



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Hong Kong's place in South East Asia

England, V.M.

Citation

England, V. M. (2024, November 7). *Hong Kong's place in South East Asia*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4107972>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4107972>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Chapter 4 The Parsi Network of the Nineteenth Century

Closely connected to the British trading world — and often fundamental to it — was the densely woven world of the Parsis. This chapter aims to draw a picture of the Parsi world as it moved from Canton to Hong Kong. This is necessary because this group with its Asian roots and re-generating network played a central role in the development of Hong Kong.²⁰⁰ Recognition of their importance comes from the fact that in conventional and/or contemporary British accounts, whereas members of any other minority were called simply 'Malay', 'Indian', 'Chinese' and similar, the individual Parsi was invariably referred to as a 'Parsi gentleman'. In British eyes at least, it seemed the Parsi was a cut above other 'Others'.²⁰¹

Yet the history of the Parsis of Hong Kong has barely been written. The Parsis of Hong Kong (unlike those forming the India-based community) cultivate a discreet, almost invisible presence. Efforts to document their past have been stymied by an unwillingness among the Trustees of the community to invest the time and money necessary. Occasional articles offer only broad outlines. Thanks to one dedicated man, however, this thesis can draw on a unique resource: the papers compiled by the late Jamshed K. Pavri, and shared here by his nephew, Jimmy Master. For Pavri, his work was a celebration of Parsi brilliance in all fields – finance, morality, faith and continuity. Despite this hagiographical approach however, his scrupulous detail of individuals and their connections provides the prosopography needed to gain insight into Parsi networks.

Bombay-born Pavri (1917-1989) moved to Hong Kong aged 17, and to Vancouver, Canada, with his wife Roda Framroze in 1958. A dedicated Parsi from a leading Parsi family, he was ideally placed to chronicle his community. Alongside an active community life, he spent many months over several years making extensive notes in English from the documents left in the Parsi Temple and Offices in Hong Kong, many in Gujarati.²⁰² These include the *Parsi Prakash* magazine from Bombay, along

²⁰⁰ The Far East opened 'as much by contact with India as with European merchants...' Hyde, *Far Eastern Trade*, p2. See also, Allen & Donnithorne. *Western Enterprise*.

²⁰¹ Jamshed K. Pavri recorded a story about the Indian shoes known as Jodas; British law in India required native shoes to be left at door but an exception was made for Parsis. See The Pavri Papers, unpublished, pp189-190.

²⁰² It should be noted that spellings of names shift even within The Pavri Papers.

with records of the Hong Kong Anjuman (Community), which include its past lives in Canton and Macao.²⁰³ In addition, Mr Pavri consulted hard-to-find books, particularly that by Ratanjee Faramji Vatcha, *Mumbai no Bahar*, published in June 1874 by Bombay's Union Press.²⁰⁴ He also actively corresponded with descendants of the great dynasties he discusses, with which his own family is inter-related. These close, collegial contacts garnered much new information. His goal was to encompass the entire history of the Parsis in the East.

The huge significance of his work lies not only in what he collected but in the fact that when the Hong Kong Anjuman demolished its old temple and built a high-rise in Happy Valley, the bulk of the records he had been working on disappeared. Only Mr Pavri's work, here called The Pavri Papers, offers a digest of the earlier, now lost, records. Pavri's nephew, Jimmy Master, has given written permission for use of these records, and laments the failure of his community to take better care of its history: 'Please do use the material from my Uncle's papers, I am sure he would be delighted that it is widely read and used. The notes were compiled during his many visits to Hong Kong in the late 1970s and early 1980s when he visited Hong Kong *en route* to Mumbai, and trawled through the extensive material that was in the old Zoroastrian Club building, and with the re-development of the old property in 1989, I don't think any of the source material exists any more. Much of the material was handwritten in Gujarati, a language which most Parsees can speak, but cannot read...' ²⁰⁵

Pavri was convinced that his Parsi forebears and fellows were special. He ascribes to them a higher moral standing, greater facility in building business empires, and a communal connection and faith not found in another communities. He does not see

²⁰³ Book One of the Hong Kong Anjuman records covers 1845-1849 and 1856-1868 (1850-1855 is missing), including original documents and trust deeds from 1874 printed in 1879 and 1892. Book Two comprises originals for 1869-1898 and copies for 1886-1983. Book Three covers 1884-1898 in photocopies; Book Four is 1899-1906 in photocopies; Book Five is 1907-1913 in originals plus 1909-13 in copies; Book Six covers 1925-1930 in originals and 1916, 1918 and 1925-30 in photocopies. Pavri also consulted an original Printed Trust Deed dated 30 July 1874, printed in 1920, and several books of bound financial statements for 1886-93, pages 1-17 of 1894, 1894-98, 1909-13 (photocopies) and for 1916, 1918, and 1925-30.

²⁰⁴ Vatcha had been part of the Canton community of Parsis and with them was held under house arrest in May 1839, was a signatory to the 13 December 1842 Petition to Sir Henry Pottinger, and a significant donor to the founding of the Canton Anjuman (in 1845). He had been in China since 1836 and retired to Bombay in 1870, where he died on 22 Aug 1893, aged 78.

²⁰⁵ Email correspondence, 2 May 2023.

the need to explain his partiality, but his detailing of family after family offers answers to the riddle of Parsi predominance, showing the Parsi route to success was based on:

1. the forging of an inter-related web of family ties through constructed marital, business alliances and succession between Parsis. Traditionally, a child is only a Parsi if both parents are Parsi; inter-marriage also consolidated family capital.
2. the Parsis enjoyed a starters' advantage, being in the Asian trades before many of their Western collaborators and competitors.
3. they proved adept industrialists - providing the raw materials, then adding value to them, then shipping them on ships they owned, and always, funding their own and others' trade.
4. Above all, they enjoyed genuinely close business and personal ties to the then-dominant power, the British.

Thus, being Parsi directly offered membership of a tightly-woven but cosmopolitan network – it was a ready-made ticket to ride.

How Parsis sweetened Bombay – and seeded their success

Histories of the Parsis pre-dating Jamshed Pavri's important work do not offer the same detail as Pavri's extensive family trees, company lists and commentary. But they do confirm an outline of an early start in international trade. In Tang dynasty times (618-907), in the Chinese dynastic capital of Chang-an/Xian there were Buddhist and Taoist temples and nunneries, one Nestorian church, one Manichean temple — plus four Zoroastrian temples.²⁰⁶ These were for descendants of Parsis who went to China after the Arab invasion of Persia and fall of the Sassanian empire. More Parsis, however, went to India, and Pavri found no link between those in Tang China and those in India. The latter survived and grew, perhaps due to a more tolerant local society, some of them making their way to a very different China almost a millennium later. The story goes that when Parsis first fled Persia to India the local king had told them he had no room for them. In riposte, a Zoroastrian

²⁰⁶ The Pavri Papers cite Edward Schafer's *Ancient China* Time Life Books N.Y., p107; and Dun Li's *The Ageless Chinese* Charles Schreiber's Sons, N.Y. 1971, p173.

priest asked for a full cup of milk, took a teaspoon of sugar and gently stirred it into the milk without spilling a drop. He then told the king: 'If you take us into your kingdom, we will be like the sugar in the milk: we will blend in with you but we will also make your kingdom sweeter'. And so they stayed.²⁰⁷

Christine Dobbin states it was not only a flight from Muslim persecution in Iran c785 which founded India's Parsi community. Forebears of India's Parsi community had long been trading with India, 'Zoroastrian and Christian Persians in the centuries preceding Islam having dominated commerce in the Western Indian Ocean ... Thus the Parsis should not be seen as a refugee community settling down in India as agriculturalists and weavers, woken to commercial life by the European East India Companies, but rather as having much earlier developed a new trading diaspora between the Arab-dominated Middle East and Hindu India. Trade was their pursuit from the time of their arrival.'²⁰⁸

Surat in north-western India was the major trading metropolis of the Mughal Empire and in the seventeenth century was home port to the largest merchant fleet of the Indian Ocean. Its mercantile communities traded with the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and places beyond. What it lacked in a natural harbour it made up for through its deep connections inland with, for example, Agra, Benares and Lahore. From the end of the thirteenth century onwards, Arab and Persian traders lost ground to Gujarati shippers throughout the Indian Ocean. Jews, Jains, Parsis and Hindus were important traders before the Portuguese 'age of discovery' changed the ground rules with armed ships.²⁰⁹ The Portuguese and British built factories in what would become Bombay next to pre-existing merchant houses (Indian, Baghdadi Jewish or others). A marriage treaty between Britain and Portugal in 1661 included the Bombay islands as part of the dowry, hence transferring their ownership from Lisbon to London.

²⁰⁷ Neale, Michael. 'In Praise of Parsis', p263.

²⁰⁸ Dobbin, *Asian Entrepreneurial Minorities*, pp78-79. Her references include Wink, A. *Al-Hind. The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vol 1: *Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam, 7th-11th Centuries*. Leiden: Brill, 1991, p105. Also, Wink, A. "The Jewish Diaspora in India: Eighth to Thirteenth Centuries" *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 24, no 4 (1987): 350-1.

²⁰⁹ Curtin, *Cross-cultural trade*, pp137, 145. Also: Ross and Telkamp, *Colonial Cities*, Ch. 13, Dick Kooiman: 'Bombay: From Fishing Village to Colonial Port City (1662-1947)'.

The East India Company moved in, but what it needed was traders, bankers and artisans. The Company invited all comers, 'offering all religions and communities freedom of worship and management of their own caste affairs.'²¹⁰ Amid the Hindu Banians (adept in banking and money-lending) and, Bhattias (running merchant fleets between Africa and East Asia), and the Muslim Memons, Bohras and Khojas, came the Parsis, moving south from Surat. How did the Parsis outstrip the rest?

Some Parsi chroniclers have simply admired the wealth of the Parsi community yet it was not only Parsis who grew rich through trade. They have highlighted the values of honesty, philanthropy and all-round goodness promoted by their shared Zoroastrian faith. Yet Parsis are not the only people to have a faith encouraging good behaviour. Perhaps it was the quiet confidence of many Parsis in the cohesiveness of their own faith and culture? Or was their success just down to often being first?

Certainly they took risks and tried new things, some of which failed – just as other traders did. They were sometimes smart and sometimes lucky – just as other traders were. But Pavri not only ascribes special skills to explain Parsi success; he also skates over any possible frictions within the community.²¹¹ Alongside their appetite for risk, and knowledge of both English and Chinese languages, he claims for his brethren an 'astounding and business acumen of a far superior calibre'.²¹² Pavri also cites the 'Oriental Memoirs' of James Forbes, who visited India in 1776 and said Parsis were 'active and industrious, they applied themselves to domestic and foreign commerce, and many of the principal merchants and owners of ships at Bombay and Surat [are] Parsees: others learned the mechanic arts, and engaged in the varied manufactures of the loom, the best carpenters and ship-wrights in India'.²¹³

Dobbin stresses more practical aspects, noting Parsi inroads into industrialisation, not least because steam offered new ways to compete in shipping and cotton mills.

²¹⁰ Ross and Telkamp, *Colonial Cities*, p212.

²¹¹ Connections other than trade also lubricated Parsi networks. Pestonjee Ruttonjee Colah wrote against the opium trade (despite his father having done extensive business in it) and was part of a group that took over the 'Rasht Goftan', the Gujarati fortnightly newspaper started in Bombay by Dadabhai Naoroji in 1851; Cursetjee Nusserwanji Camajee, Cursetjee Rustomjee Camajee, Dosabhai Framjee Camajee, Sorabjee Shapurjee Bengalee and Pestonjee Ruttonjee Colah became joint proprietors, running it for ten years at a loss. Pestonjee Colah left for London in 1859 with Dadbhoy Nowrojee and Jamshejee Pallonjee Kapadia, along with students Khurshedjee Camaji, Hormusji Dorabji Camaji and Framjee Rustomjee. He died in Manchester in 1891 aged 62.

²¹² The Pavri Papers, p18.

