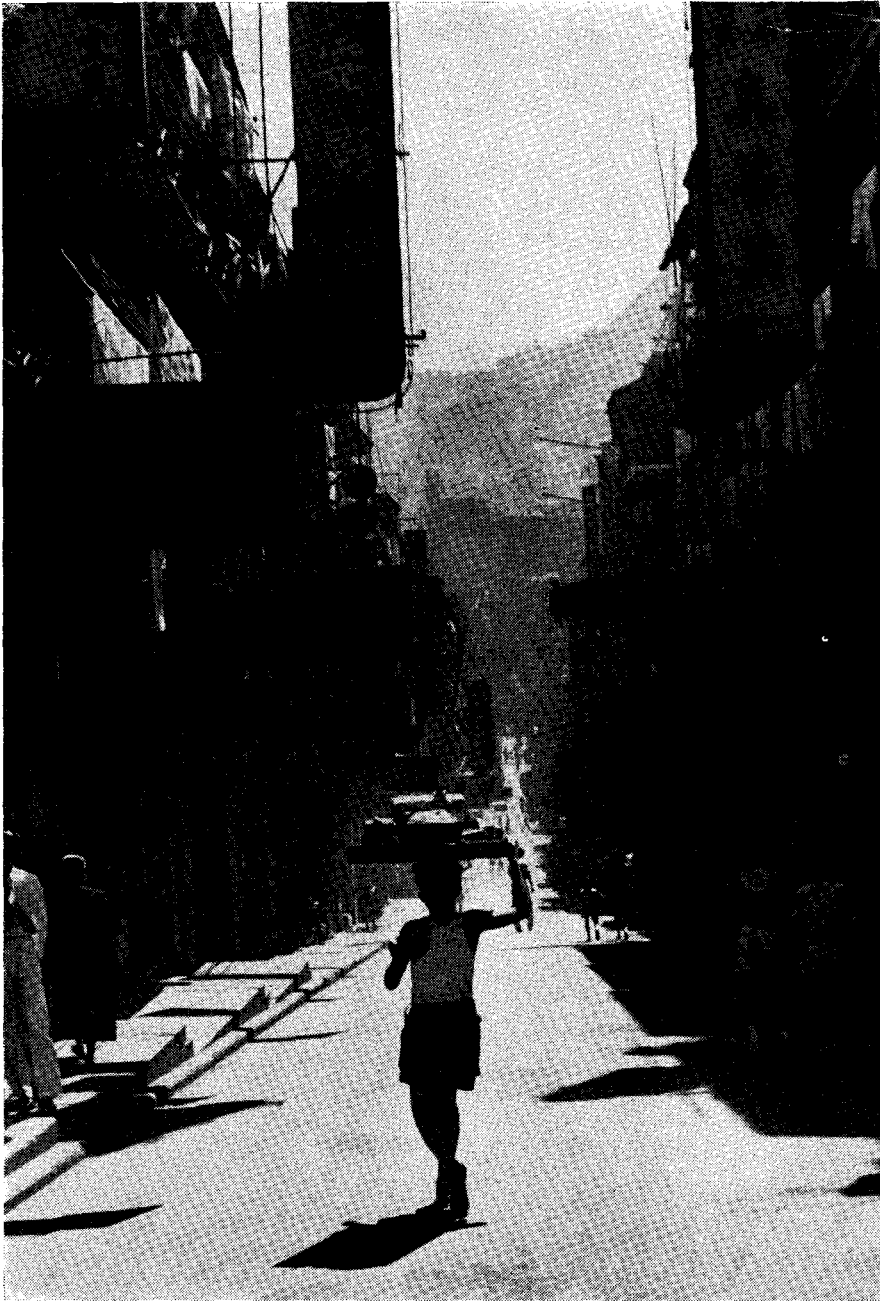


THE HONG KONG HIGH LIFE



—Henri Cartier-Bresson (Magnum).

Hong Kong street—Was it Run-Run Shaw? A purple-haired tourist?
A dope-runner from Rangoon? The flamboyant Hughes of London?

By HORACE SUTTON

THERE WAS always something very Sydney Greenstreet about Hong Kong.

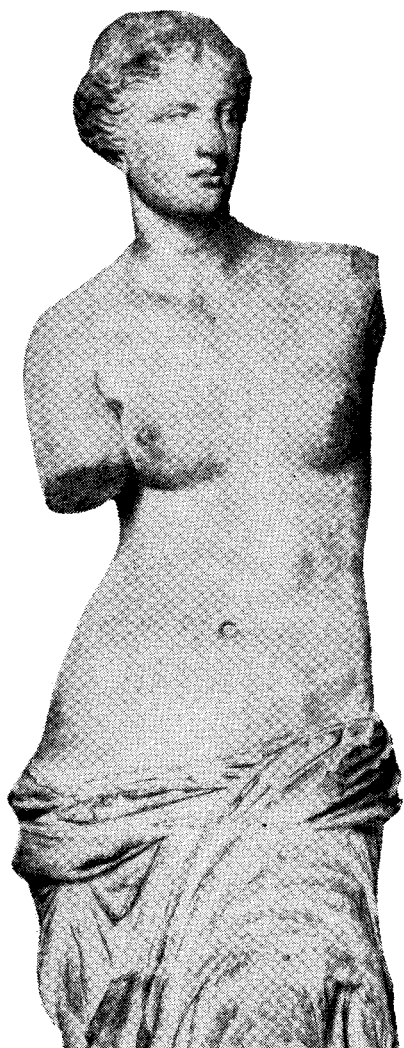
One stayed, in the early days, at the Peninsula, where the room boys padded the halls in black coolie slippers, and drinks in the open lobby, or tea if you willed it—so reminiscent of a Chinese version of New York's Plaza—was served in a sea of intrigue. Who were the people at the next table? Were they Peking agents? Dope runners from Rangoon? Fireworks salesmen from Macao?

Was it Run-Run Shaw, the impresario, with a new movie star? A touring travel agent from Moose Glacier, Montana? A purple-haired tourist from Hillsborough, California? Irving Hoffman with his magnifying-glass lenses up from the heartland of Broadway flackery with endless energy, insatiable curiosity, and a book full of addresses? Was it Kalb of CBS in from the Rann of Kutch with a hot broadcast just beamed to New York? Or Topping of the *Times* in from Saigon with new word of the war? Or the flamboyant Hughes of London down from Hanoi with a bagful of anecdotes? Or a fluttery tour dispatched by Cartan's in Chicago, back from a foray at Benny's to buy shoes, over from Frank Fong's where they ordered dresses copied out of *Vogue*, puffing from the excursion to Chan Tuck's where their measurements were taken for a suit to be run up in three days? Or Harry Stanley himself in clipped British moustache and clipped British syllables cultivated in England and the very model of the Queen's gentleman, taking tea and giving a very concise and cultured afternoon's briefing on tourism in the British Crown Colony.

All this has been Hong Kong in the twenty years of peace, if that is what it's called, that have followed the troubled days of Asia in the war. Hong Kong has become the traveler's air-conditioned synthesis of Asia, the upholstered Orient, the room with a bath and a view, the bargain house, the bazaar. Cruise boats came and took up positions in the harbor amid the junks, the ferries, the freighters in from far ports. Airliners

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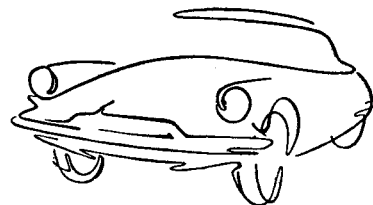
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dipped in, managing the tricky landing until at last a new runway was built. Hong Kong became such a traveler's prize, such a depot for the new Magellans circling the world that some enterprising journeyman about to set forth and frustrated by the shortage of rooms took to calling the Peninsula straight from New York, a ploy that always seemed to work.

No such dextrous scramble for lodgings is usually necessary in Hong Kong now. The rush attracted capital from as far away as Texas and as near as the Crown Colony itself. The capital investment in hotels in Hong Kong now is estimated at 800,000,000 Hong Kong dollars, or \$140,000,000 in U.S. dollars. In many ways the aspect of the city has changed. While one can still thread one's way to a tiny *boite* off Nathan Road to eat Beggar's Chicken baked in clay, Hong Kong now has a genuine multi-starred French restaurant called *Au Trou Normand*, and pretty good at that. Two of its newest and most formidable hotels, the Mandarin and the Hilton, have really changed the available atmosphere into one of sophistication and even elegance.

Oddly, although they stand only a short walk apart, on the waterfront edge of Hong Kong island, the Hilton project was put together by Leo Corrigan and T. L. Wynne of Dallas, while the Mandarin is a project of Jardine Matheson, a huge trading company whose antecedents were sharp traders far back in the time when British ships were making opium runs in the Far East. Both entrepreneurs, spawned by such widely sep-

arated societies, have brought to Hong Kong new, handsome, high-rise hotels, elaborately decorated and full of art, studded with restaurants, nightspots, and shops.

Corrigan and Wynne began their project on the leased acreage of the old Murray Parade Ground. They put up a twenty-six-story building, divided it into 867 guest rooms, and in April of 1963 turned over the management to Hilton. As it functions today, escalators glide upward through two decks of shops to the marble halls of the lobby. Its grand suite was to have been done in the air of Imperial Chinese, but the management found itself in troubled waters. To have called upon the Chinese Communist government for trappings was unthinkable. To ask Taiwan for help would not have been too popular among some local elements. It was solved diplomatically by choosing a Thai décor. Now the Bangkok and Royal Thai suites are done in silks and Siamese antiques, the floors are teak, and the beds are brilliantly canopied.

Both the Mandarin and the Hilton have brought the first swimming pools to the so-to-speak downtown hotels. The Hilton's is laid out on an open deck on the fourth floor. Forty dollars (U.S.) a night will lease one of the eight lanai suites that overlook the pool on one side and the fussy white building of the arch-colonial Hong Kong Club on the other. Thus by crossing the room, today's visitor in Hong Kong can span the distance from the old era of the British Crown Colony to its new role as the new tourist center of the East. Indeed, there are

indications, such as the elaborate pool with its lounge chairs and sauna facilities, that it is even moving toward a resort.

Whereas the old Hong Kong hotels served middling Midlands food dispensed by Chinese waiters often done up in coolie dress, there is a new attention to cuisine and service. The Hilton's grill, which is reserved for men at lunch, stations a chef at a flaming fire grilling chilled American beef. On silver-plate service it offers Sydney rock oysters brought up twice a week from Australia. Attendants wheel bread to the table in giant baskets fitted with slicing racks. The Dragon Boat bar, next door, does up its waiters in purple tunics with green silk edging and recalls, in its motif, the May festival when fifty paddlers take the dragon boats down the harbor. At nightfall the Eagles Nest on the twenty-fifth floor is a supper club with a show and a view. If one pales, there is always the other. And if both begin to drag, then there is the other extreme, the Den (first called the Opium Den) in the basement, where strings of beads divide the tables into booths, an Italian band assails the ears, and the lights are dimmed to blackout conditions.

Much the same sort of Hong Kong life is available down the block in the Mandarin, a massive concrete block-house standing like a pylon over the harbor. Here the rooms start at \$11.40 a day, and an ordinary double will offer floor-to-ceiling glass walls, a balcony, usually with a view of the Star Ferry buzzing back and forth between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon. The Mandarin's Men's Bar is a snug cocoon of masculinity where the club types gather to recline in black leather chairs while the waiters serve lunch on small brass trays. The Mandarin Grill on the first floor would be a handsome restaurant in any city. Mongol princes aboard charging horses prance across the wall murals. Chefs in white *toques* stand behind a circular grill offering cuts of meat displayed under Plexiglass and also Scotch salmon, fondue of beef Bourguignonne, Hungarian chicken paprika, and spareribs grilled on the open fire. The Mandarin dances in the Button, a red-lacquered supper club with dripping icicle chandeliers. At lunch it spreads a magnificent buffet with a chef standing in attendance upon a whole shelf of wursts waiting to be sliced. From its humble beginnings back there in Germany or France whence it has been exported, no sausage ever ended its days with a grander view. The expanse sweeps off from the twenty-fifth floor to the whole soft curve of Hong Kong harbor, to the new buildings sprouting by the water's edge, to the drama of the mountains behind and,

(Continued on page 93)




—Werner Bischof (Magnum).

Crown Colony transport—"the traveler's air-conditioned synthesis of Asia, the room with a bath and a view."



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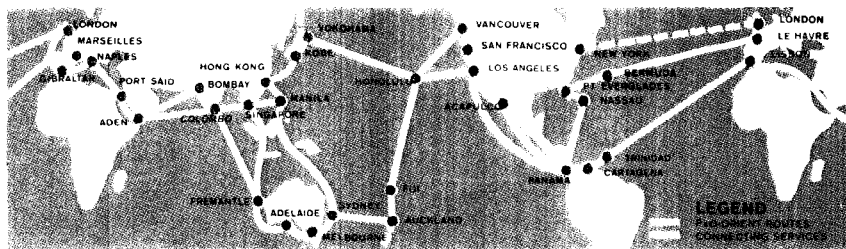
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A SOUVENIR FROM THE KLONGS



—Harrison Forman.

By MARC CONNELLY

TO FOREIGN TOURISTS in Bangkok the appeals of the Peking-sponsored Thailand Patriotic Front to "drive the U.S. imperialist aggressors out of Thailand" seem to be falling on deaf ears. Every time a fresh manifesto urges giving Yankees the boot, Bangkok offers them a new hotel. With the Hilton flag now flying over the Rama, plus the outcrop of other new hostels, the city is fully prepared to meet the requirements of the most electronically equipped American visitor. Even most of the older hotels have 110-volt bathroom outlets for electric toothbrushes.

Several of the new ones offer the comforts of snazzy establishments at home. Half a dozen have swimming pools. One, the Atlanta, has a movie theater for its guests. At the Erawan, the most expensive, there are daily concerts in the tea lounge and if you hunger for Thai food you can probably get it in two of the hotel's restaurants, *Le Chalet* or *La Cave*. The Rama has a floor show in its Tropicana nightclub and but for the Oriental pattern of its silverware and china the Rama coffee shop could be anywhere in the States. Close your eyes at breakfast time and the aroma of griddle cakes, sausages, and American coffee will waft you home. Last year even the old Oriental, that

elegant dowager among Asiatic hotels, added a new wing, as incongruously up-to-date as the multi-storied addition to Frank Lloyd Wright's Imperial in Tokyo.

Bangkok's outdoor appearance is changing more slowly. Every morning you can still see those diminutive three-wheeled taxis careening down streets, bursting at the seams with saffron-robed monks returning to their monasteries after receiving breakfasts from pious citizens. Small Hindu boys still run about with their hair in topknots and enough of their older brothers maintain an interest in traditional Thai-style boxing to fill the Rajdamnoen and Lumpini stadiums four times a week and watch favorite gladiators gouge each other with knees and elbows, occasionally landing knockout blows with foot-to-jaw uppercuts. Thailand's ancient equivalent of cock-fighting, "mains" between fighting fish, are no longer permitted within city limits. Aficionados, so to speak, must now scream encouragements to a plug-ugly carp in the suburbs. Last month, the winner of another competitive sport caused Thailand to abandon for a time all other interests. In Bangkok you couldn't get through the streets when eighteen-year-old Apasra Hongsakula, the new Miss Universe, appeared in public.

Whether or not the ban on mayhem

in urban aquaria has caused teen-age sporting blood to flow elsewhere is uncertain, but its growing interest in another Western institution has caused Thai police concern. Gang wars have caught on in a reasonably big way. Denied the racial antagonisms behind so much American street fighting, the delinquents of Bangkok have had to find substitutes for ethnic loyalties. They fight over soft drinks. Last spring there was quite a rumble between the Coca-Colas and the champions of an indigenous refreshment, the Howdys. What the Pepsi-Colas or the 7-Ups were doing at the time was not disclosed. The authorities took immediate and vigorous action to preclude further clashes by forbidding all moviehouses to show *West Side Story*.

During the last year Thailand police have had to face another new problem in maintaining public safety. A new development in the technique of burglary has been proved highly disturbing. When the wind has been in the right direction thieves have been putting smudge pots filled with oleander leaves outside the open windows of dwellings. The smoke makes a dandy soporific and insures the continued sleep of every member of a household until a haul has been made. This may be why there's been a boom in air conditioners.

There's also a boom in the dressmak-