

Retirement years: 2000+

This part of my life is based on information in the diaries I wrote in my diaries for each year. To find out what happened on specific days, refer to these diaries.

Retirement begins

I reached the age of 60 on March 26th, 2000. As 60 is the normal retirement age in Hong Kong, my official working life came to an end at the end of the academic year on July 31st, 2000. I moved out of the campus flat on August 1st to go to the suite in Harbour Plaza Resort City in Tin Shui Wai. We had been living in the flat on the university campus since returning from Stanford in 1985. I remember the last hours in the flat quite well. I woke up after a typical sleep and threw out the remaining curtains, duvet, sheet and carpets. Last check; still found a few things behind beds, etc. Took one to two hours to actually get ready to leave. Because it was raining, I had to wait for a break in the weather. While doing so, I kept walking from room to room around the now-empty flat, thinking.



I left the flat at 11:30 am just as workmen arrived to remove the air conditioners (everything else had already been removed). I walked to the railway station lugging a heavy load - two bags and a large plastic bag including a portable radio. Got to the Tin Shui Wai apartments at about 1:30 pm. Checked in. Paid \$600 for the Internet connection. I then spent the rest of the day connecting the computer and sorting things out. In the early evening, I went to the supermarket (in the same building complex) then came back and cooked dinner in the kitchenette in the suite. To bed quite late. A number of repairs were needed in the suite including the air-conditioning; a second visit by the engineers found the thermostat needed repairing. (I had wondered why it was so hot during the night even though the thermostat was set low.)

Harbour Plaza Resort City (HPRC)

HPRC is in Tin Shui Wai, close to the border with China and about 45 minutes drive from Tsim Sha Tsui. It is primarily a satellite



dormitory city. Most working people there have to travel into Kowloon or to Hong Kong

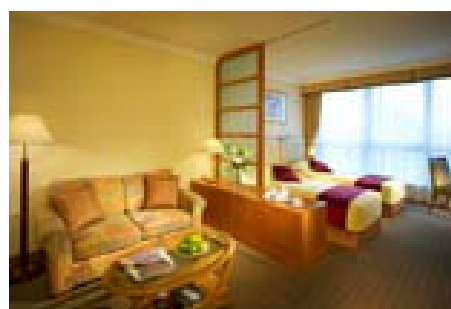
Island as there are few offices, etc. here. Tin Shui Wai is a mix of middle-class and low-cost housing estates. The border with China used to be visible between buildings (on non-polluted days!). It also has the moniker 'sad city' as there are quite a number of migrants from China living here who have nothing to do. As a result, the suicide rate has been quite high.

HPRC opened on November 1st, 1999. There are two buildings, one a regular hotel (right, in photo above) and the other consisting of serviced suites (left, in photo above). All rooms can all be used for either purpose if necessary. I moved in nine months after it opened and stayed for nearly 12 years, moving out in 2012. I was therefore probably the longest-staying guest. In fact, my stay here is the second longest of any stay in my life in one location, with only the post-Stanford years at the CUHK flat at 15 years being longer (even longer than anywhere I lived in New Zealand).

For my purposes, staying here was very convenient. Most of my post-retirement work - writing textbook - could be done on my computer. The hotel also provided shuttle buses to Tsim Sha Tsui and the airport (need to pay) and nearby facilities included banks, a supermarket (Park 'n Shop), a public library as well as shops and restaurants. I had no car and it was not really necessary to have one because of working there and the provision of shuttle buses and good public transport.

I moved out in 2012 only because the rent was substantially increased as the hotel wanted to cash in on the lucrative business of catering for tourists from China. As they raised the daily rate, the monthly rate, in turn, had also to be raised. My rent would have gone up from \$9 600 per month to about \$16 000 per month had I stayed. (See below.)

The facilities in the suites were very good for long-term stays. Most suites are of the size of the suite I had, with a few smaller and larger available. Guests included individuals, couples and even families (sometimes in two suites that are connected). The suite is one large area separated by a sliding glass partition into a sleeping area and a living area. There is also a kitchenette with sufficient facilities for cooking and storage. A refrigerator and microwave oven are included, but no washing machine. The living area consists of a dining table, a sofa that can be converted into a double bed (used when guests stayed), plenty of cupboard space and a TV. (Food of course is not included.) As the the whole building has



internal air-conditioning, I never had to suffer through the sweltering summers. The bathroom is rather luxurious and quite spacious. Linen and a three times a week cleaning service are provided. All this is included in the rent. In the last year, Internet connections with a router

were added by the hotel for an extra \$100 a month, which meant that guests then did not have to arrange for their own connections. (Looking back, this was probably an indication that they were getting prepared for daily visitors.) A minor change was that in 2004, the door keys were changed from actual keys to card keys. In the lobby there were also several computers connected to the Internet which guests could use; one was dedicated to the (many) Cathay Pacific Airways cabin staff who stayed here.

Every year, at mid-autumn festival, the hotel would put on a free buffet for long-term guests for their 'loyalty'. The food was never as good as at a normal hotel buffet but still not bad. This was held for most at the years at the poolside, but later in the hotel lobby because rain sometimes affected the outdoors event. The 'price' of attending was some packaged or canned food that would then be distributed to a charity. On new-year's day, they would also put on a free brunch. I only ever went to one of these and that was in 2002 with Leonie, when she was here. At Christmas time, there would always be a tree in the lobby under which we could place gifts to be distributed to charities.