²¹³ 'Oriental Memoirs' of James Forbes, Vol 1, p79. In The Pavri Papers, pp18-19.

Their entrepreneurial foresight extended to an embrace of the joint stock principle which enabled investors to contribute varying amounts. 'The starting capital of these early industrial ventures was raised exclusively by the families and relatives of the founders, but ultimately numerous Parsis outside the great families proved willing to buy shares in Parsi firms.'²¹⁴ Parsis built Bombay's first cotton mill in 1856; by 1895 they controlled 20 of city's 70 mills. The Parsi Tata clan's steel factories provided railway lines for the British in Mesopotamia in World War One and for colonial east Africa; now they own Jaguar, Land Rover, Tata Steel at IJmuiden in the Netherlands, Air India, Tetley tea and more.

However, Dobbin also finds a moral or at least communal element: 'To be part of these communities of trust, the merchant was required to play an active and steady part in the temple as well as the bazaar. Reverence for religious values was required.'²¹⁵ Whether such values are peculiar to Zoroastrianism seems debateable.²¹⁶ But industrialisation, and the raising of funds within their own community help explain how Parsis of generally quite humble backgrounds were able, within one or two generations to achieve wealth. The cohesiveness of their community enabled a mutually reinforcing circulation of money, goods and familial ties.

Conflicts arose, of course, but each Parsi community in each different place (Bombay, Canton, Hong Kong, Singapore etc) ran, and runs, its own affairs through a body of Trustees; there is no over-arching clerical nor civil authority that can claim governance over the entire community. At stake are matters not only of theology (usually agreed upon by seven hereditary priests), but, as the community became wealthy, vast funds, trusts, endowments, charitable bodies and properties. The Bombay Panchayet, tending to the largest community of Parsis, has long had the largest land bank to manage and was initially regarded as supreme by early traders abroad. But Bombay's remit applies only to Bombay. It has often involved the courts, which concluded that the French wife of R.D. Tata could not be accepted as a Parsi convert; a current case is whether a Parsi woman can be deprived of Parsi rights

²¹⁴ Dobbin, *Asian Entrepreneurial Minorities*, p88.

²¹⁵ Dobbin, *Asian Entrepreneurial Minorities*, p96. She cites Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*: 'Moral peril and economic unreliability were seen to be closely connected,' p385; pp 31, 371, 373.

²¹⁶ See also: Palsetia, 'Mad Dogs and Parsis.'

since she married a Hindu.²¹⁷ Overseas communities are often more liberal; except for India, Pakistan and (recently) Hong Kong, which each have full-time paid priests, religious leadership is voluntary. A marriage or conversion in one place might not be acknowledged in a more orthodox place. Trustees manage community property and decide who may or may not enjoy the benefits of the property.

The basic question is who can be considered a Parsi. Does conversion to Zoroastrianism give full right to the funds, properties, fire temples and Towers of Silence burial rites? What happens when Parsis marry out, and do the children of a couple in which only one part is Parsi qualify as Parsi? It is a struggle over money, land and maintaining the 'purity' of the tribe. Each community is tending towards the more liberal side, but each moves at its own speed.

Trustees cannot and do not get involved in family or other issues unless specifically asked to do so. In small communities, leadership has always rested on a handful of families who have managed their own affairs as they wish. This made for a tightly-woven elite in the early days of the Canton trade and among the first settlers of Hong Kong where members, bound closely together, retained the flexibility to express their faith and sense of belonging according to their time and place.

Pavri's records suggest the primary cause of Parsi success was the depth and breadth of the Parsi network. Profit-making was a family affair and that family was large, international, and trustworthy. Dobbin and others have also shown the importance of financing and industrialisation practices alongside the human ties of trust and family fealty. In this era of British imperial expansion, however, one more factor was vital: Parsi alliances with the British, both personal and professional.

²¹⁷ I am indebted to Jimmy Master for references and context on this subject. See: https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1697846/?_cf_chl_jschl_tk_=cb165f2b9f662405c51918aad3c503c17d938a55-1597817360-0-AOO1MXcWLKWpUXpqbuNCqzucaKGjhDnyzGqksmOi-q0FB1BpQa03YrfSIJ-LlnlYwAXuPRafpM_VbaSzur0UDEPIN-Xslzjl7nsoP1-8-M-1ztqXRfpDvf2fMNdtqwcofuJaQicxvkrZIR3QNviqL8vUFBd9YgRG-A_uy19sEMzmgoGiVw_IVvndXBXINMNzwJrZ7rWHVLIvWl4ZHXvI2F7z82TPAeQvpqpaUkC6WefYiaggv7ZHxk5aNYIaH6YuYBJkEdkxw-IbKOl0UeY2bqoolgv-sDP0u6u8BrI6M_xcCZKwCDJg4Rioiipf9LbZZ_4MWvdc5xVXdwWnRoM2ALp9v5h-IPc8L1iN-7HAPhui Also: https://media.law.wisc.edu/m/2ywnk/sharafis_judging_conversion_to_zoroastrianism.pdf Also: <https://www.scobserver.in/cases/goolrokh-gupta-burjor-pardiwala-parsi-excommunication-background/>

Parsi - British ties

Gaining experience and capital from trading first with the Portuguese and then with the British, Parsi clans began building and owning ships, and warehouses. Soon they were trading on their own account from Bombay to Canton, Singapore and Shanghai. A steady stream of young men travelled between India, through Southeast Asia to China and back. They were learning the trade from their forebears, ready to pass it on to the next generation, unafraid of far-flung travel and ready to work anywhere. Amalendu Guha traces Parsi success to migrant mobility, 'their religious work ethic, their special minority position, their lack of caste prejudices, their production-oriented peasant-artisan background'.²¹⁸ Certainly, Parsis punched above their weight. In 1826, Parsis owned nearly half of Bombay's property but numbered just 10,738 of its 200,000 people.

However, notes Guha, a key to their success in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was 'above all, their acceptability to British patrons as stable collaborators'.²¹⁹ This was not an uneven relationship of powerful Westerner and 'native' middleman. On the contrary, the Parsis were respected by the British because they were not subservient. Guha notes: 'unlike their counterparts in China of the same period, the Indian comprador of the coastal ports was not merely a collaborator; he was also a competitor of the foreign merchant. Both collaboration and conflict were reflected in his vacillating political stand and economic position.'²²⁰

The Parsi's progress from Bombay to Canton and Hong Kong can be seen in a business calendar of 1794, listing the leading Parsi families: Hirjee Jivanjee Readymoney, Sorabjee Muncherjee Readymoney, Nusserwanjee Maneckjee Wadia, Pestonjee Bomanjee Wadia, Faramjee Nanabhai Daver, and Dabida Nusserwanjee Dadyseth. Before the end of the eighteenth century, such families had become major ship-owners: in 1794, nine prominent Parsis owned 21 ships, six of which were engaged in the China trade.²²¹ Armed, of solid teak and heavily staffed, these were smaller than East Indiamen. Tellingly, notes Pavri, Parsis were not exclusive in their

²¹⁸ Tripathi, *Business Communities*. Ch. 8: 'More About the Parsi Sheths: their Roots, Entrepreneurship, and Comprador Role 1650-1918', by Prof. Amalendu Guha, pp109-150. p112.

²¹⁹ Guha in Tripathi, *Business Communities*, p112

²²⁰ Guha in Tripathi, *Business Communities*, p119.

²²¹ The Pavri Papers, pp137-8.

business: 'On Parsi ships, usually the Captain and officers were British. The crew also known as Lascar (from the Persian word Lashkar, meaning army), were native Indians from Gujarat and Chinese.'²²² Ownership, thus power, was Parsi, while management via the officer class was British.

Parsi bonds with the British were often close and personal. By the time the Parsis had reached Canton, they were seen as easier to socialize with than other religious groups. Sharing a drink or two at Bombay's Byculla Club — one of the models used by the founders of The Hong Kong Club in 1846 — was not encouraged but neither was it banned.²²³ The fact that, unlike Muslims, they could drink alcohol has been cited as something which made them appear more user-friendly to the free-drinking British. Parsis also sometimes allied themselves to the British imperial cause.²²⁴ Dobbin confirms: 'A symbiotic relationship grew up between the Parsis and the British which had no comparison in any relationship which existed with the Hindu or Muslim commercial communities.'²²⁵

This connection long predated the birth of Hong Kong but would be foundational to it. Together, these men of London and Bombay saw the potential of Hong Kong's deep water harbour and together they staked the claims that encouraged others to follow.²²⁶ The Pavri Papers offer a multitude of familial combines which over several

²²² The Pavri Papers, p12.

²²³ The Byculla Club's history dedicated several pages to the prominence and dignity of Bombay's Parsi community. Sheppard, *The Byculla Club*, pp11, 14-15, 144-145.

²²⁴ The Pavri Papers, p32. Parsis had moved south to Madras in the 1780s, often on EIC contracts. By 1796, these included Eduljee Rudibaina, Mobed Rustamdaroo, Mobed Jamshedjee, Ramjee Adarbadna, Sohrabjee Meherwanjee Mehta, Bhikhajee Butoo, and Jamaspjee. Meanwhile, Manajee Kukajee took the name Talati, already in Zanzibar, Natal, Durban, China, Cambodia.

²²⁵ Dobbin, *Asian Entrepreneurial Minorities*, p82. And, 'Pamela Nightingale's study of the period shows mutual lending between the Company's servants and the Parsis.' p82. To get faster news of Calcutta opium auctions to Bombay Rustomjee & Pestonjee Muncherjee Co 'made arrangements with Messrs McIntyre & Co of Calcutta to send "express" messengers on foot so that they were getting there four days ahead..' The Pavri Papers, p245.

²²⁶ Neale concludes 'the British formed a symbiotic relationship with Parsi merchants, financiers and middlemen, radiating from Bombay. Parsis effectively became a pillar of Britain's imperial establishment.' Neale, 'In Praise of Parsis', p256. That bond with the British took on many forms. Parsis were friends and mentors to Nehru and Gandhi — being both pro-British and active in the movement for self-rule. Ms Bhikhaiji Cama (1861-1936) was a friend of Lenin and unfurled the tricolour Indian national flag in Stuttgart in 1907. Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) was the first Asian Member of Parliament in London, co-founder of the Indian National Congress, a priest, mathematician and cotton trader, who argued for home rule in both Ireland and India. Sir Mancherjee Bhownaggree was Tory MP for Bethnal Green in 1895; Shapurji Saklatvala was MP for Battersea in 1922. In 2006, Lord Karan Bilimoria of Chelsea, maker of Cobra beer, became the first Parsi member of the House of Lords. Other famed Parsis include the conductor Zubin Mehta and leader of Queen rock band, Freddie Mercury (née Farrokh Bulsara).

decades secured a powerful place in the China trade and so, eventually, in the founding of Hong Kong. As private traders, and among the earliest to engage in China, they were free of EIC rules yet close enough to exploit them. As close allies to the British, in relationships of mutual respect, their choice about when to ease out of Canton was pivotal to the future of Hong Kong.

Mr Readymoney goes to China

According to Jamshed Pavri²²⁷, the first Parsi trader in the China seas was Hirji Jivanji Readymoney in 1756, with two ships, the *Hornby* and the *Royal Charlotte*. H.J. Readymoney was the second of three sons of Jivanji Kukaji Sui (Darji), the Parsi who, apart from Rustom Maneck, had enjoyed the most dealings with the East India Company in the 1700s. Jivanji extended significant finance to the EIC whenever it needed it; 'They always did business buying merchandise paying cash and thus began to be known as Readymoney.'²²⁸ (His other names also indicate the occupation of his ancestors: Sui means needle and Darji means tailor.)²²⁹

Hirji was 43 when he first went to Ningpo in China (further north than Canton), and took the younger, 28-year old Rustamji Dadabhai Nadirshah with him. (Founder of the Nadirshah family clan, Rustamji died in Bombay in 1793, aged 65.) He took a cargo of raw cotton and opium, bringing back supplies of tea, silk and earthenware and was said to have made a two hundred percent profit. He made more trips, via Calcutta to China until the 1780s. Crucially, in Bombay (and probably due to his father's connections), Hirji forged a close trading friendship with John Forbes, formerly of the EIC before founding his eponymous trading firm.

