

CLAUSTROPHOBIC CONDITIONS

As is of course the case anywhere, the education system of Hong Kong forms part of, and indeed is dovetailed together with, the very cultural milieu in which it is delivered. It is arguable however that in Hong Kong, where it “is usual for children to start school at the age of three, with homework and in uniform”, and where from “that day onward their lives and those of their parents are dominated by the school system”,¹ this is more so the case than elsewhere. In order to begin to make sense of education in Hong Kong then, we must first take a brief look at Hong Kong itself. Of course, taking even a cursory ‘look’ at the SAR would be something of a mammoth task, and would be well outside of the scope of the present discussion. Here then we shall limit ourselves to a brief examination of some of the living conditions in Hong Kong which seem particularly germane to students and education, starting with some remarks and observations that other writers have made in connection to the territory.

It must be stated at the very outset that various observers of many a different bent have remarked that Hong Kong is something of an extreme, if not downright odd and peculiar, conurbation. In her (mainstream) book on the territory, for example, the popular travel writer Jan Morris writes that

It is an abnormal city. Until our own times it has been predominately a city of refugees, with all the hallmarks of a refugee society – the single-minded obsession with the making of money, amounting almost to neurosis, and the perpetual sense of underlying insecurity, which makes everything more tense and more nervous.²

As regards the insecure refugee element and the resulting scramble for psychologically compensatory financial security, Rupert Hodder in his book on the region concurs, noting that “the real engine of growth in Hong Kong has been the entrepreneurial spirit fostered by the desire of its largely immigrant population to make money.”³ In his social reformist manifesto, *Humanize Hong Kong*, Tony Henderson (founder of The Humanist Association of Hong Kong), when referring to the underlying insecurity that is practically tangible in Hong Kong, notes that

The lack of security in Hong Kong drives people to work, work, work, without let up, even when, if they should pause to look around, they would see that they had already ‘made it’. It’s an exaggerated sort of place Hong Kong.⁴

Whether or not one chooses, following Jan Morris, to term Hong Kong an “abnormal” city, and/or, following Tony Henderson, to refer to it as an “exaggerated” city, it is certainly a city of abnormalities and exaggerations. For example, densely populated Kowloon (Nine Dragon[s]), which, as noted by Austin Coates in his classic book dealing with post-WWII rural Hong Kong, is “in reality seventy flattened hills”,⁵ has areas and suburbs where only a handful of men – and they are typically men, (at least in the sense of being male) – in the entire world can afford to reside. Kowloon Tong (Nine Dragon[s] Pond) is a good example of one such area. It is prime ‘location, location, location’ real estate, and in fact is one of the few places in Hong Kong where one to this very day can still see detached houses-cum-mansions (typically behind iron gates, closed-circuit TV cameras, and high walls capped with broken glass) set back from the tree-lined avenues, most if not all of which boast of a stereotypical British street name. In fact, Kowloon Tong is probably second only to the Peak in terms of price per square foot (plots of land – or, as is more often the case, *cubes of air* – in Hong Kong are purchased by this measurement) and is a fashionable area popular with US dollar millionaires/Hong Kong dollar billionaires, exclusive love hotels (complete with curtains in the driveway to act as veils over the patrons’ vehicles’ number plates), upmarket private kindergartens, and international schools.

At the other end of the social spectrum however living conditions elsewhere in Kowloon are somewhat different, to say the very least. In addition to the detached mansions of Kowloon Tong, Kowloon also offers plots of cardboard-covered concrete under bridges in Yau Ma Tei and Sham Shui Po which cater to homeless drifters and unemployed construction workers, and lodgings which house the infamous cage men of Hong Kong, those who cannot afford their own rooms, let alone homes, and so who rent a lockable cage in a dorm-like room. Though inhumane and debasing, the cage is needed to protect their inhabitants' scant possessions whilst they are 'out' roaming the streets seeking employment, and sitting outside their local Hong Kong Jockey Club outlet, puffing frantically on a cigarette, willing their horse to come in.

The disparities in wealth and living standards are arguably even more extreme on Hong Kong Island, however. In the November of 2007, for example, it was announced that a split-level 7,000 square foot luxury apartment in the Mid-Levels sold for a whopping HK\$283 million, making it the then-most expensive flat in the whole of Asia.⁶ As in Kowloon however, one need not travel all too far from such luxury and privilege to experience slums more reminiscent of those to be found in the Third World states of South Asia, as a stroll through Wan Chai or Sai Wan Ho rapidly reveals.

One particularly candid index of the sheer degree of disparity of wealth in the SAR of Hong Kong is the sheer extent and atrocious conditions of *government*-provided housing. In their book examining the economic development and public housing projects of Hong Kong and Singapore, *The Shek Kip Mei Syndrome*, Manuel Castells *et al* note that, somewhat ironically, "the free-market paradise of Hong Kong operates the second largest public housing system of the capitalist world."⁷ In the end products of this vast public housing scheme live those who are somewhat less fortunate than those who reside in the mansions of Kowloon Tong and the luxury condominiums of the Mid-Levels. For various reasons precise figures regarding the number of residents in this government-provided accommodation are difficult to ascertain, but Henderson states that "at least forty percent of the Hong Kong population live [*sic*] in public housing."⁸ Morris puts the figure a tad higher, noting that "Today half the entire population lives in apartments provided in one way or another by the State – horribly crowded."⁹ The 'other end' of the social spectrum then, actually constitutes at least two fifths of the population of Hong Kong, and may in fact be around one half of the territory's local residents.

No matter what the exact figures, that a large proportion of Hong Kong people live in crowded conditions will come as no great surprise to many readers, but those with no personal experience of Hong Kong may not be aware just how crowded and claustrophobic these conditions actually are. For whilst on the one hand Hong Kong has a population close to 7 million, on the other hand, as noted by Hodder, it "is a small country of only 1,068 square kilometres."¹⁰ One point that is often overlooked in this connection however is that around 50% of Hong Kong is (protected) country park, so those 7 million live on what is a very small area of land indeed (though in fairness Hong Kong's landmass does seem to increase on a fairly regular basis through reclamation). As a result of nigh on 7 million souls trying to exist on a plot of land of around 500 square kilometres, homes in Hong Kong tend to be rather small by any standards. In his book *We Deserve Better: Hong Kong Since 1997*, the anonymous Hong Kong blogger Hemlock refers to family flats of 400 square feet,¹¹ with people having little more than 100 square feet each.¹²

Unsurprisingly of course given that homes tend to reflect means and earnings, we also find extremities and extreme disparities in the realm of incomes. Indeed, an article in the *South China Morning Post* with the telling title of "Hong Kong's wealth gap is biggest in Asia" notes that a report published by the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) showed the SAR to have a Gini coefficient of 0.53 (the Gini coefficient is an indicator of income equality/inequality, where 0 would mean that income was perfectly distributed and 1 would mean that a single individual had all the income).¹³ This of course is hardly surprising. After all, for whilst 'domestic helpers' in Hong Kong (the vast majority of whom are from the Philippines and Indonesia) earn a mere HK\$3,600 a month (or thereabouts), then-28-year-old political assistant-designate to the Secretary for Food and Health, Paul Chan Chi-yuen, *started* his career in the civil service on a salary of between HK\$134,150 and

HK\$163,960 a month – though of course “It was not out of any monetary consideration that I accepted this appointment” stated Chan Chi-yuen to the press.¹⁴ We believe you, Paul.

