

COOKIE TIME WITH ANNE DRENNAN

Vancouver

He was found guilty of murder. He got away with the rest.

WICKED WICKED WICKED MAN

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Joseph Breen:
rapist, cocaine
user, boxer, karate
expert, patient killer,
family physician.

every smart shopping mall is a smart shopping-mall developer. And, on Richmond's Asian strip, a smart religion.

{ AND THE ART ZEN OF MALL RAISING }

By Ric Dolphin

PHOTO MONTAGE BY GRAHAM LAW

A QUIETLY EXCITED PARISHIONER is giving me the spiel on Buddhism from a cushioned bench in the Kuan Yin temple. This big red and gold pagoda, built a dozen years ago by the International Buddhist Society, sits on Steveston Highway on the southern edge of Richmond, the suburb that in a twinkling has become a living sutra to big Chinese money in little Canada. • Trying not to appear rude, I let my eyes travel around the Gracious Hall where the Sunday morning devotees are lighting joss sticks in front of the big golden statues of the Bud-

dhas in residence. The man, 25 years in from Hong Kong and a mechanical engineer, seems to smile all the time as he tries to enlighten me in the tenets of the world's second most popular religion, and the one to which roughly half of the new Chinese in Richmond subscribe, all the time touching my arm to emphasize the simple profundity of his latest aphorism. "A Mahayan Buddhist is somebody

who has dedicated himself to follow the teaching of Buddha to reach the ultimate goal of becoming a buddha," he says, the soft singsong tenor surfing merrily over the *l*, the double *r* and the *th* sounds. • On one wall of the temple is an array of brass plaques lit by candles, each plaque memorializing someone who died and left money to the Buddhist society—Fung King Hey, for example, the super-rich Hong Kong financier who died on his yacht during a cruise off Vancouver Island in 1985. The man touches my arm. "It's like being in a stormy sea: some people have to learn to swim themselves before they are able to help others." • Are the man's words all knowing or merely portentous? I find myself leaning toward the latter. They remind me of *Kung Fu: The Legend Continues*, which my 14-year-old son likes so much, or the hippie girl I once knew who read the *I Ching* at dope parties. What they don't remind me of is the delightfully frenetic mercantilism that has swept in from Asia and is overrunning

the Lower Mainland. But then, Buddhism has everything to do with everything, including the price of noodles and the story we are about to write about the high-rolling mall merchants of this baby city on the south side of the Fraser that is mutating into something the world has not seen before.

Buddhism, with its links to the earlier Confucianism and the later Shintoism, has, after all, a core belief in the interconnectedness of all living things. An amoeba farts, and an emperor feels the breeze. An emperor dies, and amoebas rub their cilia together yelling, "Buffet!" Buddhism, bless it, understands and appreciates the hierarchy. It acknowledges that emperors are at a later stage in their path toward Nirvana than are amoebas, but smiles at the great cosmic joke that amoebas and emperors must, as chimney sweeps, come to dust. Buddhism sees a hell of a lot of connections and does a hell of a lot of smiling.

The smile is always the tip-off. Thomas Fung has it. Jack Lee has it. And from the pictures I've seen, Kazuo Wada has it too.

These gentlemen are Richmond's mall merchants.

Fung, 43, now a director in the billion-dollar-a-year company built by his father—the same Fung King Hey commemorated in the temple—started the ball rolling with Aberdeen Centre and Parker Place, the deluxe assemblages of Hong Kong boutiques and Oriental shoppers at the heart of Richmond's reinvented Chinatown at Number 3 Road and Cambie.

Lee, 40, putatively a self-made man, but

with close ties to Taiwan's huge food conglomerate President Enterprises (which in turn has close ties to the Taiwanese government), built President Plaza, the shiny blue-glass hotel/shopping/office development across Cambie from Aberdeen.

And Wada, 65, a Japanese tycoon who has taken his family's grocery business to precipitous international heights and who now bases himself in a postmodern office building in downtown Hong Kong, built Yoahan Centre, the supermarket and shopping complex next door to President Plaza on Number 3 Road.

