

Cirilo F. Bautista  
translated from the Tagalog by José Edmundo Ocampo Reyes

## Song of Hong Kong

The first name of Hong Kong  
is Water.  
As your guts turn

inside-out on the ferry  
the waves devour  
your every heart's desire,

swallow them whole,  
fold into themselves every habit  
that enslaves you.

The waters between  
Kowloon and Hong Kong Island  
are the dregs of minds

worn from scraping by  
as they try to ensure  
their rightful place

in the book of the depths—  
“The soul that is drenched  
will become immortal”—

and that the fitting tears  
are shed from the heavens and  
the bottom of the sea.      Desire

is what drives the rickshaws  
from Canton  
to here, in Kowloon,

and though each man has  
no God and each man has  
no red stars, their bellies

all jiggle the same  
way, all are subject to  
the law of milk, and jerkies

are the swinish fruits  
of the ever-howling machinations.  
The lament spans Kowloon-Canton

all day long  
until the entire city is  
floating on tears

and the tears become  
a storm that hurls  
the grimy sampans,

pursues the communist  
in his commune, and cleanses  
his weeping

uniform.  
The last name  
of Hong Kong

is Money. That's why  
the mind is priceless  
paper, green

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or blue, in a rush  
to get to Chartered Bank.  
O! Water that has become

Money or a Money-grubber!  
How many have died  
working stone that

rose into skyscrapers?  
Which of the Queen's Guard  
branded a crown

on the labor of the Chinese?  
At Victoria Peak  
the clouds of Li Po dance

among themselves to adorn  
the Queen's face;  
on the tram,

the Queen's iron wheels tally  
her silver; at the racetrack  
the Queen's horses

one-up each other  
for tickets.  
The Queen declares:

"A hollow stomach  
is a welt on my honor;  
mount your horses,

unfurl my face."  
The iron wheels turn  
day and night inside the clouds

of Li Po, and the horses  
that no longer recognize  
their own mothers

are burdened by their neighs  
with every tramp  
of their hooves. The yoked horse

and the free horse  
become a horse made of gold  
as soon as night falls.

The hardship, the desolation  
of a heart lost  
in the treasury

are wrapped  
in forgetfulness like  
a stuffed rice cake, and thrown

into the trash.  
The bills are English, Japanese  
Filipino, African:

there is no difference  
in the color of skin  
when money

goes dancing  
in the nightclub and  
the stock exchange,

so in the midst  
of water  
and money,

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of bones  
and dreams,  
of cattle and

racehorses,  
ten thousand  
stone-faced

souls  
come and go—  
without any kin

save for stars  
at the bottom of the sea,  
unable to weep.