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Outline of Conditions in Occupied Hongkong

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MOTOR BUS SERVICES  
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The Japanese have probably removed all save a few motor buses from HONGKONG. A large number were sent away in 1942 following a wholesale seizure of all types of motor vehicles. Reliable information shows that, of about 120 buses formerly operated by the CHINA MOTOR BUS Co. on HONGKONG island, only 18/19 remained in the latter part of 1942. It is probable that a similar removal was made of cars formerly operating on the KOWLOON mainland. The shipment away of vehicles appears to have continued until 1945, the latest information being that buses from HONGKONG were seen in CANTON in mid-Feb 45.

In September 1942 the Japanese entrusted the operation of all bus routes on both sides of the harbour to the "HONGKONG Automobile Transport Association" (HONGKONG Jidosha Unso Kaisha), with NGAN SHING KWAN, formerly manager of the CHINA MOTOR BUS Co., as President, and TANG SHIU KIN as Vice-President. At that time, buses were running on most if not all of the routes served in 1941. However, the service was gradually curtailed until September 1943, when it was entirely suspended after the bombing of the LAICHIKOK oil installation which was reported to have caused an acute fuel shortage. After several weeks, the service between the city and ABERDEEN and STANLEY was resumed, with one bus operating once daily on each of the 2 routes. At the end of 1943, an hourly service between TSIMSHATSUI and WATERLOO Road was re-introduced, as well as a daily one-trip service between KOWLOON and the New Territories. In August 1944, it was reported in the HONGKONG press that buses had resumed running between PEDDER Street and CAUSEWAY Bay with 11 trips being made either way daily.

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FERRY SERVICES  
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Harbour ferry services have been maintained but not on the same scale as before hostilities, in the first place because of the frequent requisitioning of ferries for transporting troops and supplies and, secondly, on account of the coal shortage which has made a reduction in sailings imperative, especially since late 1943.

In August 1944, it was reported that 3 ferries were operating on 2 of the trans-harbour routes, viz:- HONGKONG-TSIMSHATSUI and HONGKONG-MONGKOK-SHAMSHUIPO. There were 30 trips daily on the former line, 18 between HONGKONG and MONGKOK and 14 between MONGKOK and SHAMSHUIPO. The schedules were later reduced, and in November 1944 it was known that only 15 trips daily were made between HONGKONG and TSIMSHATSUI.

In addition to the harbour services, ferries also plied on the following routes:- (1) HONGKONG-CHEUNG CHAU-MUIWO-PINGCHAU (2) HONGKONG-CASTLE PEAK-TAI-O (3) HONGKONG-ABERDEEN-STANLEY.

These services were not sufficient to cope with the traffic, especially as intending passengers had to wait long intervals thus causing congestion and over-taxing the accommodation capacity of the boats. For these reasons, auxiliary junks have been used, and ferries have also been known to tow wooden boats with passengers.

In mid-1944, it was reported that the ferries were burning charcoal or part coal and firewood.

The Japanese made use of several ferries as military transports in June/July 1944, at the time of the West River operations, and it is not known how many of these have since returned to HONGKONG. Of the vehicular ferries, 2 were seen in HONGKONG in August 1944 but they were not in operation as public ferries.

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RAILWAY SERVICE  
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Repairs to the BEACON Hill Tunnel, demolished during the hostilities, were completed by the Japanese about April 1942 (?) and a restricted train service between TSIMSHATSUI and the New Territories was resumed in the middle of the year. At first, only Japanese nationals and government employees were allowed to travel on the railway, but later ordinary passengers and cargo (mostly farm produce) were carried.

In November 1943, in conjunction with the military drive made simultaneously from the HONGKONG border and SHEKLUNG to gain control of the hitherto unoccupied section of the line between POKUT and SHEUNG PING, work was begun to restore the rail link between HONGKONG and CANTON. Extensive tree-felling was carried on in the New Territories and adjoining areas across the border to provide sleepers. In certain stretches (e.g. SHUMCHUN to PEI PA LING) these were placed about 4 feet apart, against the normal 24 inch interval on other sections. Although trains were probably running to SHEKLUNG from CANTON and HONGKONG for a time previously, through traffic was not restored until September 1944 with the completion of repairs to the SHEKLUNG bridges. Owing to the shortage of coal, it was reported that firewood was being used as fuel.