Hirji had no son, so made sure to marry off his daughters to men all in China trade. Daughter Soonaji married Nussewanji Rustomji Banaji, partner in the famous Parsi

²²⁷ The Pavri Papers, pp235-7.

²²⁸ The Pavri Papers, p89.

²²⁹ Shroff as a family name derives from the function of taking payment for services, a word still in use today; Screwalla was for men responsible for the Screw which helped pack cotton; the Allbless family formerly known as Karani got their new moniker due to patriarch Eduljee Maneckjee's job as cook for Sir Charles Forbes, where he was so diligent for nine years that he became a favourite of Sir/Lady Forbes. 'He was in the habit of saying "All Bless" most of the time and hence it stuck as his name and eventually [he] began to be known as Eduljee Allbless.' The Pavri Papers, p164. When Charles Forbes returned to England in 1811, Eduljee started working for his partner, Mr Tasker, and became his broker; this developed into retail trading on his own account, and so his family's move into the China trade.

China trading co Banaji Limji & Co; Soonaji was not only religious and charitable but a very clever woman, which probably helped. (She died on 14 May 1847, aged 84.) Second daughter Jivnai married Naoroji Rustomji Nadirshah, son of the Nadirshah who had accompanied her father on their first trip to China. Third daughter Bhikhaiji married Cursetji Ardeshir Dadiseth (Dadyseth), another family with a powerful and wealthy future ahead in China. Meanwhile, Hirji's younger brother, Muncherji Jivanji Readymoney, went to China once and became a 'known big merchant, vessel owner and land owner, well respected person in Bombay...' before his death in 1786, aged 75.²³⁰ Muncherji's eldest son Sorabji Muncherji Readymoney conducted his China business through (an apparently Muslim) agent, Nakhoda Mia Mohammedali bin Mohammed Husain Roge. Sorabji owned two ships, 'Shah Monocher' and 'Shah Kaikhosrow' and was renowned for feeding 2,000 refugees of the Gujarat famine of 1790 for ten months; like his father he had the honourable position of Akabar in the Parsi religious community, the Parsi Punchayet. He died in Bombay in 1805 aged 50.

Muncherji's second son, Dhunjibhai Muncherji Readymoney, went to China and stayed a few months but on his return to Bombay, died at sea in 1779 aged 28. Another brother, Kaikhosrow Sorabji Readymoney, followed the family business in China but was more interested in life as a literary intellectual in Bombay; he sent his cousin Tehmuljee Rustomjee Readymoney to China in 1824, who would also become agent to Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy alongside running his own business. Another son of Muncherji, Tehmuljee Jivanji Readymoney, also engaged in the family business but led a quiet life until his death in Bombay in 1805, aged 87.

When the patriarch, Hirji Jivanji Readymoney, died, his fortune went first to his wife Cooverbai, 'an intelligent and worthy lady of her days'.²³¹ She proceeded to arrange the child marriage of their first daughter Soonaji's son (Jehangir Nusserwanji Rustomji Banaji) to third daughter Bhikaiji's daughter (Meherbai Ardeshir Dadyseth) - both grandchildren were so young that they sat on lap of Cooverai for the marriage. The point of this arrangement was that Nusserwanji Rustomji Banaji became the Readymoney's adopted son; indeed he received not only the family fortune but the family name. (When Sir Cowasji Jehangir Kt CIE, died in Bombay in

²³⁰ The Pavri Papers, p94.

²³¹ The Pavri Papers, p97.

1878 without an heir, his brother Hirji's eldest grandson Jehangir Jivanji Readymoney took on the knighthood.)

Among other early starters in the China trade was Edulji Bomanji Edulkaka who made a first trip in 1775 and spent nearly 30 years in China. In 1768, Kaikhosroo & Fardoonjee, sons of Dhunjishah Manjishah of Surat, sailed for China with merchandise on their own ship but drowned in a typhoon; the date of their deaths is unknown. In 1774, Muncherjee and Eduljee Camajee went to China; they were sons of Camajee Cooverjee who had gone to Bombay from Surat in 1735 with Lowjee Nusserwanjee Wadia, and died 9 March 1773. Pavri's records show that on 6 March 1790, Eduljee Bomanjee (Edulkaka), Muncherjee Dorabjee Colah, Busserwanji Bhikhajee China and Muncherjee Nowrowji who were in China as agents of Bombay merchants, petitioned John Harrison of the EIC regarding a Chinese merchant who had absconded with their cotton. Eduljee Bomanjee (Edulkaka) and Hormusjee Dorabjee Lashkar were still China agents of Bombay merchants in 1803. The next year, in 1804, they were joined by Dadabhai Nusserwanji.

Other early Parsi traders with China included Hormusji R Chinai (a first trip in 1793), Hormusji S Dolakhau (in 1775), D.M. Readymoney (a first trip in 1779), H.E. Cama (first trip in 1786), and Merwanji M Tabak (in 1790, before joining Jamsetji Jeejeebhoy on a 1799 visit). By 1807, Parsi vessel owners included Hormusjee Dorabjee Lashkari (*Minerva* and *Shah Behram*), Sorabjee Cawasjee Patel (*Albian*), Dhunjibhai Sorabjee Readymoney (*Alexander*), Framjee Cowasjee Banajee and others (*Sulemani*), and Ardeshir Dadibhai Dadyseth (*William*).

When Dadabhai Nusserwanji Modi died in Bombay in 1810, aged 50, he left a business partner, Eduljee Behramjee Modi; they had been trading in China since April 1790. Burjorjee Rustomjee Chinai died in 1816; he had been the main agent of Ardeshir Dadibhai Dadyseth in the China trade. The Parsi said to have visited China most often was Jamshed J. Porter who died in 1837 having made 42 visits. Many more examples exist to show how Parsis were early entrants to the China trade based in Canton and how this enterprising approach enabled them to achieve dominance in trade, ship-owning and finance.²³² Another interlocking kin and

²³² The Pavri Papers, pp89-91, sourced to Parsi Prakash, Vol. 1.

business network was that led by Framjee Ruttonjee Moos, who went to China in 1809. In partnership with Jayachand Laichand and Muncherji Fardoonji Vajifdar he opened the Muncherji Fardoonjee Company for business at China, Calcutta and Madras. Framjee made just two trips to China, but he had six brothers, and the sons of two of those brothers would find a future in China: Hormusji's son Merwanji, and Nusserwanji's son Shapurji. Merwanji went to China with uncle Framjee in 1823 and did not return to Bombay until 1840, (where he died aged 65, in 1863).

In 1814, Jehangirjee Cursetjee Tarachand with Seth Tarachand Motichand left Bombay for Canton, and later became known as Jehangirjee Tarachand. Significantly, Seth was the first Hindu to go to China to trade; he stayed eight years, leaving Jehangirjee to carry on the business from 1822. Jehangirjee later became agent to Sir Jamshetjee Jeejeebhoy, Motichand Amichand and Huthesing Kesarsingh, alongside his own business. In 1826, Burjorjee Framjee Kohidavas first went to China with his maternal uncle Bomanjee Maneckjee Bhandara. By 1830, he seemed to be trading on his own but from 1840 he was in partnership with Dadabhai and Muncherjee Hormusjee Cawasjee and Nusserwanji Bomanjee Modi in the name of Dadabhai Muncherjee Cama & Co in India, and Dadabhai Nusserwanjee Modi at Canton. But China was not enough for every Parsi. In 1828, Sorabjee Cawasjee Kharas started in China, but went from there to Aden in 1840 where he conducted his business, returning to Bombay in time to die there in 1875.

The Readymoneys shows how inter-marriage, business alliances, and an early Parsi start in China made the difference.

Wadia rules the waves – and the trust bank

Another key founding family of Parsi networks from Surat to China was the Wadia. A look at this lineage shows how multi-generational power accrued through trade, in this case through the ownership and building of ships. It also shows the central importance of trust, not only within the Parsi community but beyond it. A closer look, enabled by Pavri, shows the centrality, too, of the Parsi practices of inter-marriage, generational business succession, and close ties to the British.

Lowji Wadia was the leading Parsi shipbuilder; he established the Bombay Dockyard in 1736; he and his descendants stayed in charge there till 1884. His grandson, Pestonjee Bomanjee Wadia, was the most successful of all Wadia, the leading figure among Bombay's Parsis before Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy came along. His agent in China was Cursetjee Faramjee Wadia, who spent more of his life in China than in India, and was the first to be buried in the Parsi cemetery in Macao in March 1829 (aged 48). Pestonjee was also a prominent cotton trader with his own cotton bailing press or 'Screw' (hence origin of the Screwalla Parsi family name), one of the biggest landowners and shipowners of Bombay, and stood as an equal to the [British] Governor of Bombay.²³³ His brother, Hormusjee Bomanjee Wadia, was house broker for Forbes & Co, and dealing mainly with China.

Indicative of the workings of the Parsi community of trust, Hormusjee Bomanjee Wadia had the responsibility (in the absence of banks) to keep the records of the monies of the community, and to act as custodian of same. 'When disputes arose between partners... senior partner handed over the Parsi Punchayet funds to Hormusji Bomanji Wadia, for safe keeping, which he continued until 1823.'²³⁴ When Hormusjee himself once found he was in financial difficulties, he quickly transferred the community funds into a selection of names – himself, plus Nowrojee Jamshetjee Wadia, Framjee Cawasjee Banajee and Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy – and had it all deposited at interest with Remington Crawford Co.

When Hormusjee Bomanjee Wadia died in 1842, aged 74, Forbes & Co rushed supplies of solid silver and coins to his office to restore confidence, showing the strength of the bond between them.²³⁵ Hormusjee's youngest son, Ardaseer Hormusjee Wadia, meanwhile, had a close relationship with Dent & Co, one of the founding firms of the Canton trade (and subsequently Hong Kong). Thanks to that relationship, B & A Hormusjee Co became the Bombay agents for the leading British

²³³ The Pavri Papers, pp145-8.

²³⁴ The Pavri Papers, p152.

²³⁵ The Pavri Papers, p155. Hormusjee's sons and Forbes & Co built the 'Hormusjee Bomanjee', caught in a typhoon, 24 July 1836; 14 Parsis were among all those on board drowned, including Sorabjee Nusserwanjee Nadirshah, Rustomjee Hirjeebhoy Tabak, Shapurjee Bomanjee Guzder, Eduljee Dorabjee Mehta. The ship 'functioned as a floating warehouse for half a million sterling in bullion and the opium consignments from India because it was safer in Hong Kong to store opium and treasure abroad.' Keswick, *Thistle and the Jade*, 1982, p196.

financial institution, the Hongkong & Shanghai Bank. Again, Pavri's granular detail highlights Parsi cohesion, and the central importance of ties with the British.²³⁶

One other Wadia line of note was through Nusserwanji Maneckji Wadia, who secured the agency from the French government to handle their ships and cargoes through Pondicherry. His sons continued the French business while becoming brokers for various British firms. His brother-in-law Muncherjee Jamshedjee Wadia helped found the Canton Chamber of Commerce in 1834.²³⁷ Nusserwanji Wadia had been in partnership with Cursetji Ardeshir Dadyseth; the Dadyseth name can be traced back to Homji Behramji, said to have come to Bombay in 1760. One of his grandsons, Dadibhai Nusserwanji, was a wealthy merchant, cotton trader and shipowner in the London-China trade, who used six agents, some of whom we've already met: Edulji Bomanji Edulkaka who first went to China in 1775 and had houses in Penang and Macao; Rustomji Dadabhai Nadirshah, the young pioneer who went with Hirji Readymoney on the first Parsi trip to China (and whose second son Nowroji had married Readymoney's second daughter Jivnai); Dadibhai Nusserwanji's own eldest son Hormusji; Jamshedji Nanabhai Guzder, who would make seven trips to China; Dosabhai Maneckji Parekh who made 11 China trips before retiring in 1818; and, Faramji Cawasji Banaji – another illustrious name.