On Christmas eve 2002, a local primary school girls' choir was in the foyer in the evening; I listened to it for a while. (Nadine seems to have been here at that time too - pictured.)



One thing that irritated me in the suite was that cigarette smoke from other suites would come through the ventilation duct in the bathroom and then spread to the rest of the suite. The smoke could be removed by turning on the extraction fan, though it was nosy and also I did not want to leave it on for a long time, especially if I was not there. Eventually, I got the management to turn on the extraction fans on the roof of the building, which also worked, though a slight noise could always be heard.

Rents: Until the increase in 2012, rents were only about one-third of those in serviced suited in the business districts on Hong Kong. People who had to work in those areas would not have liked the longish daily commutes from Tin Shui Wai. Rents varied according to market conditions and were relatively low for several years (particularly in those years when Hong Kong was being affected by various epidemics such as SARS in 2003) but started increasing again in recent years. The approximate monthly rents I paid over the years are as follows (vary slightly depending on actual term of the leases):

2000-2001: \$6 850

2001-2003: \$7 100

2003-2008: \$6 500

2008-2009: \$7 900

2009-2010: \$7 100

2010-2011: \$8 700

2011-2012: \$9 600

This gives an average over the whole time in HPRC of about \$7 238 per month. This compares with the \$7 700 I paid on first moving to the flat (which did not include utilities, though this is surprisingly low).

Gymnasium and pool: Because I regard physical exercise as important, the hotel gymnasium and swimming pool were an important part of my life here. The gym is the best I have ever used - large, many aerobic machines (treadmills, rowing machines, cycling machines, step-up machines and cross-



trainers), many stand-alone *weight* machines, an area for aerobic classes (in photo below, but never used for this purpose!) as well as a 50-metre circular one-lane running



track. The pool, which is outside, is open from about mid-March to mid-November, though in the early years it was open most of year, although few used it in the colder months. The water was extremely hot at the peak of summer, with the water being up to 34°C!



I would used the facilities five times a week in the summer, and in the cooler running season, four times a week (taking Fridays off before the Saturday runs). In the early years, when the original gym manager was in charge, there would also be the occasional gym 'challenge' with prizes being awarded. One could do the challenge over several weeks, with one's best time being

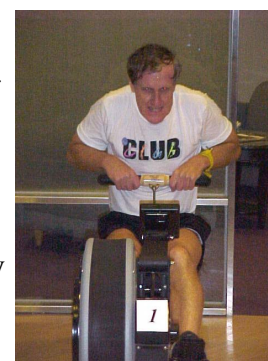
kept. Here are two examples of such challenges:

- In December 2000, there was a 2000 m rowing challenge (see picture).

My best time was about 7 minutes 58 seconds, coming second behind Shaun, a (helicopter pilot) guy with a well-built upper body.

- In 2001, there was a “3 + 2” (3 km cycle + 2 km treadmill) challenge.

My first attempt was in 13 minutes 53 seconds (I cannot remember my best time). I won this challenge!



[p] [\[When I can find my certificates I will include one or two\]](#)

Exercise Regime

In the summer/hotter season (April to November) I would go to the gymnasium and/or swimming pool up to five days a week. The number of days in the pool would vary; sometimes maybe just two and sometimes five days. Each swimming day would begin with a warm-up jog in the gym first (at least in the later years; earlier I would just go to the pool). For gym sessions in the summer, it would be mainly weights plus jogging warm-up alternating with aerobic days, with jogging, cycling, rowing, skipping in different combinations at different times.

In the cooler season (November to March/April), it would be gym four times a week, alternating weights and aerobics days (as above). Friday would be a rest day due to the runs/hikes on Saturdays. These runs would be in the country parks, much as I did when at the university, though runs are gradually getting shorter and slower(a little) as I get older. For example, in the 2011-2012 season, my runs averaged just 2 hours 34 minutes. While at CUHK, I used to do many runs in the Sai Kung area but not now, as it takes too long to get there from Tin Shui Wai. These have been replaced by runs in the nearby Tai Lam Country Park). Sometimes I would trip and have nasty falls, which would be mainly sprains, cuts, scratches and bruises; fortunately no broken bones. Only a few times did I *not* finish what I had planned to run. This might be due to exhaustion or to hot weather. An example of the latter was in March 2000 (when I was still at CUHK), the temperature was about 24°C (26°C in some places; I have run on hotter days). The run was good initially but then fizzled out again. I stopped at Kei Ling Ha village (near Jacobs Ladder) then hitch-hiked to the main road!

Over the years, air pollution in Hong Kong has become significantly worse. In 2011, for example, there were only 59 'good' days in terms of air pollution. A lot of the pollution in the inner city is due to vehicles. But out here, a lot of it comes across the border from China. On a bus to Sheung Shui on most days it is no longer possible to see across the border, even though it is only a mile or less away. Instead, the air just looks dark brown or grey. And yet, the air pollution during my runs does not seem to have affected me. However, I do notice if there is little air pollution; on such occasions, I can see for miles, though this rarely happens in Hong Kong now.