It would be something of a mistake however to think that it is just Filipina ‘maids’ who are on low incomes. Hemlock notes that “As of 2006, over 25% of teenagers were living in low-income families (those on less than half the HK\$16,000 median monthly income).”¹⁵ If the median monthly income in Hong Kong in 2006 was HK\$16,000, then, given that some enjoy incomes in excess of HK\$130,000 a month, we can immediately see that a significant percentage of locals presumably also earn wages comparable to those earned by ‘foreign domestic helpers’ (read, present-day wage slaves).

There are inequalities everywhere, of course, but the point here is that in Hong Kong such inequalities and disparities are more extreme and vastly more pronounced than in comparable states. As noted succinctly, and in typically dry fashion by Hemlock, in Hong Kong “the Rolls-Royce passing a street sleeper is a sort of local icon.”¹⁶ It would be something of a mistake to think that such glaring discrepancies in wealth and lifestyles are simply an Asian phenomenon, however. In his *Confucius Lives Next Door* (secondary title, *What Living in the East Teaches Us About Living in the West*), for example, T. R. Reid notes that “the average American chief executive at the end of the 1990s [made] about 157 times as much as the average American factory worker. In Japan, the gap is much smaller: the CEO earns a little less than 30 times what he pays his factory hands.”¹⁷ Furthermore, the UN-Habitat report cited above also notes for example that Beijing has the *most* equally distributed wealth in the region. So the blatant inequality in Hong Kong is neither an ‘Asian thing’ nor even a ‘Chinese thing’; rather, it is a Hong Kong thing, that is, a situation peculiar to (the somewhat peculiar city of) Hong Kong.

This is not the only peculiarity associated with Hong Kong, however. For in addition to being host to the least equally distributed wealth in the entire region, Hong Kong is also home to many other ‘est’ form superlatives, or ‘negativelatives’/‘terriblelatives’, to coin a pair of expressions. To cite but one example, in 2005 for instance the territory boasted of the lowest birth rate in the entire world, dropping to a somewhat shocking 0.7 per woman.¹⁸

At least part of the reason why Hong Kong has such a low birth rate may be then that a significant portion of the territory’s populace are on subsistence level wages and live in small, cramped flats. In addition, in a city where as a result of such low wages both partners typically have to work, it is often difficult for many couples to even contemplate having a child and the break from employment, and thus income, this would entail (there is no social security in Hong Kong worth speaking of). Of course, the birth rate in Hong Kong is 0.7, not (yet) 0.0, so *some* couples are having children, albeit a small number in comparison to the rest of the planet. A tiny percentage of these mothers may stay at home to raise their offspring, but, more often than not, this task is farmed out to one of the numerous ‘maids’ referred to above, though the word numerous may be something of an understatement. In their book *Tokyo: City on the Edge*, Todd Crowell & Stephanie Forman Morimura remark that “ex-pat spouses who move to Tokyo from Singapore or Hong Kong often complain about the lifestyle: Tokyo does not have the legion of domestic helpers that are so readily available in those cities.”¹⁹

Legion would certainly appear to be a more apt term. In her book *Maid to Order in Hong Kong*, for example, Nicole Constable notes that “Over 100,000 Hong Kong households employ domestic helpers.”²⁰ Constable’s work was published in 1997 however and so her figures may be outdated. More contemporarily, a 2001 article in *The Economist* entitled “The Filipina Sisterhood” puts the number somewhat higher, referring to “154,000 households across the territory where [Filipinas] work as “domestic helpers”, or *amahs* in Cantonese.”²¹ Others put the figure vastly higher. Speaking in the House of Representatives in 2002, for example, Tom Lantos (of California) referred to the more than “230,000 domestic workers in Hong Kong who watch children, cook and clean while their Hong Kong employers are off at work.”²² The most up-to-date figures available at the time of writing indicate that Hong Kong is ‘home’ to some 258,895 foreign domestic helpers, with 126,075 stemming from the Philippines, 125,567 from Indonesia, 3,774 from Thailand, and 3,479 from other countries.²³

Historically speaking of course, Hong Kong and its people have long had a reputation for importing workers from less developed countries in order to perform the chores, errands, tasks, duties, and manual labour with which they themselves are simply unwilling to dirty their hands. Such 'labour' can even extend to activities which to outsiders would more likely be classified as enjoyable and invigorating leisure pursuits. Jan Morris for example notes that "An old tale tells of the Chinese gentleman who, watching a pair of Englishmen sweating away at a game of tennis, inquired why they did not hire coolies to play it for them."²⁴ Many Hong Kong Chinese women must be equally mystified as to why many western – and, arguably more relevantly, Japanese – women seem to actually *want* to bring up their own child – and, presumably quite inexplicably – actually seem to derive some form of pleasure and satisfaction from it.²⁵

Similarly, many people in Hong Kong must find it hard to fathom why many western expatriates and others from outside of the territory opt, and like, to use their legs for activities such as hiking, jogging, and taking part in marathons. After all, Hong Kong people do not have to propel themselves forward through bipedal locomotion anymore, at least not when going between the MTR and KCR stations in Tsim Sha Tsui or between Hong Kong station and the MTR station in Central, where, like robots on a factory assembly line, Hong Kong's stressed 'commuters' are transported along on human conveyor belts such as those, which, elsewhere in the world, are unheard of outside of airports. Interestingly, the existence of this labour saving technological 'advance' was foreseen by George Adams in his futuristic short story of "The Last Abalone". Published in 1995 and set in Hong Kong in 2050, in this story Adams somewhat prophetically refers to a "moving pavement."²⁶

The reader could perhaps be forgiven for questioning the relevance of such aspects of life in Hong Kong to education and socialisation. Such points however could in fact not be any less relevant. For it is quite obviously the case that labour saving devices – of which imported maids are arguably the ultimate example – first eliminate the need for effort and then, ultimately, also dampen and dull, and eventually eradicate creativity. George Orwell argues this point quite eloquently in the controversial second half of his classic *The Road to Wigan Pier*, and as such is worth quoting at some length. Orwell writes that

The function of the machine is to save work. In a fully mechanized world all the dull drudgery will be done by machinery, leaving us free for more interesting pursuits. So expressed, this sounds splendid. It makes one sick to see half a dozen men sweating their guts out to dig a trench for a water-pipe, when some easily devised machine would scoop the earth out in a couple of minutes. Why not let the machine do the work and the men go and do something else? But presently the question arises, what else are they to do? Supposedly they are set free from 'work' in order that they may do something which is not 'work'. But what is work and what is not work? Is it work to dig, to carpenter, to plant trees, to fell trees, to ride, to fish, to hunt, to feed chickens, to play the piano, to take photographs, to build a house, to cook, to sew, to trim hats, to mend bicycles? All of these things are work to somebody, and all of them are play to somebody. There are in fact very few activities which cannot be classed either as work or play according as you choose to regard them. The labourer set free from digging may want to spend his leisure, or part of it, in playing the piano, while the professional pianist may be only too glad to get out and dig at the potato patch. Hence the antithesis between work, as something intolerably tedious, and not-work, as something desirable, is false.²⁷

