

acquired in this way.

Although Hong Kong Island and Kowloon had been ceded in perpetuity, it was obvious by the late twentieth century that they could not be separated from the New Territories. In 1984 the British and Chinese agreed that the colony would revert to Chinese sovereignty at the expiration of the New Territories' lease on 30 June, 1997. Hong Kong is now a "special administrative region" of China.

The Afnán: Hájí Mírzá Buzurg-i-Afnán and Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí

There were Bahá'ís in Hong Kong in the lifetime of Bahá'u'lláh. Hájí Mírzá Buzurg-i-Afnán, a cousin of the Báb who lived and traded in Hong Kong in 1879, was part of a trading empire that Balyuzi described as "stretching from Hong Kong to Báku". Bahá'u'lláh once requested from Mírzá Buzurg a few pairs of good spectacles to be given as gifts to prominent men in Beirut and Damascus. Aqa Mírzá Ibrahim, a nephew of the Báb, lived in Hong Kong during 1881-82. Another member of this family, Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí, son of the Báb's maternal uncle Hájí Mírzá Siyyíd Muhammad, resident in Hong Kong from 1870 to 1897. He later visited in Haifa. 'Abdu'l-Bahá subsequently wrote of him in Memorials of the Faithful:

What a radiant face he had! He was nothing but light from head to foot. Just to look at that face made one happy; he was so confident, so assured, so rooted in his faith, and his expression so joyous. He was truly a blessed being. ...After he had received the endless bounties showered on him by Bahá'u'lláh, he was given leave to go, and he traveled to China. There, over a considerable period, he spent his days mindful of God and in a manner conformable to Divine good pleasure. Later he went on to India, where he died.

It is not known whether the Báb's relatives established a community of believers in Hong Kong. According to Balyuzi, Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí exercised a virtual monopoly on trade in Chinese porcelain to the Persian nobility. His clients are said to have included Násiri'd-Dín Sháh. A number of ornamental Chinese vases sent by him to the Holy Land are now located in the Shrine of the Báb. No doubt further information about these Persian traders in the new and rapidly expanding British colony will be uncovered. For the moment there are no indications of other Bahá'í progress there until the infrequent visits by Western travellers that commenced some two decades later.

Early Bahá'í travellers

The visit to Hong Kong by American Bahá'ís Howard Struven and Mason Remey in 1910, during their world-encircling travels, seems to have been no more than a stop-over. Agnes Alexander, who introduced the Bahá'í teachings to Japan and Korea, first visited Hong Kong in 1923, although this too was most likely a transit visit. Miss Alexander returned to Hong Kong on several more occasions as much as thirty years later.

In 1924 Martha Root visited Hong Kong for the express purpose of making the Bahá'í teachings more widely known. She arrived from China on 27 March 1924 to undertake a busy schedule, meeting editors, librarians, and the president of the university. She spoke on radio, and at the Hong Kong University. "Long articles about the Bahá'í Teachings" were printed in "all the leading papers of Hong Kong". The Hong Kong Telegraph carried on its front page for 17 April a report of her public address before the Theosophical Society. Another travelling Bahá'í, Mrs Lorel Schopflocher, who had recently visited Ceylon and Borneo, and who was passing through Hong Kong at this time, attended the same lecture, and spoke about the Bahá'í movement in America and Canada. The South China Morning Post reported that "Two distinguished visitors" were in Hong Kong: Mrs Schopflocher, who was staying at the Hong Kong Hotel, and Martha Root, at the Astor House Hotel:

While interviewing Mrs. Schopflocher and Miss Root they both said that the Bahá'í Revelation is the spirit of this age. It is the essence of all the highest ideals of this century. The Bahá'í cause is an inclusive movement; the teachings of all religions and societies are found in it, Christians, Theosophists, Buddhists, Mohammedans, Jews, Freemasons, Zoroastrians, find their highest aims in this cause. Socialists and philosophers find their theories fully developed in this revelation.

Martha Root received further coverage in the South China Morning Post following her lecture at Hong Kong University on "Universal Peace and how the Students can help bring it". From Hong Kong Martha Root travelled to Vietnam and Canton, before returning to give another five lectures at the end of May. On May 15 her lecture to the Theosophists on "New Views of Immortality" was reported in the Hong Kong Telegraph and The China Mail. Miss Root returned to Hong Kong briefly in 1930, and again spoke at Hong Kong University. She recalled a year later:

When I spoke in Hong Kong University the second time last year, a beautiful girl in the university called upon me the next day and said: "What can I do to promote the Bahá'í Movement in Singapore, my home city?" A professor's wife who was calling at the same time, told me afterwards that if that girl takes up the Bahá'í Movement, she will certainly be a great teacher for she is one of the brightest and most capable girls in the entire university.

Whether or not this woman promoted the Bahá'í teachings on her return to Singapore is not known (there were no Bahá'ís in Singapore at this time). In Hong Kong Miss Root associated with her Esperanto friends and acquaintances. Presumably, she also met Mr Pei Tswi, a Bahá'í who lived in Hong Kong for a decade from the late 1920s (about whom little else is known) - although such a meeting between the two is nowhere recorded.

The only other Chinese Bahá'í known to have resided in Hong Kong prior to the Second World War is Liu Chan Song, whose address was given in the directory of the Bahá'í World volume for 1939-40 (p689) as 767 Nathan Road, Kowloon. Mr Liu had heard of the Bahá'í Faith while a student at Cornell University in the United States. After returning to China he worked for the government. By 1943 Mr Liu had moved to Kweilin (Quilin), Kwongsi in China. There were other brief visits by Bahá'ís to Hong Kong in the 1920s and 30s. Siegfried Schopflocher visited about 1927. Mrs Keith Ransom-Kehler passed through in 1932. Mark Tobey and Bernard Leach visited for a week in 1934, during their investigation of eastern artforms and philosophies.

From the late 1930s the countries of Asia experienced considerable social and political turmoil. Bernice Wood, an American Bahá'í who had been living in Shanghai until the city fell to the communists, stayed briefly in Hong Kong about May 1949 before moving to Bangkok in Thailand. She returned in 1960, and for almost three decades made her home in Hong Kong.

The World Crusade

Such is the scant record of Bahá'í activity in Hong Kong in the first century of the Bahá'í era. Although followers of Bahá'u'lláh had lived in the colony during his lifetime, no Bahá'í community had been established, and throughout the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh's son `Abdu'l-Bahá, the intermittent visits by Bahá'í travellers had similarly produced little result. It was only during the Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi, `Abdu'l-Bahá's grandson and his appointed leader of the Bahá'í Faith, that a more systematic approach to the planting of the

principles and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith had its impact on countries world-wide, including Hong Kong.

When Shoghi Effendi embarked the Bahá'í world on a "decade long, world encircling crusade" in 1953 Hong Kong was one of several hundred locations around the world to which the members of larger Bahá'í communities were called on to direct their energies. At a conference convened in New Delhi in October 1953 for the purpose of discussing the movement of Bahá'ís to new posts throughout Asia, Hong Kong was among those territories marked for consolidation. The British Bahá'ís were given primary responsibility for this task. However, as it turned out, Bahá'ís from a number of other countries came to settle in the colony, through a variety of planned and unplanned circumstances. As the community expanded it corresponded at first with a committee of the British National Assembly, and later with the Asian Teaching Committee in North America.

Early pioneers and travellers

Shoghi Effendi had asked the North American Bahá'ís to open two other territories close to Hong Kong and to China. These were the Portuguese colony of Macau, and Hainan Island, which was part of China. Frances Heller visited Hong Kong on her way to the New Delhi Conference. She stayed at the Victoria Hotel, visited Macau for a day, and decided to pioneer there after the conference, arriving on 20 October 1953. Miss Arden Thur travelled directly from the New Delhi conference to reside in Hong Kong:

After the Conference in New Delhi, October 1953 [one of four conferences held at the beginning of the World Crusade], I went to Burma, Thailand, Malaya, and Hong Kong - arriving in Hong Kong in December 1953. The purpose of these travels was always to meet the Bahá'ís and teach the Faith. These experiences are my eternal joy - friendships through the Blessed Beauty.

Miss Thur secured a three month position with the British Publishing Bureau selling advertisements in the Hong Kong Medical Journal, before departing, in March 1954 to make her pilgrimage in the Holy Land at the invitation of Shoghi Effendi. Miss Thur later wrote:

Hong Kong was beautifully international. I met many important people who were there then. I participated in society events with Mrs Church, the woman who ran the advertising bureau. She was not well liked but even this association helped me to meet people and speak of the Faith "Those months in Hong Kong were among the most meaningful of my life. I really felt like a pioneer.

There were many confirmations of a spiritual nature for me and a feeling of constant assistance from on high. Even though there were no declarations of new believers, I had the feeling that being there was important. Now looking back I realise that three months in a place is not really pioneering, but it does not change the impact that those three months had on my life....Mr Sun Sun was a money changer on Queens Road. He became a good friend. I visited him later when coming to Hong Kong in 1956 and again in 1958. At those times, Mamie Seto was pioneering there and I took a young Englishman, Maurice (Tim) Williamson to meet her. He was an inspector of police and he liked Mamie. He attended Naw Ruz with the friends in 1958 and spoke of having a spiritual experience after hearing about the Faith, but he never declared. "

Although no one became a Bahá'í through the activities initiated by Miss Thur (the one Bahá'í she found in Hong Kong had heavy work commitments and little time to spare), her presence provided an important sense of continuity at a crucial period in the community's early stages.

Hishmat and Mahboobeh Azizi

Hishmat and Mahboobeh Azizi arrived in Hong Kong in March 1954. They were from Tehran, and had volunteered to pioneer to the remote destination of Hainan Island while attending the New Delhi Conference. They had tried, unsuccessfully, to obtain visas for Hainan while in India, and later in Singapore, and once more on their arrival in Hong Kong. They were to wait until the 1980s before they succeeded.

Gian and Mrs Lachmi Datwani

Mr Gian and Mrs Lachmi Datwani arrived in Hong Kong on 4 August 1954. Mr Datwani had met Mrs Shirin and Dr Fozdar in Singapore and become a Bahá'í there before his wife had left India (Mrs Datwani became a Bahá'í in February 1954). Gian served on the first Singapore Local Spiritual Assembly, and having moved to Japan with his wife in November 1953, served on the first National Spiritual Assembly of Japan. On their arrival in Hong Kong the Datwanis were unsure of their future, but Gian soon obtained a position managing a trading company. Hong Kong became their permanent home.

Anthony and Mamie Seto

Anthony and Mamie Seto arrived in Hong Kong from San Francisco on 1st October 1954. The Setos had become Bahá'ís in Honolulu in 1916 and had moved to San Francisco in 1932 (Mami Seto's

family was from Michigan, while Tony's was from Canton, in Southern China). In 1943-44 they pioneered in Canada's Maritime Provinces, and in 1951 Mrs Seto was elected to the United States National Spiritual Assembly. She and her husband thus brought considerable experience to their new pioneer post.

After settling in Hong Kong, the Setos received a six month extension to their visas, to 30 June 1955. They also obtained a year's permit for entry to Macau. Mrs Seto wrote to the Suleimani family, who had lived for many years in China, and were now in Taiwan:

We are just getting settled and are concentrating on some friends and we feel that we are needed here to keep up the continuity of the work. Also, my husband is not well and I feel that he should not attempt travelling and visiting for a while. The entire matter of selling our business, making plans for the journey and the strain of travel have been hard for him and he is just becoming rested.

There was now a small group of Bahá'ís in Hong Kong, and others had settled in Macau. Charles Murray, an elderly Canadian Bahá'í, had arrived in Hong Kong early in 1954 and was living on his pension in a small room. Carl and Loretta Scherer had arrived in Macau in December 1953. The Azizis moved between Hong Kong and Macau, able only to obtain three month extensions to their Hong Kong visa, where Mr Azizi was working hard as a merchant of Persian carpets, and seeking more permanent status.

In March 1955 Mrs Seto described progress in Hong Kong in a three page report to the Asian Teaching Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States:

For over a year now we have had active workers here in Hong Kong, but as yet no immediate results; there are always the remote ones, as we have been repeatedly assured. Arden Thur did very good work here as did Charles Murray; the latter rarely lost an opportunity in presenting the Faith, and fearlessly gave the Message whenever there was an opening. The Scherers, Frances Heller and the Azizis likewise have sown many seeds, and also Mr. Datwani.

Mrs Seto found the Chinese people "very pleasant people to be among", and admired their kind, gentle and sweet qualities. They responded to friendship, were earnest and sincere, and worked with an admirable "vim and intentness". She felt that the Chinese adhered to their religious beliefs with a devoutness that would make them firm

Bahá'ís, once they knew of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. The Setos attended meetings of ECAFE, the United Nations Association, dinners at the American University Club, and lectures at the University of Hong Kong. They presented Bahá'í books to the head of the Chinese Department after attending his lecture on "China's Age of Faith". Nineteen people had attended an event to commemorate World Religion organised by the Bahá'ís. Mrs Seto had spoken on the Bahá'í Faith to audience of 20 at the Kowloon Union Church, an interdenominational Christian Church. A report to the European and Asia Teaching Committee in November 1955 focused on dinners hosted by the Setos, and other activities with which they were involved:

... We had Persian pilau prepared by Mrs. Azizi, and East Indian curry prepared by Mr. and Mrs. Datwani. We are holding two regular study classes per week, and we go out to attend different gatherings, lectures and meetings with the view of meeting new people. In this connection my husband and I joined the United Nations Association of Hong Kong, first studying its by-laws to see if these contained anything that contravened our Bahá'í Teachings. During the United Nations Week Celebration, I was asked to be chairman of a meeting and my husband also spoke briefly.

Mamie Seto considered Hong Kong an attractive place, with a magnificent harbour, but overcrowded. Many refugees had arrived from China in recent years, and there were shortages of housing, water, employment, schools, and telephones (there were 18,000 ahead of the Setos in the queue for a telephone). Hong Kong was a "melting pot" of peoples in which many languages were spoken. The local news was broadcast in Cantonese, Mandarin and Fukienese. Few Chinese spoke English and few foreigners spoke Chinese. The people worked hard, many working seven days per week.

Community activities

In the first years of the Crusade a number of Bahá'ís passed through Hong Kong en route to their virgin and consolidation goals, or otherwise travelling to visit new Bahá'í communities. Indian Bahá'ís Zena Sorabjee and her husband visited for two days in May 1954, en route to Japan. The Nadler family had passed through Hong Kong after having spent four years in the Philippines and Hazel Mori visited en route to Manila. The Suleimanis visited in November 1954, renewing there their acquaintance with Elin L. Tsao, who with her late husband, Dr Y.S. Tsao, had been a member of the Bahá'í community in Shanghai. Hand of the Cause Mr Zikhrullah Khadem, together with

Mrs Khadem, and Miss Haddad, visited Hong Kong and Macau in November 1955. Mrs Seto reported to Mr S.A. Suleimani in Taiwan:

Yesterday all three went over to Macau to visit the friends there and will be back here by Saturday for an evening talk to the local friends and our contacts at our apartment. This is our greatest teaching opportunity and we have sent out invitations to all prospects whom we feel will be interested.

The visitors departed Hong Kong for Bangkok on 21 November. Mrs Seto informed Barbara Simonds (secretary of the East Asia Teaching Committee of the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles), that Mr Khadem inspired the Bahá'ís "by telling of his travels and experience in working for the Faith in various lands. He sets the great example of strict and implicit obedience to our Beloved Guardian."

Association with so many Bahá'ís from other lands thus gave heart to the Hong Kong pioneers, and demonstrated to the first Hong Kong Bahá'ís the reality of the global community of which they had become a part. Charles Duncan, Knight of Bahá'u'lláh to Brunei, later recorded of this period:

The greatest cooperation has always existed between the friends in these two crucial spots in the orient. Mr and Mrs Carl Scherer and Francis Heller went to Macau. later, Mr and Mrs Anthony Seto went to Hong Kong. There was constant exchange through visits and correspondence. Although there were new declarations in these colonies, the progress was slow due to the fact that the population in both places is mobile. Hence, after declaring, the new believers often left to go to Japan, Taiwan, England, India, Cambodia and other places. Although the victories gained are for the entire Bahá'í world, keeping the Bahá'í work going in Hong Kong and Macau was difficult. Later, Dr and Mrs Dean and Bernice Wood went to serve the Faith in Hong Kong. Pioneers came and went. Slowly a community was built in Hong Kong consisting of long time residents. They were of Chinese, Indian, British and Southeast Asian backgrounds. There was a constant stream of Bahá'í visitors from abroad including travelling teachers, tourists, pilgrims, Auxiliary Board Members, Continental Counsellors, and Hands of the Cause.