The train service on the HONGKONG side of the border was closed to the public in mid-1944, being reserved for military traffic only, but in December a press report stated that "surplus seats if any" would again be available to the public.

Original repairs to the BEACON Hill Tunnel were apparently not completely effective, for on at least 2 occasions since (January and May 1944) repair work was reported to be under way.

Surplus rails on sidings have been sent North, but there is no information as to the numbers or condition of engines and rolling stock still available. However, locomotives with the following numbers were reported observed in use in December 1944 and January 1945:- Nos. 033, 036, 56, 57, 152, 156, 305, 310, 316, 503, 512, 521 and 3003.

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COAL SUPPLY.  
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Since the middle of 1943, HONGKONG has suffered from a shortage of coal due to lack of shipping. The situation grew progressively worse, and since early 1944 the shortage has been acute. This has resulted in the suspension of the electricity supply to the public and the curtailment of various essential services, besides the closing down of many factories and reduction of working capacity at local dockyards and other industrial plants engaged in production for the Japanese.

Coal has been reported as coming in the main from FORMOSA, although supplies have also been obtained from French Indo-China, the PHILIPPINES, MANCHURIA and Japan. A report dated September 1943 said that shipments consisted mostly of coal dust. Supplies from FORMOSA were believed to have dwindled considerably in late 1944, and it was reported at the time that the HONGKONG Industrial Association had sent representatives to FORMOSA to "negotiate" for supplies.

Complete and accurate figures of coal imports are not available. However, calculations based on such information as is available show that a minimum monthly average of 3/4,000 tons arrived in HONGKONG during the 3 months July/September 1944. This figure does not include inward shipments by small wooden vessels.

Labourers at the Gas Works, which had ceased supply, were reported in October 1944 to be making coal briquettes, 500,000 of which were said to have been made in one month.

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FIREWOOD SUPPLY  
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Supplies of firewood since the middle of 1943 have not been sufficient to meet the demands of the population. It was estimated at the time that daily requirements were in the region of 2,000 piculs. Despite repeated official assurances of ample stocks and frequent press reports of the arrival of large consignments, the shortage remained unrelieved and the price continued to rise steadily.

Wood has been obtained from the New Territories and the immediate hinterland as well as from the outlying islands, the chief collecting points being TAIPO, SHATAUKOK, SHAYUCHUNG, SHUMCHUN and NAMTAU. The wood is conveyed to HONGKONG both by overland transport (railway, hand-drawn carts, etc.) and by junks and lighters. The KOWLOON-CANTON railway, for instance, was reported in November 1943 to be carrying an average of 1,500 piculs of firewood to HONGKONG daily. Large stocks were also said to exist at various places in the New Territories. However, it is believed that a large proportion of the wood cut was used by the Japanese for other purposes, such as railway sleepers, wooden ships, etc. Firewood stocks in HONGKONG were held in several storage dumps, some of which were located in West Point, YAMCHOW Street in SHAMSHUIPO and the open ground beside the railway line from opposite the PENINSULA Hotel to a point opposite GUN CLUB Hill Barracks.

The importation and distribution of firewood, as in the case of many other commodities, was in the hands of a Japanese syndicate. Supplies were rationed to the public through a number of authorized sales depots, the quota being 10 catties per week to each holder of a rice ration card. In August 1943, the official price was MY 21 per picul. This was raised to MY 25 per picul in April 1944, and to MY 35 in July 1944. In reality, however, the public were often unable to obtain supplies through official channels, and a black market for ordinary firewood and old furniture was thus created. Rationing ceased in July 1944, and the official depots were closed down.

The following table shows the constant upward unofficial price trend:-

October	1943	-	MY 25	per picul.
April	1944	-	40	" "
July	1944	-	70	" "
August	1944	-	120	" "
December	1944	-	230	" "
January	1945	-	300	" "

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