Orwell further remarks that

The tendency of mechanical progress, then, is to frustrate the human need for effort and creation. It makes unnecessary and even impossible the activities of the eye and the hand. The apostle of 'progress' will sometimes declare that this does not matter, but you can usually drive him into a corner by pointing out the horrible lengths to which the process can be carried. Why, for instance, use your hands at all – why use them even for blowing your nose or sharpening a pencil? Surely you could fix some kind of steel and rubber contraption to your shoulders and let your arms wither into stumps of skin and bone? And so with every organ and every faculty. There is really no reason why a human being should do more than eat, drink, sleep, breathe, and procreate; *everything* else could be done for him by machinery. Therefore the logical end of mechanical

progress is to reduce the human being to something resembling a brain inside a bottle. That is the goal towards which we are already moving, though, of course, we have no intention of getting there; just as a man who drinks a bottle of whisky a day does not actually intend to get cirrhosis of the liver.²⁸

In very much the same way that, as Orwell remarks, cirrhosis of the liver is not consciously sought by the dedicated whiskey drinker, obnoxious, self-centred, arrogant, selfish, and spoiled children are probably not necessarily desired by parents in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, however, as the physical complaint of cirrhosis of the liver is the logical conclusion to a lifetime of daily whiskey consumption, so such less than ideal character traits are the end result of having children supervised, cared for, and raised by maids. The reader with no experience of societies in which maids are commonplace has to attempt – perhaps, struggle – to envisage what they might be like today if, throughout *their* childhood, that is, throughout their formative years, they had never been corrected, and no one had ever said ‘No!’ to them. That is, if there had not been any restraints on their desires and wants, and there had been a complete absence of constraints on their behaviour. After all, maids brought to the metropolis of Hong Kong from the rural backwaters of lesser developed countries such as the Philippines – to work for a mere HK\$3,500 a month – must, by definition, stem from what are, relatively speaking, fairly modest backgrounds and must, in all likelihood, be in need of the injection of hard currency; even this paltry sum. It is highly unlikely that such domestic helpers, despite being to all intents and purposes surrogate mothers, would do anything to risk placing that much needed income in jeopardy, especially since, as noted by Constable, “the average [Filipino] migrant worker supports five people at home, and one out of five Filipinos directly depends on migrant workers’ earnings.”²⁹

Children who have been brought up in such an unrestrained fashion typically stand out like sore thumbs; at least to those who stem from societies where maids are unheard of outside of royal circles. After visually scrutinising one such social square peg in his court, for example, Austin Coates relates how “Once, long ago, I reckoned, he had been a mummy’s boy; or, perhaps nearer the mark, he had been brought up by amahs, and thus shielded from many normal human contacts.”³⁰ In the case of another such individual whom he encounters in the course of his duties, Coates dryly remarks how “His fat white hands had observably never handled anything heavier than a safe-deposit key.”³¹ Coates would no doubt observe that Hong Kong is today full to the brim with male hands which have clearly never handled anything any heavier than a mobile phone or a TV remote control. This is never more so the case then when it comes to those of school age. In an article in the *South China Morning Post* entitled “Looking abroad? Think before you pack their bags”, for example, it is observed how “Boarding schools in Britain and Australia have remarked that many Hong Kong students have been unprepared to do household chores, expecting to have things done for them.”³² Indeed, many youngsters in Hong Kong do not even have to lift anything as heavy as a pair of chopsticks. In an article in the *South China Morning Post* with the title of “Spoil a child, mess with its maturity”, it is somewhat nonchalantly remarked that, according to a study conducted by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, some 79 per cent of children in Hong Kong who should be feeding themselves are in fact still fed by others, and that some 23 per cent of these are fed by their domestic helpers.³³

Such neotenous upbringings of course predictably create students who expect *someone else* to do the learning for them, in very much the same way that, ultimately, all their life *someone else* has done *everything else* for them, from clearing away the plates after dinner to wiping their backside after going to the toilet. Why, we may ask, should we expect a child to apply themselves, to study, and to learn, when they are not expected to clear away their own plates, or even so much as to pick up their own chopsticks and put food in their own mouth? Is it even reasonable or responsible to ask this of them? How can anyone expect mere children to be diligent and dedicated in one realm of life whilst simultaneously being bone idle in all others? Would this not obviously encourage – if not demand and necessitate – the formation and honing of schizophrenic-like split-personalities, that is, one personality for ‘study’ and ‘study-related activities’ and another, or more, for ‘all other areas of life’?

We have seen that there are, by any standards, a large number of maids in Hong Kong, and we have also seen how this swarm of imported labour carries out a whole host of duties, even down to spoon feeding children who, elsewhere in the world, are somehow magically managing to feed themselves. However, despite the fact that maids in Hong Kong – or, as they are euphemistically termed in the territory, “Foreign Domestic Helpers” (or simply “FDHs”) – are so numerous and perform such an ‘integral’ role in Hong Kong society (at least in the sense of freeing women up from tedious domestic chores and thus allowing them to enter the workforce, or to simply enjoy extended bouts of leisure), they are not exactly overpaid, or even well compensated. Indeed, given that it was announced by *Reuters* at the start of 2009 that their ‘host city’ was “ranked as the world’s freest economy for the 15th consecutive year”,³⁴ we have to assume that, considering the ‘minimum’ (i.e., fixed) monthly wage for foreign maids – what are essentially the backbone of middle class Hong Kong Chinese society – is but HK\$3,670 a month, the “free” in the superlative “the world’s freest economy” refers to the freedom the Hong Kong Chinese (and occasionally others) enjoy to openly enslave and exploit workers from poorer states.

Employers of maids will of course attempt to justify paying such chicken feed wages by asserting that “It is a lot of money where *they* come from.” This is clearly as outlandish as it is hideous. For, working by this logic, the slave master-to be may as well go to the absolute poorest country in the world to recruit their maid. After all, that would be even more where they come from. In concert with this logic, we may very well ask how long it will be till Hong Kong is busting at the seams with domestic helpers from the countryside of mainland China. After all, one would only have to pay *them* a mere \$500 a month, for that too would be “a lot of money where they come from.” Of course, there are very good reasons why this is not the case now, not least the fact that those from the countryside of China have no English to speak of, as it must of course be remembered at all times that a large proportion of Filipina “FDHs” are in fact full-time English teachers for the children of middle class Hong Kong.³⁵

It also has to be stressed how it is obviously the case that different logic and principles are applied by employers of maids in different contexts, as and when it suits them to do so. When they purchase a car, for example, they ask themselves what the most expensive model they can afford is (and they will make cutbacks and sacrifices in other areas to be able to afford a slightly more expensive model than would otherwise be possible). Such a financial outlay will be defended by appeals to lack of depreciation and to how relatively low maintenance costs will, in the long term, ultimately make the vehicle pay for itself. However, when they choose their *maid* – quite often a full-time babysitter, that is, the person to whom they entrust the very life of their child (or, less frequently, the lives of their children) – the question is no longer what is the most they can afford but rather what is the cheapest available in the global market. In short, their car (but a lump of metal on four wheels) appears to be more valuable than their offspring.