A typical day of 'retirement'

A typical day would begin with a breakfast of porridge and fruit (usually half a grapefruit). Occasionally I would include a couple of hash-browns, which I like, but as they are deep-fried are not too healthy, they were seldom included. After breakfast, a lot of the day would be spent at the computer. First, I would do 30 minutes or so of Russian. (I have been trying to learn the language for many years and wonder why I still persist, but I do.) Then, there would

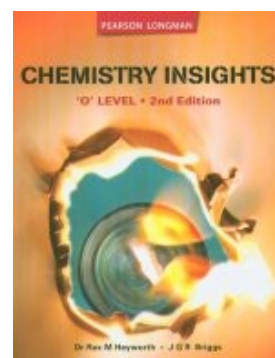
be work (writing textbooks) until 1 pm for lunch. This would take 30 minutes or less and normally consisted of sandwiches with multiple fillings (sardines, cheese, tomato, cucumber, lettuce) plus some noodles (for their carbohydrate energy content). More work and then to the gym and/or pool at about 4 pm. A self-cooked dinner would begin at about 6.30 pm though prior to this I would study some Cantonese using the Radio Hong Kong (as it was then) books I used when I first came to Hong Kong. (In those days, a 15-minute lesson was broadcast five days a week. I recorded these lessons on magnetic tape but now have no machine that will play them. And like Russian, I wonder why I continue.) Anyway, dinner would typically begin with sweetcorn (half or one cob), fish or chicken wings, small amounts of several green vegetables and coloured vegetables, rice or potatoes followed by (canned) soup and yoghurt. Then I would watch the TV news and occasionally other programmes and do some reading. Then I would have some fruit, such as an apple before going to bed at about 10 pm. Beginning about 2010, I would also do 50 push-ups on first getting up in the mornings and another 50 before going to bed.

Visitors

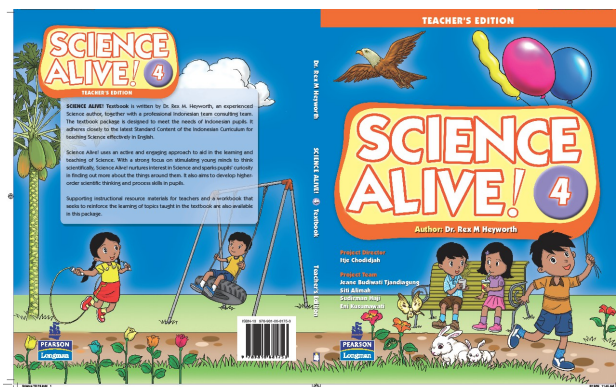
While in the suite, there were occasional visitors. People who stayed there included Leonie, Gavin (by himself and with Sian), Nadine, Edward, Uncle Bruce, and my cousin Roger White and his wife. I think that is all. (You might remember we visited Roger in 1987 in New Zealand at his home near Napier, with his third wife - his first two had both died. There was a paddock behind the house which his daughters used for riding horses. His wife appeared to be very 'ngok' but in fact, when she came here she was very nice - just initially very quiet and shy.) In July of 2001, my last group of full-time Chemistry students from the Faculty of Education came here. We had lunch in a restaurant, looked at the gym and the pool then came back here for a chat and snacks which I had prepared. The most visitors at any one time was four in December 2005 - Leonie and Tom, Nadine and Edward. On that occasion, Edward slept on the floor using the sofa seat as a makeshift mattress. (Edward had been studying Mandarin in China at the time and came here for a visit then returned to China.) To date, no-one has stayed in the flat. When that happens, there is no sofa-bed. The guests will sleep on the double bed (specially obtained for just such an event and also because, at just \$299, Ikea was almost giving it away.)

Books

Most of my 'retirement' has been spent writing textbook, with the occasional breaks with little to do. First, I completed Chemistry books for Hong Kong Certificate of Education (Forms 4 and 5) and finished the Brunei primary books (for Years 4 to 6). Since those Chemistry



books, I have not done any work for Hong Kong publishers; almost all my work has been with Pearson/Longman in Singapore. Later books included a set of textbooks for lower secondary science in Singapore and an adaptation of these for use in Mauritius. Then I did 'O' Level Chemistry books for Singapore (taking over from the original author who died). Later, there were



examination revision books for Singapore lower secondary science and Chemistry as well as a set of books for those Indonesia primary schools (“Science Alive!” - see cover in photo - for Years/Grades 3 to 6 that were switching to the use of English as the medium of instruction (very few at the moment as the government is treading carefully). This work would involve occasional trips to Singapore and Indonesia either to launch books and/or to give seminars on the use of the books (and, in the case of Indonesia, teaching Science using English, a difficult task for many teachers, as often their students English was better.)

Health

The problem of asthma, which has plagued me for all my life, continued. It was largely controllable by the use of the preventer inhalers and, when an attack occurred, by the use of a reliever inhaler. Every time I went out, including for the Saturday runs, I would always take a reliever with me, just in case, though never actually needed it (I think). However, sometimes an attack would be difficult to control and much stronger medicine would be needed to get it under control again. (In the day-by-day diaries, I often comment about these attacks.) These attacks might to some extent have been induced by my reluctance to take medicines and thus keeping the dosage as low as I thought I could. For the preventive inhalers, this meant I would use the child's dosage to reduce the quantity I had to inhale. Having been at the Chinese University, I am still entitled to medical care (but no longer hospital care) and would go about once a year to get more asthma medicine, often a mixture of adult and child inhalers.

