living. Just before the cremation when the last rituals have been performed, there is a rush to rape the figure of its most potent portions — the writing-brush and the little figure of the Goddess of Mercy, Gwoon Yam, who sits on Daai Si's knee. The lucky ones who get these prizes take them home and expect to be fully protected from evil and harm for the following year.

But only the fittest are advised to vie for those two special items — the struggle to get them sometimes gets quite rough. For those less vigorous there is another way to acquire good fortune. They can bid at auction for the many ritual fittings used in the matshed temples during the festival. The money goes to charity.

Chinese culture has always been one in which family and ancestral ties have been heavily stressed, and the consequent playing down of other ties has meant something of a lack of concern for society at large. The Yue Lan Jit is a rare example of charitable focus on the problems of other people and their ghosts.



If it weren't for the tell-tale wires in the foreground, this photograph could have been taken at any time since the camera was invented. In fact it was taken in 1969. Few New Territories villages retained their isolation and unspoiled architectural style in the way that this one had. Remarkably, it is in the easily accessible Lam Tsuen Valley, not somewhere remote and unserved by roads.

The Rev. Arthur H. Smith, one of the most astute of the 19th-century missionary observers of the Chinese scene, had his own views on villages:

A Chinese village, like Topsy, “just grewed,” how, or why, no one knows or cares At right angles to the main street or streets, run narrow alleys, upon which open the yards and courts in which the houses are situated. Even the buildings which happen to stand contiguous to the main street offer nothing to the gaze but an expanse of dead wall. If any doorway opens on the highway, it is protected from the evil influences which might else result, by a screen wall, preventing any observation of what goes on within. A village is thus a city in miniature, having all the evils of overcrowding, though it may be situated in the midst of a wide and comparatively uninhabited plain. Whether land is dear or cheap, a village always has the same crowded appearance, and there is in either case the same indifference to the requirements of future growth.¹¹⁹

No-one could accuse Smith of being uncensorious!

In nearly all parts of China the village was a densely packed huddle of houses surrounded by its fields. The houses were crowded together because that way there was less encroachment on the agricultural land which was the livelihood of the inhabitants.

Smith was unhappy too about the houses themselves:

The mountains furnish an abundance of stone, from which dwellings situated in such districts are built — dark, damp, and unwholesome at all seasons of the year, but especially so in the time of heavy rains By far the most common material of which the Chinese build their houses is that which happens to be nearest at hand.¹²⁰

“What happens to be nearest at hand” sounds sensible enough to me. Anyway, there doesn’t look anything unwholesome about these village houses: on the contrary they are very substantial. And if they are squeezed together, that makes sense too where the available land is scarce and workable then only through careful terracing.

Besides, after centuries of living in what Westerners would call “sardine-fashion”, the Chinese are not only adapted to it, many of them positively like it. I had a one-roomed village house to myself for eighteen months. My next-door neighbour, who shared a similar house with his father and two brothers, confided to me that he would not dare to live in such loneliness as I had. “Aren’t you frightened?” he asked me.

The Lam Tsuen Valley used to bear the distinction of growing three crops of rice a year; but here, high up at the head of the valley where there is less water, probably only two crops were ever grown. It comes as a nostalgic surprise to

see so many terraces still sown to rice, the low green clumps well established and about to shoot upwards. The picture does indeed have an unspoiled look.

An Italian traveller, Giovanni Botero, wrote in 1593:

Of villages and hamlets (some of them containing a thousand households) the number is infinite; for the country is so covered with habitations, that all China seemeth but as one town.¹²¹

If he were describing the contemporary New Territories, he could hardly have been more accurate. The old-established villages and towns run into each other now via an untidy sprawl of shacks, cottages, high-rises, shopping malls and derelict car lots, the accumulated jumble of immigration, over-population, profligate waste, and controls gone awry.

But Botero's description cannot really have been correct for the China he knew. It ignores the important isolation which villages enjoyed. The Chinese landscape was like a huge pan completely full of fried eggs, the yolks being the villages and the whites the fields which separated village from village. Some villages may have been close to others, but a physical separation was there, and it reflected a real sense of village identity.

The village community was tight-knit, and, next to the family, was the most important focus of loyalty for the individual. For many people the village and its fields were the world. I have spoken to New Territories men who had not been outside the triangle of village, field and market in decades. Their family was in the home, their livelihood in the fields, their religion in the temples and ancestral halls of the village, and their friends were their neighbours.

For the women there used to be a curious broken pattern. Having grown up in the village of their birth, they were ripped away from it on marriage and taken to the village of their husband — they exchanged one narrow world for another.

Nowadays the pattern of marriage, like the pattern of village settlement, is far less restricted.



This is hardly my most distinguished effort at photography, yet it is one of the most unusual in terms of subject matter. It shows the tight-closed doors of an old village house, the paintwork almost gone. Traces of the Door Gods at the top are nearly weathered away completely, giving a clue to the fact that it is late in the year (December actually), and that new gods should soon be stuck up. But it is what is hung on the doors which is a rarity. The two

garlands are there because a child has just been born in the house, and they serve as a warning to people to keep out, and as a protection against evil. In this case the garlands are quite simple ones, and consist of couch-grass, ginger root, and red thread.

Red is of course the auspicious colour, and its presence needs no other explanation. Couch-grass is probably used because in its prolific growth and constant shooting it symbolizes the desired growth and spread of the family. Ginger is much used as a medicine, and for its restorative qualities. Dyer Ball says:

The author has seen it cure a violent headache when applied in the Chinese fashion, which is to heat fresh ginger in the fire, and slice in thin pieces which are stuck on the forehead and temples.¹²²

And in *Dombey and Son* Dickens writes of Walter Gay's leave-taking before going abroad:

Perch the messenger, descending from his mahogany bracket, and jogging his elbow, begged his pardon, but wished to say in his ear, Did he think he could arrange to send home to England a jar of preserved Ginger, cheap, for Mrs. Perch's own eating, in the course of her recovery from her next confinement?¹²³

So ginger and birth seem to have been connected in occidental minds as well.

I was told that in the old days a cloth shoe was always a part of the garland, because the word *bo-hai* (布鞋) meaning "cloth shoe" sounds similar to *bo-hoi* (保孩) meaning "protect the child". Indoors, the cooking pan would be filled with rice husks, rags, and wood from the wood-oil tree (*tung-yau-sue* 桐油樹), but I did not discover the particular significance of these things.

New Territories custom is now much less complicated than that in mid-19th-century Fuzhou described by Doolittle. There, an assortment of articles was wrapped in red paper, tied up with red string, and hung on the door:

This parcel contains two of a certain fruit full of seed used in the manufacture of a material employed somewhat like soap in washing, some pith of a rush used for wicking, two chopsticks, one or two onions, two pieces of charcoal, some cat's hair, and some dog's hair. A pair of trowsers of the child's father are put upon the frame of the bedstead, in such a way that the waist shall hang downward, or be lower than the legs. On the trowsers is stuck a piece of red paper, having four words written upon it, intimating that all unfavourable influences are to go into the trowsers instead of afflicting the babe.¹²⁴

The time immediately after birth is thought to be a very dangerous one for mother and child. If anyone other than a close relative were to look at the new baby it would be frightened and might die: hence the garlands to warn off strangers. But it is the supernatural which is most to be feared, and so the doors are kept shut and the house is guarded by as many charms and protective devices as possible. For thirty days the baby remains in seclusion in the gloom of the windowless house. By the end of that time the worst danger is past, the baby may come out of doors (the mother has frequently done so, because the luxury of a whole month's relaxation is not for her), and a feast is held to mark the event. The feast is known as "Full Month" (*moon-yuet* 滿月), and to it are invited all who should know of and rejoice in the new birth.

It is normal for the child to be given its name on this occasion, so it is rather like a christening. The name-giving is not an easy matter, because there are many different constraints on choice. Often there is a long-term plan within the family which dictates what the name should be, or at least what one character of the two-character personal name should be. Each generation uses a designated character called a *paai-meng* (排名), and each individual in the generation has that character in his name.

No child may have the same personal name as his parents — indeed a child was formerly supposed to avoid speaking or writing any character in a parent's name all his life long, a difficult matter when the parent's name consisted of common characters, as it often did. An American-type system giving names like "John Smith IV" would horrify the Chinese.

If the time of birth happens to be inauspicious in some way, the name given to the child tries to rectify the situation. Thus, if the birth-time indicates that there is an imbalance in the Five Elements which make up nature, the name can be used to restore the balance. It may be that there is a lack of Water, and the child will be given a name which includes the character *sui* (水) "water", for instance.

Boys are much favoured over girls, and it is assumed that the evil spirits are as covetous of them as are the parents. To protect the boy child it is sometimes given a girl's or an animal's name — the evil spirits, gullible to a degree, are fooled by this ploy, and don't try to take the child's life away.

In the New Territories the proud parents prepare a special soup of hard-boiled eggs and pig's trotters boiled in vinegar. Plenty of fresh ginger is added,

and this is drunk by the mother as a strengthener, while some of it is sent round as a thanks offering to all those who have given presents to the new baby. In this way everyone in the village gets to recognize the claims of its new members — birth certificates aren't really necessary in this kind of society.

84 Reverence



China is big enough and its people are diverse enough to make many countries. Over the past two millennia as the Chinese spread southwards from their homeland in the Yellow River basin, they met different geographical and climatic conditions, and their way of life had to change to accommodate the environment. Dress, architecture, farming methods, crops, food, means of transport ... nearly everything was affected.

Perhaps most noticeable of all was the change in language. Pioneering groups would lose touch with the area from which they came, and the language they spoke would gradually change in a different way from that of the people they had left behind. As a result there are now many different Chinese languages, not just one, and quite a few of them are so wildly different from the rest that they have to be learned as separate languages. Even in an area as small as the New Territories there are two mutually unintelligible languages spoken — Hakka and a heavy rural dialect of Cantonese.

By a happy-for-the-Chinese chance the system of writing which had been developed at least as early as 1500 B.C. did not depend on the spoken word

in the same way as an alphabetic script does. Basically the Chinese system links a written symbol with a notion, it does not tie written symbols to spoken sounds. The earliest characters were simple pictures of things: ☉ was the sun, 👁 was an eye, 𪎭 was rice (growing in water), and so on. In the course of time these symbols became stylized (the above examples are now written as 日, 目 and 米), but the principle remained. 日 has no spoken value at all, it merely means “sun”, and anyone who has learned the symbol can understand it regardless of whether they read it *sun*, or *soleil*, or *yat* (Cantonese), or *ri* (Mandarin), or *nichi* (Japanese), or whatever.

So, when the languages of the Chinese people grew apart, they were still able to communicate through writing. The written word has been the major unifier of China, carrying on its back a massive body of literature, a single system of government and bureaucracy, and a sense of cultural identity which pervades the whole country.

No one could be more conscious of this than the Chinese themselves. Their respect for the written word and its important role grew eventually into outright reverence — writing became sacred. In the cities of China special baskets for paper with writing on used to be placed in the streets and labelled “reverence lettered paper” (*ging-ji-ji* 敬字紙). This was not an early form of recycling to prevent waste. Charitable societies would employ men to empty the baskets and give their contents respectful cremation:

The ashes of this paper are carefully put into earthen vessels and kept until a large quantity is collected. They are then transferred to baskets, and carried in procession, attended by the members of the society in their best apparel, through the principal streets of the city or suburbs, to the bank of the river, where they are either poured out into the water, and allowed to float down into the ocean, or placed in a boat and taken several miles down the river, or, as some say, near its mouth, before they are emptied into the stream. A band of musicians is hired to accompany the procession, who play on their instruments as they pass along the streets. The members of the society carry each a large stick of incense, already lighted, held reverently in one hand before them as they pass along.¹²⁵

Clearly, then, it would be wrong to say that the Chinese have no reverent inclinations. Yet it is often tempting to think it. Even that arch-Chinese Lin Yutang in *My Country and My People* seems to believe it when he writes: “a certain hard-headedness characterizes the Chinese ideal of life.”¹²⁶

The disconcerting fact is that reverence seems to be lacking in just those situations where we might expect to see it displayed. I remember feeling quite upset in my first days in the New Territories as I watched a geomancer going about the serious business of siting a grave with a cigarette clenched between his teeth, the smoke making his eyes water. Shortly afterwards I was at a major ancestor worship ceremony in a hall, and throughout it bystanders and participants alike were chattering and laughing as though nothing out of the ordinary was happening. How could they? I thought, but no one seemed to find this irreverent behaviour strange.

The photograph records an even more bitter pill for me to swallow. A New Territories village had gone to enormous expense to organize a festival, and a fair part of the cost had been incurred in buying several beautifully made tableaux depicting religious scenes and figures from mythology. I did not approve of the piece of pink paper (bottom left) which is a blatant advertisement for the firm which had made the models, but I supposed that to be more of an evil of modern commercialism than a traditional piece of irreverence. Throughout the festival these tableaux had added their colour and significance to the rituals; but on the last night I noticed that they were being systematically desecrated as small children (and some adults too) climbed over them tearing off the heads of the figures and removing anything else that took their fancy.

“Oh, that always happens,” said a Chinese friend. “People like to have them as keepsakes and to bring them good fortune. They usually put them on the ancestral altar at home.”

That brought me up short. It wasn't vandalism but a kind of religious fervour I had been condemning. After all, why should reverence take the same form in different cultures? Might not a 19th-century Chinese have been horrified at the way I screw up and throw away the draft of this article as I finish typing it?



The Chinese family was essentially a male dominated institution. Surname was transmitted through the male line, as it is of course in the West too; the family estate was inherited by sons, daughters having no significant share in it; and only sons were full members of the family ancestor worship group.

Women were in theory subject to men throughout their lives. “The Three Subserviences” (*saam-chung* 三從) stressed that the unmarried girl was subservient to her father, the married woman was subservient to her husband, and the widow to her son. Though reality did not always correspond with the theory, it took a woman of considerable strength of character to assert her independence.

The marriage system also worked to the woman’s disadvantage. She was expected to move from her own home to live with her husband, and in most cases that meant living with her husband’s family. So, while he remained in the friendly comfort of his own home, she was admitted as a young bride into surroundings to which she was a stranger.

In fact the situation was often even more traumatic than this. First, because with the system of arranged marriage the bride and groom had sometimes not

even met before their wedding. Second, because it was generally considered wrong to marry someone from the same village, so that the bride necessarily came from another community and not only did not know her husband-to-be, she might not even know anyone at all in the village into which she was being married. No wonder, then, that for a Chinese woman marriage was known as “the greatest event of life” (*jung-san daai-si* 終身大事).

The arrangements for a wedding were in the hands of the families, and the couple might be kept completely in the dark about the preparations being made on their behalf. Here is a Chinese account of things from the girl’s point of view:

One month before she leaves her natal home, the bride’s family go through the ceremony called “knowing the day”. This is because her wedding is something completely outside the bride’s control, it is her parents who decide on it, and she has been kept in utter ignorance of it. Now, when the time to be married out of her home is near at hand, she may be deceived no longer, and it is only when she is formally acquainted with the fact that she becomes aware that she is about to be married out as someone’s wife. From the moment of her telling on, her freedom of movement is limited, and her rising and living, drinking and eating, sitting, sleeping and working all are confined to one place (usually upstairs in the house) Young girls of about her own age and friends who are particularly intimate with her may all go up into her room with her during this period to keep her company and comfort her. This is called “company in the room”. These girls who are company in the room sleep with her at night and work with her during the day; they are in fact the aides of this pitiable girl under house arrest. During the night she wails very loudly¹²⁷

The custom described above belonged to an area not far from Hong Kong. I have not heard of quite such strict surveillance over the New Territories bride-to-be, but that she had to be a considerable optimist not to be terrified of the new life ahead is certain.

Come the wedding day the groom’s family would send a bridal sedan-chair to take her from her parents’ village to his home. She would be carried out of her house and sat in the chair, the curtains would be drawn round her, and red ribbons used to seal her in. Then in triumphal procession she was carried off. Shut up in the chair she was expected to weep and wail loudly all the way. Doubtless in her terrified state she did not find this difficult. Some brides were taught obscene and abusive songs to sing about their future in-laws, and their weeping would be interspersed with snatches of scurrility.

The photograph shows an incident during the collection of a bride in the New Territories in 1963. True to tradition she had been crying desperately until this point, about half way to her destination. Here her howls rose to such a crescendo that the go-between and the other women accompanying her became really concerned: it was a scorching day and shut up inside the chair it must have been unbearably hot.

They told the bearers to put the chair down, and asked the bride through the curtains if she was alright. "Of course," she said — and the procession moved on.

Well, in this case it was a love-match not an arranged marriage, and the girl was neither unhappy nor afraid. But it was in all other respects a traditional wedding and she was intent on doing it properly.



I picked this photograph from my collection not because it has any great distinction but because it offers a nice contrast in dress, and I thought it would serve for an article on that subject. But the more I looked at it the more it grew on me, because it is full of contrasts both obvious and subtle.

The old men in their best hats are getting ready to worship at the grave on the side of which they are standing, putting on their long ceremonial gowns, called “cheongsam” (*cheung-saam* 長衫), the same name as is given to the Shanghai-inspired, high-necked, slim-fitting ladies’ dresses. By contrast, the boys in the background wear casual, sloppy clothes, including shorts, which older country people find somewhat disgusting. When I lived in a New Territories village I was told so often that Western men walking around in shorts were an unpleasant sight that I thanked my lucky stars that I hadn’t got any, and am still fully programmed to find them offensive myself.

The little girl is another contrast: she wears school uniform. The old men would not have worn uniform when they attended a few short years of school, and in their day hardly any girls received an education at all.

The modern bicycle which brought one of the men to the grave contrasts with the traditional gong which summons the spirit to be worshipped. The evaporated milk box is out of tune with the ceremonial foods it has been used to carry and which the ancestor is about to be offered, foods which were specified long before tin cans were ever made. And how about the contrast between the flat, open fields and the crowded huddled village in the distance? Or between the total cultivation of the fields and the wilderness of the hilly area in the foreground?

Then there is the contrast between the pair of old men in the front and the two young children behind. Is it fanciful to read significance into the fact that the old are leaning to the right where the young both lean to the left? Or that the old are both men while girl and boy stand side by side equally representing the young?

Girl and boy, female and male, are not merely contrasts, they are opposites which come together to form a complementary whole, and this is an idea which has permeated Chinese thought from earliest times. In the beginning, said one of the many schools of philosophy, there was Chaos. Gradually Chaos separated out into two kinds of particles or forces, the *Yang* (*yeung* 陽) and the *Yin* (*yam* 陰). The *Yang* formed the heavens, the *Yin* the earth.

But *Yin* and *Yang* could combine in innumerable ways to produce other matter, and so developed the idea that the same principle which could be seen at work for the animal world also applied to the inanimate and even the abstract. The following is taken from a Taoist text but is completely in line with the *Book of Changes* (*Yik-ging* 易經), the much beloved *Yee-ching* of recent Western faddists:

The Great Beginning produced emptiness and emptiness produced the universe. The universe produced material-force which had limits. That which was clear and light drifted up to become heaven, while that which was heavy and turbid solidified to become earth. ... The combined essences of heaven and earth became the yin and yang, the concentrated essences of the yin and yang became the four seasons, and the scattered essences of the four seasons became the myriad creatures of the world.¹²⁸

In terms of matter and space and abstract qualities, *Yin* and *Yang* are opposites, so that there tend to be pairs of contrasted phenomena. The sun is *Yang*, the moon is *Yin*; the north side of the river is *Yang*, the south side *Yin*;

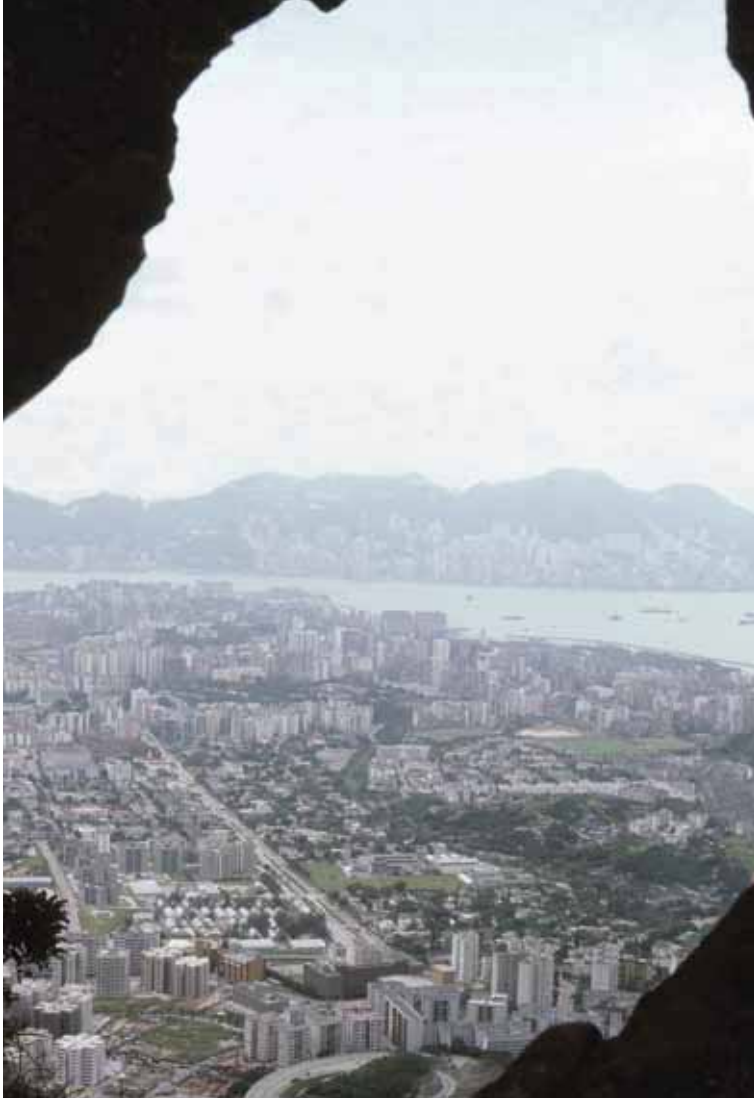
sunlight is *Yang*, shade is *Yin*; vigour is *Yang*, passivity is *Yin*. The opposites together achieve a balanced normality, a natural harmony.