Even the most ardent defender of employers of maids would have to concede that it would, elsewhere in the world, be considered at least somewhat odd that, for example, both a production line worker in a factory and the factory owner – despite obviously having radically divergent incomes, and vastly different lifestyles, homes, clothes, cars, watches, etc. – nevertheless both typically have a \$3,600-a-month maid from the Philippines. Those who live in ridiculously overpriced glorified shoeboxes in one of the countless anonymous residential filing cabinets in the Mid-Levels, and often even those who live on the Peak, employ the cheapest of the cheap when it comes to the person who will bring up, safeguard, and socialise their child; few – if any – hire an English nanny or a Swedish au pair, or any other trained and qualified professional.

It also has to be noted that, apparently, despite such Third World wages, some employers of maids in Hong Kong seem to believe that their helper’s wages are not low enough, and, to compensate for such inflated remuneration, pay their employees less than the agreed, that is, contracted, legally-binding, amount. An article in *South China Morning Post* in the early part of 2009 reports how 12 percent of 464 Indonesian maids interviewed by Caritas Community Development Service between August 2007 and December 2008 claimed they had been underpaid by between HK\$1,800 and HK\$2,000.³⁶

Underpaying staff is of course ultimately a form of abuse. Unfortunately, however, abuse of maids in Hong Kong is not merely limited to matters monetary. In a letter to the *South China Morning Post* entitled “Plight of many foreign domestic helpers goes largely unnoticed”, Holly Allan (manager, Helpers for Domestic Helpers) notes that “Verbal and physical abuse [of FDHs in Hong Kong] by employers is common”.³⁷ Readers who suspect that this lady has a potentially distorted and/or exaggerated view of the true “plight” of maids in Hong Kong as a result of her employment are referred to an all-too brief article, again in the *South China Morning Post*, with the telling title of “Employer who burned maid with an iron loses appeal.” The epigrammatic article relates how a Hong Kong Chinese woman who branded her maid with an iron was convicted of grievous bodily harm and sentenced to seven months imprisonment.³⁸ In her *Maid in Hong Kong*, Nicole Constable relates how she

met women at the mission [for domestic helpers] who had been underpaid, forced to do illegal work, beaten, starved, locked inside rooms for days on end, and verbally and physically assaulted.³⁹

It is not just employers who abuse and mistreat maids, however, for in Hong Kong maids are also maltreated by official bodies such as the police force. Writing in the *South China Morning Post*, for example, Michael Chugani recounts a story of Hong Kong police officers interrogating a maid for some fifteen hours for the heinous crime of daring to use an Octopus card she had found on the street.⁴⁰ One wonders whether they could or would do the same for someone using money found on the street. After all, the Octopus card is but a rechargeable, pre-paid travel card and so is only a convenient substitute for cash, particularly coins.

One is also forced to wonder what, exactly, employers of maids do with the time they ‘save’ by having such home help; after all, they certainly do not seem to use it by reading, exercising, or partaking in adult education. Following on from Orwell’s remarks concerning labour saving devices, one is reminded, somewhat more contemporarily, of the journalist Andrew Buckoke’s *Fishing in Africa: A Guide to War and Corruption*, when he recounts his tale of when a

herdsman came up to us once under an extinct volcano in the Kedong Valley. We were watching the cars from the Kenyan Safari Rally hurtle by, trailing great plumes of dust. We told him they would only take an hour and a half to reach Nairobi. He told us it would take him three days. After a moment’s thought he asked, “But what do they do with the extra three days?”⁴¹

George Orwell again raises the same question in his essay “Some thoughts on the common toad” when he asks “If a man cannot enjoy the return of spring, why should he be happy in a labour-saving Utopia? What will he do with the leisure that the machine will give him?”⁴²

We saw above that there are highly divergent figures and estimates as to the number of maids in Hong Kong. No matter what the precise figures however, the number of domestic helpers is certainly very high by any measure. Of course, although there are a staggeringly high number of ‘amahs’ in Hong Kong, not everyone can afford live-in domestic help. Many of those who do not hire an ‘amah’ and who continue to work thus turn the task of caring for their child over to their or their spouse’s mother, many of whom often live with their son’s or daughter’s family.

One could be forgiven for asking what if any relevance the fact that many married couples have an elderly person living with them has to education in Hong Kong. Again though, such a question would merely reveal ignorance of life in Hong Kong. For, due to the prevailing culture in the territory, it is the grandmother, if one is present, who exerts the most influence over how the family lives, acts, and behaves. It is the grandmother for example who invariably dictates what the family eats, where the food is purchased, how it is prepared, and the time the meal is eaten. Similarly, when it comes to education and general upbringing, it is the wishes of the grandmother that typically prevail. The problem here of course is that these grandmothers of course stem from a different generation – indeed,

from a vastly different place and time. Many fled China in the last of the major upheavals there, and many it would seem are still living in that horrific time, at least in their own mind, and at least to judge by their outward behaviour on the street. Indeed, in the current author's opinion one of the most disturbing spectacles to be witnessed on the streets and public transportation system of Hong Kong is the all too common sight of the boorish grandmother mumbling to herself whilst elbowing and barging her way through crowds, dragging her primary school-aged grandchild behind her (despite his never visiting the territory, the words of Jack Kerouac spring to mind: "sidewalks crowded with Hongkong-like humanity").⁴³ The government can initiate regular 'civic education' campaigns and promote 'Confucian' values if it so chooses, but when a large number of young children are being socialised in this way on a daily basis then such campaigns and promotions may have rather less impact than desired.

Another effect of infants and children being raised by their grandmothers is that it is most likely only through such elderly caregivers that the irrational superstitions and paranormal beliefs reminiscent of the Dark Ages which are so prevalent in Hong Kong are perpetuated. What such beliefs, the reader may well ask, are held and propagated by the elderly? One such medieval belief is that of animism. Jan Morris notes for example that "European miners had to be imported to build the first railway tunnels because Chinese would not risk disturbing the earth-spirits."⁴⁴ If that is too far back in history for some readers then a more recent example, this time revolving around geomancy, is also given by Morris who notes that

When a ship went ashore at Lantau in 1980 some of the islanders demanded compensation from the Marine Department on the grounds that its violation of the local *feng shui* had caused the otherwise inexplicable deaths of many chickens.⁴⁵

Of course, the ultimate and thinly disguised aim here is the extortion of hard currency, and such tactics are far from novel in the territory. Based on his time as a Special Constable in rural post-WWII Hong Kong for example, Austin Coates notes that "When *fèng shui* is brandished as a weapon, besides this – *beside* it, not concealed behind it – lies another reason for the protest, usually a material reason."⁴⁶ Nevertheless, what would be the response in a country in the West if a group of farmers attempted to claim compensation from the government on account of the fact that, for example, someone had walked under a ladder in the local village and this, they claimed, had brought about the mysterious death of some livestock?

