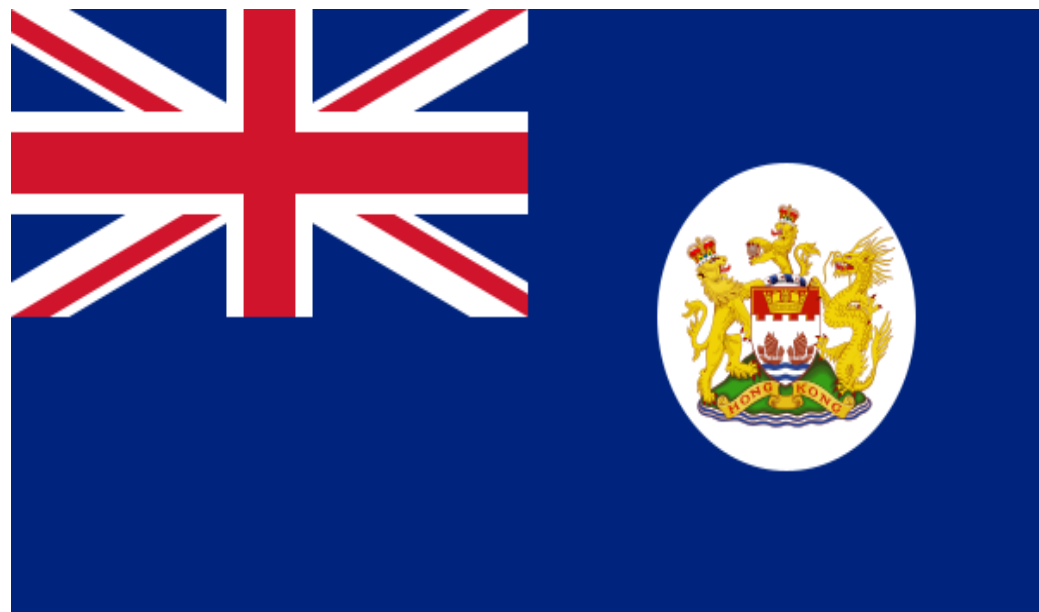


## 二十六

Thirty-one hours later  
touched down in Hong Kong  
stepped into a steam bath  
but moved right along  
we rode the Star Ferry  
looked dapper and chic  
ate dim sum, drank Po-lay  
and trammed to the Peak



## Chapter 26 – The British Colony of Hong Kong

No one who ever landed at Hong Kong's Kai Tak airport, in the heart of Kowloon, ever forgot the experience. There are tons of photos from planes landing that captured clothes hanging outside windows and on balconies of Kowloon high rises and some passengers claimed they could watch TV shows through the open doors behind the balconies. There was only one short runway built on "reclaimed land" in Victoria Harbour just south of Kwun Tung. Some say that the reason there were never any serious mishaps were that pilots were just too scared coming in.

June is a muggy month in Hong Kong. Coming off a 15 hour flight from Los Angeles, six high school students from Tulsa stepped into a steam bath of exhaustion and energy. A part of all of us just wanted a shower and a bed, but another part wanted to drop our stuff off and explore. Air conditioning wasn't as ubiquitous then as it is now in Hong Kong so heat and jet-lag won out and it was on to the New World Hotel. For many of the kids, jet lag was a new experience. After all, it was sixteen hours earlier in Tulsa than it was in Hong Kong and none of our bodies or minds knew quite what to make of that.

In the early 1980's, Hong Kong harbour was wider. Kellett Island, home of the Hong Kong Yacht Club, had only been connected to Hong Kong Island since 1969. There was no peninsula where the Hong Kong Convention Centre now resides. The first cross-harbour tunnel had only opened 10 years earlier. The Fleet Club at Fenwick Pier had a McDonalds sitting right on the harbour where American sailors passing by could stop off and have a draft beer. The Star Ferry terminal sat next door to the main post office in Central. And one could have tea on the first floor of the Peninsula Hotel with an unobstructed view of Hong Kong harbour. They call what's happened in Hong Kong harbour "land reclamation," but I always wondered how land that was never land before could have been reclaimed.

Those were the days of really cheap public transportation. Double decker trams cost 10 cents for an hour long ride from Shaukeiwan to Western District. The Peak Tram was still going strong ever since opening up in the 1890's. Taxi's dropped their flags at \$2. The Star Ferry cost 10 cents for the lower deck and 20 cents for the upper, and there were always rickshaw drivers standing right outside the Star Ferry to run you in, around, and through Central and Wanchai. For some reason, "Morning Star" was the ferry every kid wanted to ride. Anybody smoked cigarettes whenever and wherever they wanted, and that included on all forms of transportation.

Hong Kong has always had the best Dim Sum in the world and it didn't disappoint. Our kids from Tulsa had their first taste of Cha Shao Bao (叉烧包 chā shāo bāo,) Siu Mai (燒賣 shāo mài,) Har Gao (蝦餃 xiā jiǎo,) Chicken Feet (鳳爪 fèng zhǎo,) Spring Rolls (春捲

chūn juàn), Turnip Cakes (蘿蔔糕 luóbo gāo,) Spareribs with Black Beans (豉汁蒸排骨 chǐ zhī zhēng páigǔ) – which were just the tip of the iceberg. And all washed down with Jasmine tea (茉莉花茶 mòlihuā chá), or Pu-Erh aka Polay tea (普洱茶 pǔ'ěr chá.) And they did it the old fashioned way. Food carts wove among the tables, stopping whenever anyone asked, waiters and waitresses placed the saucer sized plates and mini-bamboo baskets filled with Ma Lai Gao (馬來糕 mǎlái gāo) and metal plates with covers heaped with changfen (腸粉 chángfěn .) At the end of the meal, the cost was tabulated by counting the number of plates and baskets on the table (most plates costing less than one US dollar). The literal translation of “Dim Sum” 點心 diǎnxīn is “a little bit of heart”. Whenever and wherever in the world I eat dim sum today it always takes me back to Hong Kong. Maybe it really is “a little bit of heart.

