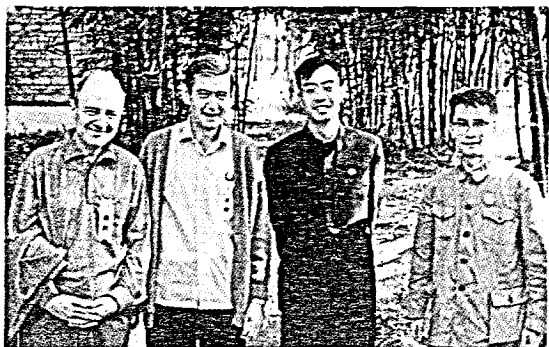

Chapter Five

The Decade of the Dragon



The Canadian Wheat Board at the Canton Trade Fair 1966. Fifty percent of China's foreign trade was done there.

The vicissitudes of the sixties demonstrated yet again how dependent Hong Kong and the Trade Commission were on the moods of their giant neighbour.

While Canada was gearing up to celebrate its centenary, 1966 was not a pleasant year for the Colony. There was very little rain that summer and reservoirs were fast emptying. The Cultural Revolution threatened to spill over the border, as it had in Macau. Charles Reid Gallow had been the Acting Trade Commissioner in Hong Kong immediately after the War, and returned as the Head of Post in 1966. The offices were then on the 11th floor of the P & O Building on Des Voeux Road Central. Adequate and modern at that time, they deteriorated as the staff expanded. Robert Godson, then the Assistant Trade Commissioner, recalls being posted to Hong Kong at the height of the bloody summer of 1967.

He arrived by liner – "The President Cleveland", an American President Lines ship from Hawaii, to take over from Marc Lemieux. Although also responsible for trade in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, it was China that took up most of his time. He was assigned an office in the International Building, several blocks away from the Commission. Here too were the offices of National Health and Welfare and Immigration. Although not immediately exposed to the

riots of 1967, no staff member could be unaffected by the tension they generated.

On May 11th, a riot at the Hong Kong Artificial Flower Works at San Po Kong heralded the start of a long, hot and bloody summer. Baton charges by the police, huge crowds demonstrating outside Government House, and the taking of a border post by Chinese militia, made for a traumatic time. Canadian Trade Commission staff recall the cordoning of whole blocks in Central and Wanchai as bombs, both real and fake, were planted throughout the Territory. They could watch the mobs chanting Maoist slogans from the Hilton Hotel, waving their red books as they moved up to Government House.

At the same time, the total storage of water in the Colony stood at 50 days supply and all requests for additional supplies from China were unanswered. Only the big hotels had water, and as Robert Godson recalled, water rationing meant that this mundane item assumed an importance out of all proportion that summer. Water was available for two hours in the morning and at night; then one hour each time; and then only in the morning. Body odour at the office was becoming noticeable. The local staff were granted time off to stand in long queues with their buckets, waiting for the water to appear.

Everyone who could afford a vacation in the United States seemed to be at Kai Tak that July. For those who remained in Hong Kong, the silver lining was that accommodation was cheap and plentiful, and antiques became affordable in the Territory. Exclusive clubs were now desperately attempting to recruit new members, and the officers and support staff of the Commission took advantage of this. Several joined the hitherto exorbitantly expensive clubs and retain their memberships even today.

The summer in which communist and capitalist fought it out on the streets of Hong Kong came to an end on October 1st, as the Chinese turned on the water, and demonstra-