On 16 February 1956 Mrs Seto reported some of the community's activities to the European and Asia Teaching Committee:

In our letter of 24th January to you, we wrote of a tea we were giving at our home for selected members of

the U.N. Association of Hong Kong. This tea turned out to be a most complete Bahá'í meeting. After the meeting progressed and tea was served, the Vice-Chairman of the Association said to my great amazement and utmost delight, "Mrs Seto, please tell these friends about the Bahá'í Faith." After such a pleasing request, I felt very free to speak, and did so for well over half an hour. After which I gave those present Bahá'í pamphlets in the Chinese language, and to the Vice-Chairman, a brochure of the proposals for the revision of the U.N. Charter. The friends stayed on and on until early evening. Present on this occasion were a professor, a doctor and students, none of whom had ever heard of the Faith. We shall give another tea in the coming months and throughout the year. We are working closely with this organisation.

We have also given three of our Bahá'í books to the head of the Department of Oriental Studies of the Hong Kong University, for his private library. In a warm letter which we received in acknowledgement of this gift, he gave us a special invitation to attend a series of four lectures, he was giving on the subject of Tibet. We have accepted the invitation and are learning much about this mysterious land.

The Setos added much confidence to the work of the small Bahá'í community. Through her involvement in the United Nations Association, Mamie Seto demonstrated how it was possible to inform public-minded people about the Bahá'í teachings. Gian Datwani also joined civic organisations, such as the Lion's Club, at which he gave occasional addresses.

New Bahá'ís

On 12 February 1956 four "very fine young men" joined the Bahá'í Community who were "punctual, dependable and eager for knowledge" became Bahá'ís having studied the Bahá'í teachings for ten months. These were Chan Lie Fun, Chan Lie Kun, Ng Ying Kay, and Nari Assudamall Sherwani. The families of Chan Lie Fun and Chan Lie Kun (who were twins), and Ng Ying Kay, had fled from Canton to Hong Kong at the time of the Communist revolution. The twins' father was a bank employee in Canton, and Ng Ying Kay's father had been a minor official in the pre-revolution government. All three young men spoke both Cantonese and Mandarin, but their educational and career opportunities had been disrupted by the revolution. Chan Lie Fun and Chan Lie Kun were now working at the Kowloon Motor Bus Workshop. They heard about the Bahá'í Faith through a cousin,

Mr Ng Wing Kwong, who told them of the experiences of a Mrs Wu, who had met Bahá'ís in Macau. Lie Kun and Lie Fun lived at the National Bahá'í Centre in Hong Kong for a number of years before migrating to North America.

The fourth man who declared in February 1956, Nari Assudamall Sherwani, left the colony soon after. He had arrived from East India in late 1955 to train in his cousin's import-export business, Dhanamall & Co. of which Mr Datwani was manager. On February 12 Mr Sherwani had attended a talk at the Seto's home, at which Mr Mumazi - a resident of Japan, spoke of his recent pilgrimage in the Holy Land. Mr Sherwani had already accepted the message in his heart, and joined without hesitation when the three young Chinese men who were also present declared their belief in Bahá'u'lláh. Although Hong Kong was a cosmopolitan city, Mr Sherwani stated that it was only at Bahá'í meetings that the several races - Chinese, European, and Indian - integrated, and so demonstrated the truth of the Bahá'í principle of racial harmony and unity. Like a number of others who became Bahá'ís in Hong Kong, he departed, intending at first to live in Japan, but moving then to Africa and eventually to Ireland (from where he continued to visit Hong Kong regularly). Among the other members of the early Hong Kong community were Paul and Mary Shia, who had been living in Macau. Paul Shia was already in Hong Kong when Mary arrived in February 1956. After residing for a time in Tsuen Wan in the New Territories, they they moved to Cambodia and later to North America.

The formation of Hong Kong Assembly

The enrolment of four new members allowed the Hong Kong Bahá'ís to form their first Assembly at Ridvan 1956. The members were Mamie and Anthony Seto, Gian Datwani, Chan Lie Kun and Chan Lie Fun, Paul and Mary Shia, H. Azizi, and G. Punwani. (Although part of the community, Mrs Lachmi Datwani was not yet twenty-one years of age).

Table: Hong Kong LSA 1956-1963

1956
1957
1958
1959
1960
1961
1962
1963

Mamie Seto

Mamie Seto
N.Sherwani-vc

Paul Shia
Paul Shia
M.Seto-sec
Mamie Seto
Mamie Seto

Mary Shia
Heshmat Azizi

KH. Chiu
Mary Shia
Mary Shia
B.Wood-tr
Bernice Wood
Bernice Wood
- sec

Gian Datwani
Gian Datwani
G.Datwani-ch
Gian Datwani
Gian Datwani
Gian Datwani
Gian Datwani
Gian Datwani
Paul Shia

Chan Lie Fun
Chu Kwok Hung

M.Seto-sec
Mamie Seto
Mamie Seto
JimmieY.Jung
LachmiDatwani

Sun Pao Kang

H. Azizi
F.W.-Strong
F.W.-Strong-tr

F.W.-Strong
Wu Ying Chi
ChanLieKun
ChanLieKun
Chan Lie Kun

G. Punwani
Chu Hon Lung

Chan Lie Kun
Chan Lie Kun
Chan Lie Kun
Chan Lie Fun
Chan Lie Fun
Chan Lie Fun

Paul Shia
Paul Shia
Chu Hon Leung

Chu Hon Leung

Chu Hon Leung
L. H. Lewis
H.Azizi
H.Azizi

Anthony Seto
Anthony Seto
Lachmi
Datwani
Lachmi
Datwani
Lachmi
Datwani
Paul Shia
Marjorie
Buckle
L.M.Y.C. Tao

Chan Lie Kun
Chan Lie Kun
Chan Lie Fun
Chan Lie Fun
Chan Lie Fun
Mary Shia
Chu Hon Leung

Chu Hon Leung

Table: Delegates to North East Asia Convention 1957-63

1957
1958
1959
1960
1961
1962
1963

H.Azizi
H.Azizi
M.Seto
Mamie Seto
Mamie Seto
Mamie Seto
M.Seto

T.Seto
M.Seto
?
?
H.Azizi
Gian Datwani
H.Azizi

At the beginning of 1957 there were 14 members in the Hong Kong Bahá'í community: Anthony and Mamie Seto, Hishmat and Mahboobeh Azizi; Gian and Lachmi Datwani, Mr Chu Hon Leung - who joined at the end of 1956; Mr Chan Lie Kun and Mr Chan Lie Fun; Mr Wu Ying Chi; Mr Chiu Kwok Hang; Mr Punwani; Paul and Mary Shia. There were also the Datwani's two daughters and the Shia's son.

Mr Chiu Kwok Hung had become a Bahá'í late in 1956. He was then 26, and living at Castle Peak Boy's School, 19 miles from Kowloon, too far to be able to attend meetings regularly. Chiu wrote that he had been impressed with the nomenclature for "Bahá'í", (Tai Tung + plus Chinese idiograph),

which signifies "the world is unified and all people irrespective of their races are sisters and brothers in the fourseas family". In fact, such magnificent enlightened ideas had been manifested by Confucius, one of the greatest Chinese philosophers over 2500 years ago in the late Chow dynasty. He related "Tai tung" as "only could people love one another, the wars be perished; true philanthropy and peace be permanently maintained."

Mrs Seto described Chiu Kwok Hung, who was a member of the United Nations Association of Hong Kong, as the community's "most gifted bi-lingual believer". He subsequently translated a 20-page Bahá'í booklet from English to Chinese.

Bahá'í Writings were to be translated into five Chinese languages (Chungchia, Kado, Kapo, Mongol, and Na-Hai) during the World Crusade. From June 1958 the NSA North East Asia appointed a three-member "standing committee" in Hong Kong to identify books to be translated, select well qualified

translators, and supervise translation and publication. Among translations completed were Stanwood Cobb's *Tomorrow* and *Tomorrow*, by Mr Sun Pao-Kang, in 1962.

