

8 – SHEKOU, SHENZHEN AND HONG KONG

Up early this morning; we left our luggage outside our door, as we would be leaving Zhuhai for Shekou and Shenzhen by boat later this morning. After breakfast we assembled at the entrance of our block at eight o'clock, as instructed, but there was no sign of our guides. I wandered outside and photographed a sign by the swimming pool, which featured some very peculiar spellings and translations from the Chinese. There was another sign like this at the tennis court, but it was not as funny.



We waited until nine o'clock, when our guides eventually showed up. We were a little annoyed and showed our displeasure, though as tactfully as we could. We guessed that our guides were playing a little game with us, for certain individuals in our group were constantly turning up late. Ericus had noticed everything, and later expressed his views in a forthright manner to me when our guides were out of earshot.

As our bus had gone ahead to be transported by ferry, we were picked up in a large Mercedes vehicle. Not too pleased because of what had just happened, we now discovered that our local guides had arranged visits to a couple of extra factories that were not on our schedule. We had already

tired of this industrial region, and the last thing that we wanted to see were more factories!

Our first stop was the Zhuhai Brewery. As the reception area was still under construction, we were led into the office of Mr Mai Hanguang, the director and, over a plastic cups of cold beer, we were given a briefing about the place. I sat near the door beside a very bored Miss Liu, who was showing less and less interest at this stage, as her work was now being done by our hopelessly inadequate local guides. I made little attempt to concentrate on all the figures and statistics.

When we set off on our tour of the brewery, I stayed with Pauline and Ercus, walking in front of our host and the members of the delegation. We smiled at the workers, who seemed to be doing nothing this morning as the place had come to a standstill because of a 'fault'. Only one or two people were parcelling bottles of beer into cardboard boxes for distribution.

Mercifully we did not stay long here and were driven back towards our hotel, stopping for twenty minutes at the large and impressive shopping emporium up the road. European goods were on sale here at inflated prices. Although it was pleasant to walk around admiring everything, I was glad to return to the minibus. A certain lady caused consternation by turning up late, which meant that we now had to rush for the boat.

At the port we scrambled through a crowded waiting room and were stopped by an official. A hurried explanation was offered, tickets were produced, and we were allowed to proceed. The boat turned out to be a large hovercraft full of Chinese men, and with windows that could not be seen through. We were not travelling first class now; the floor was littered with peanut shells.

We set off at about 10.25 a.m. and travelled eastwards across an open stretch of sea to Shekou, which we reached an hour later. We waited while the unruly Chinese men fought to get off, then disembarked and went through customs, which was rather chaotic. Here we were met by a chubby fellow, Mr Zeng Zhiwen, Department Chief of the Foreign Affairs Office, Shenzhen Municipal People's Government. We learned that he had once worked in Canada, which accounted for his excellent English. Because of his unusually large tummy, his stance was rather peculiar – he had to arch himself backwards a little in order to compensate for its size. Although his manner was rather slick, he was pleasant enough. Second in charge, however, was a rather obnoxious individual by the name of Mr Li, whom nobody liked. He was a little too fond of throwing his arms around everyone, men and women alike, by way of encouragement – especially when it came to buying things. Apart from this trait, his main fault was his irritating habit of clapping his hands to get us to move on. Like Louisa, whose manner was

softening a little after Paddy had told Mr Wang that she didn't seem to know the word 'please', Mr Li's manner was far too abrupt for our liking.

Also with us now was a young chap with curly hair (very unusual for a Chinese person) and a red tee-shirt. At first he kept a low profile, but would soon prove to be an excellent interpreter – far better than the bumptious Mr Li, whose English was not the best.

We did not delay long at the port. We clambered aboard our familiar bus, which still contained our luggage, and drove to a posh hotel not too far away. It was located in an extensive park with a huge lake and a long ornamental corridor – longer than the famous one at the Summer Palace in Beijing. Here we spruced ourselves up and sat down to an excellent meal hosted by our new guide, Mr Zeng. Because of his Canadian English, no translation was needed. He was keen on proposing toasts, in an effort to get us drinking. Once again we were served by pretty girls wearing *qípáo* dresses, who placed food from the various dishes on a series of clean plates.

The plan was to take a walk along the corridor after lunch, as we had time to spare, but when the meal came to an end, it began to pour with rain outside. As the corridor was a short distance from our building, we would get soaked and so we ended up just looking out of a window at the surrounding view. I was quite surprised when Pauline removed her sandals, splashed through the puddles to the bus and emerged with an umbrella. She was joined by Ercus, who also removed his sandals. As no exact time had been given to us for leaving the hotel, they ran off to the corridor to enjoy their promised walk. Not wishing to get soaked, I ambled back to the dining room, where I discovered that the others were now leaving for the bus. I ran back to the window and shouted as loudly as I could to call Ercus and Pauline back, but to no avail. I then went to the bus and explained what had happened. Our guides were quite annoyed about this for, as they said, Ercus and Pauline could have told them where they were going. I was annoyed too, for once again we had let our side down. I ran back to the window and tried shouting again, but it was no use. Eventually some of the guides set off in a car to try to find them and we drove off. Soon we were all reunited when Ercus and Pauline cheerfully clambered aboard the bus as though nothing had happened. Paddy read aloud a paragraph from his guide book describing Chinese punctuality, but neither Ercus and Pauline could understand why we should be so upset as they had not been told when we would be leaving. I told them that they should have asked our guides. As Mr Wang and Miss Liu admitted that they had not told everybody about our time of departure, there was no further discussion about the matter. We waited for Mr Li to join us and then, when everyone was back in the bus, we drove on to Shenzhen, the newly-built city on the border with Hong Kong.

On the way, we stopped at the relatively new Shekou Industrial Area and were brought into a large building that seemed to consist mostly of glass. Upstairs we met a pleasant bespectacled lady who brought us to a model of the area on a table and pointed things out to us. As usual, we were treated to a litany of boring statistics and told about the great progress of the area. We had a good bird's eye view of the place from the window, which looked out over the bay and a host of new high-rise buildings.

We were then brought into another room to see a video about the place, during which I dozed off as it was so uninteresting. We were told about the tremendous strides and fast progress of the Industrial Area as it was built over the years. Eithne fell asleep too and Paddy had to stop her from snoring. Ercus told me later that he had to give me an occasional dig to stop me collapsing over him!

The video seemed to be endless. We eventually escaped from the place, bleary-eyed, and climbed back into the bus. We then continued our journey to Shenzhen; no doubt I drifted off to sleep again!

We soon found ourselves approaching a large modern city, full of high-rise buildings, with more under construction. We might as well have been in Hong Kong – the influence from there was immediately obvious. The fact that we would have to spend all of tomorrow here was not at all inviting. Mr Li almost jumped out of his seat with enthusiasm, pointing out everything of interest to us. At about five o'clock we arrived at the large and impressive New Garden Hotel, located not far from what remained of the old quarter. It was amazing to think that when we had passed through this place by train ten years ago, we had seen nothing.

In the hotel we discovered that our rooms were on the thirteenth floor – or rather floor 12A as it was labelled in the lift. Our rooms were first class except for the showers, which did not work properly. Ercus went off to use the swimming pool, which could be seen from our window, and somehow I managed to have a shower.

Ercus and I appeared at six o'clock on the dot in the foyer for this evening's banquet, and were surprised to discover nobody else from our party there. Louisa appeared and explained that the time had been changed to 6.30 p.m.; she had tried to ring us in our room, but we had left too early for her! Our local guides seemed to like changing the times of events, for few of them had happened at the times printed on our schedule. Ercus and I were now taking great delight in outsmarting them!

We returned to our room and filled in the time until 6.30, when we joined the others downstairs and were driven to the nearby Pan Hsi restaurant, where we went upstairs to the room reserved for us. On the way up, Ercus spotted a Guinness sticker on the side of a cabinet in a bar.

In our dining room we were introduced to Mr Kong Haozhen, Deputy Director of the Shenzhen Foreign Affairs Office, who sat us down at a low table with glasses of tea, and rattled on endlessly about the development of Shenzhen. Mr Li made a hopeless attempt to translate what he was saying – nobody could understand him – and had to be helped by Mr Zeng. As it was of no interest to me whatsoever, I paid no attention (and was observed to nod off). At the end of it all, Mr Kong indicated that comments or questions would be welcomed, but Paddy cleverly suggested that we move to the table and that maybe the meal would inspire us to ask anything that we might like to know.

At the table we were served a typical banquet, complete with more speeches and plenty of excuses for toasts. Mr Kong spoke constantly in Mandarin Chinese, but Paddy and Eithne discovered that he had worked abroad and spoke perfect English. Hence, when Paddy got up to speak at the end, he asked for no translation. As he realized that he would not have a suitable opportunity on the following evening, and as Ercus would be leaving early for Hong Kong, he now embarked on his farewell speech. It was a long and rather passionate outpouring, in which he praised China, though recognized its faults, and thanked our guides. In short, he said all the right things. Our guides seemed to appreciate this but Mr Kong, naturally enough, distanced himself. Whether he understood it all, nobody knew. One certain truth that Paddy drew our attention to was that Mr Wang, everybody's favourite guide, was 'a perfect gentleman'. Whatever Ercus thought about this – he was not exactly looking forward to this speech and had hoped that he would miss it on the following evening – the speech was well received. No presents were given at this stage, for we had taken the precaution of meeting Mr Wang and Miss Liu earlier in the Brennans' room to give them their presents.

When the banquet had finished, we left the restaurant and drove back to our hotel. Ercus and I decided to go out for a walk, and were joined by Paddy and Pauline. We sauntered out and took the street that brought us through the so-called 'old quarter', where the shops and buildings were smaller and more intimate. We soon got the feeling that we were something of a novelty here and that the local shop owners had rarely seen Westerners before. When we men looked at women's clothes shops, especially ones that displayed padded bras and frilly knickers outside, the ladies in charge turned away in embarrassment and giggled. We walked along a narrow street that was full of restaurants; we were repeatedly invited to step inside by girls standing at the doors. A narrower street was essentially a market area, where we saw stalls being cleared and their owners retreating to their tiny hovels behind the stalls.

Ercus and Pauline walked ahead, chatting, while I stayed with Paddy. I did not take much notice of where we were going, for I knew that Ercus had a good sense of direction and I trusted him. Hence I was surprised that when we completed the fourth side of the block that we had been walking around, we did not arrive at our hotel. Ercus then crossed the road and began walking in another direction. We followed him blindly until we finally realized that we had lost our way. Although we recognized various landmarks, we could not find the hotel, which was obviously nearby. We asked several people where it was, but nobody seemed to know. At last we found somebody who did, and we were waved off in the direction of a street that was being either constructed or reconstructed. Because of its state, we had to turn right. We then found ourselves at a taxi rank, where Paddy (who by now was in quite a tizzy) tried to hail one of the taxies, but once again nobody knew where the hotel was.

Ercus then recognized one of the streets that we had walked along earlier, and so we now headed off in the opposite direction and retraced our steps, though Paddy, who was completely disorientated, at first went off in another direction and had to be called back.

We eventually arrived back at the hotel at about eleven o'clock, tired. I had a shower and was very glad to get into bed for a good night's sleep.

Our last full day in China, which most of us were not looking forward to. Fortunately Miss Liu managed to persuade our local guides to cancel a visit to the Hafa Electric Company this morning, which would allow us more time for shopping.

This morning we boarded the bus at eight o'clock and were driven off to the revolving restaurant at the top of the International Trade Centre for breakfast. The lift that brought us almost to the top was on the outside of the building and was suitably impressive, but we had to pass through a tatty area in order to take the second lift to the restaurant. Although the ultra-modern restaurant was quite pleasing, we could see signs of wear and tear. We were brought to a table that offered a spectacular view of the city and were told that we would be served a Western breakfast. However, we were given various dishes of rather unappetising Chinese food that we and our guides just picked at, for none of us had fully recovered from the previous evening's banquet.

Our breakfast over, we were brought down in the lifts to the ground floor and let loose in a shopping emporium, which Ercus and I just looked around quickly. We then changed some money into Hong Kong dollars, at a rate of about eleven dollars to the Irish pound. We left this expensive place, not knowing what exactly we could do until 11 o'clock, and crossed the road to look into more uninteresting shops and browse at some bookstalls out in the

street. These proved to be interesting; I used up my remaining Chinese money by buying a couple of pocket dictionaries and a pen.

We were back in the International Trade Centre at eleven, having just escaped a sudden downpour of rain, and were driven back to our hotel for lunch. Ercus went off walking afterwards and I retired to my room to rest. Ercus returned later with a couple of fine stamp collections that he had bought locally. While out and about, he had tried to work out how we had got lost last night, but did not succeed.

Shortly afterwards, we met in the lobby and drove off to visit a local library. It was housed in a very large modern building and was most impressive. We were introduced to the man in charge, who gave us a brief introduction and showed us around. The rooms and corridors were kept immaculately clean and everything seemed to be done very efficiently. We went into one of the lending libraries, where we saw security cameras everywhere (pilfering was obviously a problem here) and examined the computerized system used for the borrowing and returning of books. The use of Chinese characters in the computers made things rather more complicated; Ercus and I were fascinated to see how they worked.

We were then brought into other areas, such as a video library and a viewing room, where several young couples were glued to television screens, oblivious to everything else. Next we were shown two English-language libraries, one for periodicals and the other for books, both of which were completely deserted. It was obvious that not much English was spoken here and that few students studied the language. I noticed that most of the books here were quite old-fashioned; many of them had their prices marked in shillings and pence. One item caught my attention: a volume of Bach's keyboard music. Louisa got very excited when she looked through some fashion and jewellery magazines – we had noticed her fondness for Western 'decadence'. Finally we were led back to the foyer and we returned to our bus, where conversation now took a literary turn.

We then drove to the Shazhui Industrial Village, which turned out to be in the countryside. We were met by some of the people in charge and together we ambled along a sleepy street. The people here did not seem to be very welcoming. We passed elderly ladies assembling plastic flowers on the side of the road, and saw a couple of others wearing the wide black hats with hanging cloth borders typical of the region.

We then entered a house that did not look typical because of its cleanliness and the presence of modern gadgets everywhere, and sat down to talk to some of the inhabitants. When we were invited to look round the rest of the house, we noticed that there were pin-ups of pop singers in the youngsters' bedrooms.

Back out in the street, we paused to observe the bus driver and a colleague playing shuttlecock – they had borrowed the rackets and a shuttlecock from a couple of girls. We then walked to the nearby plastic flower factory, which seemed to be the main local industry. Here we were able to watch the process of stamping out the flowers and assembling them. The girls here were prettier and smiled at us. On leaving, everyone of us was presented with a very realistic plastic flower. However, as we walked away from the factory, somebody from the factory caught up with us and offered us all a massive bouquet of the flowers. Louisa went wild with excitement again, and most of them ended up in her and Miss Liu's hands. I asked Louisa what she would do with them; she said that she would bring them home and put them in her room. She had definitely helped herself to the best ones!