In addition to harbouring beliefs related to animism and geomancy, many senior citizens in Hong Kong also accept as an unquestionable fact that there exists spirits, ghosts, and ghouls, and that furthermore, these phantoms do not (as is often believed in the West) inhabit a different dimension, but rather reside alongside humans and are as mortal and prone to injury and accidents as are their human counterparts. As noted by Morris "Not so long ago one of the hazards of driving in Hong Kong was the belief among elderly Chinese that if they stood close enough to a passing car any evil spirits at their heels would be run over."⁴⁷ In the New Territories of Hong Kong things can be quite extreme indeed. In one village in Sai Kung which the current author resided in paganism and idolatry were rife, with many elements of village life resembling something out of the cult classic film "The Wicker Man." On this theme Morris relates how at one festival in Fan Ling no fewer than seventy-eight different divinities were worshipped.⁴⁸

Of course, there are also some ancient esoteric beliefs in the West. Bertrand Russell in his *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* for example notes that "Words, from the earliest times of which we have historical records, have been objects of superstitious awe."⁴⁹ However, it is all a question of degree, for in Hong Kong it is not so much superstitious awe as more logophobia. Whilst there may of course be elements of triskaidekaphobia (fear and avoidance of thirteen) in many countries and belief systems in the West, it is rarely if ever a deeply held conviction, whereas tetraphobia (fear of four) in Hong Kong is a very real fear indeed, with many regarding the numeral and its wholly arbitrary Saussurean Sign with downright dread and terror. The reason behind this unease is that the Cantonese for "four" is 'similar to' the word for "die/death/dead" (Cantonese does not distinguish between these

various word forms). With limited knowledge of the language, the present writer would not dare to venture whether the two words are indeed close to being homophonic, though it is understood that pronunciation of the two lexical items differs only in tone (Cantonese of course being a tonal language). This bizarre fear often even pervades professional architectural planning and engineering. For example, some buildings – including schools – with more than three floors quite often do not have a fourth floor. Of course, any building of more than three floors does indeed have a fourth floor in the sense of being the fourth floor up from the ground floor (at least in British English), but it is not *called* or *referred to as* the fourth floor (it is instead typically termed the fifth floor), and this seems to satisfy all concerned.

Of course, it is all too easy to dismiss such observations regarding superstitious beliefs in Hong Kong as irrelevant, perhaps as an oddity of traditional Chinese culture and/or a primitive belief system. This however would miss the very real fact that such medieval beliefs do indeed have an impact on the education of many young children in Hong Kong. For, in very much the same way that many Hong Kong people will not say the word “four” in Cantonese or do anything of importance on the fourth day of the week (as Thursday is termed in Cantonese), or in the fourth month of the year (as April is referred to), many traditional Chinese males with a passion for gambling – and there are many – will often not tolerate any books related to study and education in their home, as the word for “study” is ‘similar to’ the word for “lose/lost” (as in “to lose/to have lost a bet”). The present writer personally knows of a woman – who is now very successful within her chosen field – who had her school books dumped in the bin by her father because he blamed their very presence in the home for his losing money on horse racing. Though this particular story happens to have a happy ending (the woman in question, now approaching early retirement due to her hard work, wise investments, sacrifice, and prudent saving, has now enrolled on a part-time course which will lead to a degree in Christian counselling), it must surely be assumed that some, and perhaps most, unfortunately do not.

That Hong Kong is home to many elderly and middle-aged males who are fond of gambling will come as no great shock to those who have been anywhere within the vicinity of one of the territory’s countless bookmakers on a race day. Indeed, one of many enduring images of Hong Kong in the present writer’s mind is that of scores of scruffily dressed, nervous looking, chain smoking men sitting on the wall outside one of the countless Jockey Club betting shops, scrutinising the horses’ form and pundits’ tips in the newspaper’s racing guide supplement whilst listening to results on a 1970s style portable transistor radio. It is not just the number of people in Hong Kong who gamble on horse racing that is remarkable, however, but also the sheer amount that is gambled. To give this figure some perspective Michael Harris Bond notes that “The average person in Hong Kong bet more at the racecourse in 1989 than the average person in China earned during the same year.”⁵⁰ Although this comparison refers to some twenty years ago and that average earnings in China have increased considerably in that time, there is little reason to believe that the same is not true today, for income levels in Hong Kong have also increased, as has the convenience and ease of gambling, largely through innovations such as off-site betting achieved via the telephone and the Internet.

Of course, gambling, especially on horses, has long been popular with the Chinese. Writing about his time as a consular officer in Shanghai in the 1920s for example, Ralph Townsend in his *Ways that are Dark* notes that “As in all places where there are Chinese, in Shanghai every sort of gambling joint is accessible” and that “horse racing has the largest following of any sport.”⁵¹ Townsend also speculates as to why “the Chinese are such frenzied gamblers.” He points to their history, noting that

Through many centuries there has been very little opportunity in China for safety in investments. The character of the people has been traditionally such that to thrust money into anybody’s hands as an investment was always a gamble. Hence a Chinese with money might as well gamble it over the gaming table as any other way, and have at least the thrill of exciting play instead of the long gnawing anxiety following the equal, if not greater, risk of investing it.⁵²

Although banks and other such institutions are now vastly safer than in China in the 1920s and in the centuries leading up to that time, there is no doubt that many Chinese are still frenzied gamblers,

especially in Hong Kong. Indeed, in his *Hong Kong Watching* the social psychologist George Adams has a chapter entitled “Why do Hong Kong people gamble so much?”, a question to which Adams gives four interconnected answers:

It offers a way of making money quickly (the sociological factor); it satisfies the Chinese hunger for fate-induced events (the religious factor); it provides relief to and pleasant intensification of anxiety (the existential element); and fourthly it incorporates, induces and supports life games (the psychological element).⁵³

There can also be little if any doubt that this propensity for gambling has an adverse impact on the lives of many gamblers and non-gamblers alike, particularly financially-dependent children. Referring to the vast sums spent on games of chance by Hong Kong people both in their own city and next door in China’s Las Vegas, Macau (via both legal and illegal avenues), Bond for example remarks that “Behind these awesome figures hang the ruptured lives of many individuals and families, beggared by this addiction.” Bond also goes on to note that

Despite this incalculable pain, there is little public discussion of gambling, scant writing on the topic in Chinese psychology, and almost no treatment resources are devoted to tackling this insidious compulsion.⁵⁴

The government of Hong Kong certainly does not seem all too keen on attempting to combat the social ills brought about by addiction to gambling, limiting its intervention to adding the caveat “to excess” to a televised public service announcement advising the populace not to gamble. In this example of TV ready meal-style civic education one sees (surprisingly well dressed and affluent looking) ‘down-trodden’ gamblers waiting in line to drop boxes of cash into Victoria Harbour. A sceptic may well ask why the government does not simply advise the public to not gamble at all, for the potentially dangerous nature of this message to the youth of Hong Kong (as well as adults lacking the requisite self-control) is surely plain for all to see. The received wisdom is to “Go and gamble! Go on, get out there and gamble; but not too much, not to ‘excess’ – make sure you at least leave yourself enough with which to buy the must-have new model mobile phone every two months or so.” Does the government really depend so heavily on revenue from the Hong Kong Jockey Club that it can only pretend to try to limit the amount people squander on gambling, rather than attempting to totally eradicate the practice, and what for many is actually an addiction? After all, how many habitual gamblers are there who can really control themselves and not gamble “to excess”? In fact, it is arguable that from the viewpoint of an orderly and healthy society, *any* gambling is by very definition gambling to excess. One can only assume – if not wager – that it will not be long before the government of Hong Kong airs public service announcements of the type, “Don’t speed, by a large margin”, and “Don’t smoke, at least not in excess of forty cigarettes a day.” It does not take a developmental psychologist to see what potential effects such mixed messages can have on the youth, especially in their formative years.