In about March 1957 there were three further declarations: Ling Che Fai and Lee Pun Kwong, both aged 19, and Vashi Daswaney, an East Indian merchant (who soon after moved to Hong Kong from Singapore, and eventually to India). Another to arrive in 1957 was Mr Francis Warrington-Strong, a Lieutenant in the British Navy who had become a Bahá'í in Britain shortly before arriving in the Colony on his final tour of duty. He returned to England following his retirement in December 1959. Also resident in Hong Kong were Dr Sidney Dean and Isabel Dean, until Dr Dean was invited to become Director of the New Era school at Panchgani, India, in 1964.

Bahá'í visitors began to visit Hong Kong in ever larger numbers. These included Hands of the Cause Jalah Khazeh in 1957 and Mr Ala'i in 1959. Other visitors at this time included Mr Marangella, Mr Smits, Arden Thur, Mr and Mrs Naderi, Mrs Momtazi, Anita Ioas, William Maxwell, Mr and Mrs Scherer, Harry Yim and Manuel Fereria. A newspaper printed an article featuring Albert Rakovsky, a Bahá'í from Westmount, Quebec, who visited Hong Kong for just one day. When Mr and Mrs Sabet visited Hong Kong in 1957, they hosted a dinner for the Bahá'ís at the Miramar Hotel.

The public profile of the Bahá'í community was raised by a visit to the colony for six days by Shirin Fozdar and Mrs George Lee, of Singapore. Mrs Fozdar spoke to the Indian Women's Club, and the United Nations Association. She also met the executive committee of the Hong Kong Council of Women, appeared on radio and television, and had interviews published in five Hong Kong newspapers.

With the Bahá'í community expanding in size, administrative responsibilities multiplied. Until the Hong Kong Spiritual Assembly could afford its own premises, its office was officially designated as Mamie Seto's home, at 3 College Road, Kowloon. For answers to administrative questions, it corresponded with the British National Spiritual Assembly, and the committee in Britain established to correspond with overseas communities under the British NSA's care. The Assembly wrote to seek guidance, for instance, when Mr Punwani attended few LSA meetings or other Bahá'í events. It was known that he worked from 9am to 10pm daily, but also, he seemed to show little interest, as he was seldom heard from in later years. The Assembly wanted to know whether his position on the Assembly could be declared vacant and another member elected.

The Hong Kong Bahá'ís were holding feasts, conducting Bahá'í holy days, maintaining a regular weekly study class, and managing a Bahá'í fund. Bahá'ís were invited to speak from time to time before other organisations, including the United Nations Association. Some 30 people attended Hong Kong's Naw-Ruz party in March 1957, including sixteen guests. It was the Hong Kong Bahá'ís' first "public" gathering, and a sign that the Bahá'í community was gathering momentum. On 15 June the community's voice was added to those of Bahá'í communities in other parts of the world in protest at the ill-treatment of the Bahá'ís in Iran, and in thanking the Shah for the restoration of Bahá'í property. A cable sent to the leader of Iran said:

PLEASE ACCEPT HONG KONG BAHAIS ABIDING GRATITUDE
YOUR GOVERNMENT NOBLE ACTION IN RESTORING NATIONAL
BAHAI HEADQUARTERS OUR BAHAIS PRAYING GOD'S
PROTECTION YOUR THRONE LASTING PROSPERITY YOUR GOVERNMENT
REALIZATION ALL DESIRES YOUR BELOVED LAND.

An application for registration of the Hong Kong Assembly with the government was made on 21 March 1958. Mrs Seto, as secretary, followed this with a letter explaining the nature and spread of the Bahá'í Faith on 24th March. The Assembly was registered on 29 May 1958.

The National Spiritual Assembly

From 1957 until 1974 Hong Kong was part of the Regional Spiritual Assembly (called the National Spiritual Assembly) of North East Asia. This Assembly was first elected at a convention held in Tokyo, Japan, 27-29 April 1957. Hong Kong's delegates to this convention were Hishmat Azizi and Anthony Seto. A further seventeen delegates were elected by the Bahá'ís in Korea, Taiwan, Macau and Japan. Shoghi Effendi sent a message to the first convention outlining the tasks for these Bahá'í communities for the remainder of the Ten Year Crusade:

With feelings of exultation, joy and pride I hail the convocation of this history-making Convention of the Bahá'ís of North-East Asia, paving the way for the emergence of a Regional Spiritual Assembly with an area of jurisdiction embracing Japan, Korea, Formosa, Macao, Hong Kong, Hainan Island and Sakhalin Island.

This auspicious event, which posterity will regard as the culmination of a process initiated, half a century ago, in the capital city of Japan, under the watchful care and through the direct inspiration of the Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, marks the opening of the

second chapter in the history of the evolution of His Faith in the North Pacific area. Such a consummation cannot fail to lend a tremendous impetus to its onward march in the entire Pacific Ocean, a march which will now, no doubt, be greatly accelerated by the simultaneous emergence of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of South-East Asia and of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand.

I particularly welcome the establishment of this highly important institution in the capital city of Japan, as it affords a splendid opportunity for the diffusion of the Light of the Faith, and the erection of the structure of its Administrative Order, among a people representing the overwhelming majority of the yellow race, living in the islands of the Pacific Ocean and in a country regarded as one of the strongholds of the Buddhist Faith.

I feel a warm tribute should be paid, on this historic occasion, to the members of the American Bahá'í Community, as well as to their elected national representatives, who have, for so long and so devotedly, promoted the interests of the Faith in that country, and, in recent years, in its neighbouring islands.

I call upon the Regional Spiritual Assembly now being formed to signalize its birth through the initiation of a subsidiary Six-Year Plan, designed to swell the number of the adherents of the Faith throughout the area of its jurisdiction; to multiply the groups, the isolated centers and the local spiritual assemblies; to obtain recognition from the civil authorities for the Bahá'í Marriage Certificate, as well as the Bahá'í Holy Days; to inaugurate a national Bahá'í Fund; to consolidate the work initiated in the newly opened territories; to lend an impetus to the translation, the publication, and dissemination of Bahá'í literature in divers languages; to establish summer schools, and Bahá'í burial grounds; to propagate the Faith throughout the smaller islands of Japan; and to acquire a plot to serve as the site of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of North-East Asia.

May the blessings of Bahá'u'lláh be showered, in an ever-increasing measure, on these newly emerged Communities now hold aloft, so steadfastly and so valiantly, the banner of His Faith, and may the outcome of their collective efforts illumine its annals, and

contribute to a notable degree to the consolidation of the institutions of the Bahá'í embryonic World Order now being erected throughout the length and breadth of so vast, so turbulent, and yet so promising, an area of the globe.

Unfortunately, the success of the first convention was followed by the untimely death of Tony Seto. For five months he had undergone medical treatment in California for a heart ailment, returning to Hong Kong in February. Elected as one of Hong Kong's two delegates to the first National Convention of North East Asia, he flew to Japan, where he suffered a heart attack while boarding a plane for the flight home to Hong Kong. His death at this time was a severe loss to the entire Bahá'í community, no less than to Mrs Seto. Cables expressing sympathy reached her in Yokohama, where her late husband was buried. Shoghi Effendi cabled:

GRIEVED SUDDEN LOSS DEAR HUSBAND VALUED CONSECRATED
HIGH MINDED PROMOTER FAITH RECORD HIS DEEPLY APPRECIATED
SERVICES BOTH AMERICA ASIA UNFORGETTABLE REWARD GREAT
ABHA KINGDOM ASSURE LOVING FERVENT PRAYERS PROGRESS HIS
SOUL

"My dear husband was Chinese, while I am an American," Mrs Seto later wrote to a new Japanese Bahá'í, "but in our marriage we worked for this World Religion of Bahá'u'lláh. We both loved Japan and the Japanese people." Mrs Seto returned to the United States to settle her late husband's affairs, before returning to Hong Kong. Whereas the loss of a life-long partner while living in a foreign land might have crushed the will of some, Mrs Seto remained in Hong Kong another five years. In 1957 she was appointed to the Auxiliary Board, but her health was failing. Her departure for Burlingame in California on 5 June 1962 meant that others now had to initiate activities, not only support those that others planned.

