



Winning Entries

Leaving

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Caplowe, Eve – 14

Hong Kong grew up out of the sea, spreading its roots into the saltwater and unfurling skyscrapers. The thing is, no matter how far they stray upwards from the ocean, they cannot sever that connection.

That's what I'm thinking, anyway, as I watch the city light up, a spider's web of neon after sundown. A few golden rays still linger, and in their wake everything glows. The sky is a soft grey that makes me think of doves and sad music. Clouds slip through its fingers, caught on a breeze that lifts my hair.

I look away from that distant tangle of streets and turn to the west, squinting as the sun drowns my face in light. A fish farm squats in the sea, it's a mess of planks bundled together with nets full of fish beneath the surface, attached by rope to the blue barrels that keep it afloat. People used to live there, you know. Shacks stand, crippled, scattered over this expanse. Their tarpaulin roofs are bleached by the sun and ripped by years of wind, the corrugated iron long rusted away. One man still lives there. Him and the fish and the cats. The dogs that used to live there have all left, but either the cats wouldn't or couldn't. You never can tell with cats.

We swam over once, with bread wrapped in plastic bags, not quite airtight. I remember standing on a plank with my toes curled tight around the edge, terrified of falling in. At first glance, the net looked empty. The water shimmered too much to see the writhing black fish I knew were there. I ripped off a soggy crust and threw it in. The net exploded, and I felt adrenaline burst through me. The saltwater thrown up scattered and trickled down my legs. I hadn't fallen in, but the feeling of relief flowed into my lungs as I breathed deep.

Why did that memory come to me, of all the ones I have of this place? Like right now. A handful of steps away from the beach is a wild landscape of rocks yet to be beaten into sand. My first playground. Every weekend, we would run here before breakfast, a tangle of eight arms and legs, and climb as far as we could before our bare feet lost all grip.

I'm alone today, though. Listening to a noise so ordinary to me it's almost silence: the sea and the birds and the wind. Across a stretch of ocean is Dog Island, where fishermen leave their dogs before long voyages. I watch the birds of prey – black kites, I think. Their feathers

lose the golden glint given by the disappearing sun as they finish they lazily purposeful loops and fly off.

It's definitely dark now. I should be getting back. I try to shift but my limbs refuse. I give up and sigh. Let them find me.

I've been forced to dress warm – god knows why, it's only about twelve degrees, but I'm not allowed out of the house until I've shrouded myself in jackets. And I admit, my hands winced when I took them out of my pockets and wheeled my suitcase to the lift. My brother looked up at me, his mouth forming a question, but my glare shut him up. I know I'm ruining this trip for everyone but I don't care. I don't care, I don't care, I don't care. I know my scowl deepened, because my mother shot me a freezing glare of her own. That did nothing to help my mood. I pressed the button to the ground floor so viciously I managed to draw a frown out of my father, the only one who really understood why I was so angry.

We're going on holiday. But that's not the reason I was stubbornly, silently seething. I jammed my hands into my pockets, not caring that the lift doors were closing and my family was still outside. I needed some time by myself. I've been needing that a lot lately. 'I want to be by myself,' 'Just leave me alone,' 'Get out of my room, I need to be on my own!' My family has kept their distance, especially recently, and that makes me worse. No matter what I'd said, I felt abandoned.

Anyway, we were going to Guangzhou, on the Pearl River Delta. All I knew about the Pearl River Delta before this was that pollution from it would leak into my favourite beaches. Black silt and decaying orange peel and plastic bags. I hated it already, but this news was worse. We were going to Guangzhou to see whether... whether we could move there.

I've been learning Chinese since I was two. Yes, Western mothers can be tiger mothers, too. I learnt traditional characters, so I could read the street signs in Hong Kong, but I can't speak Cantonese. I wish I spoke it, but my tongue trips over the words, humiliating me.

One of my first memories was standing on a stool, on my tiptoes so I could see myself in the mirror, taps running. I was putting water in my curls, pressing it into my cheeks. It was darker and straighter with the weight of the water. My mother came in. 'What are you doing, silly?' I looked at her like she was an idiot. 'Making my hair normal, so I look like my friends.' She picked me up, hugged me tight. 'You have lovely hair, sweetheart. You don't have to change.' But I did.

The airport smelled of kerosene. Usually, that smell made me excited, quickened my pulse, but today I felt sick. Walking through immigration, I showed my passport to the smiling man behind the counter. He looked doubtfully from me to the photo. It had been taken in Year Seven, the year when I had gone to a hairdresser that couldn't speak English. His pasty face lit up, but I found myself wishing he'd actually tried to arrest me. Then I wouldn't have to leave.

I was born here. As I watch the contrast between the dark sky and the street lamps grow, I feel a wrenching in my gut and the weight of the truth drops. This is my last night in Hong Kong.

The kerosene smell was stronger than ever. I walked down the tube connecting the plane to the airport. My trainers slapped the cheap carpeting. I felt trapped. Suddenly, there wasn't air. Short of knocking out the cabin crew and kicking the pilot out of the aircraft – and I was almost that desperate – there was nothing I could do.

An airhostess tapped my shoulder. In the spirit of Christmas, I decided not to punch her lights out, but I felt anger well up, nearly breaking the surface. I spun on my heel and looked her in eye. 'What?'

She stepped back as if I was rabid. ‘I need to see your boarding pass.’ she stuttered. I felt bad for a second. Then I was back, mainly because my mother had grabbed my shoulder. ‘I know you’re angry about this, but there is absolutely no need to take it out on this poor woman.’ She turned to the airhostess. ‘I’m so sorry, she’s going through a phase.’ I felt a heady mix of betrayal and fury settle over me as I pulled out my boarding pass, and stalked off to the Economy seats. I sat down at the window seat, and stared at the sea. There were no black kites here. The whole place smelled like goodbye.

My fingers trace the rocks I’m sitting on; spelling out the word I fear the most. I find a piece of charcoal, and write it out for all the world to see. Goodbye.

‘Sash?’ I don’t turn around. ‘Listen, I know you’re sad about leaving, honey, but this is just a test, a dry run. You might even like it there.’ I do look around then.

‘Like it? I’m sorry, have we met? I know you gave birth to me, Mum, but really? I will never like it there if this holiday lasts a lifetime! I hate it already, and I’m not leaving. I’ll find a boarding school or something, but I’m not leaving, you do know that, right?’ Heads turn, but I don’t even acknowledge them. ‘Listen, mother –’

‘No, you listen, Sasha,’ Uh-oh. The full name is never a good sign. ‘This isn’t final. We’re not even sure I’ll take the job. We going so we can have a look, see if it’s right for us. You are completely overreacting, and you are drawing attention to yourself,’ she hissed. It took every fibre of my being not to yell ‘Hey world, look at me!’ at the top of my lungs.

But I didn’t. I held my breath and fastened my seatbelt, not looking at my mother. She sat next to me. ‘Sashie?’ I stared steadfastly out of the window. Funnily enough, ripping me away from the only place I can call home cannot be fixed with a mushy nickname. ‘What?’ I spat. ‘What else is there? I’m adopted? You have cancer? My real dad is a Persian emperor?’ What bigger bombshell can she drop than that we’re leaving?

‘Sash! Where the heck are you?’ I tear my stinging eyes away from the skyline. I don’t want to talk, especially not to him. ‘Sash? Hey!’ My little brother scrambles up the rock. ‘Mum’s scared witless, Dad thinks you’ve been kidnapped by an axe murderer and I’ve been looking for you for about twenty minutes! What the hell, Sasha!’

‘An axe murderer wouldn’t kidnap me, he’d just slice off my various body parts.’ My brother stares at me.

‘I’m just saying, I have a much better chance of being kidnapped by a kidnapper,’ I state. He tackles me into a surprisingly strong bear hug, and something breaks inside me. Besides most of my internal organs. ‘We’re just moving, sis. It’s not the end of the world,’ I look at him. I can’t even process this. ‘I know it’s not, but it’s the end of my world.’

We hung in the air in silence. Mum looked at me like I’d slapped her. The hush slipped from my fingers and broke. ‘Mum, I...’ Her head whipped around like a python’s. ‘Umm, never mind.’ I plugged my headphones in and blast music into my ears so loud I’m sure she can hear it. What I was about to say was this: I’m sorry that I was harsh, but I don’t think you understand. You moved around a lot as a kid, I know, so this probably isn’t a big deal to you, but this city is the biggest constant in my life. This means a lot to me. I really, really don’t want to leave. Please don’t make me.

Suspended thousands of feet above the ground, I still felt the pull of the sea, my roots keeping me in place. Rivers are not the same.