And then it all changed. About September of 2010, I forgot to take the preventive inhalation one night and the next morning I felt all right. So I skipped it the next night, again with no problems. I continued like this and have never had an attack nor have I used any asthma medicine since (except for about a week in late 2012 after I had cleaned a lot of dust from the flat). Long may it continue! I still tend to take an inhaler with me when I go out though sometimes now, I forget to do so. One thing that does not seem to affect my asthma is Hong Kong's terrible air pollution, which, of course, I have to breathe while doing my weekend

runs. Maybe there comes an age when air pollution is less serious. However, the air pollution here does seem to be causing more and more young children to become asthmatic.

Then, in 2006, the years of exposure to UV light finally caught up with me in terms of skin cancer. The first signs appeared in 2003 before and during the time I was in Los Angeles. Volcano-like growths appeared on one hand and one foot, together with a lesion on my nose all of which oozed blood that would not clot easily. After returning to Hong Kong, I checked with the doctor at the CU clinic, and he said just to keep observing. Cancer did not occur to me - nor, evidently to him! It wasn't until a year or so later that he suggested I have these growths tested. So he wrote a letter of referral which I took to a dermatologist at the Tuen Mun government clinic. There, biopsies were carried out, which came back positive for superficial basal cell carcinoma (sBCC), a less serious form of skin cancer compared with melanomas. The clinic in turn wrote a letter of referral to the plastic surgery unit of the Tuen Mun hospital which I duly delivered. I knew that there could be a wait of up to a year for an appointment. However, only a day or two later, I received a phone call telling me to come in immediately for major surgery to remove the growths (major meaning only that I would be anaesthetised for the operation rather than having local operations). I remember all of this quite well. I first had to go in for tests and to learn what would happen. Soon after, I went again to be admitted. I was in a third-class ward (six beds) in the morning and had the surgery in the afternoon. I stayed in the hospital only for a day or so and then discharged myself but went back each day for new dressings and then for stitches to be removed. On getting out of the taxi on arriving back at the hotel I had bandages all over my face, right hand and left leg and foot and with a walking frame to help me walk. This caused consternation amongst staff who saw me who wanted to know what had happened. I said nothing about cancer, just saying something about being involved in a traffic accident! They were very nice however, and a day or so later sent a large basket of fresh fruit up to my room. As the discharge from hospital was unofficial, I was still being charged the daily fee (just \$100) until they thought it was time for my official discharge, which was about a week later. Their primary concern was that by walking around, the stitches might break. For the following few weeks, I would return regularly until no more dressings were needed. This was good, as it was summer and I wanted to get back to swimming as soon as possible. Since then I have had regular appointments with both at the dermatology clinic and the hospital to monitor and take action when necessary. I have had a few minor biopsies since then, many of which were sBCC positive. However, I would always ask them to excise a larger area than otherwise so that all of the cancerous area might be removed; in most cases, it worked. There is still one area on my nose where all the cancerous material could not be removed. However, I am not too worried as the probability of sBCC spreading around the body is very low, unlike most other forms of cancer. Most of the biopsies I had done at the dermatology clinic. I preferred this as

it is done quickly and little time is wasted. At the hospital, even a minor biopsy can consume half or even a whole day. However, only the hospital can carry out any large-scale surgery.

Then, in 2009, I became afflicted with Bell's palsy. I was getting severe headaches which might have suggested a stroke. I had mentioned this in my weekly letters and then late one evening, I got a phone call from Gavin telling me to go to the hospital. To check that I did, he called again about half an hour later, just as I was about to leave the suite. I actually took a train rather than a taxi to the hospital and admitted myself at the Accident and Emergency (A&E) department. There they have a triage system and they did not seem to think my case was extremely urgent so I had to wait for an hour or so. The doctor attending me ruled out a stroke and thought it was Bell's palsy. He gave me a large amount of nuelin anti-inflammatory tablets (the same as I would use for a severe asthma attack) and made an appointment at the hospital in the Ear and Nose department for later that day (it was after midnight at this stage). Treatment consisted of further use of the same medicine which gradually tapered off and because the palsy (which means 'paralysis') affects facial muscles, I also attended physiotherapy sessions for several weeks. The muscles eventually healed, though the pulsatile tinnitus that also occurred in the right ear is still present though does not annoy me.

The university clinic also provides dental treatment, though, unlike the medical side, this has to be paid for (this was the same when employed there). There have been the occasional fillings as well as placing crowns on two (I think just two) teeth. One was for an incisor which I broke on the Singapore Airlines flight to New Zealand in 2010. After the meal, they gave out chocolate ice-creams on a stick. Unfortunately they were frozen as solid as a rock, and when biting into it, thinking it would be soft, I broke a corner off an incisor. A month later, after returning to Hong Kong, I had it covered with a crown. The other crown was for a tooth that has seen better days and was falling to pieces.

Some highlights of the years 2000 to 2012

Just a summary here. More details can be found in the individual annual diaries.

