

CHAPTER 22

EPILOGUE – TWILIGHT OF THE NINE DRAGONS MIDNIGHT 30 JUNE 1997

Soon to die
Yet noisier than ever:
The autumn cicada.
Shiki Masaoka (1867-1902)

How do I finish this story – this my story of Kai Tak Airport – *Airport of the Nine Dragons*? I could continue recording seemingly trivial details of plane accidents, of promotions and changes in the Civil Aviation Department. Of the comings and goings of flight and ground crews and the people who brought life to the lifeless concrete of the runway and buildings that are the Kai Tak complex. The current role of the RAF's Wessex helicopters based at Sek Kong. Of the Royal Hong Kong Auxiliary Air Force (RHKAAF) that became the Government Flying Service (GFS) in May 1993. Of the planes that used and will use Kai Tak until replaced by Chek Lap Kok. Of Chek Lap Kok's mines that produced the marble for the old Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank. Without hesitation I concede these are essential to the future historian. Yet, unashamedly, I record that my days of flying excitement and exhilaration ended with the closure of the old runways at Kai Tak.

I picture myself inching through Lei Yue Mun Pass in rain so heavy the wipers lacked effect. Then throwing open the storm window and rain needles boring into my straining eyes – my uniform shirt thoroughly soaked. Of crabbing *Betsy* to see ahead and dodging flag-masted junks.

I picture myself screeching around a circuit – a circuit existing mainly in my memory – of ghostly buildings that somehow avoided my banked wings. Then a hill-top cemetery flashing by and of smiling in the knowledge that *final* resting place put me on *final* approach. Of touching down on a water-saturated runway and hitting the brakes, hoping that slight reduction in speed was not just imagination. Then taxiing to the Terminal's tarmac, that

tarmac an unbroken sheet of water, exhilarated at again outwitting the most dangerous and exacting airport in the world.

These are not alone my memories – most pilots of the day tell the same stories – doubtless better than have I.

With such memories it is anticlimactic to go on so I close with my thoughts for Hong Kong's future – of the Colony I love – and where I found my true love.

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*Study the past,
as Confucius once said,
if you would divine the future.*

In the era under British control Hong Kong has had many splendid governors. Though they primarily forwarded the interests of the great Hong they never forgot the small person. As the *sands-run-out* for this hustling Colony we see Britain reverting to a bellicose style of government – a feature of its birth.

In recent years we have witnessed anomalous mistakes made by experienced persons of State. In 1982, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, buoyant from her Falkland Island triumphs, visited the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping. Her forceful assertions of British Hong Kong's rights, based on the treaties, annoyed Deng to where he went into a rage. The *Iron Lady's* trip to Beijing was a disaster!

A decade later the appointment of the untitled Governor Christopher Patten did nothing to placate Beijing. His forthright attitude seems *patterned* on the Thatcher style. Governor Patten's qualifications lacked diplomatic experience. He was Party Chairman of the ruling Tories then lost his seat in Parliament. There is a name for this type of appointment – *jobs for the boys*.

The pending hand-over brings many questions to mind! Does the hand-over include records held by Immigration, Customs, Internal Revenue, Police, Judiciary, and Corporate Affairs? Many of these will be of a sensitive nature. Will we witness frantic shredding and *Providential* computer power spikes – the methods of *mislaying* such information?

Without doubt, Beijing will continue welcoming foreign business, but the stability of a British-governed Hong Kong as a spring-board will be lost. The attraction for investment and expatriates is Hong Kong's miniscule flat-rate of income tax. Surely, it is unrealistic to think this will continue? Will Hong Kong's extravagant self-serving life style, where money is the yard-stick of the successful, change? Almost a certainty!

China's investments in Hong Kong are immense. Taiwan also holds vast investments on the mainland and in Hong Kong. Whereas Taiwan's investments are for a quick profit, China's investments seem more a calming prelude to the main-event. Surely, the pending hand-over already makes them the titular owner of Hong Kong and all it surveys. This, therefore, seems to suggest that Beijing wants to avoid inheriting another Shanghai-style *ghost city*.

It is true that many locals now direct top tiers of government. Chinese they are, yet has there been serious consultation with Beijing of their future acceptability? The recent democratic elections show an inability to read the mood of the Central Government and thus an exercise in futility. It is not difficult to forecast the fate of those autonomous electees.

Yet, my concern is with the person-in-the-street. The rich local, whose stated aim is to stay in the Colony when it reverts to China, is piss and wind. Most of them have *bolt-holes* and property holdings in foreign countries. With their monetary resources any hint of

trouble will see them disappear like *will-of-the-wisps*. The small person spoiled by a capitalistic outlook will be left holding the bag. It will be a bag brimming with heartburn and pain. Still, the hardworking Chinese adjust and time will see their survival.

I believe Hong Kong's reversion to China will mark the end of a standard of living that rivals and, often, surpasses the great democracies. If Beijing allows democracy to return it will be of Chinese style – not Western. We saw this happen when they chose the socialist path and developed their style of Communism. The Communism of China retained few similarities to the Communism of the Russians.

Finally, one must not overlook the strong Nationalist presence in Hong Kong. I speculate as that 1997 date nears they will begin to cause disruptions. Then world opinion may excuse China's occupational military *over-kill* – for that, I expect, will happen!

The BEGINNING of troubled times.