He has pulled me back to the house. I have not kicked or screamed, but my leaden silence weighs on him, and I know it. I know I hurt him, and I hate myself for it. They explode as soon as they see me. ‘Where were you?’ ‘Why didn’t you tell us where you were?’ ‘What have you been doing?’ ‘How could you do this to us?’ ‘Who do you think you are?’

The last question tore any thoughts of apology out of reach. I stand staring at the floor. I will not say one word to them. I will not.

‘Sasha?’ It was my brother. My kind, wonderful brother who hunted down the wasp that stung me, who told me I was stunning when I got my ears pierced, my lovely little brother who sang in his sleep and called me the best sister ever. ‘Yeah?’ my voice was little more than a croak. ‘I... I love you.’

My face cracks into a small smile. ‘Love you too, little brother.’ It was like my parents weren’t even there. He may be years younger than me, but he has always been my hero.

We landed without speaking. My mother gripped the armrests of the chairs as the wheels brushed the ground with a rumble, knuckles turning white. My brother watched the camera fixed to the underside of the plane, pointing out the sparks. My father held my hand gently. I don’t get scared anymore, just a slight adrenaline kick at the descent when my stomach seems higher up than it should and there’s that magical moment when anything feels possible.

Leaving the plane, immigration, getting into the car our hotel ordered – it blurred, one event spilling into another. All I could think of was that this is not my home. ‘Hey, Sash, let’s go see the river. You like the water, right?’

I looked at my dad like he’d sprouted wings. Sarcasm boiled in my mouth but for once I kept it shut. I like the sea, Dad, not some mucky river famous for pollution and mutant fish. Not that I don’t appreciate the thought. But I don’t – can’t – say that. Instead: ‘Yeah, sure.’

We walked through winding streets. A thought hit me. Back home, I could read the words written, but couldn’t speak with anyone. Here, I could talk, but not read. Funny that.

I sit on my bed, looking out of the window. I share the room with my brother, but he sleeps soundly. The skyline is darker now – it must be two or three in the morning, and I’ve been awake the whole time. After a verbal wallop from my parents, I went upstairs while the rest of my family watched a sit-com. The blaring laughter sounded like blasphemy on our last night in Hong Kong. I was saying goodbye to my home, mouthing the word over and over, gazing off at the Island as one light, then another, shuts off; thinning out the glow.

Looking up, I find stars, a rarity. I sit, mapping out letters and pictures. I stay deadly still for a long time.

The air was sickly sweet. Normally, the sound of lapping waves brings the briny smell of ocean, but here, there was nothing. The river was the wrong shade of green – too brown and not blue enough. The sun was setting, and the river lit up. It didn’t sparkle like the sea. The Pearl River was docile. It meandered, twisting and turning, letting the land carve its path.

The sea has shaped continents, beaten rocks into sand and forced the world to its knees. It glitters in summer, softens in spring, darkens in autumn and by winter it is deadly. A mix of predictable and dangerous. That was the best thing about the sea.

‘Sash?’ My brother stirs, bleary-eyed with sleep. ‘Shush, go back to bed. It’s only a dream,’ I say, like I do so many nights. He won’t remember it tomorrow. ‘No, it’s not,’ he says to me, eyes already closing. ‘We’re really moving, you know.’ He is asleep.

The sun is rising, the sea a glittering gold I’ve never seen before. And this is my send off. This is my home telling me goodbye.

The Three Dragons of the Pearl River Delta

St. Paul's Co-educational College Primary School, Poon, Wing Lum Jane - 8

The Three Dragons of the Pearl River Delta

“Of course I’m better than you!!” Guangzhou declared, “I can do somersaults in the air and dive from the highest heights!”

“I’m the best windsurfer and can do tricks on the surfboard!” Hong Kong boasted.

“Haven’t you forgotten about me? I’m the best swimmer of all!” Macau reasoned.

This was a typical day in the Pearl River Delta.

The three dragon brothers quarreled about their talents every day. Their constant boasting and fighting had caused chaos and trouble in the Delta.

One day, Father Beijing was tired of their arguments and proposed a competition amongst them.

“Great idea!” Hong Kong screeched.

They all agreed.

The great day has finally arrived.

Father Beijing presented, “Greetings! We gather here today for the grand competition of the three dragons of the Pearl River Delta.”

The sea creatures cheered as the three competitors rushed to the bank of the Pearl River to warm up.

“The first competition is…… WINDSURFING!” Father Beijing announced.

The anxious competitors collected their surfboards. As the race started, Hong Kong was in the lead. She balanced well and did cartwheels on the surfboard. Guangzhou did not give up. She caught up Hong Kong and was in the lead. A big wave suddenly crashed over but Hong Kong dodged it skilfully. She continued, passed the finish line and ……WON!

“Yay!” cheered the sea creatures.

“I’ll win next time, “ mumbled the depressed Guangzhou.

“Next,” said Father Beijing, “is the SWIMMING race!”

The competitors went into the river and waited for the whistle. “Beeeeeep!!!” They began. Macau swam like a bolt of lightning. Nothing bothered her, not even the horrified fishes swirling around like uncontrolled robots. The arrogant Hong Kong ignored the other competitors. She rested and floated on water like a crouton on clam chowder. Guangzhou did not give up and tried her best. Unfortunately, Macau had already crossed the finish line.

“Macau WON!!!” Father Beijing shouted.

The excited sea creatures cheered again.

“No! I wasn’t ready!” Hong Kong snarled.

“It’s not FAIR!!!” whined Guangzhou.

“Maybe you’ll win next time,” comforted Macau.

“Last is the DIVING competition!” Father Beijing said.

The competitors went onto the diving boards. Macau was shivering because she could not dive! She closed her eyes and went “Splat!”, splashing into the river. Hong Kong was scared of heights. She (accidentally) fell into the water and screamed of pain. Meanwhile, Guangzhou twisted and turned her tail in the air and did a perfect dive into the glistening water.

“Guangzhou WON!!!” screeched Father Beijing. “IT’S A TIE!!!”

“Finally!” Guangzhou exclaimed.

After the race, the three dragons shook hands in peace.

Father Beijing was pleased and said, “Everyone has their own unique qualities. No one is the best or the worst, so be thankful for the gifts and talents you are given. Be united!”

From then on, the three brothers cooperated and worked together in harmony and unity. The Pearl River Delta hence prospered and became a melting pot of happiness and abundance, until this very day.

Judges Comments: I selected this story because of the original characterisation of the dragon brothers as the three main cities of the Pearl River Delta - Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Macau. Also, while the piece is highly imaginative and well organised, it also portrays a strong moral message to readers not to be competitive and to work together in harmony. Very impressive!

Left Behind

HKUGA Primary School, Wong, Sonja - 11

The train started slowly. People with bulky baggage crowded inside tiny compartments. All passengers were chatting cheerfully, except Yuan, the 13 year- old boy, who sat quietly beside the window alone. He looked tired, as he had walked more than three hours from his home to the train station. By the time the train had moved out of the station, his mind was immersed in the gorgeous view of the countryside. The sun was glittering in the clear blue sky. Only the yellow soil was visible in the paddy field. All these reminded him that the farmers in his village on the hill would also reap the paddy harvest before the Spring Festival.

Rewinding back eight years ago. Yuan was only five and lived with his parents in a hill village near Liannan. They had a small field to grow paddy-rice and corn. Yuan often played with other kids near the fields. Lunch, brought by his mum, would then be consumed in the fields. Though they lived poorly, they were happy and content. Unfortunately, a series of droughts resulted in decreasing crop yields. In order to earn a living for the family, Yuan's father decided to go to Guangzhou to find a better job. At that time, Yuan was too small to feel the pain of his dad leaving.

The great change came three years later. Yuan's mom also went to Guangzhou to join his dad to work on a construction site. Yuan still remembered the moment vividly when his mom left; he ran towards her and gripped her hand tightly. He didn't want to lose her. Seeing this, his uncle came and pulled Yuan away. His heart sank as his mom boarded the bus and he started kicking aimlessly. He used all his strength to struggle away from his uncle's arms. By the time his uncle let him go, the bus had departed. Yuan tried chasing the bus, but the back of the bus grew smaller and finally disappeared. He slumped on the road, crying uncontrollably. He gave a big kick to a frog hopping by the road. Yuan was in despair.

From that day on, the whole world changed. Yuan had to take care of himself. To feed the fire under the kitchen stove, he had to gather up wood and chopped them by himself. Then he perched a wooden stool to start his cooking. The shivering cold night alone at home proved to be the most difficult. He would always found himself with watering eyes when he woke up.