Moving on from gambling, another very visible consequence of having young children cared for by elderly grandparents is, if the reader will pardon the pun, the ever growing problem of obesity in Hong Kong. In an article in the Young Post supplement of the *South China Morning Post* entitled “Super size Hong Kong”, we read that a study conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) suggests that the level of obesity of children under 16 has increased to some 15%, representing an increase of 5% over the previous decade. “Grannies, junk food and too much homework may be the culprits” for this increase according to the study, with Albert Li Man-chim of CUHK stating that “Many children are looked after by their grandparents, who still think being fat is cute and healthy and brings good luck – an old Chinese saying.”⁵⁵ Everyone needs a bit of luck, especially when betting the week’s budget on the 7:15pm at Happy Valley.

To sum up so far then, we have seen how an underlying insecurity commonly associated with the refugee mentality permeates, and perhaps even infects, Hong Kong and its populace, a significant proportion of whom work for little more than subsistence wages more characteristic of less developed

states, and who have to face patent and extreme inequalities and disparities in wealth on a daily basis, and who live in cramped and claustrophobic conditions, all of which has presumably led to ever fewer couples opting to have children, with many of those that do start a family resorting to imported domestic helpers and their own parents or parents-in-law for child care, with the latter often raising their charges in an aggressive, superstitious, spoilt, and ultimately unhealthy fashion.

Needless to say, all of this has some not inconsiderable impact on the development of the young, and of course their education, particularly when it comes to opportunities – and their ability – to concentrate and engage in self-study. One arguable result of such stifling social conditions is the large number of disenfranchised youth in Hong Kong. In an article in the *South China Morning Post* entitled “One suicide every nine hours last year”, we read that “The department [of Social Welfare] estimates that about 15,000 teenagers are ‘night drifters’ who wander the streets late into the evening.”⁵⁶ In addition, escapist behaviour such as that exemplified in drug abuse is as rife as it is organised. Another article due to the *South China Morning Post* – “Dial ‘D’ for drugs” – asserts that “On some housing estates, getting high is as easy as having a pizza delivered.”⁵⁷ Such manifestations of despair are in no way limited to the younger generation. Hemlock notes that from 1997 to 2001 “suicide among the 25 and 59 age group had increased by more than 30%, with nearly half of them unemployed. The overall suicide rate was to rise from 13.3 per 100,000 in 1998 to 16.4 per 100,000 in 2003. With an average of four a day, there were more suicides than road deaths.”⁵⁸

It should not be assumed that it is merely those at the poorer extreme of the social spectrum who suffer as a result of being brought up in such conditions. As noted by George Adams in his *Games Hong Kong People Play*,

Children learn what they live, not what they are told and in a home environment dominated by traffic noise, the TV, exhausted money-earners, bad air, few books – or, at the other end of the social spectrum, by slavish accumulation of wealth, long parental absences in Canada and hedonistic values and behaviour – children are not made into winners but losers.⁵⁹

Tony Henderson goes one step further and remarks on how one’s actual physical wellbeing can be affected by such prevailing conditions, noting that

Health problems stem from a deterioration in the quality of living, where lack of time for personal needs, lack of quiet on top stressful work and societal conditions, upset the mental condition which in turn belabours the body. Today society is ridden with ‘modern illness.’⁶⁰

Of course, such observations are far from novel. In order to illustrate the effect that distractions, noise, and monotony can have on the individual’s creativity, ability to concentrate, and performance in a given task, Walter Lippmann in his seminal book *Public Opinion* of 1922, a work generally credited with going on to spawn what became to be known as political science, cites some interesting laboratory research that may explain why the average citizen’s “whole life will tend towards an automatism in which nothing is particularly to be distinguished from anything else unless it is announced with a thunderclap.”⁶¹ The research, conducted at the Psychiatric University Clinic in Zurich under the supervision and direction of Jung, indicated that a subject’s reactions (both in response time and quality of response) were seriously impaired when suffering from even “slight mental fatigue”, such as that caused for example by having to hold an idea in mind whilst beating time with a metronome. What Lippmann notes is of special interest and relevance to any study of living conditions in Hong Kong and the adverse affects such conditions may have on students’ intellect, and as such is thus worth quoting at some considerable length:

If the comparatively simple conditions of a laboratory can so readily flatten out discrimination, what must be the effect of city life? In the laboratory the fatigue is slight enough, the distraction rather trivial. Both are balanced in measure by the subject’s interest and self-consciousness. Yet if the beat of a metronome will depress intelligence, what do eight or twelve hours of noise, odor, and heat in a factory, or day upon day among chattering typewriters and telephone bells and slamming doors, do to the political judgements formed on the basis of newspapers read in street-

cars and subways? Can anything be heard in the hubbub that does not shriek, or be seen in the general glare that does not flash like an electric sign? The life of the city dweller lacks solitude, silence, ease. The nights are noisy and ablaze. The people of a big city are assaulted by incessant sound, now violent and jagged, now falling into unfinished rhythms, but endless and remorseless. Under modern industrialism thought goes on in a bath of noise. If its discriminations are often flat and foolish, here at least is some small part of the reason. The sovereign people determine life and death and happiness under conditions where experience and experiments alike show thought to be most difficult. “The intolerable burden of thought” is a burden when conditions make it burdensome. It is as exhilarating to think as it is to dance, and just as natural.⁶²

Although these words were penned close to one century ago in America in relation to experiments in Switzerland, they could easily be mistaken for a contemporary description of Hong Kong, especially the allusions to “incessant sound” and a “bath of noise”, something for which Hong Kong has long been infamous.

Rudyard Kipling for example wrote about his visit to the Frangant Harbour in 1888 in his travelogue *From Sea to Sea*, the work in which he coined the quip-like expression “Life, with a capital Hell.”⁶³ This term describes numerous aspects of life in and the living conditions of Hong Kong encountered by Kipling, not least the climate, the terrain, the chaos, and of course the sheer amount of hustle and noise present even back then. Not much has changed. Indeed, one of the most conspicuous – and indeed, distinguishing – features of any Chinese community (no matter the time or place) is their passionate need for gratuitous noise. Jan Morris notes for example that “Noise is endemic to the Chinese” and is “part of the texture of their lives”,⁶⁴ and that in her opinion it is “the sound of a jack-hammer”⁶⁵ that is the “leitmotif of Hong Kong.”⁶⁶ Morris also refers to “the racket of radio music and amplified voices, the half-shouted conversation that is peculiar to Chinese meeting one another in the street, the ceaseless clatter of spoons, coins, mah-jong counters, abaci, hammers and electric drills.”⁶⁷ Few acquainted with Hong Kong will doubt that Morris hits the nail on the head with these comments, though newcomers to the territory may find themselves wondering why local citizens even bother using their (ever present) mobile phones whilst on public transport and in restaurants; after all, given the sheer volume they ‘talk’ at they could just as easily stick their head out of the window and contact their friends and relatives in Melbourne and Vancouver that way.

