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M.W. gave lavish parties at his Peak home. The house commanded an unobstructed 360-degree view of Victoria Harbour and its surroundings. From its sprawling lawns, the guests gathered to chat and admire the view as the cool breeze primed with the scent of autumn and sea air gently blew. The moon hung in the sky, accompanied by sparkling stars. The ships in the harbour gleamed like fireflies. On both sides of the harbour, the water, lights and the moon met to create an illusion of a cluster of glittering diamonds. Champagne flowed and waiters wove through the crowd serving canapés on silver trays. Laughter filled the air. It was heavenly.

The party would begin on a sombre note but would become rowdy when the drinking started. Glasses were raised and clinked at each other in toasts. It was a way to show respect to the guests and the host and among themselves. Toasts were of two kinds – ‘salutes’ and ‘bitter’. The latter was reserved as punishment meted out to someone who spoke or acted in a manner that was considered to be ‘unbecoming’. The drinking rituals in Shanghainese parties put Hong Kong on the map. It made Hong Kong the largest consumption centre per capita of French cognacs and Scotch whiskies.

Yet, throughout the drinking ritual, cheating was prevalent and, in more ways than one, perfected to an art. One trick was to drink without swallowing, take a bite of food and spit them out together. But it could be easily spotted. The other way was to fake drinks: soy sauce, cola and tea were all diluted to make them look like whisky or cognac. Normally out of courtesy, especially to the host, the guests would turn a blind eye, but not so if the toast was made to a person whose position or station was perceived to be superior. It would be considered an act of disrespect and, if caught, the offending party would be asked to drink a ‘bitter’ toast as punishment.

“Ah, the honourable Mrs. Cheung.” Mrs. Chao came to pay her respects to the wife of a top government official one evening.

Mrs. Chao was the wife of a well-known industrialist. She was wealthy and she had a tendency to appear to look up to the wives only as long as their husbands were in power. In other words, she was only as close to the wives as their husbands were useful. As soon as their official status ended or was reduced, she would completely ignore them, looking through them as if they were transparent, even if they met at the same party. In truth, it was rare if ever that ‘fallen couples’ – as they were called – were invited to a Shanghai party.

Mrs. Cheung was well aware that she was only being toasted because of her husband’s position and she disliked Mrs. Chao intensely although, on the surface, the two appeared to be on friendly terms.

“Let me pay you my respects by drinking this ‘salute’ toast to you.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Chao.” Mrs. Cheung smiled as she emptied her glass of cognac. “Wait a minute,” she hesitated, “let me check the glass. What is this veneer of steam on the inside?”

Mrs. Chao emptied the glass quickly but it was too late. Mrs. Cheung snatched the glass and tasted what was left in it.

“It’s tea!” she shouted. “Mrs. Chao, you cheated.”

Mrs. Chao was greatly embarrassed. With the other guests now all staring at her, she asked the waiter to bring her a bottle of cognac. She then drank and emptied the bottle. No one tried to stop her, not even her husband.

Mrs. Cheung certainly did not try. She glowed with satisfaction as Mrs. Chao quickly passed out and collapsed on the floor.

I could not believe my good fortune. I was seated next to Kitty Law, the newly crowned Hong Kong beauty queen. One of the perks of winning the pageant was being able to move in the circles of Hong Kong’s high society where she hoped to meet Mr. Right, get married, have children and lead the pampered life of a *tai tai* – a wealthy wife. Unfortunately, not every dream came true. Many became prey for predators – the married men who stalked the Shanghai parties.

Kitty was young, beautiful and, rare for a Chinese woman, actually voluptuous. Her curvy figure would make any man drool. No sooner had I taken my seat than I felt a tap on my shoulder. I looked up and saw the familiar face of a textile tycoon. He was someone to whom I was beholden. He often gave me work.

"Robert, can we swap seats?" he asked.

"Of course," I said as I discreetly moved to his table with my place name card.

Throughout the evening I noticed Kitty and the tycoon were engaged in animated conversation.

"Robert, I'm giving Kitty a lift home," he said later. "I need an alibi. Can you come with me?"

The tycoon muttered something into the ear of his wife. She turned to me and gave me a sour look. Then he returned. I knew he was using me as a front. I was a willing accomplice. I really had little choice.

In his Rolls-Royce, it was apparent he was excited and 'hot'.

"Kitty, you are one in a million," he said as he slipped a stack of notes into her hand. "No, you are more than one in a million. Out of six million people in Hong Kong, you have been chosen as this year's pageant queen. Do you know this is quite an achievement... yes, quite an honour. You ought to be proud of yourself. So should your parents. You are an exceptional girl. When you have come so far, I am sure you don't want to be wasted upon just another young man, someone who has to work nine to five, do you? No... no, that would be a waste of your opportunity cost. Do you understand what it means – opportunity cost? It means your biggest asset is youth and beauty and, if you have a brain, you will come round to my way of thinking.

"Now let me celebrate your crowning success with this little gesture – a token we call a 'meet-each-other courtesy'. Now, don't be shy. Just take it," he said as he slipped another wad of notes into her hand.

I was flabbergasted. This 'courtesy' must have been worth more than HK\$400,000 – a wad of crisp new \$1,000 notes neatly bundled together measuring more than a few inches thick. He had obviously come

prepared... first, test the reaction with a token and, if it was favourable, the big gift.

The blush on her cheeks made Kitty look even more beautiful. She withdrew her hand from under his and pushed the money back to the tycoon who must have been older than her father.

"I cannot accept this," she said.

"No, no, no... that would make me unhappy."

The shuffling backwards and forwards of the wad of money continued until I noticed a signal from the corner of Kitty's eyes.

The movement stopped. "Don't embarrass me in front of this young man. Call me another time," she whispered into his ear, thinking that I was not listening.

Kitty had a good run with the tycoon. He satisfied her material needs and pandered to her every whim. He bought her properties, jewellery and everything a young woman's heart desired until one day the two fell out. No one knew who was tired of whom.

"I'm in Tokyo with Kitty," the chaperon reported. "We are in a fur shop. Kitty wants to buy a Fendi long mink coat. It's US\$75,000. Can you approve it?"

"Yes," replied the tycoon. He was caught in the middle of a busy day going from one meeting to another.

"Kitty also wants another designer brand – a blue mercury Russian sable," the chaperon called again. "It costs US\$250,000. Can you approve it?"

The tycoon hung up. As far as I know, that was the end of the relationship.

CITY IN JITTERS

In the early 1980s, Hong Kong was hit by political shocks. Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of Britain, went to Beijing to discuss the future of the colony. Deng Hsiao Ping told her that the lease of Hong Kong was

non-negotiable and China wanted Hong Kong back. They agreed on the principle of 'One Country, Two Systems' as a formula to maintain Hong Kong's stability and prosperity.

On the way out, Mrs Thatcher slipped, stumbled and fell down the steps. It was a bad omen. Despite assurances given by the Government that investors could set their minds at ease, the citizens were definitely uncomfortable.

As the terms of Hong Kong's future return to China were being formalized, the territory was hit by the jitters. The value of its currency dropped dramatically – at one point to as low as HK\$10 for US\$1 – as the outflow of capital increased. It became nothing less than a raging torrent. Over-the-counter trades at some banks were suspended altogether. The onslaught caused the overnight money rate to soar to over 200%. Panic was widespread. The citizens swept supermarket shelves clean. In desperation, the government reactivated the idea of reverting to a currency board regime. In 1983 the peg to the US dollar was introduced on the advice of an economist, John Greenwood. The peg level of HK\$7.80 to US\$1 was settled at a crisis meeting.

But the fear continued. Hong Kong residents continued to scurry around the world looking for safe havens. And disaster did not strike just once. It struck again in 1989 when the Tiananmen Square crackdown shook already fragile confidence to the core. Another wave of emigration, massive and unprecedented this time, started. Queues for emigrant visas were common sights outside the usual Western consulates. The 'brain drain' took a turn for the worse – emigration peaked at 67,000 families in one year.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong's role as a manufacturing centre ended. Factories moved across the border into Guangdong Province and the Pearl River Delta area to take advantage of cheaper labour there. It was remarkable that the transformation was achieved without creating a dent in the growth rate of the economy – the vacuum left behind by the departing factories was simply filled by the growth in the service sector. Unemployment during the period was negligibly small.

Instead of following the flow and moving north, the Hong Kong industrialists who originated from Shanghai chose to close their mills. As they sold the factories, the textile era of Hong Kong drew to a close. A new era arrived with its crop of new emerging 'kings' – the property tycoons. The textile 'kings' were on their way out, their reign over.