He jolted awake as the train arrived to a city full of factory buildings. Surrounded by the foggy air, he could smell the smoke from the factories. People started to cough and tried to cover their mouths in the train.

The woman sitting next to Yuan stood up and prepared to get off the train. By accident, her luggage snagged onto Yuan's backpack, dropping it on the floor. A piece of crumbled paper slipped out. Yuan picked it up quickly. It was his letter written on his 11 year- old birthday. He read it quietly.

~~"Dear mom and dad,~~

~~Today is my 11th birthday. I am alone at home. I miss you both so much. When will you come back?~~

~~One day, when I passed the office of my primary school, I saw a telephone. If only I had your number and could call you. But all I could do was to stare at it and cry.~~

~~If I had your number, mom and dad, I promise I would not bother you at work. I would call you only when you are free. I hope you would call me too."~~

But he didn't have his parent's address so it was of no use. He touched the lines of words crossed out. He could still experience the frustration and the disappointment he felt on that day.

"We have arrived Foshan station." The train announcement woke Yuan up from his deep memory. When the train door opened, people rushed out of it eagerly. They hugged their family members tightly. Bright smiles lit up their faces. This scene reminded Yuan of the moment when he got a letter from his parents last week, which included a train ticket. His parents wanted him to go to Guangzhou to join them for the Spring Festival. He was so excited to see the ticket. He jumped up and down and screamed, "Yeah! I am going to Guangzhou! I am going to see my parents soon!"

Suddenly, Yuan heard a noise behind. He turned back and saw a tall man grabbing the two hands of a thin little child. In the child's hand was a wallet. Yuan realized that it was his old wallet with the recognizable stain on it. The tall man announced to the people around, "Thief! Thief! I saw him squatting down on the floor. He must have stolen that wallet." The thin child looked nervous, unable to say a word. Then Yuan spoke to the tall man, "That is my wallet. It dropped out from my backpack earlier. I know what it contains."

Yuan turned to the child and asked, "Why did you take my wallet?"

The child replied, "I thought the owner was already gone. I am so hungry. I have had nothing to eat for 2 days..."

Yuan asked softly, "Where are your parents?"

"I haven't seen them for a year. They have gone to the city to work..."

Immediately, Yuan knew that this was an abandoned child. "Here, take this bun. It's a bit dry, since I brought it from home," said Yuan. The child took it with gratitude.

"We have arrived in Guangzhou station." The train door opened. Yuan left the train and waited on the platform. From far away, he heard a familiar voice, "Ah Yuan!" Immediately, tears filled his eyes.

The Three Cities

Renaissance College, Chow, Theodore - 13

Once upon a time, there were three cities – Guangzhou, Macau and Hong Kong, where their people lived harmoniously together. There was no conflict, no argument and no war among them, for they shared the great power of the Pearl, which allowed their people to have riches beyond their wildest dreams. This precious pearl was located in a vault on a deserted island in between the three cities. Surrounding the vault was a magnificent bridge, which connected the three places.

Although they had benefited from the power of the Pearl for nearly 100 years, each of these cities began to see their own problems. The Macanese gambled all the time; Guangzhou people played tricks on others in order to make more profits; and Hong Kongers were never happy with what they had. Although they got all the riches in the world, their greed had cast a spell on their land. No flowers could blossom in the land of greed. The people of Guangzhou thought that if they could have the Pearl to themselves, all their problems would be gone. But so did the other two cities.

The ruling party of Guangzhou came up with a plan to steal the Pearl, at the celebration of the 100th Year of Peace. While they were planning how to steal the Pearl from the high security vault, Hong Kong was organizing a huge feast for the celebration, and Macau was preparing for a big show of fireworks. Down below, the Pearl God, in the depths of the bay, had been listening with keen ears.

“Chairman Jiang, you will greet the people of Guangzhou and the other cities, while I will sneak into the vault and steal the Pearl,” explained General Xi. “It will be a perfect plan!” he added.

“They will never see it coming,” exclaimed Chairman Jiang.

Meanwhile, in Hong Kong, the generals were deciding what food to bring to the celebration. “What about some pudding or fruit punch?” asked Secretary Lam.

“I was thinking more down the lines of glass noodles and dumplings,” replied Governor Leung.

“Actually, I think that we should make deserts and pastries!”

“This conversation is getting us nowhere!” exclaimed Governor Leung. “We should focus on the security of the Pearl instead of what we are going to eat!”

In Macau, the fireworks were being shipped to the island, ready to set off on the eve of the celebration. Big boss Chui, from Macau, was fast asleep at his desk. He had already planned out the sequences and colors of the fireworks, and choreographed 100 brilliant dancers to perfection. His day’s work was done.

On the night of the celebration of their 100th Year of Peace, the Guangzhou citizens were busy preparing the food for the big party. Suddenly, the lights flickered and went off. Fireworks flew up into the night sky and decorated the sky full of stars with a thousand shimmering colors. The Guangzhou people all clapped in awe. “This is brilliant!” whispered Governor Leung to Secretary Lam.

“Yes, Chairman Chui has done it again.”

After the last firework, dancers came in and filled the bridges. They spun and jumped and leaped in unison while streams of confetti tumbled down from the ceiling. Then, Chairman Jiang stepped onto the podium and greeted everyone. “Welcome! Welcome all to the celebration of our 100th Year of Peace! ... ” The citizens of Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhou clapped in admiration.

Meanwhile, at the vault, everything went exactly as General Xi had planned. The citizens of Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macau were pre-occupied with the fireworks, the dancers, the food and Chairman Jiang’s speech. General Xi had almost finished unlocking the vault when he heard footsteps approaching. He hid behind a big pillar and watched as two Hong Kong governments officials walked past the vault. Suddenly, Secretary Lam exclaimed “Look! Three of the vault’s locks are unlocked!”

“Someone must be trying to steal the Pearl!” said Governor Leung. “We must alert the guards immediately!”

General Xi watched in disapproval while the two Hong Kong officers made their way back to the celebration. No one could stop me from getting what I want, he thought. After a few more minutes of tinkering with the locks, the door opened and General Xi stepped into the vault. He was mesmerized by what he saw. The Pearl looked even more magnificent up close. However, hearing footsteps approaching, General Xi had no choice but to pocket the Pearl and flee from the scene.

When the two Guangzhou generals finally arrived at the vault with some Macau soldiers and Hong Kong officials, they found the vault door open and the pedestal where the pearl once sat, empty. While Secretary Lam realized that they did not have time to panic, Governor Leung’s mouth dropped open and he stared in disbelief. “The thief is getting away! We must find him immediately! Soldiers, make sure no one leaves this place until the Pearl is found. Block off the bridges. Do whatever you must to bring back the Pearl!” ordered Secretary Lam. The soldiers wasted no time and all headed to the one and only way to get to and from the island - the bridge.

General Xi surveyed the surroundings of the bridge. Seeming that most of the guards were not taking notice of him, he made an escape towards the bridge. Once he made it onto the bridge, he turned left and started heading towards Hong Kong. Suddenly, an arrow whizzed past his ear, almost taking his ear off. General Xi turned around and saw Governor Leung placing another arrow onto the bow and getting prepared to shoot. This time, General Xi knew he would not miss. General Xi, taking his chances, jumped into the sea!

Governor Leung, stunned, placed the arrow back into its quiver and ran up to the edge of the bridge to see where thief went. Just as Chairman Jiang and Big Boss Chui opened the

gates of the bridge, a pillar of water shot up from the sea and a wet and seaweed-covered General Xi landed on the bridge, choking over the salt water.

Suddenly, hundreds of Chinese white dolphins leaped up from the sea, soaking all four of them in freezing water, and gracefully re-entered the ocean. A human form materialized out of the mist. “Who are you to interfere?!” yelled Chairman Jiang.

“Who am I?” asked the stranger. “I am the god who gave you that pearl. I am the God of Pearl!” Hearing these words, they all bowed down to the God.

“Excuse me for my rudeness, God,” added Chairman Jiang.

The God of Pearl held out his palm and said, “Give me back my Pearl now!” General Xi quickly got to his feet and placed the Pearl onto the God’s huge outstretched hand.

“I have been watching each of you, as you develop and grow. I knew that the Pearl would be found, but I did not attempt to take it back, as I wanted to watch the development. I made this Pearl, not for you to fight over it, but for the sake of peace in your places.” With that said, the God of Pearl smashed the precious gem onto the ground. “In memory of this event, all the riches of your cities will be taken back. Your people will have to earn them back through sweat and effort. To remind greedy people of the consequences of their actions, this river will from now on be called the Pearl River, and the land surrounding it, the Pearl River Delta. People in the future must understand that acting upon greed is not acceptable.” As he said that, the bridge collapsed and the three cities were separated.

From then on, despite the fact that Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhou had to work hard to restore their cities to their previous glory, they managed to survive and were able to raise a healthy generation who understood the consequences of greed. The three cities flourished and thrived harmoniously once again.

From the Gobi to the Delta

Korean International Springboard Programme, Longid, Katana - 13

Its 3:00 in the morning and the first thing I hear is “WOOF, WOOF, WOOF!”

I knew there was trouble in the back porch. There’s this figure that’s been haunting where I lived since I lived in the Gobi desert. I moved to Beijing for half a year, then, I moved here. It followed me all the way through. I now live in a medium-sized detached house in Hong Kong.

Suddenly, I heard it talk: “Haru. Haru Carrier.”

It knows my name. It always did. Since I first saw it walking towards my old house in the Gobi Desert it did. It does extraordinary things. Only yesterday I was going to the bathroom to find water shooting out of the toilet in slow motion for 20 seconds. Also, I have this painting on the wall of a white pigeon and he makes it move. It is perched on a power line, but sometimes, I see it twist, bend and sometimes fly. A while ago, in the storage room it played about 30 seconds of Fast Car on the electric guitar that was plugged into an amp. I went inside and I smelt smoke (luckily, I keep the windows in the store room a little bit open 24/7). The amp was on, but it wasn’t plugged in to the wall! When I turned it off, I felt static electricity. The figure seems to be able to generate its own electricity. When I walked out I noticed that the ceiling fan was moving at a constant slow speed (about 1 RPM). The wall regulator was off so I thought it was simply spinning down but when I came back there a minute later, it was still going- this time, in reverse direction, like how people set them when they want some circulation, but not a draft. To tell you now, my ceiling fans don’t have that little switch that does that.

It was 4:00pm and the boys would come at 7, so I had three whole hours to myself. There were shops across the road being remodeled, and I couldn’t bear the noise, so the balcony doors were shut tight. Instead, the bedroom windows were open at a full 90 degrees and the ceiling fan in the bedroom was on and it stayed on, thankfully. The house was so quiet that you could hear the clocks ticking and the refrigerators turning on and off, the silent whirr of the fans and the occasional stir of garbage in the kitchen bin, recycling bins and the compost machine. The “Grey figure” loves doing that, for whatever reason. Not to mention the silent

remodeling noise that managed to make its way through the doors.

“RING RING!” The home phone rang. This phone is really old and has acoustic bells. It is quite loud, but I’m used to it. It’s been passed on from my grandparents to my parents, but they found it just too loud, and it often acts up. Whether it has anything to do with the Figure, I don’t know. I answered it.

It turned out to be Martin, who once helped me find out whether the figure that was creepily following me around wherever I move, was man-eating or not. I’ve been on the news three times because of the darn ghost and Martin just told me that there was a bit of chaos in the jewelry and precious items shop that was behind my house. They say that a couple of items have been moved and found in all sorts of places. Martin turned out to be at the store and I could hear the store owner saying “HOW, in the name of God, has THIS ended up HERE!?” and stuff like that, and the sounds of people constantly walking by and jewelry being tossed carelessly in all directions. Martin, sounding restless and tired sighed, “Please come down here, before the whole of Hong Kong starts to blame you...”

“OK, I’m coming,” I replied. I also noticed that the sound of rustling garbage has stopped.

When I arrived at the store, it was a mess. Necklaces and rings were all over the floor and the store owner was on the verge of calling 999. The storeowner, with hands full of jewelry and various items, including a hammer approached me with a half-angry, half-scared face and told me how it started. “The lights started flickering and I went out to find things in different places. This necklace that is around my wrist right now was hanging from the ceiling fan blade.”

I looked towards the center of the room and saw a large brass CEILING FAN with four flower lights and four blades with cane insert. Not at all was I surprised. I have no idea why, but this mysterious figure seems to be fixated with these beautiful, often necessary air-moving overhead fixtures. First, it was the new kindergarten down the road, where the fans all turned off at once, and then it was an old Chinese medicine store, where they turned from off to high, and now this? This was outrageous. The Grey Figure was interrupting everyday life, and then it all goes down to me, the main victim. If there were no ceiling fans, the tables would tip or the doors would slam. I had to fix this.

When the store was finally tidied up, I picked up a green jade and bought it. I have no idea why, but a friend told me it helps with the “ghost”. I only call it a ghost, but it is possibly more. It could be an alien, or a demon, or anything else. Whatever it was, it’s the reason why this jewelry and precious items store is now closed and filled up with Bloomberg news reporters. I was tired of the mischief caused by the figure.

Martin followed me back to my house, and I put the jade from the store by the fan controls in the living space. Martin sat down and I went to the kitchen to cook dinner. I thought I heard the words “Haru the Fool” distinctly.

“Martin, did you just call me a...” I asked, trying not to be stern.

“I didn’t say anything, but I heard someone say ‘Haru the Fool!’ next to the fan controls loudly. Whatever that is, it must be angry that you’re trying to get rid of it,” replied Martin. He looked at the wrought iron front door outside. I looked too. It was open.

“Wait a minute,” I told Martin, as I walked out the balcony (the doors were open as the drilling has stopped) and closed the door and locked it. This, by the way was the only house on the street. The street was full of stores, and it was miraculous to find a vacant house in the middle of the city in Hong Kong. It had only vacated a few days after I moved here, so I didn’t spend that long at Vega Suites.

We ate dinner together. I am single, so I am usually on my own when I eat. Martin noticed the small China Flag under the painting of the white pigeon. It fell to the floor. We approached it. I carefully picked it up by the plastic pole. I picked up this charming decoration many times, when I bought it, when I got it out from the car, when I was deciding where to put it and I moved it to one side many times. When I was cleaning the wooden shelf it was on. This time, it felt cold. It started to vibrate, the way an appliance would when it was connected to AC power.

“Haru!” Martin yelped. “Haru there’s...”

I looked to my right to see a door- identical to most of the other doors in the house- cherry with an antique brass finish knob. It was getting hot. When I looked up, I noticed that the ceiling fan above me was gone. The others were still hanging, spinning merrily. Now, I just saw wires coming from the junction box that luckily weren’t touching, as this would cause short-circuit. I looked over to the controls, and luckily, the control to the fan that was here was turned off before that darn thing took it down. I also noticed that the jade I put next to the controls was gone.

Martin and I postponed the dinner and walked through the door which led us to a large river. I saw buildings behind me and on the other side of the river. I asked Martin if he was seeing the same thing. He said yes and that we were at the edge of the Pearl River. We were in Guangzhou. Far away in the distance, I saw a bridge, and behind that, there were more buildings. I had absolutely no idea why we were here in the first place- I live in the delta of the river, but I don’t know why that figure decided to bring us here. I was getting impatient.

We decided to walk a good 100 meters or so to try and find the fan that was somehow brought to this place. We didn’t find it. What we did find however was a door. We saw many doors on the way, but this door, once again was just like my door, and it was standing by itself, not attached to any building or so. It was weird, but no one noticed us, or the door. Martin turned the brass knob...

We went in and found ourselves in the same place, but this time, there were no people. The cars and buses, too, were gone. I held Martin’s hand and felt that it was cold. I asked him if my hand was also cold, and he said, “Yes, you are on.”

“I don’t get it,” I replied.

Martin made whirring sounds and moved his hands up and down, like the vane of an air-conditioner.

“I still don’t get it,” I replied.

Martin showed me a picture of a Carrier air-conditioner on his phone, which was one of the ones in my house. This guy is always prepared to make fun of me, in a nice way though.

“OK, let’s be serious now,” I laughed.

Ceiling fans and air-conditioners have one thing in common- they both cool people. I wondered if that’s why the figure suddenly became obsessed with these appliances, if it knew my last name from the beginning. For whatever reason, while we were walking side by side, admiring the elegance of the Pearl River and the buildings of the delta on both sides, and how so many cities can fit into one delta, the images of all sorts of ceiling fans came to my mind. Modern ones, classic ones, industrial ones, like the ones that I have. I saw every single detail. I saw the unique-looking blades and sleek lights of modern ceiling fans, the curved aluminum or steel blades of the powerful industrial ceiling fans and the wood blades, often with cane insert (known as cane blades) or stencil (known as stencil blades) and the beautiful fancy lights of the classic ones. Some had one, some had three, and some had even five lights! Suddenly, I saw the Delta II fan by Casablanca, and the word ‘delta’ in the fan’s name told me

immediately that the figure was controlling my thoughts.

We continued to walk. It was so peaceful, that I nearly forgot about the missing ceiling fan and Martin decided to remind me. He would also “abuse” the ghost every day until he had had it and would leave.

I turned around to see a man dressed in grey clothing walking beside me. I KNEW who he was. In his right hand, he was holding my ceiling fan, and on his left hand, a tool box. I kept my cool, but my heart was racing and I was gasping, as if I was an electric fan myself. I was on medium speed.

“Haru Carrier,” it said to me.

I turned from medium speed to high speed. “What is...? What is your name?!” I stuttered.

“Ura,” the man replied.

“You mean, you’re my...”

“I am who you think I am,” replied Ura. “I am your great great grandfather, and you are Haru, my little great great granddaughter, now grown up, right? I was already dead when you were born. I had a heart attack at the age of 37, remember.”

“Yeah- I,” I stuttered. I looked over to Martin, who was now staring with amazement.

“You know why I pretended to be a mischievous ghost?” Asked Ura. He later explained that my name was his name spelled backward with an ‘H’ added at the start. ‘Haru’ coincidentally turned out to be a real Japanese female name.

“Why?” Asked Martin.

“You never believed in ghosts until you moved to the Gobi Desert. I saw you and you were freaked out so much that you moved out a year and a half later. I was testing you. When you moved to Beijing for less than a year, I noticed that you brought your appliances with you. I pretended to be obsessed with your ceiling fans, just to give you a little problem to solve. When you moved to Hong Kong, I pretended to be extremely mischievous and decided to fake being obsessed with all electric fans, particularly focusing on ceiling fans. I tipped over furniture in different places, and I messed up the jewelry and precious stones store. I just wanted to see how you would react, and I’m sorry. A lot of things I did were quite wrong, like the kindergarten incident and stuff.”

“OK, I do forgive you,” I replied, excited.

“You know, I spent quite a lot of time working in different factories in different cities in the Pearl River Delta,” Ura added. “One did make ceiling fans. Let’s go back now and I will stop being mischievous. I will also put this big boy back!” He lifted his right arm slightly to emphasize the big white fan.

Later, we were surrounded by white light, and we were back in my house. Ura was by my side and Martin on the other. “I will fix my mistakes,” said Ura. The first thing he did was re-install the ceiling fan back to its proper place.

A few days later, we were on the news again. There was a picture of Ura, Martin, Me and another friend called Roger on newspapers around the world. Now everyone knows how Ura tried to test my fear and was really very nice. The headline on one of the articles said, “‘Man-Eating’ Figure’s Real personality is Revealed!”

This will probably be an urban legend centuries from now, and I’m ready to be famous!

What is so great about a Typhoon?

Korean International Springboard Programme, Lee, Joshua - 14

The year was 1937 and I was living in Hong Kong. I was working as a doctor. I had been through many typhoons and seen the damage that they had done. On this day the weather had started raining and big grey clouds were in the sky. I turned on the Radio and I heard the news. It said that a typhoon had blown through the Philippines and destroyed houses and killed many people. I felt scared. The Hong Kong Government had sent a warning on the radio telling us to stay in doors. I could see people outside I shouted to them to get inside, but they didn't listen and said they had to carry on with their work. My house was safe, but I worried about the people in the houses made out of wood and bits of metal. I sat in my house listening to the wind and the radio. The wind was blowing hard and the rain was lashing down. Suddenly a window smashed, then another. Soon all my windows were broken and glass lay in pieces on my floor. The noise was unbearable, the sound of the wind and broken glass with metal and wood hitting houses. Then I heard a cry for help. It was a mother and her small child. I bravely ran outside and the wind hit me and knocked me over, I got up and had to dodge old signs which were blowing around. I saw the woman and her daughter and grabbed them and dragged them back into my house. The wind calmed and the woman thought it was over, but I had been in too many typhoons to be fooled. This was the eye of the storm and soon we would have the second part. Outside I could see some bodies on the floor. They were not moving. Some people were crying and I shouted for them to come in to my house. Luckily I had medical equipment with me and I could put bandages on the people's cuts. The wind and rain started again and we huddled on the floor of my bedroom praying for the typhoon to end. After three hours of waiting for the typhoon to stop the wind died down and it was safe to leave my house. The typhoon had devastated Hong Kong. In the harbor there were many sunken boats that had crashed together. The streets were flooded and littered with rubbish and also dead bodies. Altogether 11,000 people lost their life to the typhoon. On the radio they called it the Great Hong Kong typhoon. I always thought this was strange because it didn't seem so great to me.

The Pearl River Delta

American International School, Cao, Qiongwen Charmaine - 6

The president of China, Deng Xiaoping, decided to reform and open up the Pearl River Delta in 1978. The P. R. D. covers Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Zhuhai and other cities.

I went to Shenzhen of the Pearl River Delta during Winter Break. It was a very beautiful city and very near Hong Kong. I flew a kite at Square Lianhuashan Park with my family. There were so many people flying a kite. They were so happy. I also visited the statue of Deng Xiaoping with my family. I love Lianhuashan Park in the Pearl River Delta!

Jewels Along Pearl River Delta

Clearwater Bay School, Li, Megan - 9

I am Forest Pearl, an ancient green boat with silver specks. I heard from another boat, Charming Thunder, that there is a place called Pearl River Delta (PRD) in China, at the tail of Pearl River, where it flows to The South China Sea. I set an adventurous mission for myself, sailing through the PRD. Yes, I keep a diary. I am literate and like to pass my travel stories along.

Pearl River Delta

The Pearl River was called the Pearl River because many pearl-colored shells lie at the bottom where it flows through the city of Guangzhou.

I read that eleven major cities frame the PRD: Zhaoqing, Jiangmen, Foshan, Zhongshan, Zhuhai, Macao, Guangzhou, Dongguan, Shenzhen, Hong Kong and Huizhou. I planned my course through three major cities: the forever Chinese Guangzhou, the once English Hong Kong, and the formerly Portuguese Macau--the most important trading ports around the PRD bay. I think the PRD, with its two previously colonized cities, is very special. I heard many languages and saw a mix of cultures on my journey.

Guangzhou

I started from Guangzhou, which can be Romanized as Canton. I read that Guangzhou is the third biggest city in China, with an area of 2870 square miles and a population of 12.78 million, a wall of people! Being a major trading port and an extraordinarily busy city, Guangzhou has 11 districts. I saw many amazing buildings, like the energy generating Pearl River Delta Tower. Its state flower, the Red Cotton Tree, can be eaten many ways, including as curry or tea. The tree has spines with numerous flowers. The flowers littered my deck. I was very sweaty even though I was floating. The PRD is unusually humid, being close to the Equator. Guangzhou produces many types of art, which shopkeepers sell on the street. Among these are Olive Sculpting and Wood sculpting. The two main languages spoken are Cantonese and Mandarin. I found some other interesting facts about Guangzhou. For example, do you know that there is a big African population in Guangzhou, some of whom I saw on the street?

Goodbye Guangzhou.

Macau

Cruising down from Guangzhou, passing Zhongshan, I found the Macau Peninsula, connected to the Islands Taipa and Coloane by bridges. They form Macau, which has many fewer people and is much smaller than Guangzhou. Macau covers barely 12 square miles and has a much smaller population of 624,000. I read that Portuguese settled at Macau in 1557. Between 1887 and 1999, Macau remained a Portuguese colony. It is a part of China now. Considered one of the richest cities in the world, Macau relies on gambling, tourism and manufacturing. Its city flower is the delicate and fragrant Lotus. Macau is sub-tropical and humid. I continue to sweat. A tourist brought me an elaborately decorated porcelain lotus flower that cost one Macanese Pataca, which is 0.125 US Dollar. The sellers spoke Cantonese, Mandarin and Portuguese.

I waved farewell to Macau.

Hong Kong

I started my engine again, sailing east across the bay from Macau to Hong Kong. I landed in Hong Kong's Victoria Harbor, an important key and witness to Hong Kong's success.

I saw high-rise apartment buildings like a grey-bamboo forest standing proudly from flat ground. I saw hordes of busy people, lush trees and massive mountains.

Hong Kong has a huge population of seven million condensed within 100 of its 426 square miles. That's why extensive mountains coexist with skyscrapers. Hong Kong was a British colony between 1842 and 1997, except when occupied by Japan between 1941 and 1945. It returned to China in 1997. Regarded as an important financial centre, Hong Kong has one of the highest incomes per person in the world. Still, there are lots of poor people on the street. I saw homeless people, mostly close to subway entrances. Its city flower, the Hong Kong Orchard Tree, has a five-petaled baubinia flower, which is normally pink with a center crown petal of darker color. Poking up from the center, the stamens smell like sickly sweet honeysuckle. Most coins have the flower on them. I looked around the wet market, where everyone uses HK Dollars of similar value to Macau's Pataca. Here everyone speaks either English, Cantonese or Mandarin.

A million Yellow Ribbons

In Hong Kong, I encountered Umbrella Revolution. Demonstrators were so clean and organized. Police stand in a fenced off area, and people press cold packs to their necks to cool themselves. The police and demonstrators have an uneasy truce. There are reporters and signs everywhere, stuck onto walls. People gave speeches. Things like bottled water were free. On handle rails there are yellow ribbons, some cloth, and some plastic. I joke that we could lick the railings if the ribbons were made out of cheese, though it was a hot day so it might melt. Many people carried umbrellas.

Dusk settled over the river. I sang a song on the way home ...

The Pearl River Delta,

Where the milky river flows

Before it enters the sea;

The towering buildings, busy ports,

Pockets of serenity in these cities,

Miraculous:

Guangzhou, with propelling growth engine and soaring skyscrapers

Stunningly energetic,

With its people and satellite cities,

Cosmically powerful.
Striking Macau, with European forts and churches,
Truly transnational,
With crescent bay and islands
Refined and relaxing.
Their sister Hong Kong,
Impressively compact;
With lavish green mountains and all its flats,
Astonishes with heavenly delights.
The Pearl River Delta!
An important economic zone,
A cultural Janus,
A power house,
Is unique for a boat to see.

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Consanguinity of the Pearl River Delta

Discovery College (Primary), Woo, Nicole - 13

The force of the mighty river washed away a dead tree stump onto land. In front of it was the stunning Dong Jiang, one of the vast rivers forming the Pearl River Delta. When ‘the delta’ is mentioned, People with a business mindset may think of a fast-growing economy and numerous supply of work force, whereas an environmentalist may think of the endangered Chinese White Dolphin. But, there is another thing that we may not recognize about the Pearl River Delta – the people.

Just like the dead tree stump, did the native fishermen from Hong Kong originate from the Pearl River Delta too? As recalled, a few hundred years ago, Hong Kong started out as a fishing village. Do we have any connection with the people of Pearl River Delta? Or in contrast, have the people of Hong Kong migrated to the cities along the Pearl River?

Religion, tradition’s taboo, language, living style and uniqueness are all components that can answer the question above. By figuring out the differences and similarities, it can be proven whether these fishermen come from the same origin as the people of Hong Kong.

(1) Religion

Hong Kong and Pearl River native fishermen have the same religion. Fishermen from Northern Guangdong (Xiamen and Shantou) have a unique practice in the way they cook chicken for god worshipping. They are not allowed to cut the intestine of the chicken nor do they bend the legs of it, as they deeply believe that it will make the boat sink due to the broken ship’s hawser (or called “rigging”). It is also said that the workers on the boat will break their legs if they bend the chicken’s legs.

But, neither the fishermen in Hong Kong nor Pearl River have this kind of belief. So, it can prove that the people in Hong Kong are not from Northern Guangdong area.

In addition, there are two kinds of fishermen – the salt-water fishermen (Sea fishermen) and the fresh water fishermen (River fishermen), and their religions are absolutely different too. The salt-water fishermen worships Hung Shing, and this is why Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Dong Guan have a lot of Hung Shing temples. However, the fresh water fishermen worships the god of dragon and those temples are widely located along the Yellow River (known as 黄河) and Yangtze River (also known as 长江). It could be that Hong Kong and Pearl River fishermen are of the same religion. Furthermore, if we look into the history of the Hung Shing temple in Hong Kong and China, you will discover that the oldest one in HK is located at Ap Lei Chau and was built in 1773. The oldest Hung Shing temple in China can be found in Pearl River (near Guangzhou) and was built in 594. Thus, it seems like the fishermen brought this religion to HK a long time ago.

(2) Tradition’s taboo

Taboos in both locations are the same! According to the habit of the fishermen, the most obvious tradition they have regarding eating fish is that they will not flip the fish over even when one side of fish is completely eaten. This rumor is widely spread among movies and

books, but many fishermen today admit that it is not a habit and is complete nonsense. They will even cut the fish into pieces for easy cooking on the boat.

Secondly, under the patriarchy society of the fishermen, it is vitally important that female fishermen can't step on the bow (front of a boat), especially when she has menstruation. The reasoning behind this taboo is unknown, but these two traditions are the same as the fisherman in Pearl River Delta.

(3) Language

Both the fisherman in Hong Kong and Pearl River Delta speak the same language - Cantonese (to be exact, it should be "dialect"). However, fishermen call their language "Local Dialogue" (本地話) and the other people who speak Cantonese speak "bai hua" (白話). There is difference between these two dialogues in terms of pronunciation. From overhearing two fishermen speak, it is not hard to observe that both people speak the same dialogue.

Furthermore, if you ask the fishermen in Hong Kong about their origin or home village, it is likely they will tell you that their grand-father came to Hong Kong from Dong Guan, Panyu, Shenzhen, Macau or Zhuhai, which is the area we call Pearl River Delta today.

(4) Living Style

The design and style of shack is identical for both the fishermen in Hong Kong and Pearl River. Many people will agree that fishermen live in boats. However, this perspective is incorrect. Working fishermen will stay on the boat but their children and aged family members live in a house. Their house is normally built along the coastline and over the water; it is called a "shack" (棚屋). The shack is supported by the wooden pile, which is deeply driven into the water. Alongside, there will be stairs on the sea-side of the shack which gives easy access to the boat.

Although the shack is not very big, they will spare the largest room in the center for accommodating their god; the four corners are two bedrooms (rear right and left), kitchen at the front right and the front left as a bathroom. Coincidentally, this is the exact style and arrangement used in Pearl River Delta.

(5) Uniqueness

The unique ballad of Pearl River is exactly like the one in Hong Kong. Different original inhabitants have their unique signature symbol, for instance, aboriginal dresses and/or special tattoos. However, fishermen don't have anything special on their appearance. Their uniqueness is their ballad or song. The ballad is called "Salt Water Song" (鹹水歌), which is used for interesting communication between boats. There is no pre-set format, dedicated musical instrument or even structured melody. Normally, it is most often sung unaccompanied, like "Acappella". And the meaning or purpose of the song is about love, family and the sea. Amusingly, you can only find this kind of ballad among the area in Pearl River delta and Hong Kong.

To recapitulate in short, the ancient Hong Kong people undoubtedly have originated from Pearl River Delta because they have so much in common. In other words, we are all from the same root. But curiously enough, there are a lot of people in Hong Kong who complain about the travelers from China and biasedly call them "Locusts", as well as discriminating the new immigrants from China and labeling them as a non-productive group. Would you treat your sister or brother the same way at home?

It remains a puzzle after pondering over this issue a hundred times: We are members of

this society whether people acknowledge it or not, but we continue to discriminate against and marginalize others. Some people experience rejection on a daily basis, and although they continue to overcome barrier after barrier, it is not a way of life that any person should have to encounter. We are talented individuals who want to be able to give back to our communities. Why not use them to improve this nation? Why not help the forlorn? Why can't we be more forgiving, embracing and generous? To ring the curtain down, blood is thicker than water. This problem is much bigger than people want to acknowledge... "We" and "They" are human beings who deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and after all, "We" and "They" aren't so different after all.

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Embracing A Pearly Future

Sha Tin College, Chan, Yi Lin Elin - 14

The Pearl River Delta (PRD) is comprised of nine cities: Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Dongguan, Zhuhai, Zhongshan, Huizhou, Jiangmen, Foshan, and Zhaoqing, along with two special economic zones (SEZ), namely Hong Kong and Macau. It has a total area of 42.8 sq km and is home to about 100 million people. The overall GDP of the PRD region was equivalent to the 16th largest economy in the world in 2012, ahead of Indonesia, Turkey and the Netherlands, and just a little behind Korea. As one of China's leading economic and manufacturing region, the PRD accounts for 11% of China's total GDP and up to one third of China's exports in 2013. This unique area has always been and will continue to experience massive progression; the different cities around the PRD are in full power to move forward and become the leading channel for trade and exports, achieving megatropolis status. As a soon-to-be powerful region with a booming economy, the PRD rivals the likes of Yangtze River Delta or Beijing. Needless to say, the role played by each city and the intricate relationships among them are also under revolutionary changes. There are new adventures and new challenges to face every day.

The PRD has played a major role in foreign trade since the Maritime Silk Road era, through the time of tea clippers into modernized China today. In 1757, Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty set up the Canton System. Canton, now known as Guangzhou, was the only port in China that was open to foreign trade, with Chinese merchants known as "Honggs" managing all the trading in the port. After the First Opium War (1839-1842), some "Foreign Honggs" rose to fame in Hong Kong; one of the earliest "Foreign Honggs" established was Jardine Matheson & Co. These "Honggs" became the backbone of the young Hong Kong economy when Hong Kong was established as a British Colony. Thereafter, the development of the PRD cities got comparatively slower than that of Hong Kong. A significant turning point came in 1978, when a small processing workshop that made handbags for export to Hong Kong opened in Dongguan and became the first export processing business in China. The groundbreaking opening of China, spearheaded by economic reforms piloted by the late Deng Xiaoping, officially commenced. In 1980-84, Deng formed seven SEZs around the country, of which three – Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Zhuhai – were in the PRD region and were intended to be the test areas to bring the rest of the country forward. Due to their unique location, the three SEZs in the PRD received great support from Hong Kong and Taiwanese investments. In no time, the area represented one of the most rapid urban

expansion stories in human history. The PRD is, no doubt, one of the most economically dynamic regions in the People's Republic of China. Since then, the economic ties between Hong Kong and the PRD region have become closer than ever before.

The cooperation between Hong Kong, still a British colony at the time, and the PRD cities, did not stop at the economic level. Soon, the unstoppable growth extended to transportation, tourism, education, medical services, and even environmental protection. In the last 30 years since the opening up of China, the nation's GDP per capita has increased from Rmb381 in 1978 to Rmb41,908 in 2013, equivalent to a growth rate of 110 times. This phenomenal jump has never been achieved by any other country, let alone a country as large as China, in modern history. However, Guangdong has overtaken other parts of China with an even more impressive growth rate of 158 times – its GDP per capita rose from Rmb369 to Rmb 58,540 and rocketed above the average by 40%. This is a clear reflection on the region's upgrade of production processes and a focus on industries. The PRD now accounts for approximately one third of China's trade value.

To understand the evolution of the PRD, one must dwell deeper into the breakdown of the GDP. After the open door policy took effect in 1978 and before China gained access to the WTO in 2001, the nine cities in the PRD focused mostly on manufacturing, thus earning itself the reputation as China's "workshop to the world." Much of this output, such as electronics, toys, garments and textiles, plastic products and a range of other goods, was the outcome of foreign direct investments – investments made by foreign entities – and was geared for the export market.

Following China's entry into the WTO, the signing of Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) between the Mainland and Hong Kong in 2003, and various other policy initiatives to enhance economic cooperation between Guangdong and Hong Kong have strengthened the economic growth of the PRD beyond traditional manufacturing. This signifies the beginning of a new journey for the PRD.

The development of infrastructure and logistics has been instrumental to the success of the PRD. The entire region is now well connected by highways; any city or town in the region can be conveniently reached by car. For example, Guangzhou is a major hub with connections to anywhere in China. The Chinese government has proposed further plans to build a "one-hour living zone" with labyrinths of roads, tunnels, bridges across the delta, as well as intracity and intercity railways totaling more than 4,000km. This is no small feat, considering that the entire region is geographically larger than Denmark or Switzerland, with a wide, muddy river to traverse in the middle. Moreover, the 140km long Express Rail Link with terminus in West Kowloon in Hong Kong will reduce the travel time between Hong Kong and Guangzhou to a mere 48 minutes when it is operational in 2015/16. There is also the 35.6km long Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge, the world's soon-to-be longest sea-crossing bridge-tunnel, scheduled for completion in 2017. This man-made wonder will cut the driving time from Hong Kong to Macau or Zhuhai down to 30 minutes from three hours previously!

Air travel is just as efficient. There are currently five airports in the PRD region, with major international airports situated in both Guangzhou and Hong Kong. The Hong Kong International Airport in Chek Lap Kok opened in 1998 while the Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport opened in 2004. Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Macau all have large, modern airports constructed or greatly expanded since 1990. Some of the low-cost international carriers would fly to Macau or Shenzhen because these airports have lower landing fees than those in Hong Kong and Guangzhou. Zhuhai, on the other hand, handles domestic flights

almost exclusively. In 2016 Guangzhou will open another commercial airport in Nansha. These airports are not competing with one another; rather, they have all found a niche for themselves and created opportunities for cooperation.

Amidst the massive ongoing construction and development, efforts have been made to assess the impact on the region's environment. The Environment Protection Department of the Hong Kong SAR and Guangdong Provincial Environment Monitoring Centre established the Pearl River Delta Regional Air Quality Monitoring Network in 2005. The network includes 16 automatic air quality monitoring stations within the Delta. This Quality Monitoring Network aims to provide accurate data to help the two Governments appraise the air quality and pollution problems in the PRD region and devise appropriate control measures. It also provides the public with information on the air quality of various places in the region.

Education is among the most important factors in the PRD's quest to maintain continuous growth. The University of Hong Kong (HKU) has acknowledged that today's education needs to engage and benefit from internationalization. To better integrate Hong Kong into China, HKU has a worldwide China program that allows students to participate in different academic and internship programs at universities and corporations in the Mainland. A HKU-Shenzhen Institute of Research and Innovation campus was set up in Shenzhen in March 2011. They aim to promote hi-tech R&D, knowledge transfer and industry incubation, all of which have attracted considerable funding from the National Basic Research program of China and the Shenzhen Science and Technology Program. Similarly, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) was granted permission by the Ministry of Education to establish and implement a new, non-profit, higher education institution in Shenzhen, admitting and preparing an ultimate student population of 11,000 in the fall of 2014. The ultimate goal is to make it a preferred research location in Shenzhen.

Medical development is also emphasized. Recently, a 160-million-yuan hospital funded by Hong Kong opened in Shenzhen. It is hoped that this facility, run the 'HKU way', will eventually influence the mainland for a much-needed health care reform and an entirely new hospital system. The project will also even the demand for international standard medical services within Guangdong and Hong Kong. The service quality is more efficient than that of Shenzhen's public hospitals, while the fees are 30 percent lower than those at hospitals in Hong Kong. If specific drugs are not available at the hospital, patients have access to a supply from Hong Kong hospitals. There is also an international base for scientific research and professional training.

The future of the PRD can be summed up in two words - cooperation and integration. Each city in the PRD has to identify its strengths and position itself strategically for further development, and the same time, making up for one another's shortfall.

Hong Kong needs to find a new identity within the restructured system of cooperation in the PRD region. It is believed that the special gains and preferential treatment Hong Kong has been receiving as a 'middleman' to China will soon diminish as China's financial strength improves further. According to Mr. Chan Man-Hung, Director of the Public Policy Research Institute of Hong Kong Polytechnic University, "Hong Kong will play new roles and act as a meeting point to start dialogues, develop collaboration, finish business deals, and serve as an innovation incubator." However, as Hong Kong does have a number of advantages in decision-making processes, legal, financial and tax systems, it will continue to prosper as an international business hub and maintain competitiveness in finance, trade, logistics, and professional services.

Macau has carved a niche for itself since its handover in 1999. Once a small Portuguese colony, it has developed a notable tourist industry that boasts a wide range of hotels, resorts, stadiums, restaurants and casinos. It is currently the highest-volume gambling center in the world with an approximate revenue of 360.8 patacas (USD\$45 billion) in 2013, compared to USD\$11 billion in Las Vegas (Nevada).

Guangzhou is the capital of the Guangdong Province. Its development capability is ranked 3rd among cities in China, only behind Beijing and Shanghai. Through continuous optimization and upgrading of its existing industrial sector, Guangzhou will accelerate its shift to the tertiary sector. In 2013, the service industry accounted for almost 65 percent of the city's GDP, and will continue to grow in significance.

Shenzhen is one of the fastest growing cities in the world. The port in Shenzhen is now the second busiest in China, behind Shanghai's. Its industries are more focused on high tech development: BYD and Huawei are very successful cases. BYD, founded in 1995, is considered a pioneer in China's electric vehicle industry. It was listed in the top among the 2010 Bloomberg Business Week Tech 100 companies. Another notable example is Huawei Technologies Co Ltd. Founded in 1987, it is a Chinese multinational information and telecommunication technology (ICT) solutions provider. In 2010, it recorded a profit of RMB23.8 billion (3.7 billion USD). Its products and services have been deployed in more than 140 countries and currently serves 45 of the world's largest 50 telecoms operators.

Dongguan is a major manufacturing hub. The largest industrial sector is the manufacturing of electronic and communication equipment. International companies with facilities in Dongguan include DuPont, Samsung Electronics, Nokia, Coca-Cola, Nestlé and Maersk. The city suffered significant loss of economic activity from the impact of the 2008 global financial crisis. However, with resilience and progressiveness, Dongguan will continue to restructure its industrial sector into an independent, innovative centre.