These sparkling malls reflect the new, confident Asian mentality, which really is an uncloseting of the old. The ethnic Chinese may have been kicked around a bit by the Western powers in the years since the Industrial Revolution, but the long-held belief that those of the mighty Middle Kingdom are the chosen race has really never wavered. And now, through the magic of universal capitalism, they once more have the opportunity to strut.

Traditional North American Chinatowns, with their echoes of the downtrodden past—Asian exclusion acts, coolie labour, ghettoization—are not good places for strutting. Richmond's shiny new miniopolis, on the other hand, is the perfect place. Walk around Aberdeen, Parker Place, President Plaza or Yoahan, and you will see what closely resemble upscale North American-style malls. The difference is that the stores cater explicitly to a market that is predominantly well-heeled Chinese, a group that these days, and with justification, considers the world its oyster. By the turn of

the century—the Asian century—Richmond's population will be half Chinese. On the map it resembles the pearl in the mouth of the dragon, a most auspicious circumstance to those who believe in the ancient superstition of Feng Shui.

In these new malls, along with the \$40 bowls of shark-fin soup, the \$100-a-gram ginseng and the \$3,000 lumps of rare jade, you will find \$10,000 German sofas, \$300 BMW alloy wheels, mondo Italian suits and haircuts and, everywhere you look, the brand names that denote status—Boy London, Versace, Guess, Chanel—marques that to an ever greater extent are attached to merchandise made in the Orient in factories owned by the type of people who can afford to keep homes in Hong Kong and Richmond, striding the hemispheres like modern-day silk traders.

Everything that goes around comes around; everything comes to he who waits. *Observe, Grasshopper, while I show you how to drop these Gui Lo onto their slack North American butts.*

The Prodigal Son

THOMAS FUNG SURE IS SMILING these days. Typically, it is not an ostentatious, arrogant smile. It's more the refined smile of someone who moves in the best Hong Kong circles and who could retire today and never have to worry about money again but who has chosen instead to build an empire for his family and is watching things unfold as they should. It is also the shy smile of a quiet man whose father never thought he would amount to a whole lot and who is now proving that father wrong.

Fung King Hey, by the time of his death at 65, had amassed a personal fortune of at least \$300 million, putting him in the same class of self-made super-rich as his friend Li ka-Shing. He'd done this through his Sun Hung Kai Securities and Sun Hung Kai Bank, stock brokering and merchant banking companies that rode the development and industrial boom in Hong Kong and environs through the late 1960s, '70s and '80s.

At one point Sun Hung Kai Securities accounted for a quarter of all trading on the Hong Kong stock market, and Fung Sr.'s secretive network of accounts throughout southeast Asia included gold buyers in Indonesia and government leaders in the People's Republic of China. Roger Birk, chairman of America's biggest brokerage, Merrill Lynch, explained in 1982 why his company was buying into Fung's com-

panies. "I don't think you can make significant progress in this region without a force like Sun Hung Kai."

Born into a middle-class trading family in southern China, Fung Sr. dropped out after primary school, fled the Communists in 1949 and, a little later, began his entrepreneurial life as a small-time importer-exporter working the South China Sea. He made his first millions after breaking into real estate in the late 1950s when Hong Kong was being flooded with Chinese refugees looking for apartments.

Communist-led riots in 1967 chased Fung to Vancouver, though as a hedge against his possible return he took the precaution of buying a bunch of cheap land before he left. The family, including Thomas, then 15, and his younger brother, Tony, 14, moved into an unpretentious house in East Vancouver.

In those days, the boys were two of only three Chinese students at Killarney Secondary School, and they paid for it. Fung King Hey returned to a quietened Hong Kong after a year's absence, sold the hedged land for a big profit and resumed his career. But the rest of the family stayed on, enduring racial taunts and, on one occasion, pellets shot at their house.

It must have been difficult, I observe rather lamely as Fung relates his story. His eyebrows rise above the round glasses, acknowledging that perhaps those weren't the best of times, but they're long gone and mostly forgotten. He will concede, though, that it was a "lonely" time.

Not as easily forgotten is his father's influence on his life. Fung King Hey, like many a self-made centimillionaire, had stringent expectations for his sons, expectations that he feared could never be realized. In the 1982 *Fortune* interview, which took place on his luxury yacht, *Bo Bo*, Fung Sr. swam around the craft 10 times, then expressed disappointment in his offspring, dismissing them out of hand as unworthy successors.

"For my father, nothing I did was ever excellent," says Fung, "only fair."

"Whether he likes it or not," observes his friend, realtor Stephen Kwok, "his father has a big influence on him."

Young Thomas remained in Vancouver for six years, developing an artistic and slightly rebellious streak. In the late 1970s, after spending a couple of years at UBC studying cinema and selling real estate, Thomas was shipped off to New York by his father, who wanted him and his brother groomed for the commodities trade boom the old man foresaw in

China. By day Thomas worked reluctantly for the brokerage firm Bear Stearnes. By night he studied film production and graphic design.

Against his father's wishes, he also married Ainy Chan, an actress who modelled Japanese cosmetics in Hong Kong. Fung King Hey had favoured a more strategic alliance, possibly with the daughter of one of the powerful mainland Chinese mandarins with whom he did business. The marriage was, of necessity, an elopement.

In an attempt to show his father that there was money to be made in Hong Kong's growing film industry, Thomas borrowed \$1 million from the family firm and pursued film production and advertising. He gathered a syndicate to produce the 1978 British war film *The Wild Geese* and built Photocine into the largest film development company in Asia. He



Thomas Fung's Aberdeen Centre and Parker Place. To his father, nothing he ever did was excellent, only "fair."

also made an avant garde film of which he was the producer, director, writer and, he jokes, the only viewer.

But the old man remained unimpressed, more or less telling him to drop the entertainment business and come into the family firm. Alternatively, he could get out of his life. Fung chose the latter. To escape the family pressures, Fung, Amy and their two infants returned to Vancouver in the summer of 1984. Fung remembered the city as a peaceful oasis where he could gather his thoughts away from the paterfamilias. Amy loved the beauty and pace of what was already shaping up to be Hong Kong's dormitory.

For a year, living in a 5,700-square-foot University Endowment Lands home,

Thomas did little but collect the proceeds from his businesses back in the colony. He and Amy played four-handed Mah Jong once a week with two friends, real estate superstars Stephen and Grace Kwok—games in which the participants would win or lose \$1,000 a night; not terribly big stakes, notes Stephen Kwok. The Kwoks were starting to prosper by pre-selling condominiums to Hong Kongers seeking a hedge against possible 1997 nastiness. According to Stephen, his "low-key" friend didn't seem particularly interested in the real estate industry then.

After a year of collecting his thoughts, Fung decided to pursue—of all things—the baking business. For some time, the Japanese had been enjoying great success throughout Asia with small pâtisseries selling European-inspired cakes and pastries

geared to lighter Oriental tastes. Realizing that this concept might have an appeal for Vancouver's growing Oriental population and cholesterol-conscious Caucasians, Fung arranged for a cram course in baking for himself and several colleagues in the summer of 1985. His original plan had been to strike a joint-venture deal with St. Germain, the largest of the Japanese chains. The terms proved too onerous, however, so he invited several of the company's bakers to Vancouver for a holiday. He then hired them away to his own operation, for which he appropriated the St. Germain name, which was

unprotected here.

Fung now has five of his own St. Germain stores, including the first at Cambie and 16th Avenue, downstairs from the head office of Fairchild Holdings. When naming his umbrella company, Fung harkened back to his own childhood and his relationship with his father. Fairchild was named in memory of Fung Sr.'s never having deemed anything Thomas did as better than "fair."

Having got a taste of the retail industry, Fung, perhaps more his father's son than he realized, wanted more. "For some reason he suddenly got interested in real estate," Kwok remembers. "Thomas said he wanted to build a small centre of an Oriental nature. I got the feeling we were

looking to build a shopping mall.”

In 1987 a friend from Hong Kong had visited Fung and commented on the lack of entertainment in Vancouver. “Why don’t you build a bowling centre?” the friend had suggested. Fung wasn’t interested at first, but started thinking how a bowling centre might prove a novel anchor for a shopping mall.

Richmond at the time was starting to grow as an Oriental town, the proximity of the airport and the comparatively cheap real estate being the chief incentives. With the help of Kwok and others, Fung quietly began to assemble a parcel of virtual wasteland between Number 3 Road and Hazelbridge Way, for between \$10 and \$12 a square foot (it’s now worth \$50), much of it purchased from the Richmond Curling Club.

He wasn’t quite a real estate virgin, having earlier teamed up with Kwok and developer Andre Molnar to build 60 houses on a tract in Coquitlam known as River Heights, which has since become a predominantly Taiwanese enclave. Molnar, who also assisted in finding the land for Aberdeen, had no doubt Fung would succeed—although he suspected even then that shopping malls were merely a means to an end. “His main interests are in art, movies and television,” says Molnar. “Real estate will allow him to play in an area where few people play.”

Pressing on with his bowling-alley-as-anchor idea, Fung was surprised to learn that another Oriental group was planning to build a free-standing alley just down the road. Fung approached the other group and asked if they wanted to go into a joint venture. They refused, so Fung threatened to go into direct competition with them. The showdown was averted when they accepted a buy-out, guaranteeing Fung an exclusive operation.

His troubles weren’t over yet, though. Having assembled the land, he proceeded—with backing from the Hongkong Bank of Canada, owned by Li ka-Shing’s Hutchinson Whampoa, of which Thomas’s brother Tony is a director—to build the \$22-million Aberdeen Centre, taking the name from the Hong Kong harbour. He planned it as a 50/50 mix of Oriental and

Caucasian stores, but none of the North American franchisers were interested in signing on. Fung, after all, had no experience in managing shopping malls, and Oriental-flavoured centres were an unknown quantity. Fung couldn’t even interest a leasing agent in the project.

“Everybody told me it wouldn’t work,” he recalls. “I almost turned back.” Instead Fung put himself in the mall as anchor



One-time communist Kazuo Wada and his Yaohan Centre. Employees attend a spiritual training centre near Mt. Fuji.

tenant, with his high-tech Top Gun bowling alley, the Top Gun restaurant, a 500-seat Chinese cinema and, of course, the St. Germain bakery. He used his Hong Kong advertising company to promote the mall to the chains in the colony, touting the spaces as turn-key operations. Employee hiring, customs expediting, security and accounting would all be taken care of by Fairchild. Rents would start low and increase in relation to the success of each operation.

Aberdeen Centre opened in July 1990 and has been successful by any account.

Turnover was relatively high to begin with, but a stable roster of merchants now pays between \$35 and \$80 a square foot, comparable to rents in Vancouver’s largest malls. The bowling alley is the busiest on the West Coast.

Fung went on to develop Fairchild Plaza, a 105-unit business park across Hazelbridge Way from Aberdeen, and the \$25-million Parker Place, another upscale Chinese mall with strata-title ownership (a more attractive proposition for Asians than leasing, according to Fung), which quickly filled up on property adjacent to Aberdeen in 1992. In the same year, he began acquiring media outlets, including a local radio station (AM 1470) and, later, two failing cable TV networks here and in Toronto. Taking advantage of his media connections in Hong Kong, Fung has been able to jazz up his renamed Fairchild TV and Talent Vision (a more serious, documentary-oriented channel), and is concentrating on expanding his viewership and increasing ad revenue with a view to establishing a Chinese-language media presence across North America.

Enter Japan Inc.

MEANWHILE, RICHMOND’S POTENTIAL was being noticed by other Oriental interests, notably those of Kazuo Wada and Jack Lee. Fung got wind of Wada’s intentions to build a Japanese hotel and shopping complex when he himself was contemplating a hotel complex for the Parker Place site. Wada had known the Fungs since he opened his first shopping centre outside of Japan, renting his Hong Kong premises from Sun Kai Properties in 1989.

Like Fung King Hey, who had been his contemporary, Wada is a highly disciplined man with a drive toward unlimited wealth and expansion typical of first-generation tycoons—an over-developed acquisitiveness

GEOMANCER AT AISLE 5

From North to South, new to not-quite-so-new, here’s a tour of Richmond’s Asian malls.

Yaohan Centre
A Japanophile’s dream, where homesick émigrés and *gaijin* veterans of Japanese English-teaching stints can stock up on addictive staples like UCC coffee. What else? Try a sushi deli, an aisle full of rice cookers and the best selection of

Ultra-Man junk food outside of Tokyo. On the second floor, Janéo Boutique offers the Poorboy and Ballinger Gold labels; Ichiban Collections carries, not ramen, but funky shoes and clothes; and Iwase Books’ Canadian branch is stocked with imported maga-

zines, CDs and books—including some, like a guide to traditional Sashiko quilting techniques, with English text. Just past the escalators, the Kazenotani Hobby Shop offers some of the most elaborate model kits you’ll ever see—and an amazing selection ▶

often prettied up with declarations of destiny and higher purpose.

Wada's parents started in 1930 with a vegetable stand in the seaside resort of Shizuoka, south of Tokyo, but the youthful Wada rebelled against his merchant family and joined the Japanese Communist Party. His mother nipped this disquieting development in the bud and insisted her son attend an indoctrination session put on by Seicho No Ie (House of God's Children), a Japanese religious sect that borrows from both Christianity and Buddhism.

Wada adopted the religion and began expanding the family grocery business, first in the Shizuoka prefecture, then throughout Japan, southeast Asia and North America. Today, all employees are required to read the Seicho No Ie bible, and to attend a spiritual training centre at the foot of Mount Fuji. In 1991 Wada told *Business Week* that every morning he rose at 4 or 5, meditated, then wrote down his goals, continuing to do so every morning until he achieved them. He had filled

40 volumes with these goals and accomplished most of them.

Thomas Fung ran into Wada at a dinner Sun Hun Kai was throwing in Hong Kong in 1990 (the Japanese businessman had moved to Hong Kong a year earlier). With 117 Yoahan outlets and annual sales approaching \$3 billion (triple those of Sun Hun Kai), Yoahan was in the midst of a \$1.2-billion spending plan that specifically targetted the U.S. There were already Yoahan centres catering to Japanese-Americans in Chicago; Edgewater, New Jersey; and several cities in California. Plans were

in place for stores in Atlanta; Houston; Washington, D.C.; and as Fung learned at dinner, Canada.

"Where in Canada?" Fung asked.

"Richmond," said Wada. "It's near Vancouver."

"Where in Richmond?"

"On Number 3 Road."

Fung's heart sank. He was well underway with plans for his own hotel/shop-



Jack Lee's Taiwanese-flavoured President Plaza has both a Buddhist temple and a karaoke bar.

ping complex at Parker Place but knew he couldn't compete with a deep-pocketed expert like Wada. He Cathay Pacificked back to Canada and changed his plans. Parker Place, Fung decided, would be a European-style, open-roofed, village-style centre with cobblestone streets. Richmond's council, however, didn't like the idea, feeling an open mall was unsuited to the rainy climate. So Fung was forced to build Parker Place as a fairly bland, upscale mall, shelving plans for a hotel.

Wada, meanwhile, had taken a closer look at Richmond and revised his own

plans. His hotel/shopping centre had been targetted, like the other North American stores, at Japanese customers. But market research indicated that Vancouver's Japanese population was relatively small and Japanese tourists favoured downtown Vancouver. On the other hand, the Hong Kong Chinese population was growing fast. The construction value of single family homes in Richmond had risen from \$45 million in 1987 to \$102 million in 1989; commercial construction had gone from \$17 million to \$79 million in the same period, both driven by Hong Kong immigrants, who were also being joined by a growing contingent of affluent Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese.

Wada decided to abandon the idea of a tourist-oriented hotel and shopping complex in favour of a supermarket and shopping centre that would cater to Hong Kong tastes—Japanese-influenced but mostly Chinese. When Yaohan Centre opened in June 1993, the RCMP had to be brought in to control the crush of people.

Made In Taiwan

MEANWHILE, INSTEAD of two hotels, as would have been the case had both Fung and Yaohan proceeded with their original plans, Richmond's new Asian quarter had none. It was into this breach that Jack Lee stepped.

Lee, a practising Buddhist, has a mischievous wide-eyed smile that distinguishes him from his modern Hong Kong brethren, though less so perhaps from that old pirate Fung King Hey. In the VIP room of the Top Gun restaurant in his friend Thomas Fung's Aberdeen Centre, Lee tells stories of his days as a Taiwanese paratrooper. Over a sumptuous dinner of glazed pigeons, oysters, scallops, gingered geoduck, Chinese beer and lots of cha, he makes chuckling reference to testicle-constricting

► of radio-controlled cars. Except for the food court, where the variety of Chinese food is dizzying, but there's barely a piece of sushi to be found, the mall has a distinctly Japanese feel, so be sure to present your business card with both hands.

President Plaza
Attached to the new Radisson Hotel, the smaller President Plaza mall is

anchored by T&T Supermarket, whose huge seafood selection includes live mussels, scallops, oysters, clams, lobsters, crabs and tilapia, a tropical fish. "Live crabs do bite. Touch at your own risk. We are not responsible for your injury," reads a sign over the tanks. You can also get cuttlefish, pigs' and chickens' feet and 50-pound sacks of jasmine rice. At the other

end of the mall, the elegant Ten Ren's Tea & Ginseng Co. tea room is a quiet retreat, while five floors up there's a temple that houses seven enormous gold-leaf Buddha statues, all imported from Taiwan.

Aberdeen Centre
When it's lit up late at night, the oldest of Richmond's Asian malls looms out of the suburban dark-

ness like the USO soundstage in *Apocalypse Now*. Top Gun Bowling, with its 24 lanes and a back room filled with video games and billiard tables, is open until 2 a.m. Sunday to Thursday, 3 a.m. Fridays and Saturdays. There's Tung Fong Hung Pharmacy, a branch of the Hong Kong-based chain, where various grades of ginseng running from \$24 to \$350 per 100 grams share dis-

play space with bins of dried seahorses, and there's the Yan Cheong Tea House, whose owners proffer delicate sample cups of oolong and lapsang souchong. You'll have to go around the corner to Fook Po Tong Herbal Tea to get the medicinal benefits of chrysanthemum, black plum and "bitter" teas, the latter a cure for sore throat, pimples and ►

parachute harnesses and jovially relates the tale of a comrade who, as the plane ascended in preparation for the first jump, wet his pants.

The parable winds to a moral: "When we were pushed out of that plane," says Lee, chopsticks suspending a scallop midway between rice bowl and mouth, "we were all so scared we kind of lost consciousness. But then, pop, the parachute opened—and we knew we had survived. What a feeling! What a view! It was the best thing that ever happened to me. It showed me courage, discipline, how to take a risk."

The third member of our trio smiles a small supportive smile. Joseph Li, 37, is a recent immigrant from Hong Kong, a former public relations officer for the British governor of Hong Kong, now Jack Lee's personal assistant. He is as proper and reserved as his boss is outgoing and ebullient. The Taiwanese compare to Hong Kongers much as Texans to Britons: they're rougher, warmer and happier. The Hong Konger will say they are also less trustworthy.

The careful Fung told me that the Taiwanese and the Hong Kongers "can be friends, but it's hard to be partners. Taiwan has a more concentrated Asian type of thinking; they do things differently. They will bargain even after they've agreed on a price. If they don't do that, they think they're being taken advantage of."

Of course, the Hong Kong Chinese, who once considered Taiwan little more than a low-wage site for garment factories, are now seeing their swift ascendancy to affluence challenged by their uppity neighbours. "The Taiwanese," as Joseph Li said, a touch wistfully, during an earlier meeting, "have all the money in the world these days."

Jack Lee rather personifies the miracle of the Vancouver Island-sized republic that in 25 years has gone from Third World

status to a trade surplus of \$80 billion. He was born Lee An-Bang 40 years ago in an agricultural village outside Tainan, the island's second city after dominant Taipei. Lee walked to school barefoot while his father worked as bookkeeper for a small textile factory.

The family's fortunes improved along with the country's. After compulsory military service, Lee got a business degree, then travelled to Kentucky State University, where he earned an MBA. During a subsequent stint in the international department of a bank in Los Angeles, he was unable to obtain an American residency visa. The U.S.'s loss was Canada's gain. He moved to Vancouver in 1978 to marry his fiancée, an accountant he'd met at college in Taiwan who had her Canadian residency.

Lee started his Canadian career as a salesman for a meat wholesaler making \$800 a month, sharing a small East Vancouver house with in-laws. Wishing to improve the fortunes of his company and himself, Lee devised a scheme for importing pig tripe—a Chinese delicacy—from Ontario. The wholesaler's profits increased threefold, and Lee's salary rose accordingly, but apparently not quickly enough. Soon he left the company and started his own business.

He began by importing food from Taiwan, where his accountant father was working for a growing international food wholesaler, President Enterprises. Although there were setbacks, Lee's import business grew rapidly through the 1980s, soon stretching up and down the coast from San Diego to Prince Rupert. He caught an even bigger wave when he established an immigrant investor fund that provided would-be Taiwanese immigrants with an easy spot to park the \$350,000 that federal government regulations stipulated they must invest in Canada. Although Hong Kong gets most of the publicity, the

Taiwanese are the fastest-growing immigrant group in Canada. In 1980 there were 827 Taiwanese immigrants; in 1990, 3,681; in 1993, just a shade under 10,000. In that year Canada attracted more Taiwanese than the United States.

By 1989 Lee's company had a big warehouse in Burnaby, and he, his wife and their three children lived in a comfortable house in Kerrisdale. But the prospect of real wealth didn't present itself until Kao Chin-yen paid an inaugural sightseeing visit to Canada in the summer of 1989.

Kao, a high school dropout who'd started as a noodle salesman 25 years earlier, had built the President group into the largest food-processing company in Taiwan. President imported, exported, bought and sold real estate, owned the chain of T&T Taiwanese supermarkets and the Taipei Tigers baseball franchise. The company also had recently bought Wyndham Inc., the fourth biggest cookie manufacturer in the United States, and through its political connections with the ruling Kuomintang party had become the leading Taiwanese builder of factories in the once-hated Mainland China.

Kao had no Canadian branch but was interested in opening one. He already employed Lee's father and had lately been using Lee's company as his sole food distributor in Canada. Now he suggested to Lee that he join the company and move back to Taiwan, from where he could oversee the company's North American expansion. Lee demurred. Compared to congested and polluted Taipei, Vancouver is a paradise. Moreover, his three kids had all been born in Canada and viewed the prospect of moving to Taiwan with horror.

This didn't prevent Lee from joining Kao on his sightseeing tour. "We were in the back of a limo driving that beautiful road between Banff and Jasper," Lee recalls, possibly apocryphally. "Dr. Kao woke from a nap. He turned to me and said, 'If you don't want to come to President's group, President's group can come to you. Let's pave a good, reliable road for our Taiwanese fellows.' He made me a director and his Canadian partner. Dr. Kao told me lots of people wanted the job—army generals, politicians, everything. But he said he chose me because of my integrity and my credibility. That really turned me on, you know."

Lee set about assembling land for what was originally going to be a T&T Supermarket and a few complementary stores: a little enclave of Taiwanese enterprise in the midst of the surrounding Hong Kong

► canker sores. The trend-conscious, meanwhile, hit Bennie's Shoes and Theme, while upstairs well-known geomancer Sherman Tai of Fortune Teller & Associates sees consultees from as far away as Toronto and San Francisco.

Parker Place Floata Seafood Restaurant is one of the top Chinese dining spots in Richmond, which is saying a fair bit. But don't

overeat—it shares the mall with boutiques like Donna Collezioni, one of the few shops in the Lower Mainland to sell Jessica McClintock evening gowns; Versailles, which offers Moschino and Versace's casual lines; Re-Mix, chock-full of Diesel, Gaultier and Calvin Klein jeans; and Second Skin, which caters to club kids with wardrobes that include patchwork suede A-line miniskirts. Round the corner, Canopus

Gallery's art books and scholarly economics tracts occupy the same quiet enclave as Comic Land's anime videos, which feature the popular Slam Dunk, Dragonball and Sailormoon characters. If you need to sit down again, what's probably the best mall food court in B.C. overlooks the "Four Faces Buddha," an outdoor shrine surrounded by sand trays in which the faithful burn joss sticks. —Laurel Wellman

sprawl, financed by a handful of investor immigrants, with the President group as the joint-venture partner.

However, the investor-immigrants showed more interest in President Canada Syndicates than had been expected. Too many other Taiwanese immigrant fund gatherers had disappeared with investors' money. Kao and his clean young protégé seemed solid and safe and offered a share in an exciting new project in a city into which more and more Taiwanese were moving. Ultimately, 130 investors joined the consortium, enabling the project to grow larger and larger—though not quite big enough to keep up with Jack Lee's own skyrocketing profile. Today, no media account of the rapid ethnic transformation of Richmond is complete without a quotation from Lee talking about Richmond's potential as a Mecca for Oriental and white tourists. His photograph led off one of *Macleans*' magazine's triannual cover stories on the Asianization of Vancouver. He is a director of the local Chamber of Commerce and has become a high-profile friend of Richmond's pro-development mayor Greg Halsey-Brant, to whose campaign fund he contributed. By comparison, the Hong Kong developers are invisible. "Jack really knows how to sell himself," notes Fung, not altogether charitably.

In The Temple

THE LOW-KEY JOSEPH LI gives me a tour of his boss's President Plaza. We walk the aisles of the supermarket, past the tanks of live crabs, shellfish and geoduck, past rows of boxed Taiwanese tea drinks and stacked sacks of noodles, past butchers' shelves that contain pig uterus-es. "That's too exotic for me," Li says.

In the adjacent shopping concourse, we pause for a restorative cup of bitter ginseng tea before moving on to a Taiwanese book store. Prominently displayed are books by Grand Master Hsing Yun, founder of the International Buddha's Light Society, a sect that preaches self-realization through education and human activity rather than the more traditional means of seclusion and meditation. This practical approach has gained Hsing a huge following in practical Taiwan and a rapidly growing one in impractical California, where Hsing now apparently spends most of his time. The Grand Master's prominence here is explained by the fact that the Bud-

dha's Light Society's first Canadian temple has been built on the top of the multi-storey parking lot of Jack Lee's President Plaza.

Lee became a Buddhist during a stay in a Taiwanese monastery to cram for his university entrance exam. He is devout without being pious, claiming to like the self-discipline that adherence brings, but sharing no taste for self-denial or isolation—which is why Hsing Yun's approach appeals. So when the Grand Master expressed an interest in opening a Canadian temple and school, Lee had his architect design a facility on top of the garage. Hsing, in turn, officiated at the ground-breaking ceremony for President Plaza in December 1991. It rained in the morning, but cleared in the afternoon, an auspicious combination, observed the master, as the rain water symbolized prosperity, the sun good fortune.

Li and I take the elevator past the third floor where the karaoke bar will go. "Mr. Lee loves karaoke, says Li. Then it's up to the temple level on the sixth floor. There is no fourth floor, as the number is homonymic with the word for death.

The temple is a large white room in which leatherette kneeling pads face an altar upon which sit three buddhas. Chueh Jer, a young nun with a brown sackcloth smock and shaved head, shows us around. In halting English she explains how the flowers on the altar are there to remind us of our impermanence. That being the case, we must work through our dharma without becoming too attached to worldly things.

We move out of the temple and into one of the classrooms where adult students are taught by the two monks and five nuns who live in adjacent quarters. The classroom has a view of the sea, the mountains and Vancouver International Airport, where, three times a day, 747s bring in new immigrants from the Orient. On the board in the classroom are written Chinese characters. I ask what they mean, expecting some further key to inner tranquility.

"Oh, that says, Welcome South Kowloon Lion's Club," Joseph Li explains. "They were visiting Richmond, and they used this room for a meeting. Mr. Lee is a Buddhist, but he is also a member of Lion's Club International."

Somewhere, no doubt, Siddhartha has a smile on his kisser, one that is as beautiful and as enigmatic as David Carradine's. ♣