Functioning of the Hong Kong Assembly

The mid-years of the Ten Year Crusade were characterized by steady if unspectacular progress. An article on the Bahá'ís was printed in the Hong Kong Tiger Standard, one of the leading newspapers. In 1958 eleven of the community's 14 members gathered for the third election of the Assembly (Mrs Mamie Seto and Mr Hishmat Azizi had left to attend convention in Tokyo). In June 1959 there were just thirteen members. In addition to holding regular feasts and meetings, the Bahá'ís continued their involvement in United Nations activities, and presented Bahá'í literature to prominent individuals and public

libraries. Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era was donated to the library of the Hong Kong Club in August 1959, and the Bahá'ís remained in occasional contact with a professor of Oriental Studies at the University of Hong Kong. Mr Azizi gave a talk about Persian carpets at the YWCA. Mrs Seto's speech to the United Nations Association on 24 May 1959 was reported briefly in the South China Morning Post, and she addressed the Association again on 16 November. Her report on progress in the colony written to the Hands of the Cause in the Holy Land in August illustrated the limitations within which the Hong Kong Bahá'ís worked:

While not withholding the message from any receptive soul, we have kept in mind the wish of the beloved Guardian to seek out the people with capacity. The Teachings have been freely given to the educated, the prominent and influential Chinese of the Colony. My husband never overlooked his former classmates, business acquaintances and friends in making clear to them his purpose in coming to Hong Kong. Yet to date there has been no response whatsoever... Although the Faith has been given to the rich, the educated and the prominent, it has been accepted by the lowly. These lowly ones have no homes, no money, so the meetings are all held at my home...

Mrs Seto attempted in her report to provide an accurate description of progress in the colony. She noted there had been small victories: relations with the United Nations Association had remained strong. One member of the U.N.'s Refugee Committee had moved to Switzerland, and had apparently become a Bahá'í there. Late in 1959 the Hong Kong Bahá'ís donated \$300 toward purchase of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár site in Japan.

In December 1959 Hand of the Cause Mr Shu'a'llah Ala'i visited Hong Kong, and inspired the Bahá'ís "with his humility, knowledge and service to our Cause". Other visitors in the year came from Australia (Mrs Jean and Miss Alicia Hutchinson-Smith), Korea, Iran, Cambodia, Canada, France, U.S.A., Japan, Singapore and Taiwan. In February 1960 Mr Rafi and Mrs Mildred Mottehedeh of Connecticut visited, as did Mrs Helen L. Carter, of California. Hand of the Cause Agnes Alexander visited for a week in November, staying with Mrs Seto. The following year she made another visit, this time visiting the Philippines also. Also in Hong Kong in 1960 were Mr M. Azizi and Mr and Mrs Kazempour, who were waiting for visas to return to their pioneer posts Japan. Mr M. Labib was also present for several months, prior to moving to Japan. He worked in Mr Azizi's shop, and often

spoke to audiences gathered on the Persian carpets. Miss Elsie Elliot, later a member of Hong Kong's Legislative Council, was among the guests at these early meetings.

Despite so much worthwhile activity, the Bahá'í community grew by just three members in the year 1960-61: Mr Lewis, a 43 year old school teacher from England, who joined on 11 September 1960; Mr Jimmy Y. Jung, who arrived from Macau; and Mrs Bernice M. Wood, who arrived from Kuwait. Apart from an absence between 1967-1972, Mrs Wood remained in the Colony until her departure in August 1990 at the age of 77.

In the early 1960s the Local Assembly met at the home of the secretary, Mrs Mamie Seto, at 268 C, Prince Edward Road, Kowloon. Feasts were held regularly, but it was sometimes difficult to gather a quorum for Assembly meetings. For some, work hours were long and tiring, and there was little time and energy available for community events. On 7 March 1961 Hand of the Cause Dr Muhajir surprised the Hong Kong Bahá'ís, when he arrived unexpectedly after attending the opening of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Kampala, Uganda. "Hong Kong", he later wrote in an assessment of the many countries he visited that year, "... needs the patience of Job...". Dr Muhajir encouraged numerous Malaysian Bahá'í youth to travel teach in Hong Kong, and also encouraged Filipino Bahá'ís to settle there. He returned many times over the years, sometimes accompanied by his wife, Mrs Iran Muhajir.

The Local Spiritual Assembly began to appoint committees to undertake the various tasks involved in community function: in 1962 there were committees responsible for Hospitality, Feasts, Language, and Teaching. Public meetings were being held monthly or bi-monthly at the committee room in the City Hall, and small study classes were being held in individual homes. Some new members joined the community in 1962: Mr Ng Wing Kwon, who had studied the Faith since 1955, and whose two nephews Chan Lie Fun and Chan Lie Kun had joined in 1956; Mr Ng Ying Kay, another of Ng Wing Kwon's relative; and Miss Marie Peres, a fluent speaker of Chinese, Portuguese and English, who had heard of the Faith from Mrs Buckle, with whom she was then residing. Following the departure of Mamie Seto, activities were maintained at a modest level. Feasts were sometimes conducted in Mr Azizi's carpet shop. The feast of Kamal (August 1, 1962) was attended by just five members (Mr Gian Datwani, Mr Jimmy Yen, Mrs Bernice Wood, Mr Sung, and a guest).

The Bahá'ís in Macau faced the same challenges in establishing a community as were the Hong Kong Bahá'ís. In 1957 Mr Datwani began weekly visits to Macau to teach Bahá'í

classes. His efforts were continued in the early 1960s by Mr Azizi. During 1960-61 Mr Azizi visited the Bahá'ís in Macau nine times. At the end of the Crusade there was one Local Assembly in Macau. The Hong Kong and Macau Bahá'í communities continued their close relationship, and were jointly administered (first under the National Spiritual Assembly of North East Asia, later under the National Spiritual Assembly of Hong Kong) until Macau established its own National Spiritual Assembly in 1989.

Completion of the World Crusade

Ridvan 1963 marked the completion of the decade long "World Crusade". In ten years the Bahá'í message had been taken to many hundreds of new destinations. The number of National Spiritual Assemblies around the world had risen to fifty-six, and the governing body of the Bahá'í world, the Universal House of Justice, had been established with its seat on Mount Carmel in Israel. Although progress had not been rapid in Hong Kong, the foundations of Bahá'í administration had been laid. The Bahá'í World, reporting the years 1954-1963, recorded the existence of the Hong Kong Local Spiritual Assembly and the presence of an individual Bahá'í in Kowloon.

The Nine Year Plan, 1964-73

Between 1964 and 1973 Hong Kong remained under the jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly of North East Asia. A series of goals was set for the National Assembly and the Hong Kong Bahá'ís to achieve, far in excess of their accomplishments in the previous decade. They were to raise the number of localities to twenty, the number of LSAs to five, and the number of these which were incorporated to three. Further, they were to obtain from civil authorities recognition of Bahá'í Holy Days and the Bahá'í Marriage Certificate.

There were about six additions to the community in the first year of the new plan, including Mr Chan Ching-ki, Miss Linda Wong of Kam Tin. Other new Bahá'ís at this time were the Hui family: Mr Hui Ping and Mrs Hui, Mr Tan Men, and their daughter Hui Oi Ling. Sisters Irene and Nancy Young joined in June.

The Local Assembly met on Sunday evenings at the Centre, prior to the 8pm weekly fireside. The community was working toward the establishment of an Assembly on Victoria Island by Ridvan 1965. Teaching activities were also going on in the New Territories.

The community continued to receive visits by Hands of the Cause: Tarazu'llah Samandari in 1966; John Robarts in 1968 while visiting the newly appointed Counsellors in Japan; A.Q. Faizi in January 1969; A.A. Furutan in October 1971, while returning from

the Oceanic Conference in Sapporo, Japan, and again in 1974 and 1976. Collis Featherstone, like Rahmat Muhajir, visited Hong Kong on numerous occasions. Ruhyyih Khanum represented the Universal House of Justice at the International Conference in Hong Kong in 1974. The visits of these Hands of the Cause were often only brief, but each was nonetheless a precious experience for the Bahá'ís.

Additional support for the Hong Kong Bahá'ís emerged in the 1960s through the work of Malaysian Auxiliary Board Members Yankee Leong and Leong Tat Chee, who first visited Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan in 1965. Yankee Leong was subsequently appointed to the Continental Board of Counsellors, and continued to visit Hong Kong in that capacity. On some visits he remained for several months. It was from Leong that Jerry Lulla, of Kowloon, heard of the Bahá'í Faith in April 1968 (in a dentist's waiting room?) He became vice-chairman Kowloon LSA, and married Linda Lau. The couple moved to the United States the following year.

It was through Yankee Leong and Leong Tat Chee that R.D. Gulwani, an Indian of Brahman and Sinhi background, became a Bahá'í. He declared his faith in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh on 9 February 1966, having held discussions with the Malaysians for three days. He participated in Hong Kong Bahá'í activities vigorously until he returned to India in 1969.