Although it was only a little after five o'clock by now, we were brought back to the street and into a restaurant that specialized in fish dishes. Having eaten a substantial breakfast and a large lunch, nobody was in the mood for eating so early in the evening. Some of us hoped that it would only be a fish-tasting session, but it was nothing of the sort. We went upstairs and discovered that at last we were in a typical Chinese restaurant: it was scruffy and noisy, and the waitresses were scatterbrained. We were now given fish dish after fish dish, each one very tasty, but all we could do was pick at them. Included were shrimps, mussels, eels, and crabmeat; for the first time in my life I ate fried oysters, which were very tasty, much to my surprise.

We left at little before 6.30 p.m., stopping to give some children our plastic flowers. They seemed delighted to take them; we guessed that they had probably never owned one of their local products before. Ercus and I got rid of our flowers in this manner.

Back on the bus Louisa, as usual, hesitated about sitting down, and then sat beside me, having said something to our guides that made them laugh. Mr Wang asked me if I had understood what had been said, '*xiǎo húzi*'. As I didn't, Louisa laughed and told me that '*hú*' meant 'beard'; I had just been dubbed 'the little bearded one'! We had a great laugh about this, which had the welcome effect of making everyone feel more at ease. I now found that I could chat comfortably to Louisa, who had previously shied away from us. On the way back to Shenzhen, Paddy presented her with a box of Irish handkerchiefs decorated with shamrocks, and a decorative tea towel made of Irish linen depicting a couple of owls in a tree. Louisa was delighted with these and said that she would treasure them.

We arrived back at the hotel a little earlier than expected, at about 6.45. We were all free until 8.40, but now it was time for Ercus to pack and be brought off to the train station. He left at 7.15 and we said goodbye. I was

then free to repack for the journey home, which would start tomorrow morning.

At the appointed time we, with the exception of Eithne, met in the hotel lobby for this evening's dreaded visit to the Honey Lake Country Club, which we had passed on the way to Shenzhen. This was presumably the Chinese version of Disneyland, for most of it consisted of a huge amusement park. Apparently there would be dancing here tonight, for Louisa had been encouraging me by saying, 'We're depending on you!' I certainly was not looking forward to this.

A short journey brought us to this dreaded place, where we were joined by a lady who clambered aboard the bus to welcome us. We drove through an archway in a so-called 'castle', and encountered hundreds of young people, then went around the deserted amusement park which was now illuminated by coloured lights. We stopped at the big wheel, and squeezed ourselves into the various pods; I shared one with Pauline. Very slowly we went up and around, and thus were able to enjoy a dramatic view of the whole place. In the distance could be seen a display of fireworks. Louisa waved energetically up to me from her and Miss Liu's pod below.

Down on *terra firma* once again, we boarded the bus and were driven around the huge complex. It looked very strange, as everything was deserted by now: dodgems, loop the loop, monorail, swingboats, and so forth. We then returned through the archway in the very artificial-looking 'castle' and stopped outside a large building, which turned out to be a so-called 'nightclub'. We passed through a very vulgar and bright foyer to a darkened hall full of young people, tables and chairs. We were given the best table right at the front, at the foot of the stage and close to the dance floor. Glasses of tea were served and the red curtains parted to reveal a drum kit in the middle and musicians on either side. The music began with an ear-splitting crash and we were into the first number. Lights flashed and a spotlight played on a revolving glass glitter ball as a singer came out, microphone in hand. By now Miss Liu had stuck her fingers into her ears. Mr Wang cringed and our ashen-faced Mr Chen was sitting back, looking quite ill at ease. Only Mr Li and the younger set showed any interest – Mr Li, of course, outdoing them all in his enthusiasm. He kept up a running commentary on everything and even called over a two-man TV crew with a video camera to take a shot of us.

The entertainment was excruciating, not so much because of the music (which was tuneful enough), but because of the deafening racket from the loudspeakers. The music was slow and romantic to start with, and the lighting melodramatic. We were encouraged to dance, but nobody made any move. A couple of Chinese fellows got up and threw a few shapes; they were applauded and that was that. After a lull, the bus driver explained the

steps to Louisa and the two of them got up and stumbled around. I had been challenged earlier to dance with her, but I did not dare get up on my own as I had no idea of the steps used in this formal type of dancing.

