A few weeks after I took up residence in Hong Kong in the autumn of 1967, I was taken to the cinema by what had now become a new friend. The film we saw that Saturday afternoon - I remember the circumstances with undiminished clarity - was Love is a Many-Splendored Thing, starring William Holden and Jennifer Jones. The film made a very deep impression upon me and I have to confess that, as we filed out of the cinema, I wept unashamedly.

In 1972, or thereabouts, I was contentedly idling away an hour or so, browsing in a bookshop - to this day still a particular pleasure - when I came across a book entitled A Many-Splendoured Thing by Han Suyin. Memories of Love is a Many Splendored Thing came flooding back. Could this be the book behind the film or vice versa, I wondered?

I bought the book but for many years - until quite recently in fact - could not bring myself to read it properly. This I have now done and have discovered that it is not a book to be trifled with. It should be read slowly and carefully, and savoured, if one is truly to understand and enjoy it. It is, as the Daily Express described it at the time, "a true story of piercing beauty." As Ed Murrow said of Winston Churchill, Suyin "mobilised the English language, and sent it into battle."

Although the Daily Express described Suyin's book as a true story, for some reason I had always assumed that it was a novel. Last year, however, through various circumstances, I discovered that this was the literal truth (I would have discovered it much earlier had I read My House Has Two Doors, also by Han Suyin, but unfortunately I did not read this until very recently). A Many Splendoured Thing tells the true story of a love affair between Suyin and Ian Morrison, a correspondent for The Times of London. They met in June 1949, in Hong Kong. Tragically, Ian was killed in Korea on 12 August 1950, when the jeep in which he was travelling was blown up by a landmine.1

1 A tribute to Ian Morrison appeared in Vol. 41 of JHKBRAS.
I was spellbound by this revelation and decided to write an article on the subject for *The Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, a Hong Kong publication of which I am the Hon. Editor. This appeared in 2001.²

In researching this article I had a look around the WWW and came across a webpage dedicated to Suyin hosted by the University of Minnesota and maintained by Professor Teresa Kowalska of the Silesian University, Katowice. Without any real hope of getting a response, I e-mailed Teresa and she promptly replied. This started an exchange of e-mails, which continues to this day, initially about Han Suyin, but latterly about every subject imaginable. We have become friends.

Teresa has been an ardent admirer of Han Suyin for many years and has met her four times now.³ She has written a numbers of articles about her and in 2002 told me of her magnum opus; a Polish translation of Suyin’s *The Crippled Tree*. However, she was having great difficulty in finding a Polish publisher and the cost seemed likely to be prohibitive.

By this stage I had also developed an admiration for Suyin. None of her books had ever been published in Polish and it seemed important to rectify this state of affairs by making the power and poignancy of her writing available to the Polish reading public. What follows is an account of a collaboration between a Polish professor of chemistry and a then Hong Kong assistant commissioner of police (who, incidentally, headed the information technology department at the time) to publish *Kalekie drzewo*!!

I spoke to the HKBRAS publisher in Hong Kong (Pally Printing Co.) and he agreed upon a very favourable fee. Both he and I, however, were considerably worried about our ability to produce a book in Polish, of which we speak not one word. Taking the plunge, however, I asked Teresa to e-mail me the manuscript. This I handed to our publisher and asked him to produce the first proofs in hard copy. I forget the details but it seems that we got the typesetting all wrong for the Polish language and when Teresa saw the proofs she understandably went into paroxysms of despair at what we had done to her epic work. Henry Law (our

² Vol. 40.
publisher) and I persevered, however, and Teresa was mightily impressed with our second effort. Apparently we had reproduced the manuscript exactly, including all the Polish diacritics.

Now came the editing. Teresa hand-edited her hard copy and sent it to me. I was agreeably pleased to find that Microsoft Word contains all the Polish diacritics and edited the soft copy of the proof on my office computer. I leave to the reader’s imagination the thought of a Hong Kong police officer, sitting in his office, editing a 500-page book, written in Polish. Finding the places in the book which needed correcting was, frankly, a labour of love but pride in finishing won through. I e-mailed the final version to Teresa who was highly impressed with my new-found Polish language skills!

So much for the text. There then followed an e-discussion on a dust-jacket for the book. I was keen on this, as it would give the book some colour. The Crippled Tree is an autobiographical work about Han Suyin’s childhood in China. This led our thinking to the idea that the illustration on the dust-jacket should be of a tree, or forest, or some such. It was ultimately Teresa who came up with the brainwave that the illustration should be drawn by a child.

And so it was. I sat my seven-year old son, Alexander, down one evening at home with paper and coloured pencils and asked him if he would contribute to literary history (!) by drawing a tree. This, obviously, went through several iterations before we were both satisfied with it but Alexander is rightly proud of the fact that his artwork now graces the shelves of bookshops and institutions in Poland! His name also appears on the credits page.
Finally, there was a synopsis of the book and of Han Suyin to write and the whole thing then went off for printing. This was a nail-biting period because I know, from personal experience, that even perfect texts can somehow get mangled during the printing process. However, Henry duly produced “Job 1,” which I, in turn, mailed off to Teresa. All was quiet for several days until an e-mail arrived from Teresa saying that the book was perfect! There were celebrations in both Katowice and Hong Kong that day.

Another 999 copies were produced and sent to Teresa by ship and have now been distributed or sold widely. Almost unbelievably, the book was in the Polish bestseller list for a while towards the end of 2002.

This venture, on the part of HKBRAS, coincided with a decision by Council to put HKBRAS more on the world map, a process which continues. As a member of Council subsequently remarked: ‘And, of course, Poland was the obvious place to start!’

I have had a profoundly fulfilling life but my life goals never, obviously enough, included publishing a book for a Polish professor of chemistry. What an amazing world it is!

4 By way of a postscript, Teresa and the author finally met, face-to-face, on 14 November 2002, in Katowice.