But in terms of time, *Yang* and *Yin* alternate in unending sequence, one giving place to the other. As the *Yang* principle waxes strong the *Yin* weakens, until the balance swings the other way. Winter is *Yin*, but it contains the seed of spring, which marks the growing strength of *Yang*, and this in summer produces the germ of *Yin* and the onset of autumn.

Yin and *Yang* are not really to be thought of as substances, they are impersonal natural forces, and so apply to the abstract as well as the concrete. Odd numbers are *Yang*, even numbers *Yin*, for instance. There is something of a preference for odd numbers. Incense sticks are offered in threes or sometimes ones or fives. People make a special point of celebrating their 51st, 61st, 71st and 81st birthdays, where a Westerner would choose his 50th, 60th, 70th or 80th for particular attention. Then there are the Three Auspicious Stars (*saam-sing* 三星), the Five Happinesses (*ng-fuk* 五福), the Seven Immortals (*chat-sin* 七仙), the Nine Heavens (*gau-tin* 九天), and so on. But this does not mean that *Yin* numbers are bad: Cantonese people love the number 8 (*baat* 八) because it sounds like *faat* (*faat* 發) “get rich”, and wedding gifts of money are always made in even numbers of dollars to symbolize “pairing”.

The *Yang* and *Yin* numbers do not complement each other in an obvious way: 1 pairs with 6, 2 with 7, 3 with 8, 4 with 9, and 5 with 10. The rationale for this seems to lie in the number five, a number of all pervasive significance. The *Yin-Yang* school of philosophy adopted the idea of the Five Elements (*ng-hang* 五行, Water, Earth, Fire, Wood and Metal). These five were products of *Yin-Yang* fusion, and like them form an unending sequence in time. In this way, two cycles of five produce pairs of *Yin* and *Yang* numbers.

Yang and *Yin* contrast and complement in this photograph too, for the living are *Yang* and the grave is *Yin*. Living and dead seem as far apart as contrast could go, but of course what lives must die, and the complementary side to existence on earth awaits those pictured here as it does us all. And for the Chinese it is built into their family life, ancestors and descendants going on through time in their complementary relationship of mutual dependence.



Hong Kong must be one of the most photographed places in the world, and to find an unusual angle you must either be a genius or a fool. Coming within the latter category myself, I climbed Lion Rock on a very hot day in the middle of August 1975.

Up the top there is a window-like hole in the rock, and I used it to frame this photograph. It shows quite clearly the contrasts between the hills of Hong Kong Island in the distance and the comparative flatness of the Kowloon peninsula. This flatness was the main reason for Kowloon's coming under British rule.

Hong Kong Island had been occupied by a British naval force early in 1841, and when the Opium War was brought to an end by the 1842 Treaty of Nanking it was ceded to Britain as a permanent base for her China trade. Soon the lack of flat land began to be felt, and greedy eyes were turned on Kowloon:

In the early days some British and Americans had attempted to build residences there and were stopped by Davis, but the cricket club advertised regular practises on that side. Davis reported in 1845 that Kowloon "has long been considered as a sort of neutral ground" The renewal of hostilities against China ... revived the Kowloon question, and the troops assembling for the 1860 campaign used the peninsula as a camping ground. In 1859, Caine had reported a riot at Tsim Sha Tsui as showing the lawless character of the inhabitants and the lack of control by the Chinese officials at Kowloon City, and it was largely on that ground that the Colonial Office agreed to recommend the retention of Kowloon in any settlement.¹²⁹

The October 1860 Convention of Peking ceded Kowloon to Britain "with a view to maintaining law and order in and about the Harbour of Hong Kong".

Riots in Tsim Sha Tsui, law and order in the harbour: how was it that control over the population was so poor? In theory every metre of the Chinese Empire was under the enlightened government of officials who had been selected for the task on the strength of their performance in the civil service examinations. The county of San On (新安縣) in which Kowloon lay was no exception.

At Nam Tau (南頭) in the north-west resided the County Magistrate (*ji-yuen* 知縣), the senior official in the area, with direct responsibility to the Prefectural authorities in Canton (Gwong Jau Foo 廣州府). Beneath him were four lesser officials stationed at key points. One of these lived at Kowloon City (Gau Lung Sing 九龍城). Another, the Deputy Magistrate (*yuen-sing* 縣丞), was responsible for the north-eastern part of the county and had his residence in the walled city of Daai Pang (大鵬) at the top of Mirs Bay. The

city was garrisoned by a battalion of Imperial troops, yet the *San On Gazetteer* (*San-on Yuen-ji* 新安縣志) tells us that in 1647 it was captured and sacked by insurgents who held it successfully for nine years against all government efforts to recapture it!

Admittedly those were the early years of the new Qing dynasty and the south of China was still in a very unsettled state, but if a battalion under a senior official could not hold on to its own fortified city, then it is not surprising that a lesser man with only slight military support could not control the people of Tsim Sha Tsui at a distance of two kilometres from Kowloon City.

And it is clear that even when the Qing had become fully confirmed in power the area near Hong Kong remained unruly to the point of ungovernability. Pirates terrorized the sea, the islands and the coastal region, and as for the native population:

The people are of a quarrelsome nature, and fond of rapine. They will engage in any enterprise which promises them money, or which will give them an opportunity of robbing. ... The mandarin at Fuk-wing once asked me why we attempted to carry out our missionary work among a people so depraved, and so drowned in all manner of wickedness, as to have lost their human nature The people pay the taxes, but do not allow the mandarins to interfere with their own local government. Law-suits, differences, and offences are very seldom brought before the mandarins. The mandarin from whom I learnt the preceding facts had not, as far as I know, during a period of several years, more than one case brought before him for decision; in this instance he was both plaintiff and judge — the criminal being a youth who was caught stealing fruit in his garden.¹³⁰

Kowloon City was walled in 1847, but its population was always very small; it had an administrative rather than a residential function. It was not included in the territory ceded in 1860, and there was considerable doubt as to the extent of its inclusion in the 1898 lease of the New Territories. A clause of the lease read:

within the City of Kowloon, the Chinese officers now stationed there shall continue to exercise jurisdiction except so far as may be inconsistent with the military requirements for the defence of Hong Kong.¹³¹

The British found it “inconsistent with military requirements” within a year of the signing, and from then on considered it part of the New Territories, but Chinese governments have not agreed with this arbitrary decision. The

hand of British rule always rested very lightly on the city because of this politically sensitive status. The walls of the city were not torn down until the Japanese occupation.

The name Kowloon comes from the Cantonese Gau Lung (九龍) which means “nine dragons”. I have been assured that the nine hills round Kowloon are the nine dragons in question, but I can never see nine summits. “Of course not,” people say, “some of them were flattened to make way for the old Kai Tak airport.”

Well, looming over Plover Cove in the New Territories there is a range called the “Eight Fairies” (Pat Sin Leng 八仙嶺), but I always count *nine* of them, so I obviously have no more genius for maths than for photography.



This photograph would be quite good material for a Sherlock Holmes-type exercise in deduction. From the characters it is clearly placed in a Chinese environment; the type of iron-mail gate belongs to South China

villages; the existence of the gate implies a wall in which the gate is set; and the granite building blocks speak of durability and wealth. No prizes, then, for deducing that these are the ancient gates of a walled clan village of the New Territories.

The photograph can tell us more. The electric light bulb and the water pipe sneaking in at the bottom of the gate show that this is a contemporary shot, though the worn step bears witness to the age of the gateway. We can even guess that the photograph was taken in summer, because the red papers put up round the gate at New Year have faded to off-white, but have not yet been stripped right off by sun and rain. (I confess to having the date — 25th August 1975 — on the back of the photograph to aid my guesswork here.)

The village belongs to the Lung Yeuk Tau branch of the powerful Dang clan, a branch which seems to have declined in numbers and influence over the last century. It is not easy to understand why the gates are preserved so carefully, because there is no longer need for the clan to retire behind the walls for safety. In the not too distant past, clan warfare was common, and feuds between villages made life difficult and protective walls essential. There are some fascinating accounts in 19th-century sources. *The Chinese Recorder* prints a report by the Rev. Wm. Ashmore of a clan feud near Swatow (汕頭 Shantou) which started with an apparently trivial quarrel over a duck:

Objurgations, anathemas, abuse of each other's ancestors of remote generations, and immediate progenitors of recent ones, were exchanged with unstinted heartiness; then came missiles, clods, stones, bamboo-poles, spears, tridents and gingals, as the war went on. Soon the roadways between each other's hamlets were no longer safe.¹³²

After two years, he says:

Both sides were badly used up. They were all of them in miserable condition. Among them it was known that at least thirty-five had been killed, and then there were the wounded and the pounded, the broken heads and bruised limbs, of which no record was kept. They were all worn out with incessant wakefulness, watchfulness and warfare; they had spent their money for powder and shot; they had shed their blood, and they had expended their strength, and yet they were — both sides — relatively about where they were where they began.

With rhetoric like this, the Rev. Ashmore must have been a terror in the pulpit.

The story is typical both in its goriness and in the inconclusiveness of the fighting. Inter-clan feuding was not carried on in order to conquer territory or to wipe out the opposition: it was more to assert territorial independence and family pride, an escalated dawn chorus rather than Napoleonic warfare.

But if the old days were bad and bloody, they were also days when it was possible to feel great identity with and pride in the clan. Perhaps these gates are preserved as much as anything as a reminder of historical greatness.

The most famous gates in all Hong Kong belong to another stronghold of the Dang clan — Kam Tin. In 1898 the New Territories were leased to Britain by China for a term of 99 years. When the British actually planted the flag outside Tai Po in 1899 they were met by a large force — perhaps 2,000–3,000 strong — of local men who did not want the lease to take effect. A short series of clashes proved the amateurs no match for well-trained and better-armed British forces, and the resistance collapsed. It had been organized at least partially from Kam Tin, and the gates of Kat Hing Wai, one of its walled villages, were blown in with explosives as a reprisal. The then Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Henry Blake, took a fancy to the gates, and had them sent back to Ireland, where they were set up on his estate.

In 1924, the villagers asked for their gates back, and Sir Reginald Stubbs's government paid for their return. They were re-erected in 1925, and a commemorative plaque giving their history was set up in the wall, where it, and they, remain today.

Sung Hok-p'ang's interesting series of articles on Kam Tin, written in the 1930s, has been reprinted in the *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, itself a mine of local knowledge. Sung translated the plaque, which in slightly quaint English makes amusing reading. It claims that when the lease was signed, the Chinese government did not trouble to inform the inhabitants ...

so when the British army arrived, the ignorant people of the country were inflamed by some persons and arose to resist them, the people of our waais [walled villages] being afraid to be disturbed, in order to avoid them they shut the iron gates firmly. The British army suspecting that bad characters were hiding inside, then assaulted and made the gates open. After they went inside the Waai, they understood that the people inside were all good men and women, so did not give them any bad treatment, but just had the iron gates taken away.¹³³

In fact, the leasing of the territory had been known to the people beforehand but, not unreasonably, they objected to it: and the slight fudging of history on commemorative tablets is doubtless common practice everywhere.



Chinese religions have not come up with a definitive answer to the question of what happens to a man when he dies. Ancestor worship insists that the soul continues in existence after the body has ceased to function, and that

that soul is able to bring blessings to its living descendants if it is properly worshipped by them. It is equally capable of taking unpleasant revenge on descendants who fail to worship it properly.

Buddhism, on the other hand, sees the soul as descending to Purgatory, where it is condemned to vicious punishment in order to expiate its worldly sins. Far from being able to influence what is happening in this world, it is to some extent dependent on its living descendants, who are able through prayer and sacrifice to alleviate its tortures. Ultimately the soul will be reborn, usually alternating between male and female bodies with each rebirth.

Some accounts give a man two souls, one of which on death becomes a ghost to roam the underworld, while the other ascends to the heavens as a minor god. Ten souls exist according to yet other accounts. And Addison says:

A common belief in China to-day is that each man has three souls. At death one remains with the body in the grave; one takes up its residence in the tablet; and one goes to the other world, usually to some purgatory The distinction between a *yang* soul, which ascends on high, and a *yin* soul, which descends to the earth, has been familiar in China since classical times; the necessity for positing a third soul is the direct outcome of Buddhist beliefs and practices; and the effort to combine the three in a psychological doctrine is of Taoist origin.¹³⁴

Confucius is thought to have been agnostic, and the Analects state that he “did not talk of prodigies, feats of strength, revolts or spirits.”¹³⁵ Yet he encouraged people to sacrifice to ancestors “as if they were there,”¹³⁶ and clearly understood that observance of these rites was a reinforcement of the social features which his teachings sought to promote. A twin to the Confucianists’ hard-headed attitude can be found in Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*:

The various modes of worship, which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful.¹³⁷

By a thousand years ago the Confucian philosopher Jue Hei (朱熹, usually called Chu Hsi in Western writings) had expounded the notion that the “material-force” (*hei* 氣) did not disintegrate immediately on death, and although he felt that it must necessarily dissipate in the end, it was meanwhile linked with and capable of communication with the material-force to be found

in living descendants. It was protected from disintegration by this link, and worship thus helped to keep the ancestral soul “alive”.

In homes in much of China little attempt seems to have been made to worship ancestors beyond four or five generations back. After that time the wooden tablets would be burned or buried, and the ancestors neglected, if not forgotten. But in South China at least, the predominance of clans meant that it was desirable to worship the many generations back to the founding ancestors so as to give a ritual as well as a political and social unity to the living membership.

In the New Territories, there are two main methods of worshipping clan ancestors. The Cantonese clans for the most part have installed in their specially built halls (*chi-tong* 祠堂) individual tablets (*san-jue-pai* 神主牌) for all of the ancestors who are most important to them genealogically or sentimentally. The tablets can be worshipped as single units or en masse.

The photograph shows the altar of a Hakka ancestral hall. Here the clan ancestors all share a common tablet, and therefore can only be worshipped as a unitary body of ancestral spirit. When someone dies, his or her spirit is given temporary home in a paper tablet pasted on a side wall of the hall. Then (usually at New Year) that spirit is invited to join the rest of the ancestors in the joint tablet, the paper tablet is destroyed, and the individual identity merges with the group identity.

At the time I took the photograph I failed to wake up to the fact that there are *two* tablets instead of the normal *one*. Not only that, but the two bear different surnames, an odd feature in a hall dedicated to the ancestors of one clan only. Later I returned to the village and sought enlightenment from an elder.

“Oh,” he said, “that’s because our founding ancestor had a great friend who became his sworn blood-brother. As this man had no children we have worshipped him ever since as if he were our ancestor too.”

Continuity of descent-force is as well illustrated here as it could be. Surrounding the ancestor tablets are paper gods and talismans seeking the blessings of descendants, wealth, peace, and good fortune. The large character on the left proclaims “long life”; and, given the purpose of the ancestor cult, I see no reason why that desirable quality should not apply to the dead as much as to the living.



This Survival of the Fittest: the phrase was coined by Herbert Spencer to explain the evolution of many and different life forms. It seems to me that it can describe death (in the form of ancestors) equally well.

Any Chinese who had married and had sons could expect to be worshipped as an ancestor after death. Every day his descendants would offer tea and incense to his soul at the tablet bearing his name on the family altar; and on special occasions, such as family birthdays, weddings, and annual festivals, more elaborate offerings would be made. For three, four, even five generations this would go on, and then the descendants would lose interest, and the tablet would be removed from the altar and given decent burial or cremation. At this point the ancestor would to all intents and purposes cease to exist, because his survival was dependent on the flow of forces passing between him and his descendants through the rituals.

But men who had been important while alive were thought likely to be important in death too, and their more powerful souls were worth worshipping for longer. Similarly, men who were *genealogically* important — such as the founders (however humble) of clans, or men who had started an important

branch of the family — also tended to be remembered and worshipped for many generations.

Neither of these types of ancestor necessarily qualifies for the “survival of the fittest” description, but I was reminded by this photograph of a remark made to me by a neighbour when I lived in a New Territories village:

“If there’s nothing to eat, we won’t go,” he said.

He meant that no-one would be bothered to trek over to an ancestor’s grave to worship if there weren’t an incentive in the form of a feast to go with it. Cynical? Yes, but not entirely.

It costs money to provide offerings for ancestor worship, and the most expensive element is the food. Once the ceremony is over the food can be eaten by the worshippers. In a sense then, he was saying that ancestors will only be worshipped if the descendants can afford it.

It is here that the “fittest” are marked out. They are the ancestors in whose name a parcel of ancestral trust land (*jai-tin* 祭田) has been set aside. The income from the land is used to finance the rituals, and the descendants will continue to worship because the wherewithal is always forthcoming. It is precisely the ancestors who were wealthy or important in this life whose descendants could afford to put trust land aside for them; and genealogically important ancestors would be endowed with trust land too wherever possible. And so the ancestors survived.

The photograph shows open-air cooking at the graveside after a major clan ancestor worship ceremony in the New Territories. Whole roast pigs which formed the centrepiece of the offerings have been chopped up into mouth-sized chunks and are being heated up in a *wok*. The pork will then be put in wooden tubs (two of them can be seen behind the cooks), mixed with squid, bean-curd and vegetables, and carried to the hungry worshippers. On this occasion several hundred people ate, squatting on the grass around the tubs.

The terms used by the villagers for a picnic of this kind seem a little odd. One is *sik-poon* (食盆 “eating the tub”), and the other is *hek-saan-tau* (吃山頭 “eating the hill”). It’s probably true that bits of the tub do get eaten along with the meal; and it’s certainly true that portions of the hillside find their way into the food: but the terminology is not to be taken so literally. “Eating out of a tub” and “eating on the hillside” are perfectly reasonable translations.

Chinese is like that. It sometimes throws ideas together without what English would normally consider “proper connections”. My early introduction to this I can well remember. I was with a group of Chinese friends when they all turned on poor A-Gei and said: “Tonight we are going to eat you” (*gam-maan sik nei* 今晚食你).

I felt (and A-Gei looked) horrified. I’d heard of eating dog and snake and rice maggots and cockroaches, and I’d read in *The Water Margin* of cannibalism in the Song dynasty, but to eat a friend (and a very skinny one at that) was more than even my depraved tastes could fancy. It was alright — what they meant was “Tonight we are going to eat at your expense.” A-Gei was alarmed at the prospect of paying, he wasn’t in fear of the pot.

What a silly language Chinese is, I thought ... until some time later, when I was with my wife eating in a restaurant in London. “Excuse me, sir,” said the waiter, “Are you the soup?”

Perhaps his question wasn’t so silly at that — there was a fly in me. I’d swallowed it along with bits of the hillside and the tub.

91 _____ House Re-warming



Place: Sheung Shui Village, New Territories, Hong Kong.
Date: 27th March 1964: *gap san* 甲辰 year, 2nd month, 14th day.
Time: 1.15 a.m.
Almanac entry: 11 p.m. to 3 a.m. auspicious.
Bad day for: planting, marrying, burning ancestor tablets, burying.

Good day for: worshipping; starting school; setting out on journeys; meeting friends; moving house; bathing; curing sickness; tailoring; building dikes; digging; beam-raising; weaving nets; brewing; hanging doors; pasturing; buying in domestic animals.

Two days before, on 25th March, the Almanac had promised thunder, so I was not particularly surprised when at half past midnight I was awoken by a tremendous din. However, it was immediately obvious that it was not thunder. I got dressed, grabbed camera and flash, and went to investigate.