Epidemics in Hong Kong

1. **Bird flu:** This is caused by the an H5N1 virus, which first cropped up in chickens in 1997. To control it then, millions of chickens were slaughtered. It reappeared in 2001 and all chickens in Hong Kong were culled. The import and sale of chickens was banned for about two months. Then in February of 2002, bird flu broke out again. It originated on a Yuen Long farm and this time, 100 000 birds had to be culled.
2. **SARS:** In March 2003, the first case of what came to be called SARS, was detected in a Kowloon hotel (Metropole Hotel). A *single* traveller from China had brought the infection. Others in the hotel then became infected and travelled to various countries which caused the virus to spread to many parts of the world. For quite a long time, Hong Kong was gripped by fear of contagion and panic throughout the epidemic. Children stayed home, most people were wearing face masks, schools were closed, economic activities were greatly disrupted, restaurants were empty and tourism ground to a halt. At one point, the residents of an infected housing estate were transferred to the quarantined in holiday camps (including the Lady MacLehose Holiday in Sai Kung, which some of you have stayed at, I think) because the buildings were deemed a health hazard. CY Tung was the Chief Executive at the time and he and his wife visited the estate, with his petrified wife dressed up looking like an astronaut on the moon! The epidemic infected more than 1,700 people in Hong Kong and claimed 299 lives; worldwide it killed 916 people.
3. **Swine flu:** In 2009, the first case of swine flu (H1N1 virus) that had been spreading around the world was detected in Hong Kong in a Mexican tourist who had arrived via Shanghai. The Metropark Hotel (picture), where he was staying, was quarantined. The 'guests' were held in quarantine in the hotel or at a holiday camp. All primary schools and later some secondary schools were closed. But this time, as a consequence of experience with SARS, the authorities were prepared and the disease was contained but still there were about 80 deaths. The government also bought millions of doses of a flu vaccine (Tamiflu) which I did not take, and which the virus was resistant to in some people.



Immigration department

This department featured a number of times, including some cases which they botched up. The year 2000 was a particularly bad year.

- In 2000, the courts rejected the case of people from China who were seeking right-of-abode in Hong Kong. In August of that year, two immigration staff members at Immigration Tower died after a petrol-bomb attack by disgruntled right-of-abode rejectees .
- In September of the same year, the department was involved in a botch up in which a Vietnamese tourist who had lost her passport but had replaced it was locked up for 20 days!
- Also in 2000, a 15-year old mentally disabled boy was allowed to cross the border at the Lo Wu railway station without any identification. In the confusion, and due to the lack of understanding by border officers on both sides, he was mistakenly released into mainland China and has not been heard from since.
- In January 2001, force was used by immigration officials at the airport to repatriate some Falun Gung practitioners who wanted to come to Hong Kong.
- In 2006-2007, there was the huge scheme to replace the ID cards of all residents with new permanent ID cards, which we all now have.

Trips

I have made a number of holiday trips, ranging from two to four weeks, sometimes squeezing them into slacker times while writing books. These trips were as follows:

- 2000: Britain.
- 2001: Turkey.
- 2001 (December): To Christchurch with Leonie who travelled there at the end of the Autumn term in her final year at UCSD. This was Leonie's idea as she knew that my mother was fading fast and that we should see her before it was too late. Leonie commented how forgetful Nana was at that point. For example, she had wrapped old dirty dish towels in gift wrapping and put them under the Christmas tree (which I was unaware of). She also repeated herself constantly. When they dropped us off at the airport (we were both leaving about the same time), Leonie said she believed that Nana knew it would be the last time, but her dementia only partially allowed her to understand that (her intact emotional core "got it", but her rational mind didn't follow Leonie said). We also took some photographs with Nana and Granddad which did in fact turn out to be last that were taken.



On the same visit, we went for a trip with Keith and his boys across to the West Coast via Lewis then done to the West Coast glaciers and back to Christchurch via Arthur's Pass.

- 2002: Honolulu and Tokyo.
- 2003-2004: Los Angeles, to help Gavin with his rehabilitation following the helicopter accident, though this was hardly a holiday trip.
- 2005: Egypt.
- 2010: To Christchurch for the Burnside High School 50th jubilee and to stay with Bruce and Keith. I had a look from the outside, of 34 Grahams Road, but did not go inside.

Details about the holiday trips can be found in separate files.

Parents passing

As mentioned above, Leonie and I were in Christchurch in 2001. This was the last time we saw Nana and Granddad alive. Nana died in January of 2003 and Granddad a few months later. I did not go back for Nana's funeral as she had told me not to; she wanted to see me when she was alive and not when she was dead. She had also requested a plain coffin but I don't think she got that. At the actual time of her funeral, which was a Saturday morning in Hong Kong, I did not go for a run but instead held my own 'memorial service' by myself. I think that Granddad died because he couldn't cope by himself. I remember on a number of occasions when we were over there he would issue warnings not to do anything to upset Nana in case this affected her health. I suspect that a fear of having to do everything by himself might have been behind it. However, they were both very proud of their three overseas grandchildren and I think Nana was particularly happy to have two granddaughters as she had no daughters herself. And Granddad was certainly very proud of Gavin being in the Marines. He never forgot how the the defence of New Zealand and the rest of the Pacific in World War II was due largely to US forces such as the Marines. He of course, was about to be shipped out in 1945 to the Pacific war theatre as a medic but that did not happen as the war ended.