Following this, Paddy decided to be a gentleman and asked Pauline to join him. They managed very well and it looked quite convincing. Pat then induced me to join her and suddenly I was whisked off my feet and whirled around the dance floor. She astonished me by her nimbleness, having previously professed her inability to dance. She was certainly the best! Although quite a few young Chinese couples now got up to join us, I was amused to discover that none of them knew the steps. Undoubtedly they were waiting for the disco music that would follow.

After the dancing came more singing. This time the singer was a slick character in a dress suit who came out initially with several sexy young dancing girls displaying lots of leg. (I certainly had not seen anything like this ten years previously!) Our older guides were disgusted, especially Mr Chen, who looked really angry. The music now became louder and more brash, and a laser light played on a cloud generated by dry ice. It soon became very tedious.

After a fellow in denims had jumped up on to the stage from the dance floor and began throwing himself around while roaring into the microphone, Paddy asked if we wanted to stay any longer. As everyone said 'no', we got up and left as soon as the song was over. What a night! Miss Liu looked visibly shaken, Mr Chen even more ashen-faced than ever, and Mr Wang very apologetic. There was dead silence as we boarded the bus until a heated discussion started outside between the young people. Apparently Mr Li and company wanted to stay on. Louisa also wanted to stay but was finally persuaded to get into the bus. Once aboard, Miss Liu, Mr Chen and Mr Wang gave her hell over her behaviour. Obviously they were not pleased about her wanting to stay up late, especially as she would have to travel back to Guangzhou tomorrow in the bus. Louisa turned around to me, smiled and shrugged her shoulders. I felt a little sorry for her now; being young, she obviously wanted to go out and enjoy herself.

Gradually our guides recovered, calmed down a little, and began to talk to us again. Apologies were offered. I later learned that Mr Wang had apologized to Paddy in the nightclub and had added, 'Well, maybe it's good that you've seen this. It's all an experience.' Paddy and I could see what he meant: we could now observe this decadence creeping slowly but surely up from Hong Kong. Paddy was glad that Eithne had decided not to come, for she would not have been able to cope with an evening like this.

We finally arrived back at the hotel at about eleven o'clock, tired and fed up. Our tour had ended on a bad note. It was just as well that we had been given time earlier to do our packing. We all went up in the lift together,

except for Louisa, who either went back to the Honey Lake County Club or made for the disco in the hotel. In my room I organized a few things and went to bed, where I could not get to sleep. I read for a while and finally turned off the light.

After a night of little or no sleep, I got up this morning before the booked wake-up call at 7.30. I then had a shower and left my luggage outside the door before eight o'clock. Afterwards I made my way down to the second floor as instructed by Mr Li, but was intercepted and told by our pleasant young interpreter to go to the 'Western' restaurant on the first floor. Mr Li had messed things up once again, and the other members of the party had to be told where to go for breakfast. The Brennans joined me and I gave Eithne a graphic description of the previous night's entertainment. She was very glad that she had not come with us!

After breakfast we returned to our rooms in order to get ready, then met again in the lobby at 9.30. Mr Chen greeted me, addressing me as 'xiǎo huǒzi' ('young fiery one') – a term used for any young man. I was quite amused by my two new nicknames! We were also joined by chubby Mr Zeng and all the other guides. Before we left, we took photos of the group in the lobby.



Louisa, Miss Liu, Eithne and Paddy Brennan, interpreter, Ercus, Pauline (kneeling), Mr Wang, Mr Chen, and Pat in hotel lobby, Shenzhen

We then clambered into the minibus and were driven to the train station. We entered it in a most unusual manner, crossing the railway lines in order to get to the building. Our guides may have chosen this way in order to

avoid the crowds. The building was huge and confusing, and the volume of people on the move was bewildering. None of this had existed ten years ago – back then it had been a small country station, almost deserted.