The devotion of Leong Tat Chee, from Malacca, was a particular inspiration to the Hong Kong Bahá'ís in their teaching activities. To the distress of the community, he died on 9 October 1972, after a prolonged illness.

Members of the Continental Board of Counsellors were also frequent visitors to Hong Kong in the 1960s: R. Momtazi from Japan (the primary counsellor assigned to Hong Kong); K. Payman from Indonesia; Victor Samaniego from the Philippines, and Chellie Sundram from Malaysia. Counsellor Firaydun Mithaqiyán, resident in Laos, visited several times during the years 1970-75, before moving to Hong Kong with his wife and two daughters. The Mithaqiyáns settled first at Lamma Island, later moving to Mei Foo in Kowloon.

Additional pioneers arrive

In 1967 Jacqueline Lee arrived in Hong Kong, her husband Chester following two years later. The Lees had become Bahá'ís in Cambodia in 1955. Chester had been detained by the authorities there for 18 months on his return from the World Congress held in London in 1963, and in 1965 the couple had moved to Vietienne in Laos. Now they were moving again, to Hong Kong. The Hong Kong newsletter, 29 April 1969, reported:

Chester Lee recently arrived from Laos to settle down here with his wife Jacqueline - God willing! Already he has rejuvenated the Chinese friends. He is certainly an answer to our prayers as for long we have hoped he would be permitted to come to Hong Kong to communicate the Bahá'í spirit and teachings to the Chinese folk in their own tongue. He is very very welcome and it is hoped that he rapidly settles down to enjoy a long, happy and worthwhile sojourn.

Chester Lee was appointed to the National Administrative Committee charged with preparing for the formation of the National Assembly, in 1974. The Rubitsheks were another family who arrived in 1967. They settled on Victoria Island and were able to strengthen the Assembly there. Nuri and Graham Pepper arrived in Hong Kong from the United Kingdom in 1967. The Rubitschek and Pepper families established Bahá'í children's classes, which were later handed on to Mona and Meena Datwani. In 1968 Navidad (Baby) Cruz became the first Filipino Bahá'í to settle in Hong Kong. She remained more than a year, teaching in the New Territories and on other islands.

Although these pioneers were valuable additions to the community, the Bahá'ís were still poorly positioned to convey the Bahá'í teachings to the majority of the people. More Chinese-speaking Bahá'ís were needed, and the community looked to the arrival of Malaysian pioneers. Other hindrances were bureaucratic. When in 1967 a committee (comprising Gian Datwani, Jody Rubitschek and Len Lewis) was formed to make plans for celebrating the centenary of the public proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, and approaches were made to Hong Kong broadcasting authorities to allow the broadcasting of Bahá'í programs. The committee was informed by the Hong Kong Commercial Broadcasting Company that they were:

... not in the position to accept any broadcast material on religion, finance and politics. We regret therefore, to decline your kind offer of a series of short talks on the Bahá'í Faith, because of this reason.

Acquisition of the Bahá'í Centre

Yet another hindrance to the community was the lack of an appropriate meeting place. Dr Muhajir decided when visiting Hong Kong in December 1967 that the time was right to acquire a Bahá'í centre. He may have heard that property prices had fallen as a result of recent race riots in the colony - or may have simply felt inspired, for he soon found an apartment in a

block still under construction on the eleventh floor of the Hankow Centre, Middle Rd, Tsimshatsui in Kowloon. The apartment was 840 square feet in area, and cost HK\$64,000. While this amount was substantial for the community at that time they agreed to make the purchase. The Hong Kong and Kowloon Local Assemblies held a joint meeting on 31 December to consult on purchase of the Centre. Although they did not have sufficient funds to make the purchase outright, they were confident that the funds would be found, and that the combined resources of their Assemblies would be sufficient to cover the Centre's ongoing expenses. The Hong Kong Bahá'ís made the first down-payment, and a large proportion of the outstanding sum was donations by the National Assemblies of Iran, Malaysia, the United States, and Japan, and by several individual Bahá'ís.

Full cooperation and consultation between the Bahá'ís was required to make the new Centre operate successfully. Officially opened in August 1968, it housed the National secretariat, and had live-in facilities as well as room for study classes and meetings that were open to the public. Maintaining the centre proved a challenge to the small community. Mr. Lewis made considerable financial contributions in the first months, and the Local Assemblies of Kowloon, Shatin and Hong Kong each paid a share of the Centre's monthly expenses.

National Administrative Committee

As a step toward the later establishment of a National Spiritual Assembly in Hong Kong, the National Spiritual Assembly for Northeast Asia decided that the time had come to establish a National Administrative Committee (NAC). The nine-member committee, appointed in 1968, had six duties: incorporate the LSA of Hong Kong as soon as possible; plan methods of proclamation in the colony; plan for teaching and consolidation activities, including a teaching institute and summer school; organise plans for teaching in Macau; transfer ownership of the Hazirat'ul-Quds to the LSA of Hong Kong; and send copies of the committee's minutes to the National Spiritual Assembly.

Chester Lee and Graham Pepper attended the first NAC meeting on 26 October 1969, in addition to those named by the NSA. The NAC immediately added Mrs Datwani to its membership, appointed a four-member Hazirat'ul-Quds committee, and devised a provisional teaching proclamation plan.

The committee's initial consultations indicated considerable concern at the weak position of Hong Kong's three Local Assemblies. It believed each was in danger of lapsing, and considered the possibility of establishing a business in Shatin

in order to place a pioneer there. The NAC was concerned, furthermore, at the community's ability to raise sufficient funds to pay for the activities that had now been added to the already onerous task of paying off the newly-established Bahá'í centre. The small proportion of active Chinese members compared to non-Chinese, moreover, led to considerable consultation. Minutes of the committee's meeting with a visiting American Bahá'í, Colonel Pelle, noted:

Difficulty of deepening and teaching Chinese friends in Hong Kong who are as a social group, very pragmatic people, was also a problem which to date had not been solved, in spite of considerable thought and effort. It was considered essential to maintain three LSAs at all costs.

Twelve of Hong Kong's sixty-six Bahá'ís were non-Chinese: Len Lewis, Jerry Lulla, Graham and Nourieh Pepper, Gian and Lachmi Datwani, Al and Jodie Rubitschek, T.A. Jashan. R.D. Gulwani, Irma Marsh, and Vicky Etzkorn. But no more than a sixth of the Bahá'ís were regularly attending meetings. Informed of the situation, the NSA requested Mr Tehrani to visit Hong Kong. He came for two months at the beginning of 1970 to assist in stimulating the community's activities. He visited again in 1971, with the objective on that occasion of consolidating Bahá'í communities, and assisting in reforming the existing Local Assemblies.

Signs of Growth

The Hong Kong Spiritual Assembly, having been first registered in 1958, was incorporated as a limited company under the Companies Ordinance on 28 November 1969. This form of legal recognition granted the Assembly tax exempt status, and strengthened the legal status of the Bahá'í community in Hong Kong. In the next few years the activities of the Assembly increased, as did the number of enrolled members. There had been just 14 Bahá'ís in Hong Kong in 1957; by 1961 there were approximately 60 Bahá'ís and not one but three Local Spiritual Assemblies. Hong Kong's second Local Assembly was formed in 1967, on Victoria Island. The first Assembly, which had been known as the Hong Kong Assembly, was renamed the "Kowloon" Assembly. By the 1970s there was a need for new approaches to teaching the Bahá'í Faith more widely in Hong Kong society, and the solution came following the appointment of a National Teaching Committee, and the decision to undertake wide-spread teaching campaigns.

The National Teaching Committee

In 1971 a National Teaching Committee was established to co-ordinate the propagation efforts of the Hong Kong Bahá'ís in. Chan Lie Kun was chair of the committee, Ambi Gabathy vice chair, Yin Hong Shuen secretary, and Chan Lie Fun treasurer. Peter Tsang was also a member.

Hong Kong's three Local Assemblies were reformed at Ridvan 1971. In August 1971 the NTC resolved to establish at Ridvan 1972 a Local Assembly at Tsuen Wan, an industrialised town that had recently been opened by Yan Kee Leong. The committee also moved to address the needs of Shatin community, assisting its youth committee and encouraging the commencement of children's classes.