"Robert, you are well connected. Can you do me a favour?" asked M.W. one day. "I want to sell all my factory buildings. Do you know of someone who may be interested?"

"I can try to find out for you. Give me the area and the price per square foot."

"It is about one million square feet. I hope to get \$900 per square foot – that's about market rate."

Li Ka Shing was the richest man in Hong Kong and the richest Chinese in the world. He was ranked No. 1 in Hong Kong and No. 14 of the World's Richest with a net worth of US\$22 billion according to Forbes. He was known as 'Superman' for his uncanny ability to always smell a good deal and his Midas touch.

Money came so easily to the man that he once told me: "Robert, there is so much money on the ground that I simply don't have the time to bend down and pick it all up."

After the textile era passed, Superman emerged as the new 'King of Hong Kong'.

Li was among those I called that morning. He showed interest immediately but said he would call me back.

His response was swift. Within half an hour he called back.

"Yes, Robert, I am interested." He was brief and direct. "Albert Chow will follow it up with you."

Richard Ellis, the international firm of surveyors, was asked to physically measure up the area and conduct a survey of the property.

"There is an additional 50,000 square feet that is omitted from the calculation," said M.W. after the parties shook hands on the price. "Please can you let Mr. Li know?"

I did as I was told.

“But the additional floor area is an illegal structure.” Li’s response was swift. He had done his homework well and had the information at his fingertips. “Please tell Mr. Wong that I shall pay half of the agreed price per square foot.”

I dutifully related the message to M.W. and went out for lunch. I was surprised to see him waiting in the reception when I returned. He was there with his daughter, Andrea.

“Father, please tell Robert what we have agreed.” Andrea spoke to her father.

“Ah... erm... yes,” said M.W. “My daughter tells me we can’t ask Mr. Li to pay for the illegal structures. Please tell him that he doesn’t have to pay the additional amount.”

“Anything else, Father?” prompted Andrea.

“Yes, from now on you should only listen to her,” he said. “I am out of the picture. She calls the shots.”

I asked Patricia, my secretary, to put a call through to Li Ka Shing.

“No, I insist,” said Li. “If Mr. Wong doesn’t accept then I shall personally go up to his office with the cheque.”

The father and the daughter looked at each other in bewilderment and after some discussion I was asked to hand the phone to M.W. Li was still on the line.

“Mr. Li, you are more than correct and honourable. All I can say is that ‘obedience is my highest form of respect’ for you,” M.W. said.

Shortly after the acquisition Li broke the buildings up into small strata-titled units, did a flip and sold the premises retail to end users, and in the process reaped a handsome profit – hundreds of millions of dollars.

“We sold the premises at market to Mr. Li,” said M.W. to me when he learned about the sub-sales. He was not sour. “The name of Li Ka Shing created a premium in the market and he sold higher. Good luck to him.”

Later M.W. hosted a lunch at home for Li. It was a memorable occasion when the two ‘kings’, one from the past and the other from the present, sat together and got along well, chatting amicably throughout the meal

in the presence of members of the two families including Li’s elder son and M.W.’s granddaughter – both of whom were then unmarried.

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Come rain or shine, Li Ka Shing played golf every morning at the Royal Hong Kong Golf Club in Deepwater Bay. His house was a stone’s throw from the club. He teed off punctually at 7 a.m. One morning I was there to tee off ahead of him.

“Mr. Li, after you.” I gave him the signal to pass through. “Your time is more valuable than mine.”

“Thank you, Robert,” Li said cheerfully as he passed. “I appreciate what you did. You are now a thousand times closer to Cheung Kong.”

I knew after the sale of M.W.’s properties I was in his good books but it was gratifying to hear from the man himself that he appreciated my efforts.

Whether it was that morning or some other time, I heard a roar followed by a round of applause. I looked around and saw Li emerging from a concealed tee, walking in his hallmark swaggering style beaming with a broad smile.

“Hole in one – my ninth, Robert,” Li said light-heartedly, enjoying the adulation of the other golfers. “Oh, by the way, I have a project for you. Albert Chow will follow up with you.”

Li was not the only person to be happy that day. The papers for a substantial property development and all the related conveyancing arrived even before me at the office that morning.