Relationship of Hong Kong people with mainlanders

The relationship between local people and mainlanders has changed dramatically over the past decade. In earlier times, it was Hong Kong that tended to be economically dominant. But as China has prospered, the tables are turning. Unlike in earlier times, many mainlanders are now able, both economically and politically, to travel and to spend lots more cash out of China. These two factors have lead and are continuing to cause friction between locals and mainlanders and to a feeling that Hong Kong is becoming flooded with mainlanders and will be unable to cope. And politically, although locals are proud to be Chinese, they are tend to identify with Hong Kong and not the mainland. They are not happy with the mainland system, including the Communist Party and the lack of freedoms, and they vigorously fight to

maintain Hong Kong's freedoms and way of life. In addition, people here are becoming more outspoken and hold more protests than in the past, though these are not necessarily directed against China or mainlanders. Another fear was the announcement that people in Shenzhen were able to travel to Hong Kong without needing to go to their Heung Ha to apply for a permit, which was the case in the past. This created an outcry here, due to fears of being swamped with visitors. As a result this was rescinded, which miffed a lot of people in Shenzhen.

Examples:

- **Shopping:** Many shops selling luxury brands have sprung up in Hong Kong to cater for mainland visitors. Sometimes, they have guard and signs(?) indicating that locals are not allowed in the shops, or even to take any pictures of goods in the windows. This has riled locals to the extent that there was a major street protest outside one such shop, organised using social media, against these practices.
- **Property:** Many mainlanders also come to Hong Kong to buy flats, particularly luxury flats, not usually to live in but for speculative purposes. This has had to a big increase in the price of flats in general which has meant that many locals are no longer able to afford a flat to own and live in. Even in Central Park Towers, there are a number of mainlanders who own flats and actually live here.
- **Facilities in Hong Kong:** These are being swamped. Last summer, during a time which was a holiday for both Hong Kong and China, about 350 campers turned up at a local beach that can cater for only 50 tents. Most of the campers were from China.
- **June 4th.** The anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen 'incident' is commemorated on this date every year with hundreds of thousands attending. Many mainlanders, such as those who happen to be visiting Hong Kong, attend and most have no idea about what happened on that date. (These mainlanders are not treated with hostility!)
- **Babies:** There has been the growing problem of mainland women coming to give birth in Hong Kong, at both public and private hospitals. Two reasons for this are the higher standards here and also that the children are entitled to permanent Hong Kong residency and ID cards. This has overwhelmed the maternity system and created intense antagonism. The government has now stepped in and starting from 2013, zero mainland women, who do not have a Hong Kong husband, will be allowed to give birth here. Immigration officers at the border will turn them away if they cannot prove they have a Hong Kong connection. Of course, there is the fear that some will sneak across, particularly in winter months when people wear more clothes and detecting a pregnant woman can be more difficult, and turn up at hospitals when they are actually in labour. Baptist hospital (a private hospital) has announced that if this happens, the woman will be charged an extra \$150 000 fee on top of the normal fee (about \$50 000) and they will be reported to the police.
- **Food:** Because of the many food scares in China, many people travel to Hong Kong to buy

products, especially the popular brands of overseas infant powdered milk - particularly the most popular of overseas brands - which they take back and sell at a high price. (The reason for this is because people on the mainland do not just the the Chinese-made baby formula.) Areas near the border, such as Sheung Shui, are particularly affected. Prices of store space to cater for these people has increased dramatically which means that prices in general also increase. The government was again forced to intervene and got the MTR to weigh all luggage going to the border and not allowing anything over 20 (?) kg. Also, in February 2013, the government limited the amount of infant formula anyone can take out of Hong Kong to two cans or 1.8 kg. This has largely solved the problem. (Of course, if Hong Kong women would breast feed instead of using baby formula, there may not be a problem, but many won't.)



- **Bad habits:** Then there was the incident in a train in which some mainlanders turned part of a carriage into a mini-restaurant and a local women scolded them. Someone happened to film this on a mobile phone and the clip went 'viral' when posted on the Internet. Even when I get on a train at Sheung Shui, it is often impossible to get a seat even though it is the first local station, as people from China have occupied the seats at the border stations. (By the way, there are two rail border crossings now - the original one at Lo Wu which has existed since the beginnings of the KCR more than a century ago, and the other at Lok Ma Chau which began just a few years ago; both link up to the local line at Sheung Shui.)
- **Verbal comments.** There was a whole page ad in the 'Apple Daily' newspaper describing mainlanders as 'locusts' (because they come here in large numbers and devour everything). Then, a professor in China calling Hong Kong people 'dogs'. These kinds of comments just widen the ill-feeling between Hong Kong and the mainland.

- **Independence.** It has been mentioned on the news that a small number of people in Hong Kong have been protesting for independence from China, though I was not actually aware of this. However, at some protests (having nothing to do with

independence that I can make out), such as outside mainland hawker stalls in Sheung Shui, the old



British colonial flags appeared. They have also been waved at other protests including outside China's Hong Kong Liaison Office ('embassy'); what the protests were about I do not know. The pictures here show colonial flags that appeared at that protest.