Dadibhai Nusserwanji's son, Ardeshir was the first to use the Dadyseth name. Aged 43 when his father died he made a large inherited company even larger, buying more ships, building more houses in Bombay and consecrating more temples. When he died in 1810, his two sons Cursetji and Jehangirji carried on the business for 19 years; Cursetji's sons took on the trade and agencies continued with a variety of British firms; his third son, Homji, married Chandanbai, the daughter of Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy. Almost a century later, one Nusserwanji Jamshedji Dadyseth (Dadi) would be 'son-in-law of Sir Hormusji Nowroji Modi of Hong Kong'.²³⁸

Already, simply by looking at Readymoney, Wadia, Dadyseth, Banajee, Cursetjee, Framjee and others, the hitherto-undercovered centrality of the Parsi presence in the early Bombay-Canton trade is clear.

²³⁶ The Pavri Papers, pp162-3.

²³⁷ The Pavri Papers, p141.

²³⁸ The Pavri Papers, p108.

Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, Jardine's, and Parsi advancement

The most famous tie-up, stemming from a shared shipping disaster in 1809 but coming to fruition in the 1830s in Canton, was that between Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy and William Jardine. As so often, the attention by British chroniclers has gone to the British trader, Jardine, often forgetting the pivotal role of the Parsi Jamsetjee.

Hinnells says: 'It has been estimated that in the 1830s, Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy and Sons were the largest constituent of Jardine Matheson. In the 1830s Jardine's were annually transacting more than £1m worth of business, with Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy and Sons remitting to London about £150,000 per year through Jardine in China.'²³⁹ Jardine Matheson Archives confirm the closeness of the relationship, which reads as a partnership of equals. Jeejeebhoy was not easily intimidated and would freely reject any produce not up to scratch. He personally took the initiative to put their jointly-owned clippers up for sale when they couldn't compete with newly introduced steamers.²⁴⁰ As Hinnells noted: 'Contrary to the popular image of Parsis being cringing and supine in their attitudes to the British, many of the letters complain in strong terms that Jardine Matheson were not obtaining the highest prices they could for opium by trading in different places rather than just in local markets.'²⁴¹ Jamsetjee wanted the best price, wherever it could be got, be that locally in Canton or further afield.

Not only was Jamsetjee pivotal to the entry and survival of Jardine in the China trade – he was pivotal to the development of the Parsi trading diaspora. This is because of that key layer of networking within the Parsi community, beyond marriage and faith, namely the continual placement of sons, brothers and nephews into jobs in the trading firms of one's own or related Parsi family's firms. Just as many young Baghdadi Jews would get their start in Bombay or Hong Kong by working for the expansive Sassoon conglomerate (as would the Kadoories, for example), so would Parsi families, launch their sons into trade via a clerkship in the capacious embrace of Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy & Co. Some such clerks, such as

²³⁹ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, p161. Jardine saw Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy and Sons as the best-managed business east of the Cape.

²⁴⁰ JMA:Reel 58, p105, letter dated 15 Jan 1853, see also Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*.

²⁴¹ Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, pp 161-2. Footnote 38, p162, gives JMA references for same.

Meherwanjee Meneckjee Tabak who first went to China in 1790 and later traded for himself as well as being an agent for then-Sir Jamsetjee, were related to the Jamsetjee family line, but that was not necessary. Any bright Parsi male could apply or, more likely, be put forward by a father or uncle for the best apprenticeship available in international trade.

Among the countless young Parsi men who worked in the Jamsetjee company offices were the related names of Patel, Parekh, Patuck and more. This line begins with Dorabji Nanabhoy, one of the first Parsis to leave Surat for Bombay and then to pioneer in the China trade. In an oft-repeated pattern, he traded his way up, changing his name along the way and founding what Pavri calls the 'illustrious' Patel family of Canton, Macao and Hong Kong.²⁴² The Patel name would soon connect with Parekh, chosen by one branch of the Wadia; successive generations all worked for the Jamsetjee firm, as did Framjee Pestonjee Patuck. Back in Bombay in 1837, he helped form the Cursetjee Cawasjee Co with Cursetjee Cawasjee Banajee and Muncherjee Framjee Camajee thus forming a next layer of prominent kin-connected trading ties. Meanwhile, Dinshawjee Sorabjee Patuck who died in Bombay in 1842, aged 35, had also, with his father, Sorabjee Pestonjee Patuck, been English writer (clerk) in the Jamsetjee firm. After all, Jamsetjee was Dinshawjee's mother Ratanbai's uncle.

Jamsetjee was the youngest son of a poor father, Jeejeebhoy Chanjee Ratanjee Vatcha, born on 16 July 1783 in Bombay and married when still young to his cousin, Avabai. He first worked for his father-in-law, Faramjee Nusserwanji Batiwala, in the empty bottle business. His first visit to China, in 1799, was made with a cousin but by 1802, he was on his own. An 1805 trip was life-changing, according to his own account, published in the *Bombay Courier* on 9 April 1806. The ship he was on was

²⁴² From 1790, Dorabji had been conducting business in the name of Dorabjee Rustomjee Patel Co, with China, Calcutta, Pegu, Rangoon and ports along the way. He first went to China 1793. His brother Cawasjee Rustomjee Patel was also the Boat Contractor of the EIC. Cawasjee died in 1799 and so Dorabjee took over his brother's business; he also owned two ships, *Purshotam*, and *Shah Jehangir*. A next Dorabjee Sorabjee Patel, who died in Macao in 1841, aged 23, had gone to China with his cousin Hirjeebhai Rustomjee Patel, second son of Rustamjee Cawasjee Patell. Rustamjee first went to China in 1834, aged 25, and ended out running a vast business between Macao, Canton, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore, Penang, Calcutta and England, owning up to eight vessels at various times. He stayed in China for 14 years, then moved from Macao to England in 1853, until his death there in 1877 aged 68. (His son, Sorabji, would stay in China and Hong Kong, 1854-64, during which time he also joined the Hong Kong Volunteer Regiment in 1861.)

captured by the French and taken off to Madagascar. Jamsetjee's account curiously omits the key fact that he endured this diversion in the company of young William Jardine. The Pavri papers fill the gap. The ship, the *Brunswick*, now crewed by the French, reached the Cape of Good Hope on 16 September 1805. That night, a massive storm smashed the ship's anchors; the *Brunswick* promptly ran aground. Jamsetjee, Jardine and others had to be offloaded with all goods and find another ship to get them home. Haggling was intense and provisions low until they reached Calcutta on 5 December 1805. Legend has it that the shared disaster made Jardine and Jamsetjee close friends and colleagues thereafter.

After Jamsetjee's fifth trip to China in 1807, he stayed in Bombay, managing an empire spread from Siam to Sumatra, Madras and Calcutta, and Singapore. Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy & Co, was not an entirely Parsi enterprise -- partners were the Hindu Motichand Amichand, and the Muslim Nakhoda Mia Muhamed Ali-Rajeh. 'With appropriate calculation, astuteness and untiring zeal, the business prospered successively and in a short period, Jamsetjee ended up amassing amazing wealth,' says Pavri.²⁴³ He bought at least nine ships and traded in partnership with Remington Crawford & Co of Bombay, and with Jardine Matheson & Co in China, mainly sending raw cotton and opium to China, and bringing bullion back.

Jamsetjee took his sons Khurshedjee, Rustomjee and Sorabjee into the business. A penchant for pomp and splendour emerged, seen in the lavish weddings of the sons, attended by the highest members of British and local government and business in Bombay. In the tradition of all wealthy Parsis, temples were consecrated in Jamsetjee's name and donations made to feed the poor, build wells, schools and hospitals. When Motichand Amichand died in 1836, Jamsetjee set up a trust in Motichand's memory to look after poor Hindus in Surat and Cambay. Jamsetjee was knighted in 1842 (an event marked by a large group of Hindus and Parsis setting up a fund to translate works from European and Asiatic ancient and modern languages into Gujarati, to be made free for all) and made a baronet in 1857.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ The Pavri Papers, p197.

²⁴⁴ This did not come cheaply. Said *Bombay Government Gazette*, 2 Sept 1857: 'This title, which Sir Jamsetjee will enjoy during his lifetime and his male successors for ever, and in order to hold the same with honour and dignity, Sir Jamsetjee gave in trust to the government, a sum of Rs 25 lacs and his palatial Mazagon Castle.'

‘But how can one person, however industrious, astute and even fortunate ... amass such abundant wealth?’ asks Pavri. The answer was China and opium.²⁴⁵

Jamsetjee was no subservient, cringing subordinate to the British. On the contrary, he chose to offer advice to the British government. He wrote to the Governor of Hong Kong, Henry Pottinger, in 1842 warning him against ‘pressing too severely upon the Chinese, who in common with all other nations are entitled to have their prejudices respected and their self-love not too rudely disturbed.’²⁴⁶ He disapproved of the small compensation offered for the surrender of opium stocks in Canton, telling H.N. Lindsay in London: ‘You can have no idea of the ruin and misery which this China War had brought to many families here and abroad.’²⁴⁷ Already by 1851, Jamsetjee was disappointed in the China trade, telling his then partner at Jardine’s, Donald Matheson: ‘Our Trade with China which, even when you were in Hongkong was beginning to be on a reduced scale is now even more limited, and where there are so many competitors in the field it is hardly worthwhile pursuing it. In fact, times are very much changed here ever since you left and many new Houses have sprung up in China.’²⁴⁸

When Jamsetjee died on 14 April 1859, ‘more or less, Bombay came to a standstill ... Since the arrival of the Zoroastrians from Ancient Persia, no Zoroastrian had risen so high in esteem.’²⁴⁹ His sons carried on the business under their own names, with second son, Rustomjee, proving most adept, not least in the lucrative cotton trade during the American Civil War. The southern states had been the dominant source of cotton for mills in Britain and India but these states were blockaded during the war, opening the trade to other players, such as the Parsis. The Lancashire Mills stopped buying from southern states to support Lincoln and bought it from India instead. ‘Several Parsi and Hindu houses were engaged in speculation on a scale and in money which today also astounds us.’ Many firms fell in the subsequent crash.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁵ The Pavri Papers, p217.

²⁴⁶ Thampi, ‘Parsis in the China Trade,’ Note 15: Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy Papers, Vol. 1/11/1842-23/12/1842 pp155-158, letter, 18 March 1842.

²⁴⁷ Thampi, ‘Parsis in the China Trade,’ Note 16, no date given.

²⁴⁸ Thampi, ‘Parsis in the China Trade,’ Note 19: Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy Papers, Vol 2/1/1851-29/12/1851, pp42-43.

²⁴⁹ The Pavri Papers, p227.

²⁵⁰ Pavri lists the 24 Companies with substantial debts: Behramji Hormusji Cama, Rs3 crores; Pestonji Cursetji Shroff, Rs1 crore 30 lacs; Cursetji Fardoonji Parekh, Rs3 crores 50 lacs; Ardeshir Cursetji Dadiseth; Shapurji Dhunjibhai Batiwala (son-in-law of Sir Jjeejeebhoy); Jeejeebhoy Dhunjibhai Batiwala (ditto); Sorabji Pestonji, and Nowroji Nanabhai (close relative to Taramji

Pavri thinks Rustomjee continued the connection with Jardine too - at least until he used his standing in the Bombay legislature to outlaw the sale of opium in 1866.

The name of Jamsetjee recurs constantly in any Parsi chronicle, not least due to the immense pride in his achievement of Baronet status in Britain. Even the histories of Jardine's done by their own family members pay due deference to the vital role played by Jamsetjee in easing Jardine's entrance into the China trade – without which one could argue there might be no Hong Kong.²⁵¹

Parsi Centrality in Canton

Core to the Parsi business in Canton (as to that of most other foreign traders there) was opium. But specific to the Parsi trade was their ability to bring in the Malwa opium from western India; they had the contacts back in India with those growing the opium, they had the financing to support growers in India, as well as to back speculative investments in the China trade; they were trusted to transmit the profits of private British traders out of China (giving the British political cover when needed); they owned the ships to carry traders and the drug; and, they now had a foothold in Canton to oversee its sale. Between 1800 and 1822 the bulk of opium brought to China was Patna (dominated by Armenians in Calcutta) but from 1822-1839 the balance was reversed in favour of Malwa, further helping to entrench Parsi dominance.