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Despite the booming economy and the continuing good life in Hong Kong, the worries over 1997 – the year when sovereignty would be given back to China – would not go away. Anyone with the means to do so was

looking for a way either to get out of the colony ahead of time and before the Communists arrived, or to obtain the right of abode somewhere in the West. Like most of my friends, I was actively thinking about Canada as a possible immigration destination.

However, Canada is far away. To move there would mean uprooting and severing ties for good – a prospect that was as unpalatable as it would be to remain and do nothing. Almost everyone I knew had either left or made immigration plans in case the transition should go awry. They were the pillars of Hong Kong without whom the economy would falter.

“The world around us is changing,” lamented T.O. “It is picking up speed even before 1997 arrives. Look at the rate at which factories are moving north and the economy is being transformed. Soon we will have no more industries. The service sector will take over. How do these changes bode for Hong Kong? I don’t know. All I know is that we must all make contingency plans.”

“What will you do?” I asked.

“Like everyone else, I will probably go to Vancouver,” said T.O. “I am different from you. I can retire there but you are young. Your career hangs like a midday sun. I really don’t know how to advise you, except to say that you too must make contingency plans. By the way, from what I read in the papers, it is almost certain that the Conveyancing Scale will be abolished. Have you assessed how abolition will affect your practice?”

“No,” I replied, “but I think about it constantly. I am worried sick. But what can I do? You tell me.”

“Why not try Singapore?” T.O. said after pausing for a moment. “Singapore is safe. It is an integral part of the West. I admire Lee Kuan Yew. He is a capable man, a leader with vision. Set up a base and from there you can monitor Hong Kong as events unfold before the deadline arrives. With a base there, you can also harmonize and work the two together as one. The two territories are close enough for one to commute. That way you deal with career and immigration needs all at the same time – it is killing two birds with one stone.”

I wrote to the Attorney General of Singapore in the early 1980s. I did not receive a reply, not even an acknowledgement.

I spoke to my Aunt Diana, who lived in Singapore. She said she would speak to the Attorney General. Aunt Diana’s family was well known in Singapore. Over the years she had been pleased to see the progress I had made in my career.

She called me one day. “I spoke to Tan Boon Teik, the Attorney General. He remembers your letter. He has not replied because he thinks your efforts will be futile – the law does not allow lawyers from Hong Kong to practise, let alone set up a branch here. Nevertheless, I have made an appointment for you to see him next Tuesday... mark it down, Tuesday at 10.30 a.m.”

“Thank you, Aunt Diana,” I said gratefully, excited by the new opportunity. There was light at the end of the tunnel. Singapore was my best shot. If I had to emigrate, I would face an uncertain future and would have to start all over again.

I arrived punctually and was ushered into a windowless waiting room. The Attorney General was busy that morning. Despite my appointment, he could not find a slot to see me. At lunchtime I was asked to return at 2.30 p.m. At 3 p.m. he finally saw me.

“Mr. Wang, as you can tell, I have had a busy day,” he said. “I can only repeat what I told Diana Eu – our law does not allow Hong Kong lawyers to practise here.”

“But, sir, I recently read an article that a City (London) firm was given an off-shore licence.”

“Ah yes, that one... the local Bar Association was up in arms against me.”

I returned home empty-handed and disheartened. It seemed that Singapore was a non-starter.

“I read in the paper that Singapore is promoting Confucian studies,” said T.O. “I informed John Tung. He is an ardent follower of Confucianism. He says he will donate S\$3 million to support the cause. He agrees to let you handle this donation.”

I knew immediately what T.O. was up to. He knew I wanted Singapore badly. In his subtle way, he was giving me another chance even though he knew it was just a shot in the dark.

I knew John Tung well. He was slight in stature and a man of few words yet behind the face lay a deep and extremely intelligent person. He had come from Shanghai in the 1950s and built up an empire in enamelware, popular for household items in Hong Kong at the time. The thermos flasks his factory made were popular and its trademark – I-Feng – was a household name. When enamelware ceased to be popular in Hong Kong, he had the foresight to move his operations to Nigeria and there he prospered – enamelware is popular in African households even in this day and age.

I took the unsolicited offer of the donation to the Attorney General. He declined my offer politely, telling me that it was none of his concern.

My hopes were once more dashed. Then one day, out of the blue, I received a message from the Attorney General's Office that the Deputy Prime Minister – Dr. Goh Keng Swee – wanted to see me. My hopes were rekindled.