Just a few doors along the row of houses there was great activity, with firecrackers and two large gongs setting standards of noise which everyone else was trying hard to live up to. The house which was the centre of attention had been under repair for several weeks, and a new roof was now nearly complete. As with a new house, a new roof requires a topping-out ceremony, and the builders had reached the stage where they were ready for the ridge-pole to be put in place with due ceremony. It was unfortunate for the weary that on this day when “beam-raising” was approved by the Almanac the most suitable auspicious period should fall in the middle of the night.

Inside the house had been set up a long red-painted table. On this were trays and bowls of offering foods. There was a pig’s head, a whole cooked chicken, nuts, a large bunch of bananas, bowls of soup with hard-boiled duck eggs in, cut meats, rice, tea, wine, and a dish of lurid red ceremonial buns. A red wooden tub at one end contained five paper swords, paper charms, ritual candles, and incense.

On the beams of the cockloft was pasted a strip of red paper with the words “May both sons and wealth enter here” (*ding-choi leung-jun* 丁財兩進) and other red paper lucky charms were stuck on the inside walls.

The ceremony was conducted by the Taoist priest in his scarlet robes and black hat. In the photograph he can be seen chanting spells outside the door of the house, while an old woman assists him. The boy in the foreground shadowed the priest throughout the ceremony: he was the oldest male member available of the family who were to live in the house.

The purposes of the ceremony were to dispel evil from the house and to appease any gods or spirits which might have been disturbed or upset by the building work. In addition, the ritual aimed to attract positive benefits to the house, as the wish for sons and wealth showed.

The five swords were smeared with blood which the Taoist took from a small nick in the comb of a live cockerel. They were taken to each of the five directions (North, East, South, West and Centre) and offerings made. I believe that this was to frighten off the evil from all directions, and to appeal to the god-rulers of the five parts of the Universe for their protection.

More chicken blood was dropped in a bowl of purified water. Then a long yellow paper charm was read out by the priest, burned, and the ashes added to the mixture in the bowl. At various stages he would sip up a mouthful of this holy water and spray it out. The climax came when the boy was made to stand under the top beam of the roof as it rested on trestles ready to be hoisted into position. The Taoist showered both him and the beam with rice and fruits — a fertility magic. Then the chicken and a pair of trousers (the latter being a symbol for wealth) were passed round the beam, and to a frantic gonging the beam was lifted into place. Hanging from it were various objects symbolizing good luck, fertility, wealth, and so on.

A long string of firecrackers burst into life, and echoed through the normally quiet night-time lanes. A feast of sharks fin soup and other delicacies was served, along with wine. It was nearly 3 a.m. before I got back to bed.

But what about all that noise late at night — did no-one complain? The answer is that no-one took any notice. Tolerance of neighbours' activities is high in close-packed villages and, after all, the need to hold a ceremony of some kind at inconvenient hours could strike anyone at any time.

As I have so often done, I turned to De Groot's *Religious System of China* for enlightenment. Sure enough, he confirms my view:

The chief instrument for the production of exorcising noise is the gong ... resounding throughout the empire every day, especially in summer, when a rise in the death rate induces an increase in devil-expelling activity Very often small groups of men and even women are beating on gongs, cymbals and drums for a succession of hours. No protest is heard from their neighbours, no complaint that they disturb their night's rest; such savage music then must either sound agreeable to Chinese ears, or be heard with gratitude as

a meritorious work, gratuitously performed by benevolent folks who have at heart the private and public weal and health.¹³⁸



The Old Protestant Cemetery in Macau is as peaceful a place as could be desired, and the more so for its unexpectedness in the middle of the city. Visitors used to have to knock on sullen gates to gain admission — a process which discouraged many — but in recent years it has been possible to walk straight in to enjoy the dappled shade and the cool of the little church, not to mention the fascination of the names renowned and unsung which are remembered on the time-worn stones.

Certainly, for most of those buried here the peace is such as they had little experience of in life. The cemetery was only used for a brief period of less than forty years, from 1821–1858, but that was a time of great activity and strife for Westerners in China. Disease, shipwreck, piracy and warfare took their savage toll of the adventurers. Merchants, administrators, sailors, soldiers, missionaries and artists, men, women and children, people of many nationalities, all found their way to the enclosed tranquillity of this garden.

Perhaps the most famous grave is that of Dr. Robert Morrison. He was the first Protestant missionary to China, sent out by the London Missionary

Society, which was still active in Hong Kong until the mid-1960s. He arrived in 1807 and died in Canton in 1834. The cemetery actually owes its existence to him, for it was for the burial of his wife that the land was first made available by the Portuguese authorities. A much-weathered inscription on his grave gives details of his works, not least of which were his translation of the Bible into Chinese, and his compilation of two Chinese dictionaries.

Macau was, of course, a Roman Catholic province, and until the cemetery was opened there was no provision for Protestant burial. Sir Lindsay Ride says:

Strong representations were made by the Select Committee [of the East India Company] to the Portuguese and although they could not let [his wife] be buried in their cemetery, the pleadings plus the popularity of Dr. Morrison won the day, and a plot of land near one of the Company's official residences, now the Museum, was sold to the East India Company for use as a burial ground. Later the East India Company allowed it to be used by all foreigners, and then a number of people sought permission for the remains of those formerly buried on hillsides to be moved into the newly established cemetery.¹³⁹

The East India Company had the monopoly of British trade with China until 1834, and it was for this reason that they were the purchasers of the cemetery. Dr. Morrison had held the post of "Chinese translator to the East India Company" since 1809, which doubtless explains their championing of his wife's burial cause.

Not everything had gone Morrison's way in China. He had met with great difficulties in his mission — the Roman Catholic priests of Macau had been opposed to it from the first, there was a Chinese government ban on the teaching of their language to foreigners, and much Chinese opposition to his presence at all. He had also been official interpreter to the totally unsuccessful Amherst Embassy to the Chinese court in 1816.

An indirect ancestor of Winston Churchill is buried here too. Lord Henry John Spencer Churchill's impressive tombstone records that he was only 43 years old when he died in 1840, "Captain of HBM Ship *Druid* and Senior Officer in the China Seas".

But even 43 was quite an advanced age. Next door to each other are the graves of "Mr. SAMUEL PROCTER OF BOSTON, a young gentleman much esteemed & regretted by all who knew him who departed this life AT MACOA January the 12 1792 aged 21 years" and "Captain William Huddart,

Commander of the York East Indiaman, who after a long and painful illness which he bore with the utmost fortitude departed this Life in Macao Roads on his passage to England March 29th 1787. Aged 24 Years." Both these men must have been reburied in the cemetery after initial burial elsewhere in the area.

The grave of the China coast painter, George Chinnery, is also here, but until more detail was added just a few years ago his memorial was hardly informative. It had consisted of an imposing pillared stone portal set into a side wall, and bore only the words "George Chinnery". He was born in 1774, and came to Macau in 1825, where he remained until his death in 1852. Many of his paintings survive, including one of Dr. Morrison.

In terms of survival Chinnery was a rarity. Few others at that time reached anything like his age. Perhaps many years on the run from a much-feared wife kept him fitter than his contemporaries? There is a Cantonese saying: *pa lo-poh faat-daat* (怕老婆發達) "If you fear your wife you'll prosper". His case seems to show that prosperity is not the only advantage to be gained.

93 _____ Water Buffalo



The water buffalo (*sui-ngau* 水牛) like the paddy-field means Chinese agriculture to me. The Chinese landscape artist and the China tourist both would feel the loss too if the buffalo were not there.

Of course the tractor is faster and more “progressive”, but whether it is as economical is a moot point. A buffalo is powerful, has a working life of twenty-five or more years, is virtually silent, requires little maintenance because it can scavenge for much of its food, uses no scarce petrol or diesel, and its waste is useful as fertiliser and fuel. And (if I may be a little earthy) what tractor after a service gives you two for the price of one?

The Chinese villager is so attached to his buffalo that he considers it almost a member of the family. Certainly few farmers will ever touch beef — it would be as repugnant to them as the idea of eating his pet cat would be to a Westerner.

Water buffaloes, in spite of their formidable appearance, are the most docile, tractable and easily trained of all domestic animals. Great numbers of them are to be seen tilling the padi fields, carting, wallowing and grazing in the charge of

old people or young children. They are placid when accompanied by a known attendant but are nervous when approached by anyone else. Their temperament characteristically combines curiosity and timidity. They are usually shy of strangers and will advance in a rather forbidding manner, heads up, nostrils flaring and teeth bared. Unprovoked attacks are extremely rare and are only likely to occur when the animal has been harshly treated or wounded and has become bewildered, frightened and disoriented. It is exceptional to encounter an aggressive buffalo.¹⁴⁰

Now that I have read that and realize that these animals are merely “paper tigers”, I shan’t be afraid of them in future ... perhaps. But caution and cowardice tell me that that “forbidding manner” may truly represent the buffalo’s feelings towards me. No less a person than Pearl S. Buck was worried about the beasts, and Dyer Ball says categorically:

The buffalo is a dangerous animal for Europeans to approach, as it has a repugnance to strangers.¹⁴¹

It could be that there is such a thing as a “bestial folk memory” which will explain why Westerners are so obviously disliked by *bubalus bubalis*: we have not been distinguished always for considerateness and courtesy. I confess to finding the following tale amusing, but my sympathies are not with the teller:

Once while out shooting pheasant in Chinkiang, I shot by accident a water-buffalo. The brute charged immediately, and my only chance was a small grave about 6 feet high; this I made for and, standing on the top, waited for the beast to come. He came straight for me, and, seeing no chance of retreat, I fired both barrels of my shot-gun loaded with No. 5 shot right between his eyes. The buffalo actually stood up on his head after he received the charge and then turned as if to charge again. By this time the villagers arrived with their farming implements, and seemed bent on charging me too. As I had no desire to be hacked by their rakes and other tools, I simply said: “*Ni-men tou Ch’ih lo fan lo ma?*” (Have you all had your food?) — equivalent to our “good morning”.

“*Ch’ih lo!*” (we have fed), they replied; and I was saved from their wrath. Later on, I gave them a dollar and we parted very good friends.¹⁴²

What an insufferable, smug, superior oaf!

The Spring Ox (*chun-ngau* 春牛) tradition has had a long history in China. We are told that in ancient times an ox or buffalo was slaughtered in the spring as an offering to the God of Agriculture, San Nung (神農). Later a clay model was substituted for the real thing, and was beaten to a powder by

way of sacrifice. Eventually in some parts of the country a paper ox took its place, and this was burned as an offering.

The ox was attended by a herd-boy called Mong San (芒神), and the colour of the animal and of the boy's clothes was supposed to give a prediction of the weather and the harvest for the coming year:

Thus if the people see that the head of the ox is painted yellow, they know that great heat is foretold for the coming summer; if it is green, there will be much sickness in the spring; if red, there will be a drought; if black, there will be much rain; if white, there will be high winds and storms. The Mang-Shen [Mong San], also, is a silent prophet of the seasons. If he wears a hat the year will be dry; if he wears no hat there will be rain; shoes, similarly, indicate very heavy rain; absence of shoes, drought; abundance of body-clothing, great heat; lightness of clothing, cold weather. Finally, a red belt on the Mang-Shen indicates much sickness and many deaths; a white one, general good health.¹⁴³

The Spring Ox still appears every year in a picture on the first page of the Chinese Almanac. The herd-boy is there too, dressed according to the predicted weather. 2010's boy had shoes on, indicating rain, and the poem printed alongside promised good grain harvests, though rice could have disease problems.

If you are very lucky you will see water buffalo working the fields of the New Territories, but they are few and far between now. The one in the photograph is not a local. I took the shot in Anhui province in China, using a telephoto lens (naturally).



The Ten Thousand Buddhas Temple and Monastery (萬佛寺) in Sha Tin has probably been more visited by Westerners than almost any other religious site in Hong Kong, so photographs like this one must be in many albums.

A pink pagoda studded with images of Buddha serves as a landmark on the hillside above Sha Tin railway station, and beckons the curious to pant up the many steps to the temple. That excellent old book *The Golden Guide to Hongkong and Macau* is rather hard on this sight, and after a discouraging description of the approach path past “a noisy and filthy huddle of food stalls and kiosques in which mahjong is played” goes on to be scathing about the ritual furniture, which it says is “of a design whose sheer horror recalls the Tiger Balm Garden”.¹⁴⁴ The comparison betrays the age of the account, because the Tiger Balm Garden with its tableaux of torture scenes from Hell has long ago fallen victim to the developer’s concrete mixers.

If you haven’t been yet, don’t be put off. Just to see the tiers of gold-leaf covered Buddhas gleaming round the huge hall is worth the trip. I was assured that there are 10,000 of them, but I made no attempt to count, and it would

perhaps be unkind to do so. “10,000” is a nice round Chinese figure which does duty for any number too large to be easily counted.

Before the communists gained power in China in 1949, it was common to find statements to the effect that China had 400 million Buddhists, and I suppose that figure would now have been altered upwards to 1,300 million were it not that an atheist government can be clearly seen to be running a society in which religion has no official role.

But if there were 400 million Buddhists, there were also 400 million Taoists and 400 million ancestor worshippers and 400 million worshippers of animist gods. For the most part the Chinese were not (and in the case of Hong Kong are not) divided up into adherents of one or another faith — they amalgamate and choose from various religious practices.

Marcel Granet puts the point quite well:

In a courtyard next to yours you hear a Buddhist mass being sung for a dead man: do not imagine that the dead man had faith in the Buddha or that someone among his kin is a Buddhist, or even that the family is more or less vaguely tied to the Buddhist faith by its traditions. You will soon hear the music and voices of a Taoist mass and, if your neighbours are the sort of people who do things on a grand scale, bonzes and tao-shi [Buddhist and Taoist priests] will take turns at their masses night and day. When the moment comes to *dot* the dead man's tablet, it is a literatus who will be called in. The service asked of him is a religious service, quite different from that which we ask of a scholar in giving him the task of composing an epitaph. His stroke of the writing brush will give the tablet all that makes it a sacred object and the centre of the ancestor cult.¹⁴⁵

Buddhism came to China probably by a variety of routes and over a long period of time, but there seems general agreement that it was known at least as early as the 1st century A.D. For the Chinese it was a revelation, with its hope of individual salvation, and a clear relationship between moral behaviour and rewards or punishments.

At an early stage Buddhism began to take on a distinctively Chinese character, not least because it accommodated ancestor worship and created ceremonies of prayer for the souls of the dead. D. Howard Smith draws attention to the differences between Buddhism and native Chinese religious practice:

The Chinese held the view that life is good and to be enjoyed, and this went counter to the Buddhist teaching that all is suffering and illusion. The Buddhist

practice of celibacy was inimical to the Chinese emphasis on family life and the need for numerous progeny. The mendicant monk was an object of scorn to those who believed that all able-bodied people should be engaged in productive labour. The concept of a monastic community possessing its own government and laws was entirely unacceptable to the Confucian, who believed in the unity of the empire under one supreme ruler.¹⁴⁶

But it was probably precisely because Buddhism was so different from the state-dominated, state-bolstering, individual-repressing ideas of Confucianism that it caught on so readily with the people.

One unexpected consequence of the popular appeal of Buddhism was the development of the Chinese novel. Not until the 20th century was there open cultured Chinese recognition of the novel as a respectable art form. The approved literature had always been serious, high-flown, and written in anything but popular or colloquial style.

But over a thousand years ago Buddhist preachers had begun to write down colloquial versions of their sermons. In time these became the jumping-off point for a full-blooded genre which concentrated on telling stories in a written language close to that spoken by the ordinary Chinese.

The novels may not have achieved recognition in their authors' days, but the greatest of those which survive stand comparison with the best of any other culture. I would recommend David Hawkes's fine translation of *The Story of the Stone*. Try also Arthur Waley's translation *Monkey*, the mythologically souped-up account of the bringing of Buddhist scriptures from India during the Tang dynasty.

The large figures in the photograph are images of Arhats (*loh-hon* 羅漢), monks who having attained enlightenment chose to remain in the world to save mankind. They are part of the attraction of Buddhism for the Chinese.



Tin Hau (天后), Empress of Heaven, is one of the most popular deities of South China, and without question the clear favourite of the boat people, of whom she must be considered the patron goddess.

Gods, like men, are thought to have personalities, and most of them have human form. Like men they also celebrate their birthdays. Tin Hau's falls on the 23rd day of the 3rd lunar month, and is the occasion for large-scale *junketings* (ouch!) among the boat people.

On shore there are plenty of temples to Tin Hau, and each of them celebrates the anniversary in its own way. At Tai Po Old Market is a nice little Tin Hau Temple. Throughout the year it is pretty deserted, but for the birthday the flags are put out, and a vast temporary matshed is built on waste land opposite. The matshed is used for opera performances, but it would be ridiculous if on her birthday the goddess could not take part in the fun. So a special little shrine is built for her right in front of the matshed, and a small-scale replica of her statue is ensconced there with full view of the stage. In the photograph she can be seen in her temporary home, alert, well-dressed and pleased, surrounded by her courtiers and with the offerings of the faithful laid out before her.

Throughout the festival people come to her to worship and pray for assistance. She is reputed to be able to provide children for the childless, and some people claim that she can give good luck at gambling — but then, nearly all gods can give that kind of blessing if they feel so inclined.

The woman seen here worshipping with a stick of incense in her hands was thoroughly engrossed in the business. I have a horror of taking photographs of strangers in situations where they might be offended at the intrusion, but this worshipper was intoning prayers so loudly and with such fervour that she was oblivious to the faint click of my camera shutter.

In the temple behind the temporary shrine the main statue of Tin Hau was beset by worshippers, and several officials were on hand to help with the business of interpreting the omens which the goddess granted to people who sought her advice and help. The most popular method of omen-taking on this occasion was by shaking a tin full of wooden divining spills until one fell out. It bore a number which an official would marry up with a pre-printed paper fortune. Such fortunes are usually couched in high-flown (not to mention slightly ambiguous) language, so expert assistance is often needed to read and understand them.

Like many other Chinese gods, Tin Hau is a deified mortal; and, as with many others, there is considerable confusion about her origins. Burkhardt, whose *Chinese Creeds and Customs* is strong on boat-dwellers' lore, says that she was the daughter of a fisherman from Fujian province. She dreamed one day that her parents' boat was in danger, and ran to the shore where she pointed to the boat and so drew it safely to land. In a version of the story which I heard in the New Territories, she actually put to sea in a typhoon and rescued her parents from drowning. And John Clements in *Discovering Macau* says that she:

was a poor Fukienese girl seeking passage to Canton, but was refused by all but the lowliest of fishermen. While at sea, a great storm threatened the fleet, and wrecked the vessels of the rich, but the girl brought her boat to safety at Macau.¹⁴⁷

Werner's *Dictionary of Chinese Mythology* cannot decide to which of three possible fathers, two possible mothers, and two different provinces of birth she belonged.¹⁴⁸ And her date of birth is variously given as in the 8th, 10th and 12th centuries. In Macau she is known as A Ma (啊媽 "Mother"). In Taiwan

she is called Ma Jo (媽祖 “Ancestress”) or Tin-seung Sing-ma (天上聖媽 “Saintly Mother in Heaven”).

What most accounts are agreed upon are her connections with the sea and with Fujian. Taiwan, which was settled mostly by people from that province, is a major centre for her worship, with many large temples and impressive annual ceremonies. I have read of her divine intervention being credited with a range of wonders, from the curing of dangerous illness to the preservation of a city from American bombing in 1945 (when Taiwan was in Japanese hands).

In the New Territories a great ceremony is held every year at the Tin Hau Temple in Yuen Long. There is always a long, noisy, colourful, and very photogenic procession. Unfortunately, Tin Hau’s birthday falls at the start of the rainy season, and the celebrations are always in danger of turning into very damp affairs.

But it is the sea which is most closely linked with Tin Hau, and the largest ceremonies of all are held on her birthday at the Tin Hau Temple (known simply as the “Great Temple” Daai-miu 大廟) in Joss House Bay. Water-folk from Hong Kong and Kowloon as well as from the eastern New Territories converge on the temple, their boats dressed overall. There are even now probably few boats which do not carry at all times a small shrine to their protective goddess.



If I were to say that this photograph is of a man, I would obviously be wrong, but may I at least be fanciful and say that it is of a substitute for a man? The man is the founding ancestor of a New Territories clan — in this case the Dang (鄧) clan of Lung Yeuk Tau.

The founding ancestor is the trunk of a family tree. If he has more than one son then the tree develops branches, they in turn may divide into sub-branches, and so on through generations. Imagine the havoc caused to the tree by the destruction of its trunk — the branches will fall off and be separated from each other. In the same way the death of the founding ancestor dissolves the physical connection between the various branches of the family.

Ancestor worship seeks to prevent this dissolution. The soul of the dead man is sealed into a wooden tablet and the tablet is placed in a special building, the ancestral hall (*chi-tong* 祠堂). It is as though the trunk of the family tree has been reinforced with concrete and brick — the tablet and the building become the enduring representations of the founder. If it is not too flippant to say so, he is dead but he can't lie down, and so the branches have a trunk still to which they are attached.