From the arrival of Mr Readymoney in 1756, the Parsis lived and worked together in Canton — and with others. They stayed in the Chow-Chow factory, so named because it was inhabited by a diverse group of people - including Parsis, Muslims and other Indians. This was one of the so-called Thirteen Factories, meaning combined warehouse/office/residence buildings lined up in a row along a tiny

Cawasji Banaji); Dosabhai Meherwanji Wadi Co; Meherwanji Nusserwanji Bhowanagree; Dhunjibhai Faramji Patel; Nowroji Ardeshir Daver; Faramji Ardeshir Daver; Dadabhai Behramji Banaji; Limji Maneckji and Maneckji Banaji; Ardeshir Cursetji Fardoonji; Ratanji Jamshehdji Parekh; Sorabji Jamshetjee Jeejeebhoy; Maneckji Shapurji Kaka and Muncherji Hirji; Behramji Nanabhai Banaji; Bomanji Faramji Cama; Rustamji Jamshedji Jeejeebhoy; Karsandas Madhavdas; Kanda Narandas; and Premchand Roychand. Plus another 11 Parsis, four English, 33 Hindu, two Muslim and one Jew debtors — a total of 51 individuals and firms with total debts of more than 7 crores on top of the Rs18 crores and 91 lacs listed above, The Pavri Papers, pp352-3; after settlement, total loss circa Rs 20 crores. But some Parsi firms eschewed speculation and did fine.

²⁵¹ Keswick, *The Thistle and the Jade*, 1982, pp17-18.

stretch of the Canton waterfront. Here stood the 'English factory', the 'Dutch factory' and all the rest, including the Chow-Chow or Parsi factory. All foreign traders at Canton had to spend six months for the annual, Chinese official-prescribed, off-season in nearby Macao; so too with the Parsis, who were first recorded in Macao in 1825.²⁵² (After the Canton Factories burned down in 1856, the trading community moved to Shamian/Shameen island on the Pearl River, edging Canton's trading district; here too, Parsis were early land-owners.)

Jardine, Matheson & Co built the first, fast opium clipper (*Red Rover*), but Parsis built the second when 'the stalwart Parsi princely merchant Rustomjee Cawasjee Banajee of Calcutta' built *Shilft* in 1832. Pavri claims this sailed from Calcutta to Macao in 16 days, 17 hours, making it the fastest ship of the time on the China run. The third opium clipper was the *Cowasjee Family*, also built by Rustomjee Cawasjee Banajee and his sons. Their descendants too would be leading merchants of Hong Kong.

The Parsi habit was (until twentieth century Hong Kong) to transmit wealth back 'home' to Bombay and to retire to Bombay in time to enjoy it and bequeath it to Parsi (and other) charities in Bombay. Many, many pages of The Pavri Papers are dedicated to the habit of philanthropy, first to their own community, but also to hospitals, schools, libraries and other institutions intended to serve the population of Bombay and beyond. In Canton or other China trading stations, Parsis chipped in together to support their own needs – for a meeting ground, a burial place and for any of their number finding themselves in trouble.

Pavri does not recount any cases of one Parsi leaving another in the lurch, although bankruptcies and personal disasters are told from time to time. Instead, writes Pavri: 'Those were the days when at least in the Parsi community there was no malice or competition with others. On the contrary, if someone came into difficult times, others would rush to help and either solve or lessen the troubles. There were others who would encourage young intelligent persons to go into business and assist them. Business was so prosperous that there was enough for everyone.'²⁵³

²⁵² Smith, in 'Parsee Merchants in the Pearl River Delta', details Parsi residents of Macao, and describes the house and goods of Heerjeebhoy Rustomjee in Macao as his finances collapsed. Three Parsis were among successful bidders for land at Shameen in 1861; in Macao by contrast, the 1863 directory offers only one Parsi, Framjee Bomanjee; by 1872 this had grown to five.

²⁵³ The Pavri Papers, p183.

Similarly mystical, perhaps, was Osmond Tiffany, writing in 1849: 'The Parsees are the most remarkable of any of the races in Canton.. They give feasts and drink wine, and cheer vociferously, and are a jolly set. Their dress is peculiar, in summer a white robe fitting closely to the back and arms, with wide pantaloons of the same, or of red or blue. In the cold season they have dark colored coats cut in the same fashion, and edged with red cord. Their hair is shaved in part, leaving it growing at the temples, and all wear the most enormous moustaches, which may often be seen as one walks behind them.. many of them speak English well, and all are very courteous in their manners.'²⁵⁴

Behind the exotic looks, meanwhile, Parsis were deploying a range of techniques designed to propel their trading success. Family ties and personal perseverance underpinned Parsi financial success, from Bombay to China and ultimately to Hong Kong. That nexus of names – Readymoney, Banaji (Banajee), Dadyseth, Cowasji (Cowasjee) – would form a core within the earliest Hong Kong elite.

Madhavi Thampi notes, 'In contrast to the Bengali traders from Calcutta known as the banians...the Parsis were distinguished by their willingness to travel personally to China. They were even prepared to spend years far from their homes setting up and working in their family establishments.'²⁵⁵ In 1809, when only one private English trader was resident in Canton, there were several Parsis. By 1831, alongside 32 English traders were 41 Parsis; in 1835, with 35 English were 52 Parsis. 'Generally speaking, they were known as aggressive traders who collaborated with the British, especially the private traders, when it suited their interests, but were also ready to differentiate their position from that of the British when they felt their interests demanded it.'²⁵⁶

They also, crucially, were ever ready with their money. They had the capital and the family-backed confidence to lend their money liberally. They were soon the vital cash connection between Canton and Bombay. Most Chinese merchants soon found themselves indebted to the Parsis; most British would find they could not trade

²⁵⁴ Osmond Tiffany, Jr. *The Canton Chinese, or the American's Sojourn in the Celestial Empire*. Boston: James Munroe and Co, 1849, in Garrett, *Heaven is High, the Emperor is Far Away*, p84n10, pp 244-6.

²⁵⁵ Thampi, 'Parsis in the China Trade,' p19.

²⁵⁶ Thampi, 'Parsis in the China Trade,' p20.

without them. Caroline Dobbin asserts that the westerners' China trade would simply not have been possible without the Parsis:

'These private traders now had a key role in Britain's important China trade, for they transferred the funds realised by this trade in sales at Canton to the East India Company's treasury there in return for bills of exchange on London or the Indian government revenue. Without this the China trade could not have been financed, and it was on this basis that the Bombay agency houses built their prosperity...Parsis, then, were the key mediating community, between the British and the products of India they desired to export. All the [several dozen] prominent Parsi families had extensive interests in China and acquired enormous wealth.'²⁵⁷

Parsis were at the centre of all major events in Canton. Signatories to a Petition to London to end the EIC monopoly on trade with China, dated 24 December 1830, included seven Parsis but, says Pavri, the biggest Parsi names were not listed, perhaps to hedge their relationships with the EIC (whose last monopoly, on the China tea trade, was not abolished officially until 1833). Also in 1830, when three members of the Select Committee of the EIC in Canton were leaving Canton for Bombay, their farewell address was also signed by five Parsis: Framjee Pestonjee Patuck, Nanabhai Framjee Cawasjee Banajee, Burjorjee Maneckjee Chinai, Jehangirjee Cursetjee Tarachand, and Meherwanjee Hormusji Moos.

Dadabhai Rustomjee Banajee of Calcutta played a key role in the early China trade offering, for example, to look after the sick Lord Napier in 1834. Napier was there in an attempt to broker easier trade relations with the Chinese but talks were not going well and Napier had become seriously ill. Banajee's offer helped negotiators to reach the compromise to allow Napier to leave Canton for Macao, where he died on 11 October 1834.²⁵⁸ The petition led by Dadabhoy Rustomjee which implored Lord Napier not to make trouble with Governor-General Lu Kun as it risked a stoppage of trade, earned the Parsis 'nothing but censure and scorn from the *Canton Register* [newspaper] and others, accusing them of going above their station and presuming to speak for all British traders.' The Parsis rejected the sneer of being 'a tribe of men', insisting they spoke only in hope of achieving the resumption of their own trade.

²⁵⁷ Dobbin, *Asian Entrepreneurial Minorities*, pp84-85.

²⁵⁸ Carroll, *Canton Days*, pp169-170.

Says Pavri: 'The Parsis formed a formidable group of traders in Canton. Dadabhai Rustomjee Banajee headed the group of 24 Parsi merchants. The Banajees were the biggest merchants and equalled Dent & Company and Jardine Matheson. They had a total of 20 ships engaged in their China trade.'²⁵⁹ Pavri also lists the 47 Parsis who were part of an elaborate farewell to William Jardine in 1839. This largest, most lavish dinner in the history of China's foreign community,²⁶⁰ took place in the British consular hall, formerly the EIC's grand hall, under Jardine's initials spelled out in lanterns. The toasts began, first to Queen Victoria, then the US President, then to Jardine himself. Speeches included one by Parsi merchant Dinear Dorabjee. Jardine made a point of toasting his Parsi partners, saying, according to the *Canton Register*: 'under the turban were to be found some of the most enterprising, skilful, and successful merchants of the East'. He lauded their business acumen, their charity, their philanthropy. Says Pavri: 'Jardine was always friendly with the Parsis for it was Framjee Cawasjee Banajee who got him started and later Sir Jamshedjee Jeejeebhoy helped him to become stronger.'²⁶¹

Throughout the build-up to the first Anglo-Chinese or Opium War (in 1839), Parsis were present. Parsi names were on the Memorial sent to British foreign secretary Lord Palmerston on 24 May 1839. This listed Chinese acts of aggression, stoppage of

²⁵⁹ The Pavri Papers, pp39-40. The 24 Parsi names he listed are: Dadabhai and Maneckjee Rustomjee Banajee, Nanabhai Framjee Cawasjee Banajee of Nanabhai & Pestonjee Cawasji Banajee, Muncherjee Jamshedjee Wadia and his son Nusserwanjee of Muncherjee Jamshedjee & Sons, Bapujee Vicajee Meherjee, Framjee Muncherjee Colah of Framjee Muncherjee Colah & Sons, Dorabjee Hormusjee Laskari of Hormusjee Doradjee Laskari & Sons, Bomanjee Maneckjee Bhandara of Permananda Maneckjee, Burjorjee Fardoonjee Parekh of Jamshetjee Jeejeebhoy Co, Dhunjibhai Mucnherji Petigara, Cawasjee Shapoorjee Langrana (brother of Muncherji Cawasji Shapurji Langrana (Mansukh - poet and writer), Jamshedjee Burjorjee Chinai, Bomanjee Jamshedjee Mulla, Framjee Jamshedjee Screwalla, Eduljee Fradoonjee Khambatta, Rustomjee Burjorjee Modi, Dosabhai Fardoonjee, Nusserwanjee Jamshedjee, Jamshedjee Nusserwanjee [sic], Hormusjee Behramjee Handa, Sorabjee Nusserwanjee, Dosabhai Rustomjee Seth, and Dimanjee Dorabjee Bengalee. The eight Parsis who joined 16 British merchants to form a first trading council were Dadabhai Rustomjee Banajee, Burjorjee Fardoonjee Parekh, Framjee Muncherjee Colah, Nanabhai Framjee Cawasjee, Muncherjee Jamshedjee Wadia, Dorabjee Hormusjee Laskari, Bapoojee Vicajee, and Bomanjee Maneckjee Bhandara. Pavri says the most important Parsis in the opium trade were Framjee Muncherjee Colah and Dadabhai Rustomjee Banajee.

²⁶⁰ Carroll, *Canton Days*, pp131 ff.

²⁶¹ The Pavri Papers, p43. He describes the Chamber of Commerce meeting in Canton on 24 November 1836, which included two Parsis, Dadabhai Rustomjee Banajee and Framjee Pestonjee Patuck. By 21 March 1838, Banajee was joined by Hirjeebhai Rustomjee Patel and Dinshaw Fardoonjee Panday. This Council meeting sought a way to avoid confiscation of opium stocks, in vain. On 25 March 1839, a Petition to Commissioner Lin, again to try to avert confiscation, included the names of 22 Parsis, including Banajee, Chinai, Bhandara, Patel, Panday, Screwalla, Dolakhan, Handa, Irani, Tabak, Mulla-Ferozna, Sethna, Hosangjee, Ranjee, Mehta. p50.

trade, detention, confinement, forced bonds and related hardships. Dadabhai Rustomjee Banajee alone had to hand over 1,000 chests of opium when the Chinese Commissioner Lin Zexu confiscated foreign stocks of opium and had it burned on 3 June 1839. Of 16 foreigners singled out by the Chinese after house arrest as the main offenders at the time, prohibited from leaving Canton, were four Parsis: Dadabhai Rustomjee Banajee, Bomanjee Maneckjee Bhandara, Hirjeebhai Rustomjee Patel and Framjee Jamshedjee Screwalla.

Camajee clan's clues to how kin works

The Camajee family, extending from Surat to China, Southeast Asia and into Hong Kong, offers just one example of how Parsi kin networks worked, illustrating to what extent the Parsi network was foundational to Hong Kong. The Camajee clan shows the size of Parsi networks, the experience of both ups and downs in trade, yet the perseverance in trade and thus the expansion of those networks.

The family line started with Cooverjee Bhimjee, aged 20, leaving Surat for Bombay in 1735, in the company of the original scion of the Wadia family, Lowjee Wadia. Cooverjee had two sons, Camajee and Kohanjee; then Camajee had two sons, Eduljee and Muncherjee.

One of Eduljee's sons, Hormusjee Eduljee Camajee, went to China with the Eduljee Bomanjee Edulkaka who had first reached China in 1775; he learned Cantonese, was agent to Hormusjee Bomanjee Wadia, and took his cousin Faramjee Muncherjee Camji to China. A mysterious allegation against him by a Chinese merchant involved him in costly litigation; 'In the process of defending his honour and name, he lost most of his wealth and became almost broke.'²⁶² But in 1818, Faramjee Cawasjee Banajee took pity and made him his China agent; he soon secured other agencies from Bombay and Chinese merchants and retired to Bombay in 1823 with a respectable fortune. Says Pavri: 'After his retirement, even the Bombay government asked for his services in dealing with the Bombay Chinese community ... as a Chinese language translator whenever some disputes arose between the local Chinese and the government...'²⁶³

²⁶² The Pavri Papers, p187.

²⁶³ The Pavri Papers, p187.

Hormusjee Eduljee Camajee's second of four sons, Dadabhoy Hormusjee Camajee, went to China in 1825. By 1833, third son Muncherjee joined him, and so was established Dadabhoy Muncherjee Camajee & Co, China. On 26 October 1840, this took in two more partners: Nusserwanjee Bomanjee Mody and Burjorjee Faramjee Kohidaroo, thus the new company name in Bombay became Dadabhoy Nusserwanjee Modi & Co; by 1845, this was also the Burjorjee Faramjee Co in Calcutta. Third son Muncherjee had travelled to London in 1854 to establish Cama & Co; by 1861 he had started and become first president of the London Anjuman, but Cama & Co was closed by 1863 and he returned to Bombay the next year. With no heirs of his own he adopted the son of his older brother Nusserwanji. Meanwhile, youngest son, Behramjee Hormusjee Camajee, had opened a company in Singapore. 'During the American Civil War he made substantial profits and amassed a big fortune.'²⁶⁴ The brothers also started the Cama Insurance Company in 1852. 'The Cama family members amassed substantial wealth in their business with China and made good use of the money in charitable worthy causes,' concluded Pavri; indeed they do well in early Hong Kong too.²⁶⁵

Stepping back to Cooverjee's other grandson, Muncherjee, there lies a larger and more venerable lineage in the China trade. Muncherjee's first son, Faramjee, had already gone to China with his cousin Hormusjee Eduljee Camajee before 1800 and was doing a large business with China in agate stone, good quality English earthenware and opium. Second and third sons, Hosmusjee and Nusserwanji, worked in Bombay in the offices of Burjorjee Nanabhai Daver and Nusserwanji Petit respectively. They then joined their older brother's China business, thus forming Faramjee & Nusserwanji Muncherjee Cama Co, later changed to Nusserwanji & Faramjee Cama Company. But Faramjee died in 1823 aged 43, and Hormusjee died in 1828 aged 44, leaving Nusserwanji solely responsible for all his brothers' offspring, akin to a small village.

In time-honoured fashion, Nusserwanji Muncherjee Camajee brought his oldest brother's oldest son, Muncherjee Faramjee Cama, into the business and so, from 24 October 1832, it was the Muncherjee Camajee Co. On going into partnership with

²⁶⁴ The Pavri Papers, p192.

²⁶⁵ The Pavri Papers, p193.

Cursetjee Cawasjee Banajee (in 1838) it became Cursetjee Cawasjee Co., where Muncherjee Faramjee Cama became a partner, owner of five ships, House Broker for Graham & Co., and a large land-owner in Bombay. He also became known as 'Bhatia' for his simplicity and frugality in life. He had two sons, Meherwanjee and Hormusjee, who continued the business until 1871, and three brothers – Pestonjee Faramjee Cama, Bomanjee Faramjee Cama and Dosabhoy Faramjee Cama. Pestonjee with his brother Bomanjee had established Pestonjee & Bomanjee Faramjee Camajee & Co, in Bombay in 1842. Then with younger brother Dosabhoy, they established Dosabhoy Framjee Cama & Co. in Calcutta; Pestonjee Faramjee Cama & Co. in Canton and Shanghai; and, Hormusjee Jamasedjee Nadirshah & Co. in another Chinese treaty port, Amoy. These brothers did well. 'Business was successful and generated wealth and prosperity in the big Cama family.'²⁶⁶ Alongside Bomanjee, Dosabhoy Faramjee Camajee opened P & DF Cama & Co and in 1862 travelled from London to New York on the then biggest liner, the 'Great Eastern', and travelled round America, the first Cama to do so. Indeed, Dosabhoy had a sense of adventure, managing to be in Afghanistan during the attack on the British residency in Kabul of September 1879; he lived to be 69, dying in Bombay in 1892.

Having made sure the family line of his oldest brother, Faramjee, was secure, uncle Nusserwanjee Muncherjee Camajee also looked to his own four sons, all of whom carried on the family business. The two oldest sons, Dadabhoy and Dhunjibhoy, were in Canton when the Canton Anjuman was established on 19 September 1845.²⁶⁷ Third son Khurshedjee started his own business in 1843 based in Bombay (Khurshedjee Nusserwanjee & Co), Calcutta (P & C.N. Cama & Co.), and China (Dorabjee Nusserwanjee & Co). The latter was largely run by younger brother Dorabjee, in China for most of his life from the age of 14, particularly in Shanghai, where he died in 1882, aged 62. Meanwhile Kurshedjee owned two ships, 'Mermaid' and 'Ardaseer', and became a partner in Cama & Co in England in 1855. He established several joint stock companies: Bombay Merchants' Insurance Co., Paper

²⁶⁶ The Pavri Papers, p175. Bomanjee Camajee also had four sons: Faramjee, Pochajee, Hormusjee, Nusserwanji, Bomanjee Camajee.

²⁶⁷ The Pavri Papers, pp170-171. Pavri describes the Camajees as reformist Parsis, as 'even before this, the Cama family members amongst themselves made a declaration in writing on November 14, 1844, that expensive and superstitious ways of the Parsis like and especially at the time of funerals, uthamna and ceremonies of the dead where friends and relatives come daily for 10 to 30 days, called "Pathernas", collection of monies for charitable purpose in the name of the deceased, the Cama family members would do no such thing.'

Manufacturing Co., Native Insurance Co., Mercantile Steam Navigation Co., Royal Spinning & Weaving Mills, Vikas Patent Ship, Victoria Patent Bricks Co. and more. Of Khurshedjee's seven sons, one became a London barrister.

Meanwhile, Nusserwanji's other brother who had died young, Hormusjee Muncherjee, also had four sons. The oldest of these, Pestonjee Hormusjee Camajee took his first trip to China in 1845, returning to Bombay in 1852. 'Prior to going to China he, with his cousin Cursetjee Nusserwanjee Camajee and some other China Parsi merchants, started the Parsee Insurance Society on September 28, 1844, with 102 shares of Rs 1,500 each.'²⁶⁸ Despite news reports that this venture failed, Pavri claims, either through loyal hagiography or because his sources in Parsi records were better, that 'By 1871, the Camajees had made so much money that they voluntarily closed their business.' Back in Bombay, Pestonjee had set up a range of charitable trusts and displayed a more than usual fervour for British royalty; he secured the Duke of Connaught in 1883 to lay a foundation stone for a women's hospital he had founded in his own name. By 1887 Pestonjee Hormusjee Cama had been made a CIE (Companion of the Indian Empire).²⁶⁹

Pestonjee's closest brother, Dosabhoy, although often eclipsed by his star-powered sibling, was active in the China trade and in Canton had been trustee of Anjuman funds. Next brother, Rustamjee Hormusjee Camajee had first been to China in 1833 but preferred Bombay where he started Dinshaw Rustomjee & Co., importing English merchandise, but dying young, aged 27, in 1839. Fourth brother, Ruttonjee Hormusjee Camajee, joined the family firm of Hormusjee Muncherjee Camajee & Co. in Canton and also started his own firm, Ruttonjee Hormusjee Camajee & Co. Highly educated with excellent English he was instrumental in founding the Canton Anjuman (donating funds and being a Trustee), before he too died aged 27, in 1851.

Khurshedjee Rustomjee Cama, meanwhile, was the son of Rustamjee Hormusjee Camajee. Because his father had died when he was just seven years old, Parsi kinship patterns kicked in to support him. His mother arranged with his uncle Dosabhoy to marry off young Kurshedjee to Dosabhoy's daughter when he was just

²⁶⁸ The Pavri Papers, p178.

²⁶⁹ The Pavri Papers, p179-180.

eight years old. He was then educated and sent to Calcutta to learn the business and from there, in 1850, to China where he was made partner in the family business. Back in Bombay, however, he chose to become a scholar of languages and teacher of Zoroastrianism. After his death in 1909, the K.R. Cama Oriental Institution was founded to hold his library and be open to all.

Thus did the Camajee clan cover all the bases of Parsi worthiness. They constructed multi-generational lineages to conserve and expand wealth-generating networks, they traded through success and loss, and contributed to the betterment of their community through philanthropy and even intellectual endeavour.

First Parsis of Canton to Hong Kong

Before the war which handed Hong Kong to the British, 15 ships (out of a 27-strong war fleet) were chartered from Dadabhai Rustomjee Banajee's father, Rustomjee Cawasjee Banajee of Calcutta; another in the fleet was owned by Framjee Cawasjee Banajee. When Britain finally embarked on war with China in 1839, the British Commander's lead ship, HMS Wellesley (and HMS Melville) had been built at Wadia's Bombay Dockyard. Crowning Parsi involvement is the fact that the Treaty of Nanking was signed on board the Parsi-built HMS Cornwallis, on 29 August 1842. Along with opening five Treaty Ports on the China Coast, this ceded Hong Kong Island in perpetuity, making Hong Kong a British Crown Colony.

Among the Parsis who stood alongside the leading British traders when the British flag was raised at Possession Point on 26 January 1841 was Faramji Meherwanji Talati. His family firm was the second to start trading in Hong Kong,²⁷⁰ although the family heritage lay in tax collection: Talati means revenue collector and the original patriarch, Kukaji Aspuji Talati, had three sons, the eldest of whom, Manaji Kukaji Talati, was given the 'Talati-ship', or revenue farm over 18 villages of Navsari and Pachora, Surat. Pavri's notes²⁷¹ reveal his frustration at being unable to pin down the exact family tree to arrive at this first Talati to reach China, in 1827.

²⁷⁰ The Pavri papers, pp270-272.

²⁷¹ The Pavri papers include a letter from Pavri to Pesi and Minnie Sorabji Talati, pp279-281, resident at La Clara Mansion in Hong Kong, dated 2 July 1989; no answer to the letter could be found. He asks for details of Pesi's father in Shanghai mentions other Talati names in Hong Kong: Dadabhai Dinshawji Talati, to HK in 1890s or so, rtnd Bombay 1 April 1899, rtnd HK until 1904; Hormushah Dadabhai Talati (perhaps son of above), his name also in HK Anjuman book of

Faramjee Meherwanji Talati founded F.M. Talati & Co. in Canton, whose major business was opium and which moved to Hong Kong in 1842. His son, P.F. Talati, took over the business in his own name (Pestonjee Framji Talati), trading not just opium but also precious stones, jewels, oils and more, before dying in Hong Kong in 1919, aged 58. Meanwhile, a Meherwanjee Pallanjee Talati, born in Bombay in 1872, left his work as a solicitor there to reach Hong Kong in the late 1800s, whereupon a company emerged as M.P Talati & Co.²⁷² The name lives on in Hong Kong.

These networks of connections among Parsis, and between Parsis and other leading merchants — often deep and personal — transformed the first settlement of Hong Kong in 1841 from a purely ‘white’, Western or British exercise into something quite different. This stepping on to the Hong Kong foreshore was a more broadly Asian and Eurasian extension of pre-existing ties into a new base off the edge of China. Those pre-existing trading routes, with their roots in the South and Southeast Asian waters which these traders had sailed together for so long, were Asian routes. For these to grow (and along the way settle Hong Kong), they needed their Asian traders. Foremost amongst these traders stood the Parsis.

This can be seen at the first auction of land along Hong Kong’s foreshore. Held on 14 June 1841, it was far ahead of any legal right to the land (enshrined by a Treaty which was not signed until August 1842). Officials (including Portuguese clerks from Macao who would themselves become leading lights of Hong Kong society)

1903 and 1904; Nowroji Edulji Talati, name appears in HK in 1872; K.H.N. Talati, name appears 1898-9 as having offices in HK, Shanghai and Japan, with a partner called Rustamji Aspandiarji Sethna in Japan, doing pearl business and visiting Paris regularly for this; Jamshedji M. Talati, in Peking, who had hotels in Peking and Tientsin, and had written to the Shanghai Anjuman requesting a Navjote ceremony (by Mobed Saheb) for daughter — ‘Your father Sorabji was the Chairman of the meeting of 20-4-1932 where Jamshedji M. Talati’s letter was discussed and it was agreed to send the Mobed Saheb to Peking’... The Pavri Papers, p280. Pavri continues, to list Ratanji Sorabji Talati in HK 1886, left 1888; Nusserwanji Talati, relative of Jamshedji M. Talati, wife was Navajbai, probably also in Peking, who might have more daughters including Freny; Bapsy Sorab Talati had a Navjote performed for her — ‘This Bapsy is your sister I hope’, p280. He adds: ‘Your father was appointed Trustee of the Shanghai Anjuman on March 18, 1925... If you know the name of your grandfather and if that would be Pestonji Meherwanji Talati, we will have a complete genealogy. In 1934, there was only one Talati family in Shanghai, your own.’ p281. Pavri asks when Pesi’s father went to Shanghai, when he went to HK etc. ‘I had a booklet prepared at the time of your wedding...now in the Manchester University Library.’

²⁷² Meherwanjee P Talati married Cooverbai (daughter of Burjorjee and Modi of Surat), herself a graduate; he became president of the Hong Kong Anjuman. They had a son, Burjor, sales representative for the leading Hong Kong firm Taikoo Sugar Co., who died young; Cooverbai published a book on Zoroastrian religion in 1954.

hastily drew up a series of 'Marine' and 'Inland' Lots, the best ones being those facing the all-important sea. The buyers needed the money and ambition to take a chance on the legalities in order to claim a vital part of that sea shore.

Aside from the British were four Parsi buyers of land: Heejebhoy Rustomjee, Dadabhoy Rustomjee, Framjee Jamsetjee and Pestonjee Cowasjee.²⁷³

Heejebhoy Rustomjee appeared first in Canton as resident there in 1825; he stayed in Canton, Hong Kong and Macao until 1857. Being close to William Jardine, he bought Marine Lot 10 at this first land sale in 1841 and by 1843 had transferred it to Jardine Matheson & Co; he also bought Marine Lot 11 and 24, the latter being taken over by military for storage of ordinance. He was keen to fund a first seamen's hospital in Hong Kong but struck financing difficulties, whereupon Jardine's funded it instead. Pavri explains that only ten days before the auction, the cousin he had brought with him to China in 1839 (Dorabjee Sorabjee Patel) had died in Macao aged 22. 'Heerjeebhoy Rustomjee's contribution appears to have gone flat as Heerjeebhoy came into financial difficulties... Jardine Matheson and other merchants provided money and the hospital was established in 1844.'²⁷⁴

Dadabhoy Rustomjee (Dhunjibhoy Ruttonjee Bisney) bought Marine Lots 5 and 20 with the latter later taken by the government for part of the naval dockyard. He built himself a house on Lot 5, then changed his mind about living in it, preferring to stay based in Macao. This was the house offered as lodging for Chinese Commissioner Keying on his visit to Hong Kong in November 1845, hence its new name, 'Keying House', until it became the British Hotel, later to be sold to Dent's. Dadabhoy Rustomjee can be traced back to seventeenth-century Bhivandi near Surat, from where Banajee Limjee came to Bombay in 1690 as an employee for the EIC. In early 1700, he started Banajee Limjee Co, with sons Behramjee, Maneckjee, and Limjee. With offices in Calcutta and elsewhere, he owned ships and did philanthropy in the generous Parsi way. Behramjee had five sons: Nanabhai, Rustomjee, Dadabhai, Muncherjee, Cawasjee. Son Nanabhai started his family name of Daver and all went

²⁷³ The full list of buyers: Dhunjibhoy Ruttonjee Bisney, Dent & Co, Dirom & Co, Ferguson, Leighton & Co, James Fletcher & Co, Fox, Rawson & Co, Framjee Jamsetjee, W & F Gemmell & Co, Gribble, Hughes & Co, R Gully, Charles Hart, Holliday & Co, Hooker & Lane, Jamieson & How, Jardine Matheson & Co, Captain Larkins, Lindsay & Co, MacVicar & Co, Captain Morgan, Pestonjee Cowasjee, P.F. Robertson, Heejebhoy Rustomjee, Turner & Co, Robert Webster.

²⁷⁴ The Pavri Papers, p252.

well in the family business until a dispute in 1790. According to Pavri's notes, Nanabhai Daver and Faramjee Cawasjee Banajee also 'had very extensive business with China'.²⁷⁵

The Banajee family business with China started with Faramjee Cawasjee Banajee, maternal nephew of Dadibhai Nusserwanjee Dadyseth who had extensive China business since 1775; young Faramjee went as agent for his uncle to China in 1796 and 1798, then started his own business as a supplier of stores to EIC ships, buying his first ship in 1805. Faramjee prospered, and bought more ships: 'In 1820, Faramjee Cawasjee Banajee sent William Jardine to sell his Malwa opium.'²⁷⁶ Jardine had already shared his *Brunswick* adventure with Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, and now here was another fruitful Parsi partnership — all long before Jardine and Donald Matheson formed their own partnership as Jardine Matheson & Co in 1828. Pavri says Faramjee's partnership with William Jardine didn't last long as Faramjee 'desired to terminate this pernicious commodity and never again touched opium during his lifetime.'²⁷⁷

Faramjee's sons also entered the China trade: 'The Banajees were highly respected and well known China merchants.'²⁷⁸ Faramjee also had six brothers, of which the fourth, Limjee, was son-in-law to the famed Ardeshir Dadibhai Dadyseth. Fifth brother, Cursetji Cawasjee Banajee, started modestly, supplying British ships but 'With honesty and hard work, he slowly collected a small fortune'.²⁷⁹ Being son-in-law to Cursetjee Ardeshir Dadyseth, and broker to British companies, 'made him sufficiently rich to embark upon still further lucrative China trade.'²⁸⁰

The result was the Cursetjee Cawasjee Company - in partnership with two other China traders, Faramjee Pestonjee Patuck and Muncherjee Faramjee Cawasjee – the latter who we have met already through the Camajee family line. The partnership lasted three years before dissolving amicably as Cursetji Cawasjee's sons were now ready to join instead, thus, from 1842, existed Cursetjee Cawasjee Sons & Co.

²⁷⁵ The Pavri Papers, p110.

²⁷⁶ The Pavri Papers, p111.

²⁷⁷ The Pavri Papers, p 112.

²⁷⁸ The Pavri Papers, pp118-9.

²⁷⁹ The Pavri Papers, p114.

²⁸⁰ The Pavri Papers, p114.

Faramjee's sixth brother, Rustomjee, along with his siblings, 'brought the greatness and glory of the Banajee name to its highest peak'.²⁸¹ He 'conducted his business on a scale which far exceeded that of any other trader of his times'.²⁸² When his older brother Framjee turned his back on opium, Rustomjee took it up and brought his sons into it, Dadabhai and Manekjee. 'Dadabhai was destined to play a leading part in China and could perhaps have become the pioneer settler there had the business not suffered unexpected huge losses and was liquidated'.²⁸³ Rustomjee meanwhile broke with tradition by bringing his wife from Bombay to Calcutta, and his daughter, Mithibai, who married Meherwanjee Jehangirjee Banajee, the grandson of Framjee Cawasjee Banajee. A brother of his wife opened an office in Singapore; back in Calcutta, Rustomjee held a 500-guest ball to open his lavish mansion there in 1837; he owned 27 ships, more than the 20 ships of the EIC, and was the driving force behind the Kidderpore Docks of Calcutta. Only when his older brother Cursetjee died bankrupt in 1847 was Rustomjee's business broken. The China company fell too, carrying huge losses. But his son, Dadabhoy Rustomjee Banajee had been one of the first buyers in Hong Kong's first land auction.

The next Parsi purchaser of land in the 1841 auction was **Framjee Jamsetjee**, who has the honour of being the first settled Parsi resident in Hong Kong — 'but he appears to have been a reluctant resident, as he repeatedly advertised his property for rent or sale until the day of his departure from Hong Kong'.²⁸⁴ Framjee was an independent trader, not connected to any firm or partnership. He lived in Canton 1834-39, and in Hong Kong's first land auction bought Marine Lot 36, where he built a small house and sea wall. By 1844, the thrill had gone, and it was advertised for sale as 'that pleasant and healthy residence known as Framjee's bungalow surrounded by well stocked garden and commanding a fine view of the bay with a large sea frontage'.²⁸⁵ Framjee had an office in European-dominated Queen's Road Central as well as in the thriving local business zone of Peel Street. A decade later, in the *Friend of China* of 22 October 1854, a 'Final Notice' appeared: 'Mr Framjee Jamsetjee, the oldest inhabitant of Hong Kong, being tired of the colony and obliged to leave at last, requests all accounts to be sent for liquidation.'

²⁸¹ The Pavri Papers, p115.

²⁸² The Pavri Papers, p122.

²⁸³ The Pavri Papers, p123.

²⁸⁴ Smith, 'The Establishment of the Parsee Community in Hong Kong,' in *A Sense of History*, p395.

²⁸⁵ Advertisement in *Friend of China*, 6 Sept 1846.