“Mr. Wang, I would like to hear from you myself. Why are you so eager to practise in Singapore? What are the concerns of Hong Kong lawyers?”

“I speak for myself, but I know many lawyers share my concerns. I am faced with this dilemma: to leave or to stay. If I stay, I am worried that the transition may not be smooth. If I leave, I face an uncertain future in a foreign country. We are between the devil and the deep blue sea. Yet lawyers will leave in droves if the current jitters continue. An exodus could undermine the legal system. What we need is peace of mind, an assurance that if the transition goes wrong we have somewhere to go. Singapore is culturally compatible and has political stability. It is my choice and, I believe, theirs too.”

Dr. Goh listened politely and patiently. He said little. “We do not agree with your assessment of Hong Kong's situation. We believe the

transition will be smooth. An unstable Hong Kong would serve no one's interest, least of all Singapore's.”

The conversation then switched to the donation. Singapore was about to launch the Institute of Asian Philosophies at the National University of Singapore.

“It would be timely if the donation was made before the Institute is launched,” said Dr. Goh as the meeting ended.

John Tung discreetly and modestly excused himself. I took his S\$3 million donation to Singapore.

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In Hong Kong, life appeared on the surface to be back to normal. Yet the anxiety continued. It was a testing time. Unless the concerns of its businessmen and professionals were addressed the brain drain could only intensify and this would spell more trouble for Hong Kong.

To counteract this, the British government rolled out the Right of Abode Scheme which conferred British nationality on locals and gave passports to no fewer than 50,000 of its leading citizens, the pillars of Hong Kong society.

I had, by then, all but forgotten about Singapore when I received a message that Dr. Goh wanted me to prepare a paper setting out the concerns of Hong Kong lawyers and make proposals on what Singapore could do to assist them.

No sooner had the paper been delivered than I was informed that the Prime Minister would be in Hong Kong. He had asked to see me.

It was a momentous occasion when I met with the Prime Minister. I was thrilled yet nervous to see Lee Kuan Yew at his modest suite in the Shangri-la Hotel. I took along my partner in the practice, Anna Wu. Anna was young and pretty with cheeks rosy as red apples.

The Prime Minister was direct and succinct. He did not mince his words. “Mr. Wang, I don't know you. You come on the recommendation

of the Deputy Prime Minister. I wish to find out as much about you as possible. I am going to ask you questions which you may find offensive. Please bear with me.”

“Yes, Prime Minister.” I nodded nervously.

“Who is this young woman you’ve brought along?” he asked.

“She is Anna Wu,” I replied shakily. “Anna is my partner. Your office told me that I could bring an associate to this meeting.”

For more than an hour, I was put through a most gruelling session of cross-examination, at the end of which the Prime Minister seemed to be satisfied.

“Please go ahead and form a committee to ‘propose, vet and recommend’ Hong Kong lawyers to us,” he said as he quoted from the paper I had prepared for the Deputy Prime Minister. “I am willing to offer them a bolt-hole. I will take a punt on Hong Kong. I have nothing to lose. An unstable Hong Kong is not in our interests.”

The Prime Minister later wrote:

Their media believed Singapore wanted to cream off its talent, but it was in our interests to have Hong Kong succeed after it returned to Chinese sovereignty. To raid and deplete Hong Kong of talent is a one-off exercise. A thriving Hong Kong will be a continuing source of business and benefits.

I proceeded to form the Vetting Committee. I was not short of volunteers. Eminent lawyers from both disciplines – barristers and solicitors – chairmen, past and present, of the Bar Association and the Law Society joined. In the years that followed, the Committee received and vetted numerous applications. Over half of the Hong Kong lawyers applied.

Singapore’s Legal Profession Act was amended in the process to allow successful applicants to be admitted to practise. They were also given residential rights in Singapore which, at their option, could be taken up at any time within a specified time frame.

I became the first from Hong Kong to be admitted to practise in Singapore.

“Robert, I am happy for you and I admire your tenacity. You moved heaven and earth to reach your goal,” said T.O., “but your battle has just begun. Singaporeans are famously *ganshu* (afraid to lose out). Your partner there – what is his name? – I am getting forgetful, a sign of old age... yes, Mr. Woo is not going to let you get away for long unless you can contribute.