First Malaysian Pioneers

In May 1971 the NSA of Northeast Asia informed the Bahá'ís of Hong Kong that two pioneers were soon arriving from Malaysia, intending to stay in the colony for two years. Yin Hong Shuen was the first. After two months in the colony he wrote home:

Not being able to speak Cantonese is a major problem as almost everyone speaks nothing else. I learn Cantonese in the mornings, and go to the villages in the afternoons with Uncle Yankee and another Bahá'í. Hong Kong and Kowloon are very beautiful, but I much prefer the countryside especially the mountains. We visit the New Territories a lot. Shatin is about nine miles from Kowloon and there is a local assembly there with a very cheerful group of Bahá'ís...

There is a continuous flow of Bahá'í visitors to Hong Kong, from a couple who have been pioneering for the past seventeen years in Swaziland to Hand of the Cause Collis Featherstone. Hong Kong, as you all know, is at the crossroads of Asia.

...We had a very interesting proclamation meeting in the City Hall where over a hundred attended. The speakers included Orpha Daugherty from the Philippines, Counsellor Rehmani from Iran and a Vietnamese Consul. Terry Madison, a very vivacious Bahá'í professional singer, sang for the audience. Publicity was obtained in three local English papers and over the radio.

That same evening we went with a busload of Iranian Bahá'ís touring the New Territories, and visited Lok Ma Chau at the Chinese border where special prayers were said.

The possibilities are so immense that really one cannot even imagine the final outcome of our humble

efforts in Hong Kong. We are hopefully awaiting more pioneers from Malaysia.

Yin Hong Shuen was elected secretary of the National Teaching Committee in 1971, and contributed significantly to the teaching activities of the years immediately ahead. Hong Shuen volunteered to move to Shatin. In October 1971 he introduced to the Faith Lawrence Ip, who became a Bahá'í on 4 April 1972, at age 22. Two years later Ip was elected to the first NSA, and became its secretary. In 1975 he went travel-teaching in the Philippines, and met there Veam Cornejo, whom he married in 1976.

Forty-Day Teaching Campaign - 1971

The idea of conducting a 40 day teaching campaign in Hong Kong was conceived at the Oceanic conference in Sapporo, Japan, 2-5 September 1971. Following this conference, a special international meeting was held in Hong Kong on 14 September to discuss plans in detail. Hands of the Cause Dr Muhajir and Mr Furutan, the Counsellors in North and South East Asia, and the National Assemblies of Northeast Asia and Malaysia, all contributed to the consultation, which resulted in the Bahá'ís aiming to attract fifty new members, in nine new areas. Efforts were made to attract newspaper coverage. In September Chester Lee and Gian Datwani approached the media, and reporters from the Hong Kong Standard and the South China Morning Post visited the Bahá'í Centre and interviewed Hong Shuen.

The campaign commenced in October 1971. Counsellors Vic Samaniego and Yan Kee Leong took part, as did Philip Marangella who moved from Japan to Hong Kong at about that time. Mrs Mae McClinton assisted for ten days while en route from the United States to her pioneer post in Swaziland. Other participants included Charles Duncan of Korea, Ray Cooprider of Taiwan, Hashemi Assassi of Iran, and Auxiliary Board Member Betty Fernandez of Malaysia.

The campaign targeted islands, rural areas, college campuses, urban areas, civic organisations, and even the communities of boat people. Pamphlets were distributed, advertisements placed in newspapers and public meetings held. A progress report by Ray Cooprider appeared Bahá'í News in January 1972:

Public meetings are now being scheduled for five communities outside of Hong Kong and Kowloon. With publicity, slides, and 50,000 copies of the new Chinese pamphlets we hope to make the name of Bahá'u'lláh known to many people throughout Hong Kong(p9).

Hong Kong Bahá'ís were also extensively involved: the

Datwanis and their children Mona, Lolita, Meena and Ranee (who all spoke Chinese), Mr Azizi, Chan Lie Kun, Chan Lie Fun, Yin Hong Shuen, and R.D. Gulwani. In the course of the campaign Yan Kee Leong, Charles Duncan and Ray Coopriider made two four-day trips to outer islands which resulted in declarations by twenty-four people. On another occasion they were accompanied by Chan Lie Kun to Peng Chau Island. Leonard Lewis, secretary of the National Administrative Committee, and one of Hong Kong's most dedicated Bahá'ís, passed away at this time. He had arrived in the colony from England seventeen years earlier as a school teacher at Victoria Barracks. He learnt of the Bahá'í teachings from Mr Labib and Mrs Seto in 1960, and had since worked tirelessly for the progress of the Hong Kong Bahá'í community, giving particular support to the establishment of the Bahá'í Centre. His passing was noted in the South China Morning Post.

More Malaysian pioneers arrive

On 19 January 1972 two more Malaysian Bahá'ís, Mr Teh Tiek Hoe, a graduate of Kuala Lumpur Technical College, and Richard T.K. Lee, a newspaper correspondent with the Straits Times, arrived in Hong Kong. Mr "Hungshun" and Mr "Tekho" (as they were known) arrived in Hong Kong highly recommended by the NSA of Malaysia, and by Hand of the Cause Dr Muhajir. They stayed at the Tai Po Bahá'í Centre to concentrate on teaching activities, reporting to the Malaysian Bahá'í News:

As soon as we settled in and found our bearings (it was so cold!), Uncle Yankee, full of youthful vigor and bouyant spirit took us round on whirlwind visits lasting many days, to meet the Bahá'ís living on various islands around Hong Kong. These places had been opened up during the forty-day campaign and we were quite amazed to see how much the friends had achieved. These islanders are steeped in traditions of which they are immensely proud and to bring in a single believer in this atmosphere is equal to bringing in a few hundred in more fertile places.

The success of the first 40-day campaign resulted in two more being conducted before Ridvan 1972. Nineteen new localities were opened, and more than 60 new members were attracted during these campaigns, boosting the size and capacity of the community just two years before the formation of the National Assembly.

The energy and enthusiasm of the Malaysian pioneers made possible Hong Kong's first Winter School, held at the Bahá'í Centre in February 1972. 19 Bahá'ís and 7 enquirers

participated. Lee and Teh also organised a youth teaching Institute in July 1972. The growing numbers of Bahá'í youth was a sign that the community as a whole was expanding. A National Youth Committee was established in 1974, its first members including Meena Datwani, Stephen Fong Kwok Wai, Graham Smith, Tse Yip Oi, Yik Siu Ying, and Mary Sze.

Passing of Philip Marangella

Philip Marangella, who had retired to Hong Kong after having spent almost two decades in Japan, passed away on 31 January 1974. He had attended the North East Asia Convention in Japan in 1973, and although ill on his return to Hong Kong had continued his Bahá'í administrative duties. In particular, he had been engaged at the time of his death in determining the allocation of delegates among the Hong Kong communities in preparation for the election of the first National Spiritual Assembly.

Other new members

Toward the end of the Nine Year Plan the Hong Kong community was bolstered by the addition of pioneers, and new members. K.H. and Monavar Attar, formerly pioneers in Algeria and France, who resided in Hong Kong from 1972 to 1986. From Hong Kong Mr Attar frequently attended business fairs in China. An able speaker, he associated with the leaders of Hong Kong's religious communities: the Sikhs, Taoists, Baptists, Brahma Samaj and other Hindus. Mr Attar was also a member of the Lions Club and Toast Masters, and participated in activities of the United Nations Association. Before departing in 1986 the Attars donated to the community the Bahá'í Centre at North Point in King's Road. This property was later sold, the proceeds from its sale contributing to the purchase of the Bahá'í Hall in Shelter Street.

Graham Smith arrived from Australia in 1974 and settled in Tsuen Wan. James Liew arrived from Malaysia in January 1974 and remained one year. A fluent speaker of Cantonese, he convened a workshop in Chinese, and was able to assist with his knowledge of Bahá'í administration. He attended the first National Convention as a delegate.

In August 1974 Michael and Sharon Bond arrived in Hong Kong, after living for three years in Japan. Dr Bond was a lecturer in psychology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The Bonds were the first non-Chinese Bahá'ís to live at Shatin, where there were some 30 Bahá'ís, and a functioning LSA. Sharon Bond recalled:

I remember Tsang Bei Dak who used to mass-teach with us on Sundays in then rural Shatin. We also had a younger

Peter Tsang (no relation to the above), Mr and Mrs Yik and their daughter Yik Shiu Ying, and Lau Kin Kwok in our community. We had most of our Bahá'í meetings in the Yik's home. Counsellor Yankee Leong often came to Shatin in the early days for mass teaching with us. I believe Shatin was the third LSA formed in Hong Kong.