Framjee Jamsetjee also took the name Buxey, as his forebears, the brothers Jamshedji Nusserwanji and Sorabji Nusserwanji had been in the service of a Buxey in Surat and thus took on the name.²⁸⁶ Framjee's father, Jamshedji, was a supplier of household effects to Bombay Governor Sir John Malcolm, who in return gifted lands near Crawford Market in Bombay. Faramji (Jamshedji) Nusserwanji Buxey, this early land-buyer of Hong Kong, had first been a teacher in Bombay, then in a solicitor's firm servicing the EIC; he first went to China in 1829 working for Dadabhoy & Maneckjee Rustamjee Banajee & Co where he later became a partner; he too is on the founder's list for the Canton Anjuman. After the Banajee firm closed down (in 1848), Framjee later joined Ruttanjee Hormusjee Camajee & Co, becoming a partner there on 6 July 1861. This firm also closed, in 1864. As the *Daily Press* reported on 11 January 1864: 'Parsee merchant, Jehangir Framjee Buxey, to leave on 15th instant, very old firm Messrs R.H. Camajee & Co has been dissolved, he is to retire, he filled place of Parsee Punchayat in HK'.

But Framjee was not finished with Hong Kong yet. Although he retired to Bombay in 1864, he was back in Hong Kong for the Anjuman meeting of 1870. Indeed, a 27 January 1868 announcement suggested he had arrived only four years after he had left Hong Kong 'for good': 'Mr Jehangirji Faramji Buxey authorised to sign for Eduljee Framjee Sons & Co'. However, he fell sick in May 1873, and died in Bombay the next year. Says Pavri: 'All members and descendants of Jehangirji Faramji Buxey married into wealthy and illustrious famous [sic], Sir Hormusji Nowroji Mody of Hong Kong was also his relative.'²⁸⁷

The fourth purchaser of land in the 1841 auction was **Pestonjee Cowasjee** who bought Marine Lot 7, but soon decided to sell it; the government took it back sometime before 1844, after which the Dent's trading firm bought it and built a large structure intended as an exchange, but slow business again saw it resumed by the government for use as a supreme court. Pestonjee Cowasjee also bought Marine Lot 66, but died soon afterwards, on 18 August 1842, aged 62. The latter lot reverted through his will to Jehangir Framjee Buxey who immediately vested the lot with

²⁸⁶ The Pavri Papers, pp287-291. 'Bisney had some non-Parsi blood. But then, it becomes a very long story to explain' p422. Letter from Pavri, 22 July 1988.

²⁸⁷ The Pavri Papers, p291.

Cowasjee Pallanjee, head of Cawasjee Pallanjee & Co - one of the biggest Parsi firms on the China coast. 'There was no legal status of Hong Kong but Cawasjee Pallanjee & Co was the first to commence their office in Hong Kong from Canton. The second one was Faramjee Merwanjee Talasi to see the flag hoisted but moved to Hongkong in 1842, the third one was Rustamjee Dhurjeeshaw of P.P. Cama & Company and the fourth was Albert Sassoon, son of David Sassoon who continued his business from his opium clipper in the harbour and came ashore and established his office six months later.'²⁸⁸

Cawasjee Pallanjee & Co, officially the first Parsi firm to start trading in Hong Kong, lasted more than one hundred years. The Pavri Papers take us back to 1820 when Cawasjee Darasha Sethna had four sons who all moved from Surat to Bombay: Pallanjee, Bomanjee, Pestonjee, and Faramjee. Pestonjee was apparently 'the intelligent one', who travelled to China from 1820 (and died in Macao in 1842, aged 52). Pestonjee brought in two brothers (Pallanjee and Faramjee) and four nephews (Cawasjee Pallanjee, Khurshedjee Bamanjee, Cooverjee Bomanjee and Cawasjee Faramjee) to form Cawasjee Pallanjee & Co in China and Cursetjee Bomanjee & Co in Bombay (both in 1829). When his father Cawasjee died in 1842, Pestonjee took over, trading mainly in opium, spices, silk, and later yarn. He was 'a talented businessman and the firm reached new heights of prosperity under his leadership ... The firm became so successful that a popular saying arose: "Whatever Cawasjee says, Hong Kong does."'²⁸⁹

After Pestonjee died, the business was carried on in the family. Nephew Cawasjee Pallanjee was one of first trustees of the Canton Anjuman. His first marriage connected the Cawasjee family to their Sethna cousins; a daughter from that union married Shapoorjee Bomanjee Mistry, who was also a partner in Cawasjee Pallanjee & Co. Cawasjee Pallanjee's second marriage to Bachoobai Dinshawji Parbhoo (Warden) produced five sons: Eduljee, Ardeshir, Petanji, Dinshawji and Bomanjee; and four daughters: Navajbai, Shirenbai, Armai and Dhanbai. Another Pestonjee nephew, Khurshedji Bomanji Sethna was in China from 1833 where he welcomed all cousins, sons and relatives; he 'loved them all and the Sethna family never had any

²⁸⁸ The Pavri Papers, p251. Sassoon was not Parsi, but scion of the Baghdadi Jewish dynasty.

²⁸⁹ Guo Deyan, 'The Study of Parsee Merchants', p58.

shortage of manpower, mutual trust, love and respect for all'.²⁹⁰ Another Pestonjee nephew, Cooverjee Bomanji Sethna, a tutor to Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy 2nd Baronet, became the first Parsi to go to Shanghai, opening a branch there in 1849.

At home in Hong Kong

In trying to pin down why Parsis have been so important to the making of early Hong Kong, some attempt has been made to find the sources of their special strength. Even though he himself did not deconstruct the success stories, the records Pavri saved go a long way to explaining this. He shows the almost unequalled longevity of the Parsis in trade, and specifically in trade on the China Coast. They were trading east of India before the British arrived in northwest India and found them such helpful allies. They were in China ahead of virtually any other foreign traders. As Pavri shows through his extensive genealogies, many of the first individuals to meet each other in the Canton trade and move together to Hong Kong had already known each other back in Bombay. Whereas British and others might trade through family companies, those families were not genetically tied into scores of inter-related families all linked by faith and ethnicity into an active, multi-national network as Parsis were.

The Zoroastrian Charity Fund was founded in Canton and Macao before Hong Kong was born. In Canton in 1823, those who gathered to lead the community had been Hormusjee Bomanjee Wadia, Framjee Cawasjee Banajee, Nowrojee Jamshedjee Wadia, and Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy. The first meetings of Hong Kong's Parsi Anjuman (community centre and temple) were held at the offices of Dadabhai and Maneckjee Rustamjee Banajee in 1845. This Anjuman was intended to provide spiritual, social and practical succour purely for the community in Hong Kong. A primary challenge for Parsis abroad was also to bury the dead, in contrast to Bombay Parsis who could follow traditional practise in leaving the dead out on sacred towers. Four years earlier, the Canton community had sent representatives south to Singapore too.²⁹¹ But Hong Kong's Anjuman would soon take on a larger importance.

²⁹⁰ The Pavri Papers, p258.

²⁹¹ The Pavri Papers, pp487-8. See p489 for a list of Singapore Parsi donors, 1853.

On 27 September 1857 in Hong Kong, a meeting of the Anjuman was held thanks to Rustamji Dhunjeeshah Captain, at the offices of Rustomjee Ruttonjee Company, chaired by Jehajirjee Framjee Buxey. This meeting discussed how Canton was becoming too unstable. Indeed, within a year the second Anglo-Chinese war would break out; Adarjee Shapoorjee reported that the endangered Parsis of Canton needed a roof over their heads in Hong Kong. By 11 February 1861, they had bought a house at 49 Elgin Street, just up the hill from Hong Kong's waterfront. The process was another example of how the Parsis stuck together, looked after their own, and hedged their bets between Canton, Macao and Hong Kong – before consolidating in Hong Kong.²⁹²

Land for their own cemetery in Hong Kong was granted in 1852, and a first burial took place there in August 1858; by 1872, 143 internments had taken place. In 1859, when Parsis were excluded from an offer of season tickets to the Dramatic Corps' shows in Hong Kong, it caused such an uproar that the Corps had to apologise and immediately remedy the failure; the debacle contributed to the Corps' eventual merger with the Amateur Dramatic Corps.²⁹³

And so the pattern repeated — sons and well-married daughters, nieces and nephews, kept trading between both west and east coasts of India with Canton, Singapore, Shanghai and above all, Hong Kong, in a multi-generational series of connections which continually strengthened Parsi networks, and long-standing relationships with others in the China trade. Most Parsis of nineteenth century Hong Kong were men; their wives were either back in Bombay or lived in seclusion. The reality of frequent marriage between cousins occasioned comment (for example, in the *Daily Press* of 7 February 1865), claiming this caused moral problems and should be avoided by bringing in wives from Bombay. But a couple of leading Parsis –

²⁹² The 1923 committee comprised Jehangirjee Hormusjee Ruttonjee, Rustomjee Ardeshir Dastur, Rustomjee Eduljee Desai and Muncherjee Nanaghhai Mehta. Rented sites at Duddell Street and Leighton Hill Road followed; an attempt to buy premises in 1929 fell through. Meanwhile Mohamed Nimazee, a personal friend of Richard Lee Hysan, chief executor of the Lee Hysan Estate Ltd, reported the Lee's purchase of Jardine Matheson Hill which they were levelling. Rustamji Ardeshir Dastur asked Lee Hysan Estates and was granted a special price for 3,000 square feet on a 999-year lease. Architects Leigh & Orange were hired and a foundation stone laid at 101 Leighton Road on 24 October 1930. Fund-raising continued from Hong Kong to Canton, Shanghai, Kobe, Bombay and Calcutta; the official opening ceremony was on 19 July 1931. Today's temple and Anjuman remain on the same site, but now in a high-rise office block.

²⁹³ See Jarrett, *Old Hong Kong* / by Colonial.

Kotewall and Ruttonjee – took a different approach, choosing to marry Chinese women and building dynasties with them.

The Ruttonjees, by marrying locally in Hong Kong, forged a clan which would play a leading role in trade, industry, philanthropy, health and support for (British) Hong Kong during World War Two. So would the Kotewall who first worked in Hong Kong for Tata, married locally and produced Sir Robert Kotewall, Hong Kong's first Eurasian member of the Legislative and Executive Councils in the 1930s, and a contested figure in the process of the War and Japanese occupation. Lesser known heroes include the (unrelated) Kotwal brothers, and one Mr Jokhi who escaped death at Japanese hands and gave away a fortune in response. Conflicts and competition became unavoidable in subsequent generations of Parsi families even as a paucity of family memoirs and other sources provide little evidence of earlier rivalries within the Parsi community.

Parsi influence in Hong Kong has long outstripped their numbers. Street names give a hint: Kotewall Road, Bisney Road, Mody Road and more. The first stock exchange, cricket club, Jockey Club, Ruttonjee Hospital and more banks have Parsi roots. Star Ferry grew out of the love that Dorabji Neoroji had for horticulture. He lived in Hong Kong for more than 50 years and owned large warehouses on the Island, a bakery and the King Edward Hotel. He built an extensive garden in Kowloon which he visited with his own small boat. Soon, he was lending it to friends who also had gardens in Kowloon and the ferry was born. The service ran commercially from 1880, growing to four boats a decade later, making 147 crossings a day. The founders of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (today's HSBC) in 1865 included two Parsis: Ardasheer Hormusjee (Wadia) and Dadabhoy Rustomjee (Banajee). One of the bank's three trustees was KH Dadabhoy Rustomjee.²⁹⁴

As this chapter has shown, by the late nineteenth century, the Parsis were well-entrenched in Hong Kong. They had strong kinship networks, based on flourishing webs of inter-related family ties. They enjoyed a starters' advantage, which had given them a head start over other trading groups who arrived in Hong Kong without the shared Canton experience and knowledge of the China trade. The Parsis

²⁹⁴ See King, *The History of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation* Volume 1, p54, pp88, 90. 135. pp166-9, p52. See also White, *Turbans & Traders*, pp189-192.

made sure to cover all aspects of trade, from innovations to industrialisation, from finance to shipping, and more. Being Parsi meant being part of a closely-knit but cosmopolitan, well-travelled and, by now, highly experienced trading network.

Above all, close ties with the British, and the Parsi ability to fraternise easily with everyone but particularly with this dominant imperial power of the time, explains the persistent success and importance of the Parsis.

As will now be seen, their particular network then became part of the wider mixing of diasporas that forged the young Hong Kong.