When he was alive the founding ancestor ran his family and controlled the purse-strings. Now the hall which represents him still performs these functions, because the leaders of the clan operate from the hall, and call themselves collectively by its name, controlling clan activities and finances. The family revolved around the founder while he lived, and now the clan revolves around the hall. It is at once a church, a council chamber, a community centre, and in some villages a school — its triple roof covers a great deal of space and gives plenty of scope. So it is not too fanciful to call this a photograph of a man-substitute.

The founder's tablet is up at the far end of the building on the altar. Alongside and around it are a host of other tablets, each one representing the soul of a clan ancestor and his wife or wives. Several times a year, for example at the Spring Rites (*Chun-jai* 春祭), the clan elders will put on their long ceremonial robes and perform rituals of worship of all these ancestors on behalf of the entire living clan.

But large as the hall is it is not big enough to hold a tablet for every past member of the clan — there has to be a certain amount of selecting out of ancestors. Commonly it works like this: there are three altars ranged across the back of the hall. The middle one is the most important, and on it are the tablets of the founding ancestor, of his sons, and of those men who are genealogically important because they are the founders of major branches or sub-branches of the clan. This is a constant altar, new tablets rarely if ever being added to it and, except perhaps in the event of a branch dying out altogether, none being removed from it. Sometimes a small section is reserved for “clan heroes” who have fallen in battle against other clans.

To one side is an altar for ancestors who have been particularly distinguished in life and so can cast reflected glory on the clan as a whole. The tablets proclaim the achievements of the men, degrees and titles picked out in gold for all to see and rejoice in. New tablets can be added to this altar at any time, though the qualifications demanded are high.

On the other side is the third altar. The ancestors whose tablets are massed here are important neither for genealogical status nor for success in life: they owe their position to their own or their descendants' generosity. From time to time ancestral halls, like other buildings, need major repairs or rebuilding, and one way in which the money for the work can be raised is by offering a tablet-

place on the altar to anyone who contributes the necessary minimum sum. The numbers of tablets on altars of this kind testify both to the enthusiasm with which the offers are taken up and to the frequency with which the halls have needed restoration.

Having made his donation a man was in a quandary. He could place his father's or perhaps grandfather's tablet on the altar, or he could set up his own soul tablet. Some did the latter, but were then faced with another dilemma — ancestor tablets are for the dead, and they were still alive. It would be inauspicious, not to mention presumptuous, to pretend to be an ancestor too soon.

The answer was to set up the soul tablet but to cover it over with a wooden sleeve painted red for good luck and bearing the characters *cheung-saang* (長生) "long life". I remember one hall where just one such covered tablet remained from the last restoration: all the other donors had died over the years and the sleeves of their tablets had been removed. I wonder how that one man felt and whether he sometimes dropped by to check on his own survival.

Through ancestor worship the Chinese have always lived in the presence of the dead. Those yet unborn receive life from those now living; those already dead require the worship of those same living people to maintain the forces which keep their souls vital. So the dead, the living and the future are in a sense all merged into one. The ancestral hall houses the dead, shelters the living, and is the registry office for clan births. The founding ancestor watches over all.



In the 1960s from the train through the New Territories this village of Tai Po Tau could clearly be seen (and shakily photographed through the window). The apparent squalor and dilapidation was belied on closer inspection, for the houses were solidly built of good brick and the villagers were not unprosperous.

Tai Po Tau was founded during the Yuan dynasty (A.D. 1280–1367), when the Mongols ruled China and when Marco Polo was exciting the West with his accounts of the wonders of China's culture and civilization. It is the home of a branch of the great New Territories Dang (鄧) clan.

The tower standing up above the houses is an unusual feature of this village. There are no prizes for guessing that it is a watch-tower, but the reason for its necessity is less obvious. At roughly the same time as Tai Po Tau was founded, the Dangs established another hamlet known as Tai Po Shui Wai nearby. This hamlet was walled and moated at some time during its history — probably in the 17th century, when most New Territories villages seem to have built their walls. Shui Wai was thus a safe refuge in the event of attack from pirates or bandits or other clans, and the inhabitants of Tai Po Tau would flee there too.

When in the early years of the 20th century the Kowloon-Canton Railway was built (it was completed in 1910, with the extension to Tsim Sha Tsui added six years later), the lie of the land made it necessary to drive the track between the two villages, cutting them off from each other. Worse, the track was raised on a high embankment, so that they could not even see each other.

If the benefits of scientific and material progress had included the elimination of bandits and pirates, there would have been no problem. Britain had leased the New Territories in 1898 and taken control in 1899, but this control was more nominal than real, and the outlaw scourges remained to some extent right up to the Japanese occupation in 1941. So the Dangs built their tower high in order to keep watch over the embankment and to be able to signal to each other in case of trouble.

In other ways Tai Po Tau is a fairly typical example of a long-established New Territories village. All the houses are close packed together in rows, and they all face in the same direction. Whichever compass direction that might be, it is always called “south”, and hence the misapprehension on the part of many Western commentators that all Chinese houses do actually face compass-south. In fact, south in this context is a technical term out of the jargon of geomancy. The front view from any geomantic site is always known as “the South” or “Red Bird” aspect. The left-hand side is thus “the East” or “Green Dragon”; the right-hand side is “the West” or “White Tiger”; and the rear is “the North” or “Black Warrior” or “Tortoise”. Tai Po Tau actually faces east, certainly not due-south.

For reasons of geomancy again, houses used to have no windows. The few windows visible in this photograph have either been made recently or are in comparatively newly-built houses. The trees behind the houses are generally known as the “*fung-sui* grove”, and because of their sacrosanct status were spared the axe during the Japanese occupation when virtually all the then Colony’s trees were felled.

In front of the houses is a wide paved area. The basic purpose of this is for the sunning of rice so that it is dry enough to store without rotting. The grains are spread out thinly in the sunshine, and regularly turned with a rake-like tool. The golden covering to these drying areas after harvest time is now a thing of the past, as rice cultivation is no longer even a memory for anyone under forty years old.

Tai Po Tau's lands, which stretched before it to the sea at Plover Cove, were used almost exclusively for flower and vegetable cultivation for some years until the expansion of Tai Po Market as a new town swallowed them up. As in other areas which had easy access to the hungry markets of Kowloon and Hong Kong, the high returns from market-gardening had hastened the demise of paddy-farming. A field grown with green vegetables could produce many times the income of the same field grown with rice. And flowers fetched a good price in the urban areas too.

Particularly important was the cultivation of the peach saplings for New Year decoration. If you passed the fields before Chinese New Year you would see row after row of them, some covered in polythene sheeting, others not, as the farmers tried to bring them all to the point of imminent bloom for New Year's Eve. The amount of blossom that opened in the house during the New Year celebrations determined the wealth the household would acquire in the coming year, so careful timing was absolutely essential.

New Territories rice was of a fine quality, but it could not compete with these crops nor with cheap and plentiful rice imports from China and Southeast Asia. As the picture shows, where once the rice was spread to dry there are now lines of drying washing.

certain deference, but not with absolute subservience; to try to obtain their divine help, and not to incur their wrath; to seek their blessings, but to be wary of their tricks.

Confucius and other philosophers of his school encouraged the taking of “the middle path”, the avoidance of extreme emotions, of violent actions, or of total seizure of advantage. The Gentleman (*gwan-ji* 君子), the superior moral man, was always to leave an escape route for his defeated enemy. An ancient work, *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Jung-yung* 中庸), quotes Confucius as saying:

The Gentleman harmonises with the middle way, the inferior man goes against it. The Gentleman harmonises with it because he is gentlemanly and always holds the middle course. The inferior man is in opposition to it because he is small-minded and has no restraint.¹⁵⁰

Confucius would never have gone out on a limb as Mahomet did. To command the hill to come to him would have left himself with no escape route, and the Gentleman would surely have rather died than suffer the humiliation of the hill’s deafness to his bidding. Mahomet was big enough to be “unabashed”: King Canute having commanded the tide to retreat got wet feet, but apparently was big enough not to fall into a decline because of it; but the Confucian Gentleman’s bigness would have saved him from trying either of these feats in the first place. He would simply have quoted a passage from Mencius:

故君子有不戰，戰必勝矣。So the Gentleman does not need to fight: were he to do so he would certainly win.¹⁵¹

Something of this seems to show in attitudes to gods. Confucius didn’t hold with talk of supernatural things, but he nevertheless enjoined people to make sacrifices to ancestors “as if they were there” (*jai yue joi* 祭如在).¹⁵² And while few Chinese in Hong Kong’s New Territories today would claim to be “superior moral men”, the middle path attitude to religion is pretty well entrenched.

Once every ten years the village of Ha Tsuen, like many other villages of the area, holds a massive five-day and six-night festival called *da-jiu* (打醮). The festival is partly a thanks offering for blessings past, partly a prayer for future prosperity and peace, and partly a community-wide exorcism of ghosts and evil.

It is considered important that every single one of the gods which

inhabit the village and its surrounding countryside should be present at the ceremonies — indeed they are given the seats of honour at the rituals and at the accompanying opera performances. An extraordinary collection of Taoist, Buddhist, animistic, and ancestral gods are sat cheek by jowl on a special altar.

But the gods need to be got to the altar and, wiser than Mahomet, the villagers do not just call upon them to attend. Instead they send out processions of men to all the shrines and temples to collect the gods and escort them in style to the centre of ritual activity.

Most temple gods are heavy plaster or wooden statues. Moving these can be difficult, and might damage them, so there are usually tiny plaster replicas which are the “processional images”. The man on the extreme left of the photograph is carrying one in a special wooden seat. Other gods, such as Earth Gods, Tree Gods, Mountain Gods, and so on, are not represented by statues and do not have processional images. For these gods the men burn incense at the shrines and invite each to enter a piece of red paper on which his or her name has been written. The papers are then taken back in procession, as here.

I was reminded of the story of Mahomet when the procession arrived at a hill whose god was to be invited. I was told that he lived at the top of the hill, but to go up it would have been time-consuming and onerous. The men stopped at the foot of the hill and invited the god to come down to his red paper. Respect had been shown to the god, but not too much.



The human speech organs can produce a huge variety of noises, from squeaks to grunts, clicks to plops, hisses to trills, and the lips and tongue subtly shape them in an infinite number of distinct ways. No one language can use all these sounds, so each selects a limited range of them only, some

more, some less; and the particular combination of sounds used becomes the fingerprint of a language — we all recognize French, or American, or Japanese as soon as we hear them.

The Chinese languages are remarkable for the small range of sounds which they use. But since the number of ideas which Chinese needs to communicate from speaker to listener is as large as with any other language, it follows that each Chinese sound has to be used more frequently than a sound in another language.

English uses a rich mixture of sounds, but still finds itself with some words which sound just like others. Where this happens we like to spell the words differently to be certain as to which is meant. So we have *to*, *two* and *too*; *pair*, *pear* and *pare*; *see* and *sea*, etc. Some Chinese sounds represent not just three different words, but as many as fifty or even eighty. English could not, I think, find a way of representing the sound *see* in eighty different ways, but Chinese has no problem, because the writing system is not tied to an alphabet nor to attempting to show how a word is pronounced in speech. Instead it uses a different character for each idea or word which it wants to communicate. If (ridiculous thought!) every word in Chinese were pronounced *see*, the written language could still cope.

Even so, historical developments sometimes leave characters with more work to do than seems fair. The character 樂 can be read *ngok* and mean “music”, or it can be read *lok* and mean “happy”. One of the worst offenders is probably the character *dim* 點. It has twelve separate meanings in one dictionary I use (a speck; a point; a small amount; snacks; hours; to dot; to instruct; to check; to light; to select; to nod; to touch), and yet more meanings can be found in it — Cantonese, for instance, uses it colloquially to mean “how?”

In religious rituals *dim* crops up in several ways. The long colourful dragons which are danced at major ceremonies cannot come to life properly until a V.I.P. has “dotted” their eyes with red paint (*dim-ngaam* 點眼). A geomancer “selects” a site for a grave (*dim-yuet* 點穴). But most important is the “dotting” (*dim* 點) which is thought to attach the soul of the dead to the ancestor tablet (*san-jue-pai* 神主牌). Doolittle explains how it used to be done:

An acting mandarin, if possible to engage the services of such a man for the occasion, is called in; the higher his rank, the greater or the more auspicious the omen for good to the descendants of the person whose tablet is to be

dotted. It must be premised that, to this period, one of the characters which have been written upon its front is deficient in one dot or stroke. The deficient character, meaning “king”, by receiving a small dot above the uppermost parallel stroke, becomes “lord”, which is what is desired. The mandarin dotter, or the dotter whatever his rank, uses a vermilion pencil. The eldest son kneels down reverently before the dotter, who dots the “king” character with the required stroke, making it into the “lord” character. He then returns it to the kneeling son, who reverently places it in the niche provided After this time the tablet is regarded as a *bona fide* residence of one of the three spirits of the departed.¹⁵³

Ideally tablets should be made of chestnut wood (*lut-muk* 栗木). The one in the picture was photographed in a New Territories ancestral hall. It carries the standard information: the generation number of the ancestor, his posthumous name and surname, the surname and village of origin of his wife, and the fact that this is their soul tablet. The bottom-most character is the dotted one.



Ancestor tablets have often been called phallic symbols, and the reason is not solely based on physical form. Ancestors cannot be ancestors unless they have descendants — well, can they? For the living who worship the ancestors the desire for descendants who will eventually in turn worship them is strong, and hence the preoccupation of many Chinese men with virility and aphrodisiacs.

It is this preoccupation which ensures that when a couple get married they are presented with a pair of red chopsticks. The word for chopsticks (*faai-ji* 筷子) sounds just like a phrase meaning “quickly get a son” (*faai ji* 快子). There is quite some mileage in puns to be got out of a language which is not rich in sounds.

100 _____ Hundred Surnames



This photograph makes no claim to originality. It is an everyday Hong Kong picture of what Hong Kong has in abundance — people. Here is “the man in the street,” “the people”, in Cantonese “the old hundred surnames” (*lo-baak-sing* 老百姓).

Surname has been terribly important to the Chinese, so important that unlike Westerners they put it before their personal names. The Westernized

Chinese who reverses his names for the convenience of non-Chinese friends is felt somehow to be disowning his birth-right, not to mention causing confusion to those who do not know whether he has done it or not.

A man may have many names in his life, casting off old ones and adopting new like a snake shedding its skin. Often he will change his name to mark some new stage in his life. When he first goes to school he will take a “book name”; when he marries he will take a “style”; if he writes he will use a “pen name”, and so on. But his surname will not be changed.

Surname is passed down the male line, as it is in the West, but it carries with it far more significance for the Chinese. In the past, when people wanted to adopt a son, they looked for one of the same surname as themselves, so keeping adoption “within the family” as it were. Traditionally two people with the same surname were by law not allowed to marry. The idea that all with the most common surname Lei (李) were related and that intermarriage would be incestuous seems strange to foreigners, but it gelled perfectly with the emphasis on the male line. By contrast it was quite respectable, even laudable, for a man to marry a first cousin on his mother’s side, because she would have a different surname.

There is said to be an area of Fujian province where virtually everyone for kilometres around was surnamed Lim (Lam 林), and since it was impracticable to go too far away to find a spouse, Imperial dispensation to marry within the surname was given provided the couple had no common ancestor for five generations back.

Nowadays there are fewer people who would worry about this problem, and I have known marriages in Hong Kong between couples with the same name; but at the other extreme there are still those who consider marriage between the surnames 王 and 黃 to be improper because both are pronounced *wong* in Cantonese and so *sound* as though they are the same surname. Mandarin speakers have no such problem, as they pronounce the two characters *wang* and *huang* respectively.

The old hundred surnames represented the common people, but why?

Its ordinary signification is considered as equivalent to the term 民, or “the people” in a general sense; and some commentators have been led to assert that on the first invention of family names the number of these was restricted to one hundred. This is fantastically explained by a supposed arithmetical

process, the 5 constant virtues being multiplied by the 5 notes of harmony and the product again by the 4 seasons, giving the total sum required. The only foundation for this theory appears to exist in the fact that the Chinese family names have been grouped according to their tone of pronunciation under the notes. The number of characters actually in use as surnames is between four and five hundred.¹⁵⁴

Even four to five hundred is less than the full total, but there are certainly many fewer than the range of surnames to be found in a British telephone directory. The fact is that a hundred (*baak* 百), a thousand (*chin* 千) and ten thousand (*maan* 萬) are nice round numbers, and Chinese delights in them. The “old hundred surnames” merely means “all the many surnames”. In the same way “a hundred birds” (*baak-niu* 百鳥) means “all the many kinds of bird”, and “a hundred goods company” (*baak-foh-gung-si* 百貨公司) means a “department store”. It is a courtesy to wish someone “a hundred sons and a thousand grandsons” (*baak-ji-chin-suen* 百子千孫) so as to ensure the continuation of his male line — note that you do not wish someone even a few daughters or granddaughters!

From the 5th to the 3rd century B.C. in China there were so many rival schools of philosophy (of which Confucianism and Taoism were but two) that they have become known to posterity as the “hundred schools” (*baak-ga* 百家). And in 1957 Chairman Mao Zedong made one of his most famous speeches on the theme “Let a hundred flowers bloom” (*baak-fa-chai-fong* 百花齊放). This was taken to mean “Let all the many opinions be expressed” and this was the signal for a (very short-lived) free-speech movement.

“A thousand antiquities” (*chin-gwoo* 千古) means “a long long time ago”, “thousand mile eyes” (*chin-lei-ngaam* 千里眼) means “far sightedness”.

The Great Wall of China is called the “10,000 mile long wall” (*maan-lei-cheung-sing* 萬里長城), but that is not supposed to be an accurate measurement of its length. When a Chinese shouted loyally “Long live the Emperor!” or more recently “Long live Chairman Mao!” it came out as “May X live 10,000 years!” (X *maan-sui* 萬歲). It would be absurd to think that anyone took the 10,000 years literally: it was neither more nor less meaningful than the English “Long live X!”

Talking of round numbers — this is the one hundredth article I have written in this series. I should like to dedicate it to the “old hundred surnames”

of Hong Kong, without whose colourful inspiration I wouldn't even have started to write.

101 _____Vegetables



A common enough scene, vegetables on sale in a New Territories market, Tai Po in this case. What the photograph cannot show is the crisp, just-cut freshness which makes these vegetables so good.

So insistent is the Chinese housewife on freshness of food that, in the New Territories at least, she shops twice a day, once before each of the main meals. The city dweller in Hong Kong or Kowloon cannot always be quite so choosy, but even so it is almost impossible to find such weary, limp and wrinkled vegetables as fill many of the London greengrocers' shops.

In 1945 at the end of the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, the population of the colony was around 600,000. But the civil war in China quickly gathered momentum after the surrender of Japan, and as the Communist armies swept southwards in victory, Hong Kong began to receive huge numbers of refugees. By 1950 the population was estimated to be 2,360,000, by 1961 it was 3,130,000, by 1970 it had passed the 4 million mark, and it stood at around 7 million at the end of the first decade of the new century.

One of the early effects of this largely urban population increase was of course the demand for more food. China, with its vast agricultural capacity,

was the chief food supplier, but she could not get green vegetables into the Hong Kong markets fresh enough to satisfy the fastidious palates of the customers.

It just so happened that at this time the New Territories had been hit by the availability of cheap Chinese and Southeast Asian rice, so that traditional paddy-farming had become uneconomic. The demand for fresh vegetables came at the same time as rice became less profitable to grow, and from the 1950s onwards land use began to change.

The area around Fan Ling in the north, which had convenient lines of communication with the cities by road and rail, turned out to have excellent soil for growing vegetables. Like iron to a magnet, refugee market gardeners were drawn to Fan Ling; they rented idle land from the villagers, and began their arduous cycle of production.

The same process occurred in all areas with good communication with Hong Kong. As the population grew, so the acreage under vegetable cultivation began to expand. Even the surviving rice farmers were bitten by the bug, and would plant a catch-crop of vegetables in the winter between rice seasons, where before the fields had often been allowed to lie fallow. When I went to live in Sheung Shui Village in 1963, the edge of the vegetable growing area just touched one side of the village. By the time I left eighteen months later virtually the whole of the village's fields had been engulfed, and the few patches of rice still grown looked very lonely.

Traditionally rents for fields were paid in rice. So the vegetable farmers sometimes had to buy rice with their earnings in order to pay the rent. In other cases the landlords set the amount of rent in terms of quantities of rice, but were willing to accept as rent the cash value of the agreed quantity of rice.

But the vegetable farmers were doing extremely well. True they worked unceasingly, but they could get six, seven or even eight crops a year from the land, and their produce sold at a high price. Inevitably rents began to rise, and very soon appeared a strange phenomenon: rents were still expressed in terms of rice, but the increased rent for a field often turned out to be greater than the amount which the field could have grown were it still growing rice!