Corrosive liquids

From time to time, people have dropped corrosive liquids from buildings onto the pavements below. This occurred mainly in crowded areas such as Mongkok. Quite a number of passers-by have been affected by the liquids. Because it has been difficult to catch the perpetrators, there was talk of installing CCTV cameras in such areas but I do not know how many have actually been installed.

Overseas doctors

The shortage of doctors in hospitals is acute. Particularly so in public hospitals, from which many doctors often move to private hospitals which are more lucrative. The government introduced a scheme to get overseas doctors. But this has not been successful, partly due to the local medical association being against the scheme and to protect its own turf. A year or so ago, just nine overseas doctors were accepted to work in local hospitals, and even these few was met with opposition from many doctors.

Environmental protection

The Environmental Protection Department has a bad record of protecting the environment. Even in something relatively simple such as upgrading the air pollution standards to more realistic ones has not been implemented; local air pollution would look much worse if newer standards were used! The department has also been reluctant to go after people who destroy the environment, even in country parks. It often takes protests from the public before action is taken. Still, there has been some progress in the private sector with several hotels limiting or even banning the sale of endangered species such as shark's fin and tuna. The HPRC restaurant no longer serves shark's fin soup; instead they serve a vegetarian version.

Minimum wage

After years of wrangling and opposition from the business sector, which sometimes treats some workers not much better than slaves, a minimum wage of \$28 was introduced in 2010(?). The predicted closure of businesses such as restaurants never eventuated. The minimum wage will be adjusted (upwards) from time to time.

KCR and MTR

The KCR (Kowloon-Canton Railway) was inaugurated way back in 1910 for travel on a single track between Hong Kong and Canton (as it was then known) in China. The Hong Kong terminus used to be opposite the YMCA where the Cultural Centre is now (see picture below left). All that remains of the terminus is the clock tower. In 2007 the operation of the KCR was taken over



by the MTR Corporation to give a unified rail transport system. The other picture (below, right) shows the KCR University Station in 1980 with a train heading towards Kowloon; all the area on the left has, of course, been reclaimed and built on.



School reunions

In Hong Kong, I have worked in three places:

1. Ming Yin College (from 1967 when it was a new secondary school, until August 1974).
2. The Hong Kong Technical Teachers' College (a teachers' college for non-degree primary school and junior secondary school teachers in subjects such as woodwork, metalwork, shorthand and typing; from 1974-1977). This college no longer exists, having been combined with the other three teachers' colleges to form the Hong Kong Institute of Education.
3. Chinese University of Hong Kong School (later Faculty) of Education (training of secondary school teachers; from 1977-2000).

Only Ming Yin College has had any reunions. Those which I attended included:

- 2002: 35th anniversary. I attended the dinner for staff and students only.
- 2007: 40th anniversary at which the first principal (also a New Zealander) came back from Australia (where he now lives in Adelaide) for the celebrations. I attended a staff reunion and staff dinner as well as a look over a much-changed school; I did not go to the general dinner.
- 2012: 50th anniversary. I attended the a reunion for the first Form 1 (just two classes) and the general dinner for staff and students.

Hong Kong and its Government

The population has been increasing and now stands at just over seven million. However, because the birth rate is one of the lowest in the world, the number of older people is increasing more than the number of younger people. The increase in the population is also partly due to immigration from China.

Since the handover in 1997, Hong Kong has had its own system of government independent of China. The central government is only responsible for defence and foreign affairs. There is a 'Chief Executive' (or CE, an appropriate term perhaps given the business orientation of the city) who has his appointed Executive Council of advisers. Each branch of the civil service is a bureau headed by a minister (also called a secretary) appointed by the CE. For example, Arthur Li, the former Vice Chancellor of the Chinese University was for a number of years the Secretary of Education and managed to rub teachers up the wrong way just as he did when at the university - his nickname was "King Arthur"! Then there is the Legislative Council that passes into law the proposals of the government (most of the time as the majority of the legislators are 'pro-government').

The Legislative Council now has 70 members, half of which come from 'functional' constituencies (various organisations such as business, education, medical, sport) and which, except for education, have only small constituencies to elect the representatives. Thus all teachers choose a person to represent the education functional constituency. These were introduced by the last colonial governor, Chris Patten as an attempt to have a degree of elected representatives, even though universal suffrage was not possible. The other half of the legislature comes from 'geographical' constituencies which are elected by everybody in Hong Kong. Because of the two kinds of constituencies, many people have two votes, such as me when I at the university, one for the education functional constituency and one for a geographical constituency. But in 2012 two 'super' functional constituencies were created, with five representatives to be elected from everybody in Hong Kong who did not already belong to a functional constituency, thus giving everybody two votes. The representatives for these two new constituencies come from members of district councils. Thus, having lost my education functional constituency vote on leaving the university, I now have two votes again.

As many of the functional constituencies tend to side with the government on issues (education being a notable exception), many of the bills presented by the government to the council tend to be passed as the 'pro-government/establishment' (often also equivalent to 'pro-Beijing') people are in the majority. The so-called 'pro-democratic' camp acts as a kind of opposition. The behaviour of the members of the Legislative Council has changed over the years from being very passive to sometimes being very aggressive, especially among the more extreme members of the pro-democratic camp who are not averse to yelling out, walking out and at times throwing things in the legislative chamber! One small party, called

the League of Social Democrats is like this. One of its leaders, nicknamed 'Long Hair' (for his long hair) often wears T-shirts with pictures of Che Guevara on them and is very vocal. He once threw bananas at the then Chief Executive (Donald Tsang). In spite of this behaviour, they still keep getting elected.