It should be noted that this seeming need for noise is not simply an unavoidable artefact of industrialisation and urbanisation, but in fact appears to be a continuity of longstanding preferences. For whereas in the West in the days of old night watchmen of walled towns and villages would not raise the alarm unless they were threatened or came under attack, in the early days of the colony of Hong Kong it was the exact opposite. All one could hear from a Chinese night watchman was the incessant drumming of their bamboo tympani⁶⁸ or the half-hourly bang of their gong.⁶⁹ The logic here, presumably, was that constant noise indicated that the lookouts had *not* had their throats cut (though of course anyone capable of creeping up on somebody on sentry duty and murdering them would most likely also be capable of continuing to bang their drum to give the impression of all being well). In sum, continual noise actually comforted and reassured the inhabitants of old Hong Kong, as it arguably does their descendents in Hong Kong today. When the new Exchange Square in Central was opened, for example, brokers complained that it was too calm and quiet. In response there was actually a proposal to play background tapes of the old exchange’s “noisy clatter” on a perpetual loop.⁷⁰

Visitors to schools in Hong Kong could be forgiven for believing that classrooms also have such recordings playing in the background, for the noise can often be nothing short of alarming – which appears to have been the case in Chinese schools for quite some time. Referring to the noise emanating from Chinese classrooms in Peking in the early 1920s for example, Bertrand Russell remarked that the “din was deafening.”⁷¹

One factor contributing to the high levels of noise in present-day classrooms in Hong Kong is the microphone. For, in very much the same way that at sports days and other such events there is

invariably an MC, with a microphone, who never stops babbling away (it is easy to find oneself wondering how primary and secondary schools elsewhere in the world manage to coordinate such events without a person performing such a role), each classroom in Hong Kong contains a local teacher for whom constant microphone use appears to be obligatory. Pedagogically speaking, there are at least three distinct potential problems here. First, microphone use by teachers allows – indeed, arguably encourages – students to talk whilst their teacher is talking, further adding to the general racket and row in the classroom and often leading to an auditory arms race of sorts between the teacher and the students. Second, the microphone can often induce fear on the part of the students (especially when it is all but rammed down their throats) as, quite understandably, many do not necessarily want any mistakes to be amplified and broadcast to their classmates, especially not when attempting a foreign language. Third, also particularly relevant to the learning of a foreign tongue is the fact that the acoustics, that is, the natural stress, rhythm, and general pronunciation of a language, can be grossly warped and distorted by the amplification effect of the microphone, especially the cheaper models often employed in Hong Kong (teachers typically have to provide their own and so most are not necessarily of the highest possible fidelity). Native speakers will of course rarely even notice such distortions, but this is simply as they have the underlying competence required to compensate and ‘fill in the gaps’; it is quite a different matter attempting to *learn* a language from such flawed and defective input, however.

Another factor contributing to the high general level of noise associated with Hong Kong classrooms is the sheer number of announcements made over the PA system *during* lessons. John Biggs and David Watkins cite analysis which indicates that 30 per cent of lessons in the USA were interrupted by announcements over the PA, 10 per cent of lessons in Germany, and that no such interruptions were recorded in Japan.⁷² No data are supplied by Biggs and Watkins in relation to Hong Kong, but the personal experience of the current author at both primary and secondary level suggests that somewhere between 10 per cent and 30 per cent of lessons are *not* interrupted by announcements broadcast over the PA system. Other forms of ‘noisy data’ typically include large, old, clapped out ceiling fans, rusty, dated, air-conditioning units, perpetual traffic noise penetrating through the ill-fitting windows, students fidgeting (hardly surprising as they often have to remain in the same seat in the same classroom all day), and the seemingly obligatory and constant construction and/or renovation work being carried out somewhere in the school or in an adjacent building.

It has to be noted however that perhaps as a result of the living conditions outlined above students are certainly very tolerant of noise. Indeed, most if not all seem more than able to shut themselves off from, that is to ‘filter out’, all this noise, and to withdraw psychologically. In fact, it would not be going too far to say that the average Hong Kong student, and person in general, appears to be able to shut their ears in very much the same way that people elsewhere in the world can close their eyes. This capacity to ‘filter out’ the immediate environment has both disadvantages and advantages and thus is both a curse and a blessing. Perhaps a personal anecdote will help to illustrate some of the obvious advantages to being able to blank out one’s surroundings.

Once while adjudicating an exam some repair work began in the building immediately adjacent to the campus. This building work consisted of blasting, drilling, sawing, hammering, and ultra-loud banter between the workmen on the bamboo scaffolding, etc. Anyone who has been anywhere near a Chinese building site will know exactly just how loud these places can be. Now, if this had been in a Western state then no doubt complaints would have been made and students would have refused to continue to sit the test. Witnesses would have been requested to come in, note the distracting conditions, and perhaps even to take readings of the noise so that students could apply to re-sit the exam at another time, for the racket emanating from the building next door was ear-splittingly and brain-numbingly loud. In the opinion of the current author at least, it was simply not appropriate to hold an exam under such conditions. However, despite the din from the building site the students simply carried on regardless and not a single one complained. It is even possible that some of the students were wholly unaware of the noise; that much was evident from the absence of any change in their facial expressions. This would appear to be an example of the Hong Kong Chinese employing

what Jan Morris refers to as “some Daoist precept” to “deliberately [expunge]” aspects of their immediate surroundings “from their consciousness.”⁷³

The disadvantages of such an ability do not need to be elaborated upon, however, and those with experience of teaching in Hong Kong will be more than familiar with them. Suffice it to say that the ability to shut one’s self off from one’s surroundings and to blank out reality and input from the immediate environment can obviously be misapplied. After all, it is difficult to imagine how else after some six years of English language tuition at primary school, seven at secondary school-cum-sixth form college, and then three at university – and perhaps more in postgraduate courses – there can be articles in the *South China Morning Post* with titles such as “Less than half of teachers pass English writing in proficiency test.”⁷⁴ It is also likely that it is this ability which allows Hong Kong people to go about their daily affairs despite the somewhat horrific levels of air pollution. World Health Organisation guidelines relating to air quality state that an air pollution index in excess of 100 indicates that the pollutants pose immediate health risks, with those suffering from respiratory or heart illnesses being at particular risk. Greenpeace have stated that between 3pm and 4pm on 01.06.09, for example, all eleven of Hong Kong’s air quality monitoring stations registered one or two pollutants above these WHO guidelines, with the station at Causeway Bay, a shopping area popular with tourists, climbing as high as 135 at 11am.⁷⁵

Of course, there is probably a sound reason why the average Hong Kong citizen does not ‘notice’ such aspects of their environment. Not ‘taking in’ the surroundings is most likely a coping mechanism, that is, a defence strategy employed to survive the harsh living conditions outlined above. If Hong Kong people began to take note of the details of the environment in which they find themselves, that is, if they started to face up to reality, the suicide rate would doubtless go through the roof.