To get the repeated crops from his land the vegetable farmer not only had to work at high pressure all the year round, he also needed to make constant improvements to the soil:

A great amount of labour is involved in weeding, watering, and fertilizing the crops and more than 25% of the farmer's annual budget is spent on fertilizers including nightsoil, ash, bonemeal, duck feathers, lime and artificial fertilizer.¹⁵⁵

This high investment brought about a change in tenancy arrangements. The vegetable farmers, sometimes as a result of bitter experience, claimed that a yearly verbal rent agreement was too insecure, and many rents were changed to a ten-yearly basis, so that the tenant could expect to reap the full benefit of his expenditure of effort and money.

Another and more obvious change in the New Territories was the mushroom growth of huts and shacks all over the fields. The old pattern of isolated village communities was gone, and later new town development ensured it would never return. Obviously the huts took up valuable agricultural land, but they were a necessary evil, for while rice was not a vulnerable crop, vegetables made easy pickings [*sic*] for thieves. Overnight a valuable crop representing weeks of work could disappear. So the growers had to live next to their fields to protect their livelihood.

At least this scenic disaster had gastronomic benefits.



They say that “An Englishman’s home is his castle.” But in the battle against evil spirits the English home must be considered highly vulnerable in comparison with the Chinese village house, which is a supernatural fortress equipped with a whole battery of defences.

In front of the house is the Spirit Wall (the outer rampart), which blocks the way to the door — evil spirits, unlike humans, are unable to turn round

the wall to get in the door. Door Gods in full battle dress stand guard at the entrance itself. Above the door is placed a mirror to frighten off evil spirits with the fearful sight of their own faces — an early form of psychological warfare?

Sometimes a magic charm, the supernatural equivalent of boiling oil perhaps, is mounted above the door too. One particularly ingenious form of charm consists merely of the character 𪛗 (*jim*), which Chinese dictionaries explain in the following way:

When a person dies he becomes a ghost, and people become afraid if they see him. When a ghost dies he becomes a *jim*, and ghosts become afraid if they see him. If this word is written up in ancient script over the door, all evil spirits will run away a thousand miles. This is popularly called the “Evil-averting Charm”.¹⁵⁶

I like the idea that, because the after-life is very much a reflection of this one, even ghosts may die and become ghosts of ghosts.

Finally, the walls of the house are made solid and unpierced by windows, so that attack can only come by way of the front door where the defences are concentrated.

Unfortunately the home is under attack from more than just evil spirits. The land and the landscape are repositories of good and evil “breaths” (*hei* 氣), about which the theories of geomancy (*fung-sui* 風水) have much to say. In the past, when a house was built, a geomancer was often called in to make sure that it was sited in such a way as to exploit the good breaths and not to stir up the evil breaths. A geomantically well-sited house should give benefits of long life, good health, worldly success, and plentiful progeny to those who live in it.

Nowadays *fung-sui* has become a trivialized popular fad in the West, but there are still plenty of people in Hong Kong who believe seriously in the theories, especially when things begin to go wrong. One house I know of has its door placed in the side wall instead of the front. When I asked about it I was told that, following a run of disasters for the family, a geomancer had advised bricking up the original entrance which, he said, was vulnerable to the evil breaths emanating from open ground to the front. Once the new door had been put in the bad luck had ceased.

No amount of spirit walls, mirrors, Door Gods or ordinary charms can counteract these evil breaths: other defences have to be found. Moving the door was an extreme remedy; another (and less expensive) cure is illustrated

here in the form of a plaque on the wall of a temporary wooden house. The house is exposed to the open fields on the edge of a village, and overlooking it is a landscape feature locally notorious for the geomantic trouble it causes.

The trouble is neutralized by the plaque, which reads “This stone from Mount Tai dares to oppose”. Mount Tai is one of the five sacred mountains of China, a place of pilgrimage for Buddhists, Taoists, and Confucianists alike. It is climbed by a stone stair of about 7,000 steps with temples and shrines every few feet of the way. C. K. Yang in *Religion in Chinese Society* says:

The mountain god of T'ai-shan (Mount T'ai) was believed to have authority over both the present and after life, as the god was one of the judges in the Ten Courts of Hell where man's soul was tried for his sins. In some localities this god was regarded as the summoner of souls, and in others he was the object of prayer for sons. But in all localities the god of T'ai-shan had the function of protecting the community from distress and bringing peace and order.¹⁵⁷

A stone from the mountain presumably embodies the virtue of the whole, and so is capable of pacifying any evil which it meets.

On the lamp post outside the house where I used to live in London was a sign reading “Footpath fouling by dogs. Fine £25”. It was not very effective — London dogs cannot read. Evil breaths in China apparently *can* read, because this sign is considered a very effective antidote to them. But the acquisition of literacy by these evil forces has not sharpened their wits, it seems — the so-called “stone from Mount Tai” is in fact merely a plank of wood with the words painted on!



This rather grisly sight is not unusual in the large public cemeteries, and it is a commonplace occurrence in the New Territories, where exhumation is a regular step in the progression of burial events.

The dead are buried as soon as possible, and this means that there is no time to prospect for a good geomantic site for the grave. The provident few may have reserved a good grave-site for themselves while still alive (just as some people keep their own coffins ready for eventual use), and they can be buried at once in a permanent, properly constructed, omega-shaped grave. But for most, the burial immediately after death is only temporary.

After a number of years (five or ten, I was told is normal) the bones are dug up. The man pictured is a specialist. He carefully sorts out the bones, cleans and purifies them over incense, and then arranges them in anatomical order inside a large earthenware urn. The urn is called, somewhat euphemistically, a “Golden Pagoda” (*gam-tap* 金塔). It is sealed with a double lid and then kept until a good site for reburial can be found.

In the New Territories the urns are usually left out on the hillsides, where they are safe enough: no-one is likely to risk the misfortune which interfering with the dead can bring, and there is usually nothing of value in the urns except the bones themselves. In some other parts of China the custom of topping up the urns with charcoal as a preservative gave temptation to thieves who would break them open and sell the charcoal as fuel.

The descendants of the dead employ geomancers to look for good sites in which to rebury the urns. This reburial (when it occurs: it was and is quite common for the descendants to lose interest in the process before finding a site) was permanent. The soul of the dead follows the bones, and can be worshipped by the living at all three stages.

But there was another kind of exhumation practised. It sometimes happened that after a final burial the benefits which had been expected to accrue to the living from their careful siting of the grave failed to materialize. Worse, sometimes evil and ill-luck actively seemed to seek them out. For believers in geomancy (*fung-sui* 風水) the reason was not hard to find — the geomancy of the grave must be wrong.

If they were lucky a geomancer would be able to suggest simple improvements to the site which would reverse the trend of misfortune; but he was just as likely to insist that the bones be exhumed and reburied in a new site or in a different position at the same site. In either case an expensive business.

Taking advantage of geomantic influences, the ill-disposed could tamper with the grave-sites of others, causing harm to the descendants of the buried. The following account is a simplified version of a long tale of geomantic warfare which I found in a Chinese book on *fung-sui* published in Hong Kong in 1963:

Family X found that Family Y had ruined their best grave-site by planting trees and digging a cess-pit above it. They (X) rebuilt their grave on a nearby hill, and then to get revenge they paid a geomancer to divert a stream so as to spoil the *fung-sui* of one of family Y's graves.

Sure enough, the Y's business began to suffer, and some of their children died. It took them eight years to realise that it might be the grave which was at fault, but they eventually got a geomancer who diagnosed the fault and showed how Family X were responsible for the ill-luck.

Family Y now secretly exhumed the bones from their grave, and reburied them several miles away. Now it was Family X's turn for misfortune: they kept

giving birth to leprositic sons. Their geomancer discovered the fault lay with their grave, but not with the site itself, rather with evil influences which seemed to emanate from the Y grave on the other hill.

After much hesitation, Family X and their geomancer went to the Y grave and opened it up on a dark misty night. They found the bones gone and the grave full of night-soil — the Ys had had their revenge. So the X grave had to be moved too and, as the book said: “to this day the two old graves sit facing each other on the barren hills, the weirdest conversation pieces in local *fung-sui* lore.”¹⁵⁸

For the rich, the search for continuing success might mean many exhumations:

In this manner human bones are disinterred and re-interred several times in succession by families seriously afflicted by the *fung-sui* craze. But minds of a commoner order generally lose their interest in the remains of their ancestors when a few generations have passed away; and thousands and thousands of buried and re-buried corpses, and numberless urned skeletons unburied, go the same way as the millions among the poor for the *fung-sui* of whose graves little or no outlay is made: in a short time they obey the unalterable law of Nature, “To dust shalt thou return.”¹⁵⁹



The bars of Wanchai have a long history. The waterfront near the old naval dockyard was the obvious place for entertainment for seamen to spring up, and bars and brothels were early on the scene. For a time brothels were licensed and given a licence number which was conspicuously displayed outside.

The word “number” found its way into Cantonese in the pronunciation *lam-ba*, and still can be heard in the expression *lam-ba-wan* (霖巴溫) “Number One”, meaning “the best”. Combined with the Cantonese word *daai* (大) “big”, it gave *daai-lam-ba* “big number”, which from being a description of the signs outside brothels came to be a regular term for “brothel”. The word remains in use today, long after the signs and the licensing have gone.

Girlie bars enjoyed the height of their prosperity in the 1950s and 1960s, profiting from the Korean and Vietnam wars. With the American withdrawal from Vietnam, the lode of servicemen on Rest and Recreation (“R & R”) petered out, and many bars went out of business. Some of those that remained changed their image to attract local Chinese custom, and some turned very

smart and expensive in Japanese style, though that phase too seems to have passed. A few kept going in much the same way as of old.

The bars were multi-faceted and capable of many interpretations. For some they were glittering excitement, for others tawdry dreariness. You may see them as dens of vice, or as friendly haunts for an innocent flirtation with a different kind of life. They tended to show you the face you wished to see. Most people, I suspect, would class them as “hard” and soul-less places; yet for every sailor “clipped” out of his payroll there must have been dozens who benefited from the relaxation, attention and, yes, kindness which could be found there. And, of course, not only servicemen frequented them.

Richard Mason’s novel *The World of Suzie Wong* was published in 1957. It certainly romanticizes the life of the bar-girl, but it also captures an atmosphere which was peculiarly genuine. I doubt if a better account will be written, though sociologists and police reports might paint a broader picture. Reading it again I am reminded by the character of Suzie Wong of the lotus, symbol of Buddhism, a beautiful flower rooted in mud and slime. Romanticism indeed!

The photograph here belongs to a real-life Suzie Wong story, but more tragic and less romantic. Once upon a time in a Wanchai bar, one of the girls fell in love with the owner of the establishment. What his reaction was we do not know, but he was a married man and beyond her attaining. Her romantic dreams shattered, she went to the roof of a high building nearby and threw herself off. Three years later, another girl in the same bar fell in love with the same man. Like her predecessor she eventually saw the hopelessness of her position, and she went to the same high building and fell to the same death.

One suicide is likely to lead to another, because the uneasy soul of the first has to find a substitute to release itself from torment, and the second then has to find a substitute in turn. More than that, suicide ghosts have a habit of creating trouble for those whom they blame for their untimely death. Sometimes the complexities of suicide cases reported are almost unbelievable. Dyer Ball quotes a missionary’s report of 1898:

Two persons quarrel. One carries the case into Hades by suicide, hoping both to get the first chance there and to involve the surviving one in trouble, knowing that he will be accused of so persecuting the first one that there was no help for it but suicide. The second resolves to stop this by following the first, and removing the whole theatre of war to the Land of Shades. In one such case in this city one of the patients was too far gone to be saved, whereas the other

could easily be restored. The friends, seeing how matters stood, said: "If one dies, let both die," and refused absolutely to render any help.¹⁶⁰

In this case, to break the chain of misfortune the bar set up an altar for the two girls, and there daily offerings could be made to feed and appease their souls. I first came across the story in the 1960s, and later the bar changed hands and style. The romantic may see it as a sad but exotic tale of unrequited love. Others may see the dusty shelf and fly-marked photographs of the two girls as a suitably sordid illustration of the unpleasantness of Wanchai life. However you see it, it is true: the little altar still occupied its place in a narrow passage out of sight of the bar's clientele, and the worship of the girls still went on in May 1978 when with the kind permission of the management I took this photograph.



I once lived in one of the six houses which make up this terrace in a New Territories village. My house was built of long blue bricks and had a granite threshold and lintel. There were no windows except a tiny one at the back, and a wooden section under the eaves at the front which could be slid open for a little fresh air and light. The roof was tiled over round wooden main beams.

Inside it was quite roomy, the high roof helping to keep out the worst of the summer heat, though it was decidedly cold in the winter. The section inside the front (and only) door was flat-roofed and contained the washing area and stove — the chimney stacks of three of the houses can be seen here.

At night the double doors would be shut and a stout wooden bar dropped into its slot across them. It was snug, and I have never slept anywhere with a greater sense of security.

My neighbours too felt at ease, but their security was of a compound type. Like me they felt safe from any possible human intruder, but in addition they knew that they had every protection against supernatural harm — something which I have to say I felt no danger from.

With no windows to worry about, they could concentrate their defences on the doors. The bar kept out humans, but to keep out evil spirits required more ingenious methods. Portraits of martial strongmen on the outside of the doors and a magic symbol above the lintel were the final guarantees against trouble, but the front line of defence was the wall which lies right across the front of the terrace.

The wall supports a fine collection of pot plants, and also props up the pig-sties and duck and chicken sheds of the inhabitants, but its true purpose is to block the path to the doors of the houses. Evil spirits, fortunately for man, are handicapped by being able to travel only in straight lines, and when they try to fly into the houses they hit the wall instead. Men can walk round it and into the houses, but any spirit which comes along between the wall and the houses is unable to make the turn to get in.

This row of houses is at the front of the village. The other terraces behind do not need a spirit wall (called a “shadow wall” *ying-bik* 影壁) because the front row protects them. In another part of the same village there is a front row house unprotected by a spirit wall, and the residents have had to resort to other magical devices instead.

Walls surround, walls divide, walls distinguish, and walls were everywhere in China's history to draw our attention to the “cellular” nature of traditional Chinese society. The home sheltered behind its walls, many villages were surrounded by walls to keep out strangers, some villages were divided internally by walls to keep factions apart, cities were walled with massive care, and China itself was walled against barbarian invaders from the north.

Behind their walls the cells — families, clans, citizens and Chinese — went about their business not wanting to know or understand what went on outside. It was a society in which social consciousness was at a premium.

The Great Wall (“the 10,000 mile long wall” *maan-lei-cheung-sing* 萬里長城) was originally a series of small walls built by various states which had become largely independent under the failing Zhou dynasty. When the state of Qin finally overcame the rest in 221 B.C., its king proclaimed himself “First Emperor” and set about linking and extending the existing walls to make the Great Wall into something like the form it has today. The work was completed in 204 B.C. after colossal effort and the loss of countless lives:

The entire length of the Great Wall between its extremities is 22½ degrees of latitude, or 1,255 miles in a straight line; but its turnings and doublings increase it to fully 1,500 miles. It would stretch from Philadelphia to Topeka, or from Portugal to Naples, on nearly the same latitude. The construction of this gigantic work is somewhat adapted to the nature of the country it traverses, and the material was taken or made on the spot where it was used. In the western part of its course, it is in some places merely a mud or gravel wall, and in others earth cased with brick.¹⁶¹

It enclosed the region which could be considered civilized, and shut out the barbarians about whom there was no need to be curious. Quaintly, since the word for evil spirits (*gwai* 鬼) is the same word used for all kinds of foreigners (= barbarians), the Great Wall could be considered the ultimate in spirit walls.

But its connection with spirits does not stop there. Of the tens of thousands of men employed in its construction, huge numbers are said to have died on the job. They were buried under or near the wall, and it is possibly this which has led Chinese culture to a belief that a burial under walls makes them strong. By a logical stroke it follows that when a major construction project is on there should arise a fear that bodies (and the spirits that belong to them) will be needed to strengthen the foundations.

In 1921 the Hong Kong census was bedevilled by under-registration of young children. A rumour had spread that a bridge on 99 piers was to be built across the harbour, and under each pier was to be buried a live infant. Clearly the purpose of the census was to discover where to obtain these sacrificial victims!

In the 1960s a similar rumour was started when the Plover Cove Reservoir dam was being built, and schools in the area were deserted as worried parents kept their children at home.

The Great Wall was not always successful in keeping out barbarians. Nor was the spirit wall in front of these houses always successful in keeping out *gwai* — I for one managed to get round it.



Cre-mation was never popular with the Chinese, though it is nowadays much encouraged in cities in China and in urban Hong Kong. Burial was the standard form of disposal of the dead, and it remains so for many today, despite the shortage of space for cemeteries. For the indigenous people of the New Territories space is not such a great problem. They have the right to bury their dead in the hills where they have always done it.

Burial customs differ widely throughout China. In many parts graves took up valuable agricultural land, but in the New Territories there is so much room in the barren hills that there has never been any need to encroach on productive soil. The local system of burial is divided into three stages. In the first stage, the body is encoffined and buried in a hastily dug grave in the hills. No attempt is made to make the grave permanent, and at best only a rough and perfunctorily inscribed grave-stone is erected.

After a number of years — five or ten, say — comes the second stage: the grave is dug up, and the bones are removed and carefully cleaned by a specialist, who ritually purifies them and arranges them in neat order inside an earthenware funerary urn. The urn is tightly closed with an inner and

outer lid, and then put on the hillside, often in company with other urns. Again, a rough grave-stone may be made to help identify the ancestor whose bones are inside.

In some cases, especially nowadays when the living have less leisure in which to concern themselves with the dead, the burial process stops at this second stage. For some years the urn is regularly visited at the grave-sweeping festival (Ching Ming 清明), it is coated with lime to discourage mosses, the ancestor's spirit is worshipped, and the area round the urn is slashed free of grass and weeds. But then the living lose interest in the urn and the ancestor, or they move away from the district, or the older generations die off without passing on the sense of obligation to worship to the younger. Gradually the urn becomes overgrown, it cracks, or it is kicked over by animals or by someone stumbling over it, the bones spill out, and natural processes quickly eliminate all traces.

But ideally the urn is only resting in stage two while a search is made for a permanent burial site. The search is conducted by a geomancer, who looks for a spot which will provide great benefits for the descendants of the ancestor buried there.

Stage three of the burial process is seen in this photograph. A good geomantic site has been found, and a proper, permanent, omega-shaped grave has been built. The site, according to the geomancer, is suitable for two sets of bones, so two urns containing the remains of a man and his wife are to be buried here, and a hole large enough for two has been left at the centre of the grave and purified with incense. Here one of the urns is being carefully lowered into place. When both are in position the hole will again be purified, then filled in with earth, and finally cemented over. A neatly inscribed grave-stone will be set up, giving details of the ancestors buried here, and also noting the names and relationships to the dead of those who have paid for the grave and the search for the site. Lastly, the ancestors will be worshipped, and firecrackers will be let off to "wake" the dragon in whose domain the grave is built. The body has reached its final resting place.

Throughout the process the spirit of the dead ancestor has remained with the bones, and this has meant that he (or of course she) can be worshipped at all three stages. Ancestors are worshipped in order to provide for their continued happiness in the after-world, but also in expectation or at least hope of some

kind of spiritual return for the worshippers. It is probably safe to say that it is not until the stage of permanent burial that real benefits are looked for. And here lies a dilemma, namely: Do the benefits which arise from a well-sited, geomantically correct grave flow from the ancestor who is comfortably and happily at rest? *or* Do they flow automatically from the site, with the ancestor's bones acting merely as a kind of key to unlock the powers latent there? The weight of the evidence seems to point to the latter.

Geomancy (*fung-sui*) is an amoral system, and seems to work regardless of the qualities of those who are involved with it. Thus, a good site will apparently bring the same benefits to its exploiter whether he be saint or felon. For this reason one geomancer I met told me that he would never lay out a *fung-sui* site for anyone whom he did not know, respect, and esteem. He believed absolutely in his science, and was not prepared to prostitute his talents nor to take the chance that the superior fortune he could create for a client would be misused.

Another point which seems to show that ancestor worship and geomantic benefit are only tenuously connected is that it is possible for someone to collect together abandoned urns from the hillsides and bury them in a *fung-sui* grave regardless of whether the benefactor is related to the dead or not. The one certain thing about ancestor worship is that it is *worship of one's own ancestors* not worship of anyone who is dead; that is, ancestor worship is concerned with kinship, and death is only a secondary feature. So if benefit can be received through burying the unrelated dead, it does seem to suggest that it is the *fung-sui* which is having an effect, not the person buried in the grave.

Perhaps it doesn't matter. What is important is that people are prepared to go to great trouble in all good faith to do their best by the dead. There is no doubting that the scene shown here is an affirmation of the tremendous strength of Chinese family ties.



Whole books have been written on Chinese gods, which can appear in all kinds of shapes and sizes. In the Taoist-inspired heavens there is thought to be a hierarchy of gods, with the Jade Emperor (Yuk-wong 玉皇) at the top, beneath him a large body of lesser gods, and beneath them again a host of immortals who are the common subjects of Heaven.