There have been three Chief Executives. The first was C H Tung (Tung Chee Wah) a shipping magnate, whose father, C Y Tung, founded the Orient Orient Overseas (International) Limited company in 1969. [An interesting titbit which I have written about in an earlier file: C Y Tung bought the liner “Queen Elizabeth” and intended to turn it into a floating university. It was to be called the “Seawise University” (get it? “CY-se”). But then mysteriously, in 1972, it caught fire and sank just off Mei Foo Housing Estate, an area that have since been reclaimed and built on. Arson was suspected but never proven. I together with another chap who lived at the YMCA then went to the roof of the Ocean Terminal to watch it burning.] In 2003, C H Tung intended to push through legislation on Article 23 of the Basic Law (see below), which ended in his resignation. Donald Tsang, a career civil servant and once the Financial Secretary in the last colonial government, took over and then re-elected in 2007. He saw out his term but it also ended in a cloud (see below). The third and current CE is Mr C Y Leung who was elected after another scandal (see below).

CE scandals

All three chief Executives were involved in some sort of scandal or difficulty.

C H Tung: Article 23 of the Basic Law (Hong Kong's mini constitution) requires the Hong Kong government to pass anti-subversion legislation. But this is deeply unpopular amongst the local population who fear it could be used as similar legislation is used in China to silence all and sundry. This resulted in a protest march on July 1st, 2003 of at least 500 000 (some people claim it was 1 million) against the legislation. This caught the government by surprise and especially the CE, who, apparently, had advisers who tended to shield him from public opinion. Tung would also pass on favourable views of what was happening in Hong Kong, during his regular meetings with top officials in China. The central government in Beijing must have been furious to find out that C H Tung was so out of touch and promptly 'sacked' him in the guise of 'promoting' him to some committee in China.



Donald Tsang: It was revealed that he (sometimes with his wife) took lavish trips on planes and ships of his tycoon friends (though he did pay the fares he would have paid on commercial transport). Further, he bought a luxury retirement apartment in Shenzhen from a mainland property tycoon (and then sold it once this had been revealed).



C Y Leung: There were three candidates for the position of CE after Donlad Tsang retired. But only one, Henry Tang, the scion of a textile business, was expected to have a chance as he was popular in the business world, had worked for some time in the government and had the blessing of Beijing. That is, until it was revealed that he had built illegal structures at his homes (two of them, adjacent to each other) in Kowloon Tong. He got his wife to take the blame but that went over like a lead balloon. Then it was discovered that he had fathered an illegitimate daughter. He still stood for election but was defeated by Leung, who, it was suspected, had quietly received the blessing from Beijing after the problems with Henry. After he was elected, it was revealed that he too had illegal structures at his home on the Peak, though nowhere near as substantial as at Tang' homes. He weathered this storm but his credibility has suffered somewhat with the population.



National Education legislation

One of the first acts of the new C Y Leung administration was, in 2012, to launch a *compulsory* National Education subject, starting in Primary 1. But this too proved unpopular among many segments of the population as, among other things, it glorified the Chinese Communist government as the best form of government and included *emotion* towards China and the Chinese flag as part of its method of assessment. People feared that such an assessment would be held against children later in life, particularly if they disagreed. The subject also did not include any of the bad episodes in Chinese history. Eventually it was modified and schools were given the *choice* whether to introduce it or not (most chose not to). To be fair to Leung, this subject had actually been prepared by the previous administration.

New Headquarters

In 2011, the new government headquarters opened at Tamar, the site of the naval HQ in British times. Not long after, legionnaires disease was found in parts of the new buildings, including the CE's office. This after the Secretary for Education



Michael Suen had just recovered from the disease having got it from his office toilet water. After that, toxic gases were found in the new building! Oh dear - teething problems, I suppose! I have still not seen the new HQ nor even glimpsed it!

Relationship between China and Taiwan

China has always regarded Taiwan as a renegade province that will have to be re-united sometime, by force if necessary. However, relations between the two places dramatically improved in the last decade despite especially with the *election* of the KMT party to power in 2008, when negotiations began to restore the transportation, commerce, and communications links between the two sides, cut off since 1949. (KMT stands for **Kuomintang**, the name of the Nationalist party that fought Mao's Communist party and after losing the Civil War in 1949, fled to Taiwan where it was in absolute control for many years until the election.) In 2005, non-stop flights began for one month between China and Taiwan, but for a while, aircraft had to pass through Hong Kong air space! Since then regular flights between the two places began and tourism also began.

Holidays and Observances (Hong Kong)

Example for 2011:

New Year's Day Jan 01

Chinese New Year Feb 03-05

Ching Ming Festival Apr 05

Easter Apr 22-25

Labour Day Holiday May 02

Buddha's Birthday May 10

Dragon Boat Festival Jun 06

Spl Admin. Region Establishment Day Jul 01

Day after Mid-Autumn Festival Sep 13

National Day of China Oct 01

Chung Yeung Festival Oct 05

Christmas Day Dec 25; Dec 27 Christmas Day Holiday

Boxing Day Dec 26