Notes to Chapter One: Claustrophobic Conditions

¹ Veronica Pearson, ‘Women in Hong Kong’ (pp.114-139 in Benjamin K.P. Leung (ed.) *Social Issues in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong; Oxford University Press, 1990), p.128

² Jan Morris, *Hong Kong: Epilogue to an Empire*. (2nd ed., with an additional chapter.) (London, Penguin, 1997), pp.71-72

³ Rupert Hodder, *The West Pacific Rim: An Introduction*. (London, Belhaven Press, 1992), p.98

⁴ Tony Henderson, *Humanize Hong Kong*. (Hong Kong, Humanist Association of Hong Kong, 1993), p.230. Available at: <http://home.pacific.net.hk/~tonyhen/hhk.txt>

⁵ Austin Coates, *Myself a Mandarin: Memoirs of a Special Magistrate*. (Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 1968/1987), p.98

⁶ <http://www.overseaspropertymall.com/regions/south-east-asia-property/hong-kong-property/most-expensive-apartment-in-hong-kong-sells/>

⁷ Manuel Castells, Lee Goh, & Reginald Ying-Wang Kwok, *The Shek Kip Mei Syndrome – Economic Development and Public Housing in Hong Kong and Singapore*. (London, Pion Limited, 1990), p.1, cited in Rupert Hodder, *The West Pacific Rim: An Introduction*. (London, Belhaven Press, 1992), p.98

⁸ Tony Henderson, *Humanize Hong Kong*. (Hong Kong, Humanist Association of Hong Kong, 1993), p.130

⁹ Jan Morris, *Hong Kong: Epilogue to an Empire*. (2nd ed., with an additional chapter.) (London, Penguin, 1997), p.234

¹⁰ Rupert Hodder, *The West Pacific Rim: An Introduction*. (London, Belhaven Press, 1992), p.97

¹¹ Hemlock, *We Deserve Better: Hong Kong Since 1997*. (Hong Kong, Paulus, 2007), p.85

¹² Hemlock, *We Deserve Better: Hong Kong Since 1997*. (Hong Kong, Paulus, 2007), p.180

¹³ Dennis Eng, ‘Hong Kong’s wealth gap is biggest in Asia’, *SCMP*, 25.10.08, p.A4

¹⁴ Fanny W.Y. Fung, ‘Six were offered more to avoid pay cuts’, *SCMP*, 11.06.08, p.A3

¹⁵ Hemlock, *We Deserve Better: Hong Kong Since 1997*. (Hong Kong, Paulus, 2007), p.188

¹⁶ Hemlock, *We Deserve Better: Hong Kong Since 1997*. (Hong Kong, Paulus, 2007), p.65

¹⁷ T.R. Reid, *Confucius Lives Next Door: What Living in the East Teaches Us About Living in the West*. (New York, Random House, 1999), pp.202-203

¹⁸ Hemlock, *We Deserve Better: Hong Kong Since 1997*. (Hong Kong, Paulus, 2007), p.85

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- ¹⁹ Todd Crowell & Stephanie Forman Morimura, *Tokyo: City on the Edge*. (Hong Kong, Asia 2000, 2002), p.114
- ²⁰ Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers*. (New York, Cornell University Press, 1997), p.60
- ²¹ *The Economist*, 'The Filipina Sisterhood: An Anthology of Happiness', 20.12.01, original italics
- ²² Tom Lantos of California speaking in the House of Representatives, 'Minimum Wage for Filipino Workers in Hong Kong', (Extensions of Remarks, 06.02.02), available at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?r107:2:./temp/~r107wSzRmA::>
- ²³ Daniel Sin, 'Indonesians set to overtake Filipinos', *SCMP*, 01.06.09, p.C1
- ²⁴ Jan Morris, *Hong Kong: Epilogue to an Empire*. (2nd ed., with an additional chapter.) (London, Penguin, 1997), p.60
- ²⁵ Todd Crowell & Stephanie Forman Morimura refer to the "scarcity of married women with careers" in Japan. (*Tokyo: City on the Edge*. Hong Kong, Asia 2000, 2002), p.60
- ²⁶ George Adams, 'The Last Abalone' (pp.50-56 in *True Hong Kong Confessions*. Hong Kong, AIP, 1995), p.54
- ²⁷ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1937/1962), pp.172-173
- ²⁸ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1937/1962), p.176, original italics
- ²⁹ Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers*. (New York, Cornell University Press, 1997), p.34
- ³⁰ Austin Coates, *Myself a Mandarin: Memoirs of a Special Magistrate*. (Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 1968/1987), pp.110-111
- ³¹ Austin Coates, *Myself a Mandarin: Memoirs of a Special Magistrate*. (Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 1968/1987), p.46
- ³² Will Clem, 'Looking abroad? Think before you pack their bags', *SCMP*, Good Schools Guide supplement, 14.06.08, p.12
- ³³ Amy Nip, 'Spoil a child, mess with its maturity', *SCMP*, 22.05.09, p.C6
- ³⁴ Reuters, 'Hong Kong ranked world's freest economy for 15th consecutive year', 13.01.09, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS227494+13-Jan-2009+PRN20090113>
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- ³⁷ Holly Allan, letter, 'Plight of many foreign domestic helpers goes largely unnoticed', *SCMP*, 25.04.09, p.A10
- ³⁸ 'Employer who burned maid with an iron loses appeal', *SCMP*, 22.05.09, p.C6
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- ⁴¹ Andrew Buckoke, *Fishing in Africa: A Guide to War and Corruption*. (London, Pan Books, 1991), p.223
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- ⁴³ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*. (With an Introduction by Ann Charters.) (London, Penguin, 1957/1991), p.279 (part IV, chapter V)
- ⁴⁴ Jan Morris, *Hong Kong: Epilogue to an Empire*. (2nd ed., with an additional chapter.) (London, Penguin, 1997), p.127
- ⁴⁵ Jan Morris, *Hong Kong: Epilogue to an Empire*. (2nd ed., with an additional chapter.) (London, Penguin, 1997), p.127, original italics
- ⁴⁶ Austin Coates, *Myself a Mandarin: Memoirs of a Special Magistrate*. (Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 1968/1987), p.171, original italics
- ⁴⁷ Jan Morris, *Hong Kong: Epilogue to an Empire*. (2nd ed., with an additional chapter.) (London, Penguin, 1997), p.123
- ⁴⁸ Jan Morris, *Hong Kong: Epilogue to an Empire*. (2nd ed., with an additional chapter.) (London, Penguin, 1997), p.122
- ⁴⁹ Bertrand Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*. (Harmondsworth, Pelican, 1940/1962), p.21
- ⁵⁰ Michael Harris Bond, *Beyond the Chinese Face: Insights from Psychology*. (Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 1991), p.91
- ⁵¹ Ralph Townsend, *Ways that are Dark: The Truth About China*. (New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1933), p.11
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- ⁵³ George Adams, *Hong Kong Watching: The Essential Guide to Hong Kong People's Behaviour*. (Hong Kong, AIP, 1994), p.94

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