Zhuhai, which benefits from its proximity to Macau, has also developed a tourism industry over the past couple of years. It opened a new theme park called Cheung Lung in 2014. It also has the first and only aviation industrial park in Guangdong. With that, the city targets to build a unique flight industry including aircraft manufacturing, general aviation operating services, business aviation and flight training. Zhuhai has been hosting aviation airshows. The first AERO ASIA, for example, will take place in Zhuhai in October 2015.

Zhongshan focuses on light industry. Guzhen in the northwest of Zhongshan city has transformed into the largest production base and wholesale market of lighting fittings in China and is one of the top specialized markets of light fittings worldwide. The products are not only sold domestically, but also popular worldwide, with large markets in the U.S, the Middle East, South Africa, and Europe. Guzhen is expected to further develop into the 'International Lighting Capital'.

Huizhou's economy ranks sixth among the cities in the Guangdong Province. Its two major industries, electronics and petrochemicals, accounts for 63.7% of the city's total industrial output. TCL, Desay, Qiaoxing and Foryou Group, which specialize in the manufacturing of telecommunication equipment and electronic products, are the largest firms based in the city.

Jiangmen mainly focuses on heavy industries. It is the home for China's largest motor production base with presence of leading makers such as Grand River Group, Guangdong Tayo Motorcycle Technology, and Heshan Guoji Nanlian Motorcycle. However, textiles and garments, electric home appliances, ceramics and furniture manufacturing are also important industries in the city.

Foshan is a key exporter of mechanical and electrical products, which make up 54.4% of the total export value in Foshan. This city is also a large foreign-trade partner with Hong Kong. Since 1992, this city has been home to a state-level development zone for the Foshan High-tech Industrial Development Zone designed to develop optical-mechanical- electronic integration, electronics, information technology, and new materials.

Zhaoqing, neighbors to Foshan and Jiangmen, is a diverse industrial city held up by nine pillars - three emerging, three traditional and three potential. The emerging pillars being electronic information, machinery, oil refining and petrochemicals, the traditional pillars being textiles and garments, food and beverage, and construction, leaving us with paper making, pharmaceuticals and auto parts as the potential pillars.

However, a number of challenges, such as rising labour costs, air pollution, appreciation of the renminbi, mainland economic slowdown, lie ahead for the PRD.

Guangdong Province has drafted new rules and regulations to allow migrant workers to negotiate salaries and related benefits annually. The draft has been submitted to the Guangdong Provincial People's Congress for review in Sept 14. If the new rules are passed, they will definitely increase production costs.

The PRD is notoriously polluted with sewage and industrial waste treatment facilities failing to keep pace with the growth in population and industries in the area. Factories in the area bring about a large portion of the pollution. Much of the area is frequently covered with brown smog.

From July 2005 through June 2013, the RMB has appreciated by 34% on a nominal basis against the USD and by 42% on an inflation adjusted basis. Pricing of exports from China will gradually rise as the yuan strengthens, making all products labelled 'Made in China' more expensive. However, recent moves indicate that the appreciation of the yuan will slow down over the next few years, thus reducing some of the pressure on exporters.

Increase in non-performing loans (NPLs) in the PRD is also a concern, according to Raymond Yung, head of PwC's China financial service unit. NPLs in PRD grew at the fastest pace among the key regions in China during the first half of 2014, by 30.7 percent, which is an alarming trend.

Despite the challenges, the PRD tomorrow will look starkly different from the PRD yesterday or the PRD today. Premier Li Keqiang has made restructuring the Chinese economy a priority of his in the years to come, and, with the blessing of the central government, the PRD will be part of the grand plan to ensure the country's prosperity going forward. His recent visit to the region mirrors the symbolic visit of the late Deng Xiaoping to the south back in 1992. This time, Li spearheaded a number of new initiatives for the PRD, including approval for Webank - the first online banking service to be based in Shenzhen, the setting up of a stock trading link program for the Hong Kong and Shenzhen exchanges, and establishment of the Guangdong Free Trade Zones (FTZ) in Nansha, Shenzhen and Zhuhai following the Shanghai pilot FTZ, to name a few. These initiatives reiterate the importance of the PRD within China and will propel the region into the 21st century. To ensure a smooth transition from a manufacturing based economy to a diversified trading and financial centre, the nine cities, as well as Hong Kong and Macau, must cooperate and collaborate in order to deal with the change in external environment and other challenges as the PRD expands its role. It is comforting to know that these cities began to adopt different strategies several years ago to enhance their efficiency and competitiveness. They are on the right track, and the future is promising.

Many years ago when the Pearl River Delta region was still largely undeveloped, Hong

Kong was seen as the “pearl” of the delta. Hong Kong played the role of the master and the rest of the delta, the apprentice. Going forward, the individual cities will be equals as they search for their unique pearl while simultaneously racing for the big pearl together. Blessed with an entrepreneurial workforce, a strong education system that increasingly embraces research and development, and ample venture capital, the PRD will thrive to become a role model in modernisation and innovation. It will be a win-win situation of mutual benefit for all the cities in the region.

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A Love Wall – Walled Village

A.D.& F.D. of Pok Oi Hospital Mrs Cheng Yam On School, Chan, Sheun Kiu - 6

Four brick walls, keep away the thieves.
All Wall villagers, treasure their beliefs.
They are called and met at ancestral halls.
Warm families gather there surrounded by walls.

Special days, enjoy the 'Big Bowl Feast'.
People come and join from west to east.
The big bowls are eaten layer and layer.
Some of the villagers are good drum players.

Accompany with those active dancing lions.
And the twirling, spinning Chinese dragons.
Babies can also sleep on mother's arm
While the villagers keep working on the farm.

Zuhai's Fisher Girl

Tsung Tsin Primary School and Kindergarten, Lam, Jasmine - 10

There stands a huge stone carving,
the beautiful Zuhai Fisher Girl.
With both hands up to the sky,
she drapes a fishnet and holds a pearl.

An angel descended to earth,
and fell in love with the pretty land.
She turned herself into a fisher girl,
and healed sick villagers by her hand.

Soon she met a young fisherman,
and they fell in love with each other.
But the man made a great mistake.
He believed some evil thoughts, rather.

For this reason, the fisher girl died.
The man was filled with remorse and grief.
Finally, he found the Magic Grass,
which revived her and gave her much relief.

The fisher girl became a true mortal.
And they found a big magic pearl.
When people walk on Lover's Road,
they'll tell the story of the Fisher girl.

Spirit of the River

Kellett School, Large, Emma - 12

My daughter says that
She's met the spirit of
The river. She says that
He arose like a shadow into light.

She says his face was a
Pearl in the sun, that his beard was a
River, trailing froth. His mouth a
Delta in the jungle of white.

She says he spoke soft and
Gentle, the lapping of a mild
Winter tide against frost
And snow.

She says he said
Not to worry, he'd get better soon.
The scars that littered his beauty
could be mended in time.

And that he would watch her
For her whole life, and never
Leave her, as she waded
the unknown depths.

I watch as she peers over the
Silent water, ears alert.
Her eyes are wide, so hopeful.
And that's when I know that
The river is still alive in her mind.

Black Christmas in the Pearl River Delta

Canadian International School of Hong Kong, Chan, Nicole - 14

The pitter-patter of light raindrops
Echoes on my corrugated metal tin roof
The comforting tender voice murmuring in my ear
I gaze out
Miles of rippling jade rice crops swaying in the December wind

The cool breeze touches my face
As I sprinkle water across the tender seedlings
The bright sun shining over the Victoria Harbor
I look up
The clear turquoise sky, endlessly meets the glistening sea

I inhale the aroma of the boiling yu tang(1)
Breathing in the smell of ginger and fresh fish
Hearing the joyful cries of children ringing through our Sai Kung village
I sigh
Falling asleep while looking over the ceaseless fields

I wake up to the sound of shrill screams around me
Looking up, I see ba ba's (2) face dripping with tears
He stammers ... the Japanese, the Japanese
I wail
Sobbing loudly curled up against a rough rice sack

Walking along streets of rubble
Tan colored uniforms with weapons zoom past me
High-pitched shrieks of women fill the air
I tremble
Clutching my meager rice ration, I run back to my village

Shivering under my thin tunic
I lie there thinking of the drops on the tin roof
The crack of gun shots echoes in the night
I choke
Hearing whispers, "Black Christmas", "Black Christmas"

(1) fish soup

(2) father