The Five Year Plan 1974-1979

By 1974 there were five Local Assemblies in Hong Kong. The Universal House of Justice decided it was now time for the Hong Kong Bahá'ís to establish their National Spiritual Assembly. At Naw-Ruz the Universal House of Justice informed the community of its responsibilities for the next five years:

It is with special joy that we hail the establishment of your National Spiritual Assembly, a significant development in the onward march of the Faith holding great promise for the future. To the north and to the west live millions of souls, nearly a quarter of the world's population, the vast majority of whom have not yet had the bounty of hearing of the Teachings. To your community is given the challenge to play a preponderating role in winning the hearts of the Chinese people for Bahá'u'lláh. For this role you must now prepare yourselves.

In the next five years, the Bahá'ís of Hong Kong and Macau were to:

- * Raise the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies to a minimum of 10 in Hong Kong and two in Macau;
- * Provide for the incorporation of Local Spiritual Assemblies in all areas except Macau;
- * Greatly increase the number of believers in all parts of Hong Kong and in Macau with a view to the establishment of a solid base from which the Message of Bahá'u'lláh may reach Chinese-speaking areas of the world;
- * Incorporate the National Spiritual Assembly;
- * Acquire a national Hazirat'ul-Quds by conversion of the present local Hazirat'ul-Quds in Kowloon;
- * Acquire a site for a future Mashriqu'l-Adhkár assisted by the National Spiritual Assembly of Japan;
- * Acquire a local Hazirat'l-Quds in Macau;
- * Take over from the Universal House of Justice

jurisdiction over Bahá'í activities in Hainan Island and establish at least one locality there;

- * Encourage and organize regular Bahá'í activities and classes for women, youth and children of the communities of your area;
- * Mobilize Bahá'í youth for active participation in the teaching and consolidation work, assigning them specific goals such as the further development of the teaching work on high school, college and university campuses in your area, and the opening of new areas;
- * Establish a Publishing Committee for the purpose of providing translations of Bahá'í literature into Chinese and, in cooperation with the Publishing Trust of Taiwan, to publish such literature;
- * Make plans to accommodate, and derive the greatest benefit from the International Conference to be called by the Universal House of Justice in Hong Kong in November 1976;
- * Assign extension teaching goals to the stronger Local Spiritual Assemblies under your jurisdiction.

The Hong Kong Bahá'ís were reminded, in addition, that it was their privilege to "provide a continuous flow of Chinese-speaking travelling teachers to various parts of the world", and that they would receive pioneer assistance from Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Formation of the National Spiritual Assembly

These objectives were in the minds of the one hundred participants at the first national convention, held 26-28 April at the Mandarin Hotel. Ruhyyih Khanum attended as representative of the Universal House of Justice. She presented the community with a lock of Bahá'u'lláh's hair. Representatives from nearby Bahá'í communities also attended the convention: Kimiko Schwerin from Japan, Counsellor K Payman from Indonesia. Late on the first evening the convention cabled to the Universal House of Justice:

OFFER SINCERE GRATITUDE FOR HAVING
HONOUR OF AMATULBAHA AS REPRESENTATIVE FEEL THIS BOUNTY
AND PRESENCE TWO COUNSELLORS TWO AUXILIARY BOARD MEMBERS
AND REPRESENTATIVE MOTHER ASSEMBLY WILL GREATLY HELP US
ACHIEVE SUCCESSES TOTAL 84 BAHAIS PRESENT INCLUDING 17
DELEGATES WE PLEDGE CARRY OUT OBJECTIVE OF FIVE YEAR PLAN
AND BESEECH YOUR PRAYERS HOLY SHRINES FOR OUR RAPID

ACHIEVEMENT ALL GOALS.

The first National Spiritual Assembly consisted of two Chinese, two Iranians, two Indians, one Filipino and two Americans. Thomas Lane was elected first chairman, Chester Lee vice chairman, Lawrence Ip secretary, and Khodabakhch Attar treasurer. The newly elected NSA had the privilege of meeting with Ruhyyih Khanum, and the Counsellors. The Universal House of Justice cabled:

DELIGHTED NEWS SUCCESS YOUR FIRST
CONVENTION PRESENCE HANDCAUSE AMATU'L-BAHA PRAYING
SHRINES SUCCESS HIGHEST HOPES WIN GOALS ATTRACT DIVINE
BLESSINGS CONFIRMATIONS.

Conclusions

Although the Hong Kong Bahá'í community remains one of the colony's less-known religions after several decades of concerted effort, its foundations are undoubtedly firmly established, and its further consolidation is assured. The formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Hong Kong in 1974 was the culmination of efforts commenced by Bahá'ís at least fifty year previously. In diverse countries Bahá'í communities have grown and developed at rates which have varied in response to prevailing social, religious and intellectual conditions, and as a result also of the effectiveness of their own actions.

Hong Kong society presented a unique and in many ways difficult society in which to transmit new religious ideas. It is a congested commercial entrepot developed by a people who have for the most part arrived from China as either economic or political refugees. In their new environment they have focused on rebuilding material prosperity, using traditional Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist values in matters of religion.

Any novel systems of religious belief would have struggled to take root in such a distracted environment. Some of the difficulties that faced the Bahá'ís, however, were attributable to their own circumstances as much as to social and religious conditions. These related to culture, and to language. The first pioneers were from Western, Indian, or Persian backgrounds, and spoke English rather than Cantonese or Mandarin. Quite naturally, therefore, those to whom they gave the Bahá'í message were predominantly English-speaking - whether members of the expatriate community, or else well-educated Hong Kong residents. Both groups were highly mobile, with the result that perhaps half of all of those who became Bahá'ís migrated out of Hong Kong. It may have been that employment conditions in the colony inhibited many of the pioneers from staying permanently in Hong

Kong: their presence on fixed contracts may have deterred them from learning Chinese. A later group of pioneers, the Malaysians, were not as limited by language, and were more successful in moving among Hong Kong people and attracting them to the Bahá'í community in larger numbers.

Chinese speaking Hong Kong residents who did become Bahá'ís were frequently tied to long working hours, or resided in distant locations which prevented their regular attendance at Bahá'í meetings. One result of this continual absence seems to have been their gradual distancing from the consultative and decision-making processes that are at the heart of the Bahá'í administrative system, leading to their social and psychological remoteness from the dynamics of Bahá'í community development. The historical records mention but only briefly Mr Moon Chow, who was unable to attend meetings because of business demands; and Paul Fong, who worked as a hotel receptionist; and Mr Sun Fat, the first Bahá'í on Lantau Island; and Stephen Fong, from Silver Mine Bay on Lantau Island; and Roland Hshu, who left Hong Kong in 1957 to work aboard a ship. Neither do the records tell of the life of Chi Fai Ling, or of Ng On (who worked in a shoe shop and was unable to attend meetings); or of Pong Choo, first Bahá'í in Po Toi; or of Mr Wong Shiu Fun, who became a Bahá'í in Tsuen Wan in July 1971; or Dr Shu Feng Wong, an early Bahá'í of Tsuenwon; or Yick Shui Ming, of Shatin; or Anna Yee, who married Fok Hoy of Seattle.

Whereas numeric growth of the Bahá'í community was not large, other achievements were nonetheless notable. Ethnically, the Bahá'ís exemplified a diverse but unified community. There was Mrs Kosim Satyaputra, an Indonesian Bahá'í who lived in Hong Kong with her children Kosim and Widyustuti, and Mr Teksang Lee, who heard of the Bahá'í Faith from Shirin Fozdar while at High School in Bangkok, Thailand, and who contacted the Bahá'ís when he moved to Hong Kong about 1964. There were Bahá'ís from India, England, North America, and Malaysia, each adding their temperament and cultural flavour to Bahá'í meetings, consultation, and festivities.

In the years since the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly the Hong Kong Bahá'í community continued to expand. Land for a future Mashriqu'l-Adhkár was purchased in 1975; an international conference attended by 600 Bahá'ís from 34 countries was convened in Hong Kong in November 1976. By 1979 the Hong Kong Bahá'í community had grown to ten Local Spiritual Assemblies, and a total of twenty-six localities. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Macau was established at Ridvan 1989. By 1991 there were twenty-two Local

Assemblies in Hong Kong.

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