“You told me Singapore celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary and many of the top businessmen from Hong Kong were invited to see for themselves her achievements. Why don’t you prepare another paper for the Prime Minister? Say something along the lines that you can organize a scheme for the eminent entrepreneurs of Hong Kong, modelled after the lawyers’ scheme. In exchange for their investments, Singapore shall give them residential rights. I am certain such a proposal would be well received. It benefits all three sides: Singapore, Hong Kong and the entrepreneurs.

“You stand to benefit most. In one stroke not only would you consolidate your base of existing clients but also gain a crop of new ones. Once you solve the immigration problems for them, these entrepreneurs will be indebted to you for life. The two-way traffic will enable you to build bridges spanning Singapore and Hong Kong – the advantages go on and on. Oh, I am so excited just talking about it.”

I submitted a paper entitled ‘Scheme for Eminent Entrepreneurs’ to the Prime Minister.

As predicted, the proposal was well received. The Prime Minister gave his blessing. It gave birth to the CSHS (Corporate Special Holding Status Scheme) which in essence allowed an approved entrepreneur to nominate one person for permanent residence in Singapore for each S\$1 million he invested. The nominations could come from approved categories that included immediate family members, relatives, senior members of staff and co-investors. Thus the net was cast to cover not only the entrepreneur

but also those who mattered most to him: family, relatives, key employees, friends and business associates.

“Robert, I would like to nominate two sisters using my quota for permanent residence,” said Li Ka Shing. “They are owners of the stockbrokers’ firm that handles seventy per cent of my portfolio. Do you know how big this business is?”

“It must be mind-boggling,” I said.

“Yes, they are big brokers,” Li continued. “Please make sure you do not bill them. Send the bills direct to me.”

“Mr. Li, I will make sure we send you no bills. This is a small matter. You have been most supportive. It’s the least we can do for you.”

“Alright then, I shall send them to your office and give you the details.”

The two sisters came. They were both young and pretty. The older sister was known to me by reputation. She was married into a prominent family.

I sent the papers over to the Singapore office and gave specific instructions that under no circumstances should Li be billed for this simple work.

That morning I was in the conference room with a group of lawyers from San Francisco and we were talking about a possible tie-up of the two firms. One of the lawyers from the firm of Kaplan Russin & Vecchi, whose name was Paul, was there with his wife Nancy Pelosi. Nancy later became the sixtieth Speaker of the House of Representatives.

“Mr. Wang, there is an urgent call for you,” announced Patricia, my secretary.

“Can’t you see I am busy? Who is calling?”

“I think you will want to take this call. It is Li Ka Shing.”

Everyone in the room recognized the name. It was people like Li on our clients list that had attracted the American firm to seek us out for an association. The call could not have come at a more opportune moment as we were just about to conclude the tie-up terms and I knew Nancy Pelosi was an important politician.

“Put the line through to the conference room,” I told Patricia.

The secretary gave me a worried look as she left the room.

“Good morning to you, Mr. Li,” I said jubilantly.

“Robert, I am really upset with you,” shouted an obviously agitated Li. “You have betrayed my trust. Do you know what embarrassment your action has caused me?”

“Oh-oh-oh, Mr. Li,” I stammered and blushed nervously in the presence of the Americans. “Wh-what have I done, Mr. Li?”

“You idiot. Why did you send the bill to my office against your previous promise?” He continued to shout.

It suddenly dawned on me that Li was referring to the two sisters.

“I am sorry. I am sorry, Mr. Li. Who sent you the bill?”

“Ask your Singapore office!” Li’s anger did not subside. He was even more furious.

“Let me check,” I said nervously. “I shall do so right away.”

I apologised to the Americans, who sensed something had gone terribly wrong in my dealings with the richest man in Hong Kong, and turned to the secretary to ask her to put a call through to Singapore immediately.

I cursed my partner when I learned that indeed a note of fee was sent to Li’s office. It was their *ganshu* mentality at work again – not wishing to lose out in any case even if it meant a small fee that could upset a client as important as Li Ka Shing despite my repeated reminders over the matter.

“Please accept my apologies,” I pleaded with Li whose anger had by then subsided. “All I can say is that ‘the calculation of earth is different from heaven’ (the best laid plans of mice and men tend to go awry). Please forgive me.”

“I will accept this explanation,” said Li. “The matter is now closed.”