

巴金：香港之夜

Hong Kong Nights

By Ba Jin

Translated by Zhu Zhiyu with Don J. Cohn



Ba Jin in 1949

WE EMBARKED on the steamer to Guangzhou. At ten o'clock in the evening the boat left Hong Kong.

My friend A called to me from outside my cabin just as the boat was leaving. I came out and heard him say, "Nights in Hong Kong are very beautiful. Don't miss them."

Leaning against the railing outside my cabin I watched Hong Kong recede in the distance.

The sea was dark, as was the sky, and there were some stars out, but few were bright. In contrast, Hong Kong itself was an endless panorama of stars.

Ba Jin (1904-) passed through Hong Kong in May 1933 on his way from Shanghai to Guangzhou. The essays he wrote on his trip are collected in Lutu suibi 旅途隨筆.

There were lights on the mountains, on the streets, and on the buildings. Each light was like a tiny star, but to me they seemed brighter and more splendid than stars. In their dense array they resembled a mountain of stars, shining endless beams of light in the night sky.

The night was still and soft. Not a sound was to be heard from the shore; Hong Kong seemed to have shut its great mouth. Yet when I gazed upon the scintillating mountain of stars, I could hear the lights whispering to each other. The rocking of the boat created the illusion that all the lights were moving. The headlights on the trams and cars darted about; I could see them winking like human eyes, or perhaps they were chasing or talking to each other. Sight and hearing became confused, and I seemed to be listening with my eyes. The mountain of stars was hardly silent; it was performing a great symphony.

I almost forgot where I was

The boat seemed to be turning. The mountain of stars was beginning to shrink. But I could still see the stretch of golden lights in my eyes, and hear that wonderful symphony.

When the boat passed through mountains (or islands, I am not sure), Hong Kong finally disappeared. There were no lights at sea, and our boat was shrouded in thick darkness. The mountain of stars had now become a distant and indistinct dream.

I stood there gazing into the distance, trying to find that mountain of stars again. But I could see nothing. It was rather cool outside, and the wind blowing on my head was uncomfortable, so I returned to the cabin. It was another world there, full of noise and excitement. The moment I stepped into the cabin, I asked myself: "Was everything I just saw an illusion?"