

**Srinjay Chakravarti**

*Salt Lake City, Calcutta, India*

**Diary Poem, Hong Kong**

Between the cloud-crowned peak  
of Tai Mo Shan  
and the foam-crested waves  
of the South China Sea,

a city of gleaming skyscrapers:  
silver steel,  
black glass,  
golden sunshine.  
Glittering glass, shining steel.

Our eyes are dazzled  
by the time we touch down  
on the perch-shaped island  
of Chek Lap Kok.

From Sky Plaza Road  
on the geometrized airport,  
we are bussed through the road tunnel  
to the bridge on the seaport:

mile after mile, a bricolage  
of ships, boats, cranes, containers  
on the quays of Victoria Harbour.

Returning home, our packsacks  
are loaded with pink laughing Buddhas,  
green jade trinkets, maroon stone dragons—

and all our invisible keepsakes  
of scattered memories...

The early morning light, pearling  
the sparkling estuary of a river;

the tremulous milky homage  
of incense from the joss sticks  
at the pagodas and temples;

the tragic legacy of Butterfly Valley,  
where all the lepidoptera died out  
after the soldiers of the Japanese occupation army  
felled all the trees in its forest  
just for their wood;

and, above all, the sweet smells  
of the “fragrant harbour”,  
as Hong Kong’s name itself translates into.

Not just our nostrils,  
our tastebuds still tingle  
with those special, unforgettable odours

of sauce and vinegar,  
seafood and dim sum,  
fried mackerel and roasted duck.

Shrimp and prawn and lobster,  
crab and squid and oyster.

Laced with the salty tang of the sea,  
the very air is flavoured  
with the smells of Cantonese cuisine  
wafting from the *cha chaan teng* cafes  
and wharf-side restaurants.

Somewhere over the sea,  
a typhoon is coalescing—

the warning of an impending storm  
crackles with the static on the airwaves,

though the rumble of thunder  
is still quite distant.

We murmur our prayers  
to the Queen of Heaven Matsu,  
at her Tin Han temple,  
before we board our flight.

Back home safely,  
we thank the sea-goddess

in silent gratitude—

and her benison stays with us,  
a misty fragrance of tenderness  
throughout our sunny day.