We now passed through a security check and changed any remaining money into Hong Kong dollars. While we waited to go through passport control, we bade a hasty goodbye to our guides. I pushed a piece of paper containing my name and address into Louisa's hand in case she wanted an Irish pen pal, then shook hands with Miss Liu, Mr Wang and then with her. I was sorry that this had to be such a rushed affair. Although I was quite ready to return home now, I was sorry to leave China in general, despite all its faults and the mishaps. I had loved being in Chengdu with the charming young people and was determined to return and see them again sometime.

We were waved through passport control and brought by Mr Zeng and our young interpreter, now displaying special identity cards, across the new and improved bridge. Everything came to a stop at the CITS office; a Hong Kong official now appeared and brought us inside, where we bought train tickets and paid for the handling of our luggage. Having handed over HK\$138 (about IR£12), I had very little money left. We then said goodbye to Mr Zeng and the interpreter, and set off with the official for the Hong Kong passport control. I noticed that everything on this side of the border was cleaner and more up to date.

After our passports had been checked, our luggage caught up with us and was passed through an X-ray machine. An official asked us if we had any antiques or weapons and, having said no, we were waved into the security check area, where we had our hand luggage X-rayed and were body searched. We then left for the station, which was packed with people arriving and heading for the People's Republic.

A train pulled out just as we approached the platform but another appeared within minutes. We were shown into an empty first-class compartment. It was worth paying for this luxury, for the other carriages would have been full to bursting point and there was the constant danger of being robbed by pickpockets. Fortunately we were able to see our luggage being put on board.

When we set off, we looked for the fine scenery that we had seen ten years previously, but it was all gone. All we could see now were high-rise buildings and skyscrapers, either new or under construction. The place looked ghastly. Fifty minutes later we arrived in Kowloon station, where we collected our luggage. Paddy and Eithne left for the airport and Pauline made a few phone calls. Afterwards, Pauline, Pat and I went off in search of a taxi to go to the airport. A fellow approached me and said that he would take us for HK\$60, which I unwittingly accepted. We were conducted not to

a taxi but a plain yellow car without a meter. Pauline was annoyed by this, but there was nothing we could do but travel in the car.

When we reached the airport, I enquired about checking in our luggage, but was told that this would not be possible until 3.30 p.m. We therefore put our luggage in the left luggage office and changed some more money. Afterwards we hailed a proper red taxi and travelled to the YMCA hostel for just HK\$20. Although the building was old, the reception area was very smart. As Pauline was staying here for two nights before flying on to Tokyo, she checked in; afterwards we went with her to her room, where we left our hand luggage and rested for a while. After we had refreshed ourselves, we went downstairs to the restaurant for an excellent buffet lunch.

We then looked in the shop, where I bought some souvenirs, including a Chinese umbrella for my mother. We left our purchases in Pauline's room, and I went down to the reception area, where we were supposed to be meeting Ercus, but he did not turn up. After waiting a while, we left a message for him and went out shopping. I left the ladies and went in search of a portable CD player that I had decided to buy for myself. This turned out to be a long, complicated business, during which I tried to find the cheapest price in the many shops that I found. Eventually I bought what I wanted at a reasonable price and returned to the hostel.

After eating another meal in the restaurant, we got ourselves ready and headed back to the airport. Pauline saw us to a nearby bus stop and said goodbye to Pat and me. At the airport we collected our luggage, met Ercus, and checked in. We then filled in time by wandering around the duty-free shops, where everything was very expensive, and finally were called to the departure gate. At last we were about to leave Hong Kong. The day had not been as bad as I had feared, but I was happy to get out of the place. It had not made the same impact as it had made on me ten years previously, for now there was far less contrast between here and the southern part of the People's Republic.

Soon we were in the plane, ready for take-off. Our stay in China finished when, at 11.15 p.m., we took off and rose up into the night sky, heading homewards.