

韜奮：到香港以後

In Hong Kong: excerpts

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Tao Fen

WE ASKED Mr Zhang to be our guide because he had been in Hong Kong three times before. He took us to Des Voeux Road (the busiest street in Hong Kong, much like Nanjing Road in Shanghai, though narrower). The first thing we did was to get some Hong Kong dollars. At the counter of a small bank, one of us took out a pound note. Mr Zhang had noticed a list of exchange rates on top of a pile of papers at one end of the counter, which stated that the day's exchange rate was one pound sterling to fourteen Hong Kong dollars. But the bank clerk glanced at us after checking the exchange rate, whereupon a faint smile appeared on his face, and he

Tao Fen (1894-1946) travelled from China to Europe in July 1933. This essay is taken from Pingzong jiyu 萍踪寄語, a collection of essays written during his trip to Europe.

seemed to have made up his mind about something. He probably concluded that we were just a group of country bumpkins. He proceeded to make an especially loud racket with the beads of his abacus, and came up with an amount of thirteen-odd dollars. Obviously, he hadn't planned on Mr Zhang being so observant. But despite all Zhang's protests, the clerk refused to budge. So we staggered along to another bank.

Most of the men we saw on the street were wearing Cantonese-style suits; only a few had on Western suits. Chinese-style long gowns were as rare as in the Hongkou district of Shanghai. Some of the women were wearing Cantonese-style blouses and broad-legged trousers; occasionally we saw fashionable girls strutting about in their fine silk cheongsams, displaying their shapely legs and prominent breasts.

Hong Kong is a mountainous island. On the day of our arrival, we took a ride on the peak tram, something we had heard about long ago. The tram car was twice

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Qing guards at the border.

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of History

the size of an ordinary tram in Shanghai, with its seats arranged in rows like a second-class train carriage, only there were two seats on one side of the aisle and three on the other. The inside of the tram was neat and clean. There was a cable about two inches in diameter between the rails. Due to the steepness of the terrain, the tram had to depend on mechanical force transmitted through the cable to move it up and down the mountain. At the very steepest points, passengers would feel as if they were suspended in mid-air with their backs against a wall, and it was necessary to hold on tightly to the armrests to avoid falling out. Science has indeed created wonders with mechanical force; this is but one trivial example.

One extraordinary thing about Hong Kong is the absence of even a single Chinese-style building. Most buildings are built in the European style, with three to five storeys. But this does not mean that there are no poor people. Innumerable poor families are squeezed into run-down four- or five-storied houses, with balconies or galleries facing the street crammed with old clothing and household goods. The homeless poor line the sidewalks at night (but these were covered, and thus protected from the rain).

When we reached the Peak, the weather was so congenial and the air so fresh that merely taking a few breaths there was enough to give you a sense of physical well-being; we all felt completely relaxed, as if we had just taken a hot bath. There is a luxury hotel at the top, which from the looks of the people going in and out the main entrance, is exclusively patronized by the "blue-eyes". Mansions and villas belonging to Chinese tycoons and war-lords dot the Peak as well. Obviously this is quite a different world from that of the people who sleep on the sidewalks.

Hong Kong island occupies a total area of about thirty square miles. It has been a colony of the British empire for ninety years. It has a population of 850,000, of which 800,000 are Chinese and 14,000 British. Just imagine, 14,000 British ruling 800,000 Chinese!