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Hong Kong's place in South East Asia

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This enquiry into the social architecture of Hong Kong identifies some of its leading architects, and concludes that many peoples, beyond simply 'British' and 'Chinese', were engaged in the creation of Hong Kong. Who are the vital, but oft-ignored, people who helped to shape Hong Kong's first 'long' century (1841-1945)? This thesis aims to throw light on who these other people are, where they came from, what they did and what networks they formed in Hong Kong, within their communities and with others.

These questions matter, firstly, in order to re-set the historical record with new information. They also matter now as Hong Kong struggles through identity and political crises since London handed sovereignty back to Beijing in 1997. Chinese histories define the colonial era as a 'century of humiliation' in which Hong Kong was never a colony, but 'just another Chinese city'; British versions of history are also limited. James Hayes portrays Hong Kong as a tale of two cities: 'Two very different races and cultures have somehow contrived a mutually acceptable co-existence over one hundred and thirty-one years of dramatic change in China and in the outside world; mainly, it seems, by leading largely separate lives... The desire to live a separate life was a characteristic of both communities and fortunately for Hong Kong each possessed the capacity as well as inclination for it.'¹ I hope to deconstruct such claims, to go beyond 'two races' and to prove that Hong Kong was much more than 'two cities', thereby helping to illuminate continuing schisms between Hong Kong and China.

This thesis does not debate theoretical constructs such as colonialism, post-colonialism, identity-, elite-, or state-formation. My focus is on the people on the ground, on the actual lives being lived, in order to discover an interlocking network of familial, business and government figures. As a result of this focus on the multi-faceted background and interactions of Hong Kong's early communities, their greater significance is revealed, suggesting that more than just British colony or Chinese city, Hong Kong was a Eurasian Port City.

¹ Topley, *Interaction of Traditions and Life in the Towns*, p1, p5, pp6-7.

This granular level of enquiry matters, say historians Tim Harper, Christopher Bayly and John Darwin. Work on the daily lives and identities of all peoples in any colony is a crucial ingredient in attempts to better understand the nuance of empire. John Darwin notes that 'Imperialism and empire are abstractions. To study them only through the correspondence of officials or the declamations of critics is to grasp little of their historical reality... we need to know more about the local "agents of empire", the physical embodiment of the imperial project...'² Thus: 'empire is still widely imagined as the intrusion of a more or less homogenous group of (European) settlers, businessmen or officials into zones inhabited by stable indigenous societies enjoying varying degrees of political and cultural unity. The more we learn about pre-colonial and colonial societies, the more unsatisfactory this conventional picture appears...'³

Harper finds in Singapore, as in other cities of the time, that 'outward-looking trading communities had built up maritime connections and wealth on a scale to be seen in few other cities of the age. The fortunes of its Chinese, Arab, Armenian, Jewish, and other minorities paralleled, and in many cases eclipsed that of the Europeans, who themselves were a heterogeneous community... the imperial globalization of the later nineteenth century encouraged an ecumenical and internationalist outlook...'⁴ What survived the first World War were the networks founded on earlier systems of kinship, consumption, religion, and trades. Malleable ethnicities, the mixing of people and their movements form Harper's Invisible Empires throughout the great port cities of colonial Asia. Here, instead of a diasporic perspective of dispersal, longing and suffering, a new focus on mobility allows identity to become more fluid, hybrid, and fragmented.⁵

To this end, Harper advocates fresh biographical work on key figures to show complex and contradictory layers of belonging. Illuminating polyglot migrant communities, interactions and daily lives would, he notes, counteract their near-

² Darwin, John. 'Afterword', p250.

³ Darwin, John. 'Afterword', p251.

⁴ Harper T.N. 'Singapore 1915', p1794.

⁵ Adam McKeown, 'Conceptualizing', p307, wants to 'center mobility and dispersion as a basis from which to begin analysis, rather than as streams of people merely feeding into or flowing along the margins of national and civilisational histories... a diasporic perspective would complement and expand upon nation-based perspectives by drawing attention to global connections, networks, activities, and consciousnesses that bridge these more localized anchors of reference.'

invisibility in the archive. