

THIS BEAUTIFUL EARTH: PHOTO ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA LUMINOUS WAVES OF HONG KONG

The sea shimmered and smiled in the sunlight. I was just returning to Hong Kong after having flown from there to Nepal and Singapore. It was January 1995. “The Pearl of the Orient” greeted me with her exquisite smile. Ships from around the world came and went on the waters of Victoria Harbor, which was studded with gems of glistening light.

There is always drama in Hong Kong. The atmosphere is charged with energy, as if something is about to happen—pedestrians in a hurry, brightly colored billboards and neon signs, business people talking loudly on their cellular phones, and shop windows like kaleidoscopes.

Full of life, people walk the streets engaged in clamorous, energized conversation. Restless vigor, sun-like cheerfulness. Honest simplicity. I love Hong Kong, which somehow reminds me of Kansai.

If you go off the busy main street, you see lines of clothes hanging like arrays of international flags from over-crowded apartment buildings. You hear the boisterous sounds of living and smell the food cooking in street vendors’ pots.

The people of Hong Kong are living with all their strength and energy. Merciless competition does not allow them to stand still. With brains, guts, luck and perseverance, everyone is looking for a chance, everyone is struggling desperately with life’s realities.

Hong Kong is not a place for sentimentality—there is no time for it. The whole city is a huge vortex searching for something resplendent. At the center of this vortex is Victoria Harbor. Along the north and south sides of the strait the twin cities of Kowloon and Hong Kong Island prosper.

It was two years before the restoration of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty. Reports in the Western media only served to fan the flames of anxiety over the issue. But I wanted to relieve the people of Hong Kong of their worry. In my own capacity, I had been making efforts to this end from early on. I had spoken with the successive governors of Hong Kong, and also directly conveyed the people’s anxiety to the Chinese leaders. Through these discussions, I became convinced that China would certainly treasure Hong Kong, and so I shared my conviction with the people there. Later China announced its policy of “one country, two systems,” promising not to change Hong Kong’s present social and economic system for 50 years after its restoration to Chinese rule.

Along with China’s promotion of a socialist market economy, its decision to maintain Hong Kong’s current system will constitute a grand experiment for humanity in the first half of the 21st century. If China succeeds, it will give us great hope—hope for transcending the tragedy of a 20th century ridden with war caused by ideological rifts; hope toward realizing a peaceful world, in which people’s differences can complement one another, creating synergy through diversity.

Dr. Arnold Toynbee once remarked, “Perhaps it is China’s destiny now to give political unity and peace not just to half but to all the world” (*Choose Life*, p. 251). Hong Kong is a city that stands on the frontier of human history.

Victoria Harbor is deep; it is calm because the mountains to the north and south block the wind. There is usually little difference between low and high tides, and so the harbor provides an excellent anchorage for ships and makes for easy loading and offloading of cargo. It is a truly fine natural harbor. For this reason, Hong Kong has been much sought

after and has endured many vicissitudes of fortune.

The British annexed Hong Kong as a result of the First Opium War (1839–42). It is said that the harbor was once surrounded with warehouses for storing opium. Years later, there were exchanges of fire across the strait. The Japanese army attacked the British on Hong Kong Island, targeting British oil tanks with their artillery. The British returned the shelling to the Japanese on Kowloon Peninsula, the harbor on both sides turning into a sea of fire. Then, for three years and eight months, Hong Kong had to suffer the nightmare of Japanese occupation.

Yet Hong Kong surmounted each fierce wave of hardship, including harsh economic times. On each occasion, the people fought bravely and won. They stubbornly refused to let anything defeat them.

As a point where East meets West, Hong Kong has hungrily accepted everything from both, be it materials, people, information or technology, and put it to good use. As a result, the island, once a haven only for pirates, has become one of the world's most thriving ports of international trade. The dilapidated village where boys once rode water buffalo among the banyan trees now enjoys economic power surpassing that of some European nations.

What energy it must have required to overcome the adversity of colonialism and transform an island devoid of natural resources into a forest of skyscrapers! The history of Hong Kong is a testament to the fact that people can turn the impossible into the possible if they work at it seriously.

It is my belief that as long as Hong Kong maintains her optimism and vitality, her tomorrow will be even better and brighter, like this harbor shimmering in the sunlight.

Eleven in a series