Both Heaven and Purgatory tend to be pictured as exotic copies of this world, supernatural regions inhabited by beings with the same kinds of desires, defects, personalities, and inconsistencies as have men.

Important men have servants; important gods also have servants, helpers and hangers-on. In the Hong Kong region the goddess Tin Hau (天后) “Empress of Heaven” carries great weight, particularly with the boat people. It follows that she must have attendants to boost her standing. In the many temples dedicated to her may be found quite a range of subsidiary gods, and not a few of them include the Buddhist goddess Gwoon Yam (觀音). It is probably reading too much into this to say that the Taoists are scoring points off the Buddhists by making Gwoon Yam subservient to Tin Hau — for most people the distinction between the two religions is not so significant as to lead to this kind of rivalry. Rather it is as if Gwoon Yam were a “guest star”, important but not as important in this context as the temple’s main goddess.

Regular attendants on Tin Hau are the immortal brothers Thousand Mile Eyes (Chin-lei-ngaun 千里眼) shown here, and Fair Wind Ears (Shun-fung-yi 順風耳). According to Werner’s *Myths and Legends of China*, this warlike pair were not very nice to know. One had a blue face, flaming eyes, and prominent teeth like those of a rhinoceros; the other had a greenish face, two horns on his head, and teeth like swords.¹⁶² To make matters worse they are said to have been in the employ of Jau (紂), the last tyrant king of the Shang dynasty. Jau was a charming chap who specialized in debauchery and savagery. His most infamous crime was the disembowelment of a wise and good relative who had dared to try to lead him into better ways. As the excuse for his grizzly act he cynically remarked: “They say that a sage has seven orifices in his heart (the seat of the understanding). Let us see if this is the case with you.”¹⁶³

Jau died in the flames of his palace in 1123 B.C., and the Shang then gave way to the long-lived Zhou dynasty. The brothers were destroyed by another immortal, who used his magic whip to split their skulls apart. History was apparently not prepared to lose such characters, and it is typical of Chinese mythology that erstwhile “baddies” should re-appear in other guise, performing good deeds as a means of expiation. So here is Thousand Mile Eyes, looking much less objectionable than Werner’s description of him, as he keeps guard over Tin Hau. Nowadays, if you compliment someone with sharp eyes by calling him Thousand Mile Eyes he is unlikely to be offended.

Sharp eyes are obviously an asset to the sailor, and this perhaps explains the association with the sea-goddess Tin Hau. His brother “comes with the package”, as it were, but presumably is also favoured for the auspicious sound of his name — good hearing may not be as essential to the sailor as good eyesight, but “fair wind” is certainly important.

Chinese sea-farers are every bit as superstitious as Western ones. At the turn of the century De Groot collected a number of examples of superstitious beliefs from seamen of the South China coast. The following account is from his *Religious System of China*:

Sometimes in full sea a compact cloudy mass suddenly darkens the horizon. It nears the ship with great rapidity, to capsize her and drown her crew. It is no tornado, no water-spout, no squall, but the spirit of a woman, once a sailor's lovely wife Happily there are efficient means to combat her. First of all all the hatches must be closed; indeed, she is so unmannerly as to pass on high a flood of urine, which may fill the ship in a moment up to the deck As soon as this nymph appears, paper mock money must be burned on the deck, in order to propitiate her and appease her wrath; crackers and blunderbusses must be fired to scare her away, and one of the crew in the garb of nature has to climb the mast, his hair dishevelled, with a club, axe, sword or spear. This weapon he brandishes up there most awe-inspiringly, abusing the woman in every way and sense, and exhausting his vocabulary of invectives to the last word.¹⁶⁴

Every junk, says De Groot, carried a specially enrolled “ship-saving dancer”, who performed exorcizing steps on deck while the other man was up the mast cursing.

There is a difference between the Chinese 千里眼 and its English translation “thousand mile eyes”: we tend to take such numbers rather more seriously than do the Chinese. When I read of “seven-league boots”, I imagine that they are capable of a pace seven leagues long (however long that may be); but I doubt if a Chinese thinks of thousand mile eyes as really granting that great a vision. “A thousand miles” is just “a long way”. Similarly, a colloquial word for binoculars is “thousand mile lenses” (*chihh-lei-geng* 千里鏡), but no-one believes that to be a claim as to their precise power.



There is enough to be said about this New Territories village scene, ordinary as it seems, to fill several articles. The pigs and the chickens scavenging the ground, the washing hung on bamboo poles, the unusually high construction of the house, the materials of which it is made, its state of dilapidation, all these bear talking about.

But the photograph is most interesting for what cannot be seen in it. It used, for example, to be the house of a spirit-medium, a man who by going into trance could contact the dead or the gods. Many village people go to spirit-mediums for assistance with problems of health or fortune, and many claim to receive excellent and effective advice this way. The word for a male spirit-medium is *sing-gung* (星公) “old man of the stars”, but the majority of mediums are women who are usually known as *man-mai-poh* (問米婆) “old women who ask questions of the rice”.

The spirit-medium could have been seen in the photograph if he had cared to step outside, but the other interesting feature is not visible because it is ... nothing. It is the hole high up on the front wall on the right-hand side of the picture. You see, it is not a window. Admittedly it looks like one, and

is matched by another on the left — but it has only become a window by default. It is actually the hole made by a cannon-ball (or so I was informed by villagers).

The house is quite old (maybe 200 years?) and is in the front row of houses of a clan village. Towards the end of the 19th century the clan was in dispute with its neighbours, and the trouble escalated to the point where cannon were brought in to take pot-shots at the other side. This house directly faced the opponents' village, and so suffered damage.

Feuding between rival clans was a way of life in south-eastern China. It was a permanent state of undeclared war, with battles breaking out every few years or decades. The causes or excuses for battle were often very trivial: in this case apparently, two farmers had quarrelled over access to water supply for their fields, a blow had been struck, and then each had gone home to whip up the support of his fellow-clansmen.

My attention was drawn recently to a journal article published in Hong Kong in 1903:

A young man from Sapohing made a visit one evening to the neighbouring village of Tancho, where he indulged in gambling at the fantan-tables and lost money. But instead of losing his cash with the good grace of a veteran gambler he became nasty, accused the master of the place of cheating and snatched some money from the table. Thereupon the master hit him on the face and he retaliated in like fashion. There the matter appeared to have been ended. The young man went back to his own village that night. But it seems that the affair rankled in his mind, for he informed the elders that he had suffered an insult and demanded that they, the Chun clan, should take action towards getting an apology from the others, the Cheah clan.¹⁶⁵

The apology was forthcoming, but the young man was still not satisfied, and next day he and forty other men went to the Cheah village and "fired 300 or 400 shots into the ancestral hall". The Cheah clan replied with a war-party of some 600 men, 400 of them armed with Mausers. Taking the Chun village completely by surprise they:

made an entrance into the village and carried all before them. They sacked 17 houses. First of all they directed their attention to the looting of a rice-shop; from it they carried away between 400 and 500 piculs of rice, three cows, half-a-dozen pigs, and they killed seven or eight more pigs which they were unable to take with them. Also they shot dead an old woman 60 years of age.

The Chuns now sent to other villages of their clan for help, who:

late that night began to pour into the village armed with barbed wires, bamboo poles, spears, bows and arrows, and Mauser rifles. Barricades were erected round the town; cannon — six and ten-pounders — were placed in position for defence and provisions were laid in.

Next the provincial authorities were informed of the trouble, the Chuns hoping that they could obtain a judgment against the Cheah clan. There the report breaks off, so what the outcome was we don't know, but it is a good example of the way in which small incidents could lead to major confrontations.

The clans expected their members to be willing to fight for them at any time. In return they made arrangements to compensate for this enforced loyalty. Men who were going into battle were often given a feast of pork in the ancestral hall — and pork was a rare treat for many poorer people in those days.

If a man fell in the fray he knew that his wife and children would be honoured by all and supported out of clan funds. There are still halls in the New Territories today where special areas of the altar are reserved for the ancestor tablets of "clan heroes", silent wooden memorials to the sacrifices of men who died in the cause of their clan's pride.

So far as I know, the hole in the wall was the only damage or injury suffered on this occasion, and the dispute was settled by mediators. Common sense rather than force of arms apparently prevailed at times.

109 Kitchen God



Other than the ancestors, the Kitchen God or Stove God (*jo-gwoon* 灶君) was probably the most common god to be found in the home. Here he is represented by his name written on a piece of orangey-red paper and stuck on the chimney breast in a New Territories village house.

E. T. C. Werner's *Dictionary of Chinese Mythology* says of him:

His temple is a little niche in the brick cooking-range; his palace is often filled with smoke; and his Majesty sells for one farthing.¹⁶⁶

The ancestors were the gods of the family. The Kitchen God was the god of the household, which in most cases was the same as the family, but which could include non-family members such as servants or apprentices.

Oddly enough the Kitchen God seems to have little connection with either the kitchen or the stove as such. He was not, for instance, worshipped as the god of culinary excellence or of burning fires. But there is a symbolic importance attached to the stove by the Chinese which perhaps explains the high degree of concern with this god. When a family divided and broke up into a number of smaller family units, this was always expressed physically by the new units each having separate cooking facilities. So the stove was symbolic of family identity and family unity, and a god attached to the stove was clearly associated with the family and household which cooked at it.

The Kitchen God had two main duties. The first was to decide how long a life each member of the household should enjoy. He was not the only spiritual being with control over age, however, because the God of Longevity (*Sau-sing-gung* 壽星公) could be persuaded — with sufficient offerings — to grant extra years of life. And it was also believed by many that length of days, like everything else in life, was predetermined.

The other duty of the Kitchen God was to report once a year to the Emperor of Heaven (Seung-dai 上帝) on the behaviour of the members of the household, thus acting as Heaven's spy on mortal conduct. A few days before Chinese New Year, his image or paper was burned, sending him on his way to Heaven to report:

Those performing the rites beseech him to say much that is good and little that is bad about their doings. A special sweetmeat ... is made and sold on that day; it is made of sticky rice. When the picture of the god is being burned at night, a piece of this sweetmeat is broken off and thrown into the fire with it. This is done that the god may say sweet words. Stories are told of other places in China where sometimes a little opium is smeared over the mouth of the god, so that he may be so drowsy when he gets to the upper regions that he will not be able to speak clearly; or sometimes the picture is dipped in wine, so that when the god arrives, he will be so drunk that he will be turned out and not allowed to speak.¹⁶⁷

On New Year's Eve the Kitchen God returned and was welcomed with offerings. A new paper sheet was posted on the chimney breast, and he started another year's tour of duty.

In China, where since 1949 religious activities have been called "superstition" and discouraged, worship of the Kitchen God was not readily abandoned, and a visiting New Zealand anthropologist found in 1955 that in one village:

In every house which I visited, except one, I found that a representation of the kitchen god was still kept in the proper place above the stove.¹⁶⁸

In the New Territories the Kitchen God is still commonly worshipped, as he is not infrequently in the urban areas too. The photograph shows the Kitchen God on New Year's Day, spanking new and unsullied by smoke and dirt. On the ledge in front of him are offerings of tea and rice, an "everlasting lamp" consisting of a wick floating in a saucer of oil, incense, candles, and chopsticks for his use. A diamond-shaped paper bearing one of the dozens of stylized forms of the character for "long life" is pasted up at the top, presumably in the hope that it will influence the god in his decisions on the family members' lives.

Despite appearances, the war-like object leaning against the wall is not a spear. It is a grass-carrying stick. Much of the cooking in the 1960s was still done with dried grass and rice straw. The housewife would go up to the hills and cut two large bundles of grass which she speared on either end of the stick, and then brought down to the village over her shoulder. Where else should the stick be kept but next to the stove?

110 Catholic Church



The entry in the old *Gazetteer* for the island of Yim Tin Tsai near Sai Kung reads simply:

this island, in area .097 square mile, is well populated, and has an R.C. Church and school; the island probably had salt pans at one time since the name means “small salt pan”.¹⁶⁹

The weather-beaten church is shown here, the characters high on the wall boldly proclaiming it to be the “Hall of the Lord of Heaven”, a much more resounding title than “Roman Catholic Church” of which it is the Chinese equivalent.

The Protestant churches do not use the term *Tin-jue* 天主 “Lord of Heaven” for God, preferring *Seung-dai* 上帝 “Supreme Ruler”. It is perhaps partly from this that there arose the Chinese popular understanding that “Christianity” and “Catholicism” are two quite different religions.

Nor are the Chinese to be blamed for their misconceptions. Some Westerners have done their best to emphasize the split. Somerset Maugham

waded into this one in his *On a Chinese Screen*. In it, Christ comes to a Chinese city and asks to meet the missionaries, but all of them are away in the hills for the summer except the Catholics. The Protestant spokesman uneasily excuses himself and his colleagues:

Of course they went away from May to September. The heat made useful activity quite out of the question and it had been found by experience that the missionaries preserved their health and strength much better if they spent the hot months in the hills. A sick missionary was only an encumbrance. It was a matter of practical politics and it had been found that the Lord's work was done more efficiently if a certain part of the year was set aside for rest and recreation. And then the reference to the Roman Catholics was grossly unfair. They were unmarried. They had no families to think of. The mortality among them was terrifying. Why, in that very city, of fourteen nuns who had come out to China ten years ago all but three were dead. It was perfectly easy for them, because it was more convenient for their work, to live in the middle of the city and to stay there all the year round. They had no ties.¹⁷⁰

The book contains three score clever vignettes of life in China, but they are certainly not untainted with Maugham's prejudices. By contrast there is a sad and terrible book written from the Protestant viewpoint. Called *Martyred Missionaries of the China Inland Mission, with a Record of the Perils and Sufferings of Some Who Escaped*, it was compiled in 1901, just one year after the Boxer Rising which it chronicles. The editor has little doubt but that Catholic intolerance was one of the causes of the troubles. The Boxer movement, he says "originally anti-dynastic, then anti-Catholic, was cleverly laid hold of by the Government and turned into the vanguard of the Imperial movement against Europe".¹⁷¹

The Boxers (*Yi-woh-kuen* 義和拳 "Righteous Harmonious Fists") were a branch of the long-lived underground sect, the White Lotus. They practised physical and mental exercises not unlike those which can be seen on any morning in the parks and open spaces of Hong Kong, and they believed that these exercises could make them invulnerable to the weapons of an enemy, even to the bullets of the foreigner. The Chinese court gave support to the Boxers, who massacred many missionaries and their Chinese converts, and eventually laid siege to the foreign embassies in Beijing. A joint force of American, Austrian, British, French, German, Italian, Japanese and Russian troops lifted the siege and perpetrated their own massacres in revenge.

In all this the missionaries of *all* denominations suffered. What had they done to deserve it? They had been “guilty”, certainly, of attempts to disrupt the traditional life-style of perhaps the most conservative culture on earth. And they had shown a degree of religious intolerance which had seldom been known in China.

The turn of the century was as bleak a time as any to be in the field. The Manchu dynasty was crashing to its doom, and the arrogant West was trampling all shreds of Chinese dignity into the mud. Some have seen the missionaries as the skirmishers for Western imperialism. Combatants or non-combatants, in 1900 they were in the front line, and they became the scape-goats for the ills of the times.

History’s judgement on the role of the missionaries has not been a very favourable one, but history tends to look at major events and general movements, ignoring the unpatterned and unsung complexities of everyday life. Shakespeare put into Mark Antony’s mouth the antidote to history’s cruel verdicts:

The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones.



The Tang dynasty Emperor Ming Huang (明皇) came to the throne in A.D. 713 and reigned for 44 years. He was a remarkable man in many ways, and had been made heir to the throne in recognition of merit — he was not in the direct line of succession. His early rule was very promising of good government. Mayers says of him:

In his second year, he issued a sumptuary decree prohibiting the extravagant costliness of apparel which was in fashion, and set an example by causing a bonfire to be made in his palace of a vast heap of embroidered garments and jewelry. Under the influence of the wise counsels of Chang Yueh, Chang Kiu-ling, and other ministers, his administration of the empire prospered, and divers reforms were introduced; but as time rolled on, the emperor, satiated with the pleasures of rule, lapsed by degrees into a craving for ease and sensual enjoyment.¹⁷²

One of these “sensual enjoyments” was his concubine Yeung Gwai Fei (楊貴妃). For her sake Ming Huang promoted to high office her father, her

brother, and various other members of her family, regardless of merit. For her he created special relay teams of men to bring lichees fresh from the south of China in season. And for her he devised lavish entertainments.

Himself a lover of music, he founded a school for musicians and performers so that a good supply of talent was always on hand to amuse his favourite. The school was sited in a place called Lei-yuen (梨園) "The Pear Garden". From this beginning Chinese theatre gradually grew, and actors are still known as *Lei-yuen ji-dai* (梨園子弟) "sons of the Pear Garden", while Ming Huang is worshipped as the patron god of actors.

The photograph shows actors awaiting their cues backstage in a temporary matshed theatre. The occasion is an important religious festival in a large New Territories village — religion and drama are as closely associated in Chinese culture as they were in mediaeval Europe.

I was flicking through *Studies in the Chinese Drama* by Kate Buss when I came across the following paragraph:

Leading actors have individual dressing rooms, but to the majority of the company the greenroom is both dressing room and property chamber. Makeup stands and tables are frequent and are littered with colours and brushes; and hooks along the walls suspend a medley of masks, false beards, wigs, helmets, thick soled shoes to increase the stature of their wearers, swords, bows and arrows and early implements of war, symbolic pennants and wands, and the patched and discoloured clothes belonging to the lowest members of the company who take a variety of minor parts and are known as the "waste-paper-basket" players.¹⁷³

The scene photographed here is very much like the description except that these costumes were neither patched nor discoloured. They were in immaculate order and in brilliant shades of green, gold, black and red. Elaborate and colourful dress is part of the attraction of traditional drama. A clue to character is provided by the colour of the costume. An Emperor always wears yellow, an old man is dressed in brown, and you can be pretty sure that anyone in red is a "goodie".

In Peking Opera faces are painted in bright colours as well, each colour with its own significance. "Baddies" have predominantly white faces, strong moral types use red or purple, ghosts and demons have green, and honest straightforward men black.

Another attraction is the music and singing — all plays were operas until very recent times. As with many Western musicals, realism is not attempted, and scenery and stage props are minimal. Kate Buss again:

Prescribed action creates scenery! If some character must climb a mountain, pantomimic motions assume the presence of the granite hill. If a criminal is to be executed it is accomplished with a bamboo pole and traditional movements on the part of the actor. He, the criminal, wails a confession of guilt, walks to one side of the stage and stands under a bamboo pole on which a cloth is tied; he indicates strangulation by throwing back his head and looking up to heaven. If, in a stage story, a general goes upon a journey, the scene is not changed to transport one's mind to another place, instead the soldier cracks a whip, dashes across the stage to a crash of cymbals, and announces that he has arrived. To dismount from his absent steed he pirouettes upon one foot and drops his whip; to mount he turns upon the other foot and picks up his whip.¹⁷⁴

Women were banned from the stage by the Manchu Qian Long (乾隆 — Kin Lung in Cantonese) Emperor who reigned from 1736–1796, and all-male troupes of actors became the rule. China's most famous actor of all, Mei Lan-fang (梅蘭芳), acted female roles with exquisite grace until his death in 1961 at the age of 67.

Formerly the stage was not thought to be a respectable profession, and actors were classed with slaves, prostitutes, government runners, boat-dwellers and ex-bandits as “mean people” (*jin-man* 賤民).

Actors are of low social caste. The descendants of an actor for three generations were forbidden to compete in examinations. One reason for this contempt for the profession was that the children of slaves were brought up to be actors. Training begins between the ages of nine and fourteen. The boy must undergo strenuous physical exercises to become a skilful contortionist, and practise vocal exercises to become a good singer, for long sustained passages of recitative must often be rendered in a single breath. He must have a perfect repertoire of between 100 and 200 plays, as there is no prompter on the Chinese stage. The parts of women are taken by boys and men, sometimes by eunuchs.¹⁷⁵

The status of the actor has risen over the past century, partly perhaps through the greatness of Mei Lan-fang, but also with the return of women to the stage, and with the advent of the prosperous motion picture industry. Nothing creates respectability like wealth.

112 Hell Bank Note



The Chinese belief in Hell or Purgatory cannot escape the notice of anyone who has been to a funeral home or to the now demolished Tiger Balm Gardens. In brief, it is thought that on death everyone goes down to Purgatory for judgement and punishment of the sins committed while alive.

The details of Purgatory and the length of time spent there differ wildly from area to area of China and from person to person. In some accounts, the dead reach the gates of Hell on the evening of the day they die. In others, it seems to take much longer to get there, and up to forty-nine days for the soul to settle down in its new surroundings.

There seems to be general agreement that the soul in Purgatory is leading much the same kind of existence as the living, and that therefore the dead have the same basic requirements as those on earth: that is, food, clothing, shelter, transport and money. In time they will probably be able to provide these for themselves — one recent book notes that a deceased electrician was thought by his son to be practising as an electrician in the underworld — but initially at

least their relatives on earth must supply them. Burning is the method which transports goods from this world to that of the dead.

The photograph shows the two sides of a “Hell Bank Note”, specially printed for such offerings. Several different versions of these notes are available, though those on sale in Hong Kong seem to agree on the necessity for using English for title and signature. The Five-million denomination also is very popular, though none of them seem to specify what the unit of currency is.

The building is identified as the Bank of Hell (Ming-tung Ngan-hong 冥通銀行). Some versions bear the signatures of the Bank Head, Yim Loh Wong (閻羅王) and the Deputy Head, Dei Chong Wong (地藏王). This one announces that it is a “Banknote valid throughout Hell”.

Purgatory has ten halls or courts. In some accounts the soul is passed along from hall to hall: in others it is judged first and sent to whichever hall is most appropriate. After many years — five hundred seems to be a minimum period — the soul will have expiated its sins and then can re-enter life as a human, or as an animal, or an insect, or whatever level of existence befits its past conduct.

Some believe that it is possible through the holding of the correct services for the dead to win the soul an undisturbed stay in Hell, suffering no punishment, but just peacefully awaiting rebirth.

The various gory tortures and punishments inflicted on the soul I will not go into here, but the sins for which those punishments are ordered are rather less well-known. I found a most interesting list in John Henry Gray’s *China*, published in 1878. Here are some examples:

In the First hall are punished those who have committed suicide or murder; and priests and nuns who have received money for saying masses without actually bothering to perform them. In the same hall, rewards are given to the souls of people who have bought pornography and destroyed it to avoid corrupting others, and to those who, by picking up waste paper in the streets, have saved the written word from being desecrated — a uniquely Chinese concept.

The Second Hall punishes, amongst others, priests who inveigle children into becoming monks; husbands who divorce their wives without just cause; people who misuse property entrusted to them; ignorant doctors who won’t stop treating the sick; and officials who oppress the people.

The Third hall is for ungrateful wives; undutiful sons; rebellious soldiers;

geomancers who have made false diagnoses of sites; and letter-writers who have not written what the illiterate asked them to write

... The Tenth Hall is where the souls gather before being reborn.¹⁷⁶

Well, what are the Hell Bank Notes for? To grease palms with, of course. Here is the Rev. Justus Doolittle in thunderous mood:

It is believed that the punishment of the dead may be alleviated by obtaining favour with the governors of the ten departments of hell, through which they will be obliged to pass, and in which they will be obliged to suffer punishment for the sins of this life. If these kings are willing, they are supposed to have the prerogative, or, at least, to be in the practice of punishing the dead but slightly, imposing on him such penalties as are easily borne, or even of passing him along through the different departments without any penalty. Thus do this people fancy they can bribe the rulers of hell!¹⁷⁷

In this respect too the after-life is a reflection of this one!



The Man Mo Temple (Man-mo-miu 文武廟) in Hollywood Road contrives to remain a flourishing working institution despite its inclusion on the foreign tourist round. There is plenty to see inside, and it is rare for there not to be someone engaged in worshipping the gods, no matter what time of day you go in.

Probably the most striking feature of the temple is the forest of huge incense coils hung from hooks in the roof like hams in an old-fashioned kitchen. They smoulder slowly, taking two weeks or more to burn away. From the centre of each dangles a bright red paper slip on which is written the name of the donor, so that the gods know whose prayer to answer, or who it is who is grateful for blessings already conferred.

Incense (*heung* 香) of different kinds seems to be essential to Chinese worship. Doré's *Researches into Chinese Superstitions* says:

The worship of the divinity by the lighting and offering of incense goes back to the remotest times of Chinese history, and existed more or less as practised at the present day, or at least in the form of aromatic substances burnt in honour of the gods. We read that in very early times, the emperors *Yao*, *Shun* and

Yü, offered burnt offerings to the Supreme Ruler, *Shang-ti*, while later on as primitive tradition waned or became corrupted, private families assumed the right of offering incense to their own special gods.¹⁷⁸

Incense summons gods to where they are to be worshipped, and the pleasing fragrance of it is designed to predispose them in favour of the worshipper. Doré, always on the look-out for evidence of the inferiority of “pagan” religion, can’t resist a crack at the incense makers:

It may be generally said that the smell of this Chinese incense is peculiarly offensive to the olfactory nerves of Westerners, for nine times out of ten the love of illicit gain stifles all religious zeal in the heart of the manufacturer, who too often employs aromatic substances of inferior quality or in small quantity, preferably to better ones of which the material would cost more. Hence the walls of nearly all temples are blackened by the smoke of this inferior stuff, and exhale a smell which provokes utter disgust.¹⁷⁹

Basically incense sticks consist of a thin bamboo splint which is dipped in a gluey powder containing fine sawdust, dye, and a perfume. After repeated dippings a thick coating surrounds the splint, the whole is dried on racks and then bundled up for sale.

It is true, as Doré says, that some perfumes are cheaper than others, though it is doubtful whether quality of fragrance has anything to do with the blackening of temple walls. Sandalwood is one of the most expensive perfumes used, but most incense seems to be made with readily-available flower scents.

It has been suggested that the name Hong Kong (Heung-gong 香港) does not mean “fragrant harbour”, as it is normally translated, but rather “incense port”. Apparently in the Ming dynasty there was a thriving trade in incense through the village port of Hong Kong on the south side of the island. The incense came from plantations of trees which grew particularly well in this area.

But in the early years of the Qing dynasty, between A.D. 1662 and 1669, the inhabitants of the south-east coast of China were all evacuated inland by a government eager to starve into submission the pirates who lived off them. The incense-growing industry was destroyed by the move, and never recovered, though some of the trees can still be found locally, in the Lam Tsuen Valley for instance.

Incense is much used in “ritual transfer”. When a god is asked to move from one place to another, incense is lit before him and then taken solemnly to the new location. It is rather like carrying the Olympic flame to whatever site the games are next to be held at — the spirit of the Olympics is felt to travel with the flame.

In Hakka ancestral halls there is usually only one ancestral tablet, which houses the corporate soul of all the clan dead. When a clan member dies, his soul is temporarily accommodated in a red paper tablet on one side of the hall. Then at New Year incense is lit in front of the paper, and his soul is invited to follow as the stick is taken and put in the incense pot before the corporate tablet. In this way the individual ancestor becomes merged with the group.

I was surprised one day in a New Territories village to see an old woman walking along with a lighted stick of incense in her hands and muttering strange cries. It turned out that her grandson had fallen in a pond on the outskirts of the village and had run home soaking wet. Now, young boys are thought to have an invisible double, a “little youth” (*tung-nin-jai* 童年仔) who goes everywhere with them and is essential to their well-being. The woman was afraid that the double might be trapped in the pond, so she had gone there, thrown some rice into the water, lit the incense stick, and was now leading the double back home to be reunited with her grandson.

Sticks of incense are usually offered three at a time. In a temple recently I noticed *two* sticks smouldering away together in front of a small shrine. By good chance a temple keeper was squatting there reading a newspaper, so I asked him why there were only two. He didn’t even look up. “There are three”, he said. I counted again but could feel confident that my arithmetic was up to the strain. “Only two, I’m afraid”, I said. He still didn’t look up: “Well, one must have fallen out.” There was no question in his mind that anyone would offer anything other than three sticks at a time.

The incense coils shown here are different — they come singly.



The funeral is nearly over. The corpse has been dressed and its face washed in water bought with copper cash by the mourners from the god of a nearby stream. Its hands have been tied together with white thread, and the lid of the coffin nailed down. Then it has been “elevated” (*dang-go* 登高) on trestles while the rites have been performed. Offerings of meat, fruit, and cakes have been made and vast quantities of incense, candles and paper money have been burned for the use of the newly dead soul. Buddhist nuns have performed their rituals, a Taoist priest has nearly finished his part, and soon, lashed to its stretcher of poles, the coffin will be taken up into the hills for burial.

The white-clad mourners have been wailing for several hours. For much of that time they have crawled around on their knees, too overcome with grief to be supported by their legs. Even then their mourning sticks (*haau-paang* 孝棒) have been necessary to keep them from falling over. When the paper sedan-chair (just visible over the coffin) has been burned to provide the deceased with a means of transport in the after-world, then the mourners

know that they will have to suffer the final parting. In the photograph they can be seen surrounding the coffin and racked with sorrow.

But what about the two men who are not wearing mourning? They are not only not overcome with sorrow, they are actually chatting happily away together, and one appears to be leaning with complete unconcern on the coffin itself! The fact is that they are not there as mourners, they are merely coffin-bearers hired for the occasion, and as such they do not need to be affected or even pretend to be affected by what is going on.

Perhaps this illustrates as clearly as anything could the cellular nature of traditional Chinese society. Within your own cell you were concerned, involved, moulded, trapped and cocooned — outside phenomena might affect you, but unless they did they were not of importance.

One significant cell for most people was the village community, but the family was the most basic cell of all and family ties were immensely strong. Other people's families were their concern, not yours. As the popular saying went: "Each sweeps the snow from his own doorway, and ignores the frost on his neighbour's roof." (*Gok-yan ji-so moon-chin suet, bat-gwoon ta-yan nga-seung seung* 各人自掃門前雪，不管他人瓦上霜)

Not only should you not expend sympathy or effort on other cells, you should actively mistrust them. The word for a "stranger" is *saang-yan* (生人). *Saang* is also used for "uncooked" or "unripe": substitute "unpalatable" and "sour" for these and the unpleasant implications of the word for stranger become more obvious. In a chapter headed "Mutual Suspicion", Arthur Smith says:

There is an ancient saying in China, that when one is walking through an orchard where pears are grown it is well not to adjust one's cap, and when passing through a melon patch it is not the time to lace one's shoes. These sage aphorisms represent a generalised truth. In Chinese social life it is strictly necessary to walk softly, and one cannot be too careful.¹⁸⁰

In 1859 an English translation of the Abbé Huc's *The Chinese Empire* appeared. He had travelled widely as Missionary Apostolic in China and had been struck by the way in which his Chinese military escorts were treated once they had moved out of their home district:

One day, for example, some soldiers of the escort had seated themselves for a few minutes before a shop. When they rose to depart, a clerk of the establishment came and demanded, with much gravity, two sapecks a piece

for having rested before his door. The soldiers looked at him in amazement; but the malicious clerk held out his hand with the air of a man who has no suspicion that his demand can possibly be objected to. The poor travellers, attacked in their tenderest point — the pocket — ventured to say that they did not understand the demand. “That is very strange!” cried the clerk; and, summoning his neighbours around, “Look here! These men fancy they can sit before my shop for nothing! Where can they come from, I wonder, to be ignorant of the commonest customs!”

The neighbours exclaimed, laughed loudly, and marvelled at people who were simple enough to imagine they could sit down for nothing. The soldiers, ashamed of being taken for uncivilised creatures, paid the two sapecks, saying, to excuse themselves, that such was not the custom in Sse-tchouen. They had not gone far, however, when some officious shop keepers ran to tell them, as a consolation, that they were very silly to let themselves be taken in so easily.¹⁸¹

Confucian philosophers developed a list of the Five Human Relationships (*ng-lun* 五倫) which were supposed to govern a man’s dealings with everyone else he met. The Five were the relationships between Ruler and Subject, between Father and Son, between Elder Brother and Younger Brother, between Husband and Wife, and between Friend and Friend. No mention of strangers, notice, and perhaps that is partly why people from other cells could be cheated without qualm. Certainly social consciousness was of a very limited kind.

But for those who find the behaviour of the two men in the photograph distressing, it should be pointed out that the mourners are just as able to ignore them as they are to ignore the mourners — cellular unconcern works both ways.



In a wet-rice culture such as that of South China, water has always been of great importance. Irrigation systems and careful terracing of the landscape enable water to be used to maximum advantage. In the corners of the fields now growing vegetables can be seen shallow wells from which the farmer fills his watering-cans in the endless, back-breaking battle with desiccation.

But drinking-water too is essential, and virtually every village relied on its wells for this. Even today, when piped water from the public supply is available, some villagers still prefer to drink the water from their wells (if they are lucky enough not to have polluted groundwater).

When I went to live in a New Territories village, my next-door neighbour's wife appeared on my doorstep on the first day with a vacuum flask. "I've brought you some tea," she said. It wasn't tea, it was water drawn from the well outside my door and boiled; and every day for eighteen months this kindest of people refilled the flask for me. If it had been the best tea it couldn't have been nicer. I became a hot boiled well-water addict, finding it refreshing in summer and comforting in winter. Sweetish and slightly flat, it made me realize how "chemical" much piped water tastes.

But something as precious as the village water supply needed divine protection, and our well, like other wells, was guarded by its own god. The photograph shows the stone in which the god lives, set in a special niche beside the well (over which I stood to take the shot). In front of the stone are three holes in which the incense is stuck during worship. It is New Year, and red paper charms have been pasted over and around the stone, but they don't last long and for most of the year the stone is bare of ornament.

The Well God keeps the well filled and maintains the quality of the water. In this case he is very much needed — there is danger of pollution from the open sewer which can be seen running across the top of the picture.

According to several sources which I have looked at, the Well God was a Taoist creation, dating from about the 3rd century A.D. But the Taoist Well God seems to have been connected particularly with brine wells which, while vital for animal life in parts of China away from the sea, were not quite as necessary as the fresh water variety.

Clarence Day, in his *Chinese Peasant Cults*, puts the Well God firmly into the animistic category — that is, the gods associated with natural phenomena such as trees, rocks, mountains and streams.¹⁸² He is surely correct, and there is in any case no doubt that the Well God was worshipped in much earlier times. References to the god can be found from at least the 3rd century B.C., when he was already considered to be one of the Five Gods of the Household. The others were the gods of the Outer Gate, the Inner Door, the Hearth, and the Heavenly Well (*tin-jeng* 天井, the courtyard open to the sky which most houses seem to have had).

But distinctions such as animistic versus Taoist or Buddhist are seldom meaningful in popular Chinese religion. A Buddhist protective inscription is to be found on a stone near this well, and Taoist priests can be called on for help too. Archdeacon Gray notes in his book *China*:

It is not unusual for the proprietors to engage the services of Taoist priests, in order that the wells in the streets and houses of a Chinese city may contain pure water. The priests, after saying prayers, write a mystic character upon a piece of yellow paper, the scroll is then burned, and the ashes, with a handful of sugar, and a few leaves from a pomeloo tree, are thrown into the well. I have frequently seen this ceremony performed, especially in the month of August, both at Canton and Macao.¹⁸³

The Chinese character for “well” is 井, clearly a picture of the mouth of a well. Confucian philosophers believed that its shape could serve as a model for social organization, and in particular the philosopher Mencius (Mang-ji 孟子) advocated the use of the Well-field System (*jeng-tin* 井田).

The land was to be divided up into one *lei* (里 a Chinese mile) square units, and each unit was to be split into nine equal plots, so that it would look like a square with the character 井 in it. The middle plot would then belong to the state, while eight families would each own one of the outside plots. They would jointly farm the middle plot to produce tax for the state. This idealized scheme fired the Chinese imagination, and it was considered again and again through more than 2,000 years of history, though never did anyone succeed in putting it into practice.

As a well-water addict I feel very superior to those unfortunates who have never tasted such luxury. They are, as the Chinese proverb says, “like frogs at the bottom of a well”, inexperienced and ignorant.

夏蟲不可以語冰 The summer insect cannot speak of ice;

井蛙不可以談天 The frog in the well cannot talk of the heavens.



Sunk are thy bowers in shapeless ruin all,
And the long grass o'ertops the mould'ring wall;
And trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's hand,
Far, far away, thy children leave the land.

Goldsmith might have written *The Deserted Village* with this photograph before him, as I write now. For his “sweet smiling village” and for this New Territories hamlet alike, economic forces proved too strong.

The south coast of China has for centuries been the human equivalent of the lemmings' cliffs. Population pressure has always acted in a southward direction, and the most disadvantaged have been pushed off the land and over the sea.

The island of Taiwan was settled by the Chinese from the 17th century onwards, people moving there mainly from the coast of Fujian province opposite. Neither the aboriginal inhabitants nor the Japanese (who ruled it from 1895 to 1945) have been able to leave more than a dent or two in the now permanent “Chineseness” of the island.

Mainland and Southeast Asia were thoroughly explored by the Chinese during the Ming dynasty. The famous eunuch admiral Cheng Ho (Jeng Woh 鄭和) and other Imperial envoys made seven voyages there between 1405 and 1433, bringing back treasure and tribute from the rulers of the many lands they visited. The area was known as the Southern Ocean (Naam-yeung 南洋), a name which lives on in the title of Singapore's university.

Victor Purcell describes the explorations in his *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*:

The object of the voyages was to enhance the prestige of the Ming dynasty and, incidentally, to keep a look out for any rebels against the dynasty who might have taken refuge in the Nanyang. "The Imperial Ming dynasty", proclaimed the high envoys, "in unifying seas and continents, surpasses the Three Dynasties and even goes beyond the Han and the T'ang. The countries beyond the horizon and from the ends of the earth have all become subjects (of the Imperial Ming) The barbarians from beyond the seas ... have come to audience bearing precious objects and presents."¹⁸⁴

Some Chinese traders had preceded the official missions, but afterwards floods of Chinese began to pour off the southern coast, settling in large numbers throughout the region.

The Manchu dynasty which came to power in 1644 looked with great suspicion on this emigration, and eventually passed laws forbidding it altogether. Sir George Staunton's 1810 translation of the Penal Code of China is suitably graphic:

All officers of government, foldiers, and private citizens, who clandestinely proceed to fea to trade, or who remove to foreign iflands for the purpofe of inhabiting and cultivating the fame, fhall be punifhed according to the law againft communicating with rebels and enemies, and confequently fuffer death by being beheaded.¹⁸⁵

The laws did little to prevent the movement overseas, and the southern Chinese continued their spread to almost every part of the world, participating in the great gold rushes, the phosphate bonanzas, and more recently the chop suey gluts.

After the Pacific War, cheap rice from Southeast Asia put paid to the New Territories rice economy. For the fertile and accessible parts of the area there was compensation, because the influx of refugees from civil war in China

created a great demand for market garden produce, and the land was turned over to vegetable farming instead of rice. But for the remote villages there was no such good fortune — on the one hand, rice-growing was uneconomic, and on the other, difficulty of communication meant that vegetables could not be moved quickly enough to arrive fresh at the urban markets.

The situation was saved by the growth in demand for exotic food in Britain and Western Europe. Men moved overnight from the now worthless fields to staff Chinese restaurants and take-aways 11,000 kilometres away. It seemed a familiar pattern: the women and children remained behind to live on remittances from abroad, and the men worked hard for long years in hope of earning enough eventually to retire back to their villages in easy circumstances. But the old pattern was broken. By the early 1970s Hong Kong had passed through the turmoil caused by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, and uncertainty as to the future began to assail the emigrants.

More important than this was the effect of revised United Kingdom immigration regulations. It became more and more difficult for the men to get into Britain, their Hong Kong passports no longer giving right of entry; and to acquire the hands needed to staff the expanding restaurants was almost impossible. It was still possible, though, to bring wives and dependents over, and they could act as extra help for the restaurants. So there are now many New Territories families living in Europe, and there are few schools in Britain without a sprinkling of Chinese faces in the playground.

The effect on some parts of the New Territories is visible in the photograph: whole villages lie deserted. Others are only sparsely populated, and smart new houses paid for by remittances from abroad stand empty — perhaps until they crumble. For Goldsmith's villagers there was no hope:

E'en now, methinks, as pond'ring here I stand,
I see the rural virtues leave the land:
Down where yon anchoring vessel spreads the sail,
That idly waiting flaps with every gale,
Downward they move, a melancholy band,
Pass from the shore, and darken all the strand.

My picture is not quite so bleak — I spy a stack of new bricks in front of the ruins.



Ceremonies have many functions. They provide relief from the tedium of everyday life, they give added weight to important events, they direct emotions into socially acceptable channels and so ease the trauma of life's major changes. But by their very nature they tend to disguise true feelings.

Because all brides wail and cry at their weddings it is hard to tell which of them are genuinely afraid of the great change which is happening to them. Because everyone tries to pay the bill at the end of the restaurant meal it is sometimes difficult to know who really wants to play host. And since all mourners at funerals look grief-stricken and incapable of coherent speech or steady walking, how is one to evaluate the sincerity of their grief?

I took this photograph at a New Territories funeral in 1963. An intrusion on privacy? No, not at all: I was asked to bring my camera along, because this was an expensive and quite elaborate funeral, and there was much pride taken in it. It felt different from other funerals I had been to. There were the same wailing mourners, the same offerings, the same procedures, but throbbing underneath it all a very real feeling of grief and bereavement. The woman who had died was going to be missed badly. Here some of her many

friends and neighbours can be seen burning candles, incense and money for her soul's use.

How could there be such depth of feeling for a mere woman? After all, women have traditionally been of no account in Chinese society, haven't they? This kind of question is very hard to answer because there are different levels to it. Theoretically women were considered inferior and of little importance. Practically there could not but be recognition of their value.

According to the accepted notions, women were subject to the "Three Subserviences" (*saam-chung* 三從). When they were unmarried they were to obey their fathers, when married their husbands, and when widowed their sons. That way they were "minors" all their lives.

Everything seemed to be set against them. Where boys would be educated wherever possible, very few girls received any schooling at all, even wealthy families often preferring to keep their daughters in innocent and illiterate ignorance. On marriage the girl was uprooted from her home village and deposited amongst strangers to start painfully building up confidence and relationships from scratch.

In most cases she had not been chosen for herself, but rather as a hostage to relationships between the two families, a kind of bonding agent, not a personality. Probably nothing better illustrates this than the institution of "ghost marriage". When a couple were betrothed but the man died before marriage, it was possible to marry the girl to his ghost, and the marriage was just as valid as if he had been alive. The object was to provide a woman to care for his parents, to give effect to the planned alliance between the two families, and to adopt a son in order to carry on the family line: the girl's feelings were not necessarily consulted at all.

Ritually women were also inferior. Ancestor worship, the most important element in the Chinese religious system, operated on the basis of male relationships. Only a son could properly continue the ancestral line and perform the ancestral sacrifices. A daughter was merely a temporary member of the family "ancestral church", leaving it on marriage to become a member of her husband's church.

A man who died unmarried or without an heir had a reasonable chance of being worshipped as an ancestor either by his brother's descendants or perhaps by sons adopted posthumously to his name. The soul of a woman

who died unmarried was very rarely catered for in this way, so that she died with little comfort.

A woman could be divorced for any one of seven reasons: barrenness, wanton conduct, neglect of parents-in-law, talking too much, theft, jealousy and ill-will, incurable disease. But she could not divorce her husband.

A man could take concubines (if he could afford to), but a woman could not have more than one husband, and generally even widows were discouraged from remarrying.

Men could go out into the world, sit for examinations in order to get into the bureaucracy and have a say in the affairs of the state. Women were expected to remain at home and concern themselves with family matters, and for hundreds of years many women had their feet bound with such severity that movement outside the home was almost impossible anyway. Underprivileged in law, and with every cultural and social encouragement to be meek and submissive, the lot of women did indeed seem harsh.

Yet in practice it is not possible to legislate against women having strong personalities or being clever or able. Nor can cultural precept prevent sons from coming under the control of forceful or much loved mothers, or husbands from becoming enamoured of their wives. And hen-pecked Chinese husbands were not by any means unknown.

The real position of women could be very different from the theoretical one. As a woman got older and became established as the mother of a family and controller of her own household, so her influence could grow. In poor families (that is, in the majority of families) the woman often had to help in the fields or the family business, and her voice was more likely to be heard in the management of affairs.

Human nature ensured that women could be respected, loved, listened to, and even obeyed, despite the loading of the cultural dice against them.



Eskimos, it is said, have more than ten different words for which the only English equivalent is “white”. Their language is shaped by the demands of their environment.

In much the same way, the Chinese have an enormous vocabulary for what the English just call “rice” or “paddy” (and the latter is itself a borrowing from Malay). The all-purpose word for rice is *mai* (米), but cooked rice is called *faan* (飯), rice cooked into porridge (congee) is known as *juk* (粥), rice harvested but unhusked is *guk* (穀), and so on.

The cradle of Chinese civilization was in the north, in the basin of the Yellow River, and the first grains domesticated seem to have been types of millet. But southward feelers soon gave knowledge of rice, and it has probably been used by the Chinese since at least 2000 B.C.

In Central and South China it has always been the staple crop, and the New Territories were no exception. In 1940, before the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, over 70% of the cultivated land was under rice; and in 1960 rice still had more than half the New Territories acreage. But very soon after that

rice farming went into decline, and it is now a thing of the past. Many young people in Hong Kong have grown up without seeing the colourful spectacle of the crop growing.

Around February the rice seeds were first soaked in water, then sown thickly in nursery beds. At the end of March they were planted out in the flooded fields, little clumps of vivid green seedlings in orderly rows. As they grew, the countryside changed from the silver of sun on water to a uniform rich green. By the end of June the crop was a warm gold and ready for harvesting.

The photograph shows the traditional local method of threshing. The rice was cut by hand, and then bundle by bundle beaten onto a sieve placed over a wooden tub. Any flying grains would bounce off the matting screen and fall down into the tub.

The harvested rice would be winnowed by tossing it into the air for the wind to blow out the chaff. Then it was spread out to dry in the sun on the flat pounded-earth pads which fronted every village.

The rice straw was taken back to the village to be stacked for use as fuel for cooking, for weaving matting, for sandals, and for much else besides.

The New Territories land could produce two good crops of rice a year, the second one being harvested in October. The Lam Tsuen Valley, north of Tai Po, often grew three crops. Peplow and Barker reported in 1931 that:

The rice from Shatin Valley was reputed to be the finest in China, and was sent as part of the annual tribute to the Emperor in Peiping. Now the crop is sent to Hong Kong for export as it fetches a higher price abroad than the Chinese will pay locally.¹⁸⁶

The phrase “sent to Hong Kong” conjures up a picture of Sha Tin as a remote country area — as indeed it then was. Now, with the road tunnels, the electrified double-tracked railway, and the marching tide of concrete and brick, Sha Tin is neither remote nor agricultural.

It is not size of grain or purity of colour which sway people in their judgement of rice: it is flavour. A period of eighteen months on a rice diet living in a New Territories village was more than enough to convince me that rice can have flavour. The beauty of it is that it can be so distinctively flavoured and yet still be bland enough to go with any other food.

There are many different varieties of rice, some of them very specialized. For instance, not all types need to be grown in flooded fields: some can grow at

high altitudes in quite dry conditions. In the north-west of the New Territories, brackish water paddy thrive on soil too salty to support most other varieties.

Glutinous rices (*loh-mai* 糯米), the sweetish, sticky types, are not normally used as a daily food, but they have a large number of applications. Here are some from Samuel Couling's *Encyclopaedia Sinica*:

Glutinous-rice dumplings are made at the time of the Fifth Moon Feast and consumed in large quantities. Puffed rice is eaten by persons with weak digestions, and sweetmeats are also made from this rice; it is used in diarrhoea, in the shape of a congee, as a diuretic in fevers, and cakes of it fried in camel fat are used for haemorrhoids. The rice flowers are used as dentifrice, the stalk is recommended for biliousness, and its ash for the treatment of wounds and discharges.¹⁸⁷

The size of fields in the New Territories used to be calculated in terms of the number of measures of rice-seed it took to sow them. And rent for agricultural land was always payable in rice, even where other crops were being grown on it.



When Britain obtained the cession of Hong Kong Island under the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, she took over what Lord Palmerston the Foreign Secretary called “a barren island with hardly a house upon it”. At that time the majority of the population of Hong Kong (approximately 5,000 people) lived on boats, with a few land-dwellers subsisting on the isolated patches of cultivable soil. They were all, probably, Cantonese speakers.

In 1898 the 99-year lease of the New Territories was signed, and a large settled population came under British rule. They were not all of one type however. The most fertile areas were inhabited by the comparatively wealthy, largely Cantonese-speaking Punti people. “Punti” is merely a romanized version of the Cantonese term *boon-dei* (本地) meaning “indigenous” or “local”. Generally less well off were the Hakka people, who occupied much of the eastern, more mountainous side of the New Territories, especially the Tai Po, Sha Tau Kok and Sai Kung areas. “Hakka” is from the Cantonese *haak-ga* (客家), and means “guest families”, implying that they came later than the Punti, as indeed they did. The Hakka speak a form of Chinese quite different from Cantonese.

A third group were the so-called “Tanka”, a name derived from the derogatory *daan-ga* (蛋家) “egg families”, which the Cantonese call those who live on boats. They speak Cantonese and reject the name Tanka, calling themselves *sui-seung-yan* (水上人 “people who live on the water”). Finally there were the “Hoklo” (福佬), boat dwellers and fishermen who originated from Fujian province and still spoke their native language.

The British lost no time in setting up their own society, and they created exclusive clubs which at once shut out the majority of people by whom they were surrounded, and gave solace to the homesick exile.

But there were Chinese exiles in Hong Kong too. The Colony’s special status attracted businessmen and refugees from other parts of China, and the languages and customs of the Cantonese, the Hakka and the boat peoples were almost as foreign to them as they were to the Europeans. Like the Westerners they began to organize themselves into clubs. The model for the clubs was the *wooi-gwoon* (會館 *hui-guan* in Mandarin), a kind of official hostel. Ho Ping-ti says that:

From the early sixteenth century on there gradually arose the custom for various provinces, large prefectures, sometimes even counties, to establish in the nation’s capital *hui-kuan*, or hostels for native sons who came to Peking to take the metropolitan examination From the richly documented history of Fukien hostels in Peking we learn that as early as the Cheng-te period (1506–21) the hostel of Fu-chou Prefecture accommodated not only candidates from home districts but also native officials in need of temporary lodging in the national capital.¹⁶⁸

Before long the hostels broadened their usefulness, and merchants trading at the capital would find accommodation in the *wooi-gwoon* of their native place, and some even had displays of their goods set up there.

Nor were the hostels confined to the capital: they were found convenient in other cities too. And when the poor of coastal China left the homeland to seek (and sometimes make) their fortunes in the countries of Southeast Asia and later in North America, Australia and Europe, the same principle of organization went with them. The Chinese in Cambodia, for instance, subscribed to *wooi-gwoon* on the basis of language. There was a Cantonese one, a Hakka one, a Chiu Jau (Chaozhou) one, a Hainanese one, and a Hokkien (Fujian) one. Of course they were no longer official or even semi-official institutions. Rather they were organizations for bringing together in a strange

and often hostile land men who spoke the same language and who felt able to trust each other and co-operate for their common welfare on that basis. The *wooi-gwoon* looked after temples, cemeteries, hospitals and schools, mediated disputes between their members, and in some cases cared for the poor and sick as well.

Similar organizations called *tung-heung-wooi* (同鄉會 “same homeland associations”) were common. Usually they united men from a particular county or district, and again they were a home from home for the exile. Sometimes they were in effect subdivisions of *wooi-gwoon*.

The floods of self-exiled Chinese who have made Hong Kong their home have maintained their cultural and linguistic identity through clubs and associations which seem to be named *wooi-gwoon* or *tung-heung-wooi* quite indiscriminately. As well as running schools, burial societies, and other serious activities, the associations are much concerned with leisure and recreation. Here side by side on the waterfront of Peng Chau Island near Lantau stand the weekend rest houses of the Chiu Jau Woi Gwoon (潮州會館) (left) and the Wai Jau Tung Heung Woi (惠州同鄉會) (right).

And a very nice place to escape from the noise and frenzy of the city it is too. The inhabitants are a mixture of Punti, Hakka and Hoklo, but they don't seem to resent the advent of these “foreigners”.



In the 1960s I visited Tokyo. Its temples and formal gardens had a beauty of quietness and simplicity which appealed to me where the clash and clutter of the Hong Kong equivalents had always vaguely disappointed. Yet the greater part of Tokyo I thought excessively ugly, and when I tried to work out why, I decided there were three reasons: the drab colours, the dust, and the wires which criss-crossed everywhere.

Never had I seen such a mess of wires and lines — until I took a trip to the little island of Peng Chau (坪洲) to the east of Lantau. This photograph hardly does justice to the cat's cradle which sat over the shacks and small factories in the northern part of the island. Couldn't help feeling that there had to be awful problems with crossed wires — pick up the phone and next-door's television was switched on, that kind of thing.

Cantonese people are always talking about crossed wires (*chi-sin* 繚綫), not because of this scene, but because it is a slang term for “crazy” or “silly”, rather like “having a screw loose” in English.

The Cantonese language of Hong Kong is as rich as a language could be, compounded of classical Chinese, modern standard Chinese, rapidly changing

slang, and English words all mixed in with the ancient forms of basic Cantonese. Colourful expressions spill from Hong Kong mouths in torrents, dazzling the ear — and muddling the senses, if that last phrase is any evidence!

The man who walks too slowly is accused of “trampling ants to death” (*yaai-sei-ngai* 踹死蟻); a jealous person is said to have “sipped vinegar” (*haap-cho* 呷醋); a naughty child is in danger of being smacked on his “moon festival” (*baat-yuet sap-ng* 八月十五), that is, on the full round part of his anatomy. “Chicken stealing” (*tau-gai* 偷雞) is “playing truant”; if you’ve “dropped anchor” (*paau-naau* 拋錨) your car has broken down at the roadside; “kicking legs everywhere” (*tek-saai-geuk* 踢晒腳) means “crowded to bursting”, and comes apparently from restaurant waiters’ slang.

Then there is a kind of speech which is very reminiscent of cockney rhyming slang, where “I’m going up the apples” can only be understood by someone who knows that the words “and pears” which give the rhyme-clue to the intended word “stairs” have been dropped. Similarly, when a Cantonese says he has been eating “three and six” (*saam-luk* 三六) it doesn’t make sense unless you know that three and six make “nine” (*gau* 九), and that *gau* sounds like the word for “dog” (*gau* 狗). It is only when it is eaten that dog is called *saam-luk*, presumably because the term evolved as a secret code designed to prevent outsiders knowing about an illegal activity. Nowadays, as with “apples”, the expression has passed into everyday speech.

Another of these “double puns” is “Japanese ship” (*yat-boon-suen* 日本船). It turns on the fact that all Japanese ship names, however long, end with the word *maru* (丸 read *yuen* in Cantonese). So “Japanese ship” stands for “sooner or later comes *maru*” (*chi-jo-yuen* 遲早丸), and *yuen* sounds like the word “finished” (*yuen* 完) the intended meaning being “sooner or later he’ll come to a sticky end”. “Japanese ship” is the kind of thing you call a maniac motor-cyclist or anyone else embarked on a foolhardy course.

Not content with this already complex punning system, Hong Kong’s linguistic innovators have turned to English to make it more complicated still. “What was the movie like?” you ask someone. “Foreign devil’s moon-cake” he replies, and you know he didn’t like it. “Foreign devil’s moon-cake” (*faan-gwai-lo-yuet-beng* 番鬼佬月餅) is to be understood as “*yuet-beng* in a foreign language”, that is, the English word “moon-cake”. Now “moon-cake” sounds rather like the Cantonese *moon-gik* (悶極) which means “extremely boring”,

and that is what you are intended to understand. From Cantonese into English and back again, all in one unspoken leap.

With such deliberate ingenuity it is hardly surprising that in moments of stress Cantonese speakers can produce startling originality of English expression, and nowhere does that show more clearly than in examination scripts.

Here are some of the things I have learned from candidates about family life. For instance, "I was a child when I was young"; "The members of the family were related to each other"; "My grandmother gave birth to thirteen children all together"; "Today she still a young girl, but after a night she was become a well-used housewife"; and the subtle variant phrase "next-of-skins".

On the subject of warfare I have found out that another name for a battle-field is a "bottle-flied", and that a chariot can be known as a "fighting carrot". "Rapering of women should be excuated," said one candidate sternly. "One way of fighting a batter is to surround it and fight with it," said another. The Qing dynasty depended for its defence on "the green ballet troops" I was assured, but maybe that wasn't so odd, because "Communication in the military department was mainly by horses and lettered pigeon."

Descriptive prose brings out great originality. Who would not be moved by: "The sky was as white as the dosal side of the fish's thrunk"? or "The cock is cocking happily at the back of the house, the hans hooting with happlies"? or "They were suffered from femine, and the cold weather was like a piece of wipe which was wipping on their back"? How much more colourful than "They left home sadly" is "They bring their eye-water leaving out their own village"! And one of them, indeed, was "sprinking his eyelash", poor chap! Another was "frightened and begin to shinking his body and creaming".

I could go on, but this article is becoming more and more chi-sin, so I now declare it and this book "copse and spinney — *fini*" (as a French cockney would say) or, as a Cantonese born within the sound of Bow Bells might insist, "stewed prune" *yuen*.

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Endnotes

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Further Reading

For the reader who would like to go deeper into topics touched on in this book, details of all the works quoted are in the endnotes. Some of them will not be generally accessible, but the following titles (including some not quoted from in the text) should be readily available in bookshops or libraries, either in the original editions shown or in later reprints, and some may be found in paperback editions.

Art and Symbolism

WILLIAMS, C. A. S., *Outline of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motives*, Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1941.

Alphabetically arranged brief entries on many aspects of Chinese culture.

Culture and Tradition

BALL, J. Dyer, *Things Chinese: Or Notes Connected with China*, Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1892.

An alphabetically ordered potpourri of short articles covering many different aspects of Chinese life and culture. Numerous reprints and revised editions mean that this book can easily be found.

COULING, Samuel, *The Encyclopaedia Sinica*, Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1917.

An encyclopaedic treatment of China, not covering all the same ground as Dyer Ball, and having further reading guides at the end of each article.

DE BARY, W. T., et al. (eds.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.

A large collection of translations from Chinese works, introduced and ordered so as to show the pattern of China's cultural development.

JOHNSTON, R. F., *Lion and Dragon in Northern China*, London: John Murray, 1910.

The author's memoir of his administration of the territory of Weihaiwei in Shandong, leased to Britain in the same year as the New Territories. Johnston later became tutor to Puyi, the last Emperor of China.

WILLIAMS, S. Wells, *The Middle Kingdom*, 2 vols., New York: Scribners, 1913.

One of a number of perceptive and knowledgeable general surveys of Chinese culture and society by missionaries working in China.

Family and Clan

BAKER, Hugh D. R., *Chinese Family and Kinship*, London: Macmillan, 1979.

An introduction to the Chinese family in all its forms, with a long chapter on ancestor worship.

Food

ANDERSEN, E. N., *The Food of China*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

A lavish treatment of the development of food culture in China, with consideration of diet, production, regional differences, and cuisine.

History

FITZGERALD, C. P., *China: A Short Cultural History*, London: The Cresset Press, 1935.

Not recent and definitely not short (624 pages), but beautifully written and well illustrated.

McALEAVY, Henry, *The Modern History of China*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967.

Very readable and informative account of China's history since the mid-19th century.

WILKINSON, Endymion, *Chinese History: A Manual*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000.

A masterly survey of Chinese history with comprehensive reading lists throughout. This book can point you in almost any direction you want to go.

Hong Kong

MORRIS, Jan, *Hong Kong, Xianggang*, London: Viking, 1988.

A racy review of Hong Kong's history and a serious attempt to capture its spirit and motivations in the years before the 1997 handover.

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BAKER, Hugh, and HO Pui Kei, *Complete Cantonese*, London: Hodder Headline, 2010.

A Teach Yourself course for those who want to get the most out of meeting Chinese people in Hong Kong.

NEWNHAM, Richard, *About Chinese*, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971.

A clear introduction to both spoken and written Chinese.

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SMITH, Arthur H., *Chinese Characteristics*, New York: Revell, 1900.

A *tour de force* of analysis of the nature of the Chinese, revealing its missionary author as at once scornful and admiring, besotted and irritated by the people amongst whom he lived for nearly three decades.

LIN Yutang, *My Country and My People*, London: Heinemann, 1936.

A bestseller over many years, this self-analysis of his people by a Chinese makes a nice complement to Arthur Smith's outsider's view.

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BURKHARDT, V. R., *Chinese Creeds and Customs*, 3 vols., Hong Kong: SCMP, 1953–1958.

A kaleidoscopic collection of articles illustrated by the author's own sketches and colour plates, and dealing principally with the religious practices of the boat people of Hong Kong.

DE GROOT, J. J. M., *The Religious System of China*, 6 vols., Leyden: Brill, 1892–1910.

A monumental work on all manner of religious beliefs and practices, with the Chinese sources being fully quoted, so that authenticity can be tested.

LAW, Joan, and WARD, Barbara E., *Chinese Festivals in Hong Kong*, Hong Kong: SCMP, 1982.

A month by month guide to the festivals of the year, with many colour photographs.

SMITH, D. Howard, *Chinese Religions*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968.

A clear account of the main religions of China, though it has little to say on popular religion.

The New Territories

COATES, Austin, *Myself a Mandarin*, London: Frederick Muller, 1968.

The highly entertaining memoirs of a New Territories Special Magistrate in the 1950s.

HASE, Patrick H., *The Six-Day War of 1899: Hong Kong in the Age of Imperialism*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008.

A blow-by-blow account of the resistance put up by local people when the British raised the flag in the leased "New Territory".

HAYES, James, *The Rural Communities of Hong Kong: Studies and Themes*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1983.

A collection of seventeen essays on various themes from an experienced and knowledgeable officer of the Hong Kong Government.

Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong, 1961–.

A mine of information on local life and history. The society (address: GPO Box 3864, Hong Kong) remains very active, organizing public lectures and field visits, and publishing books as well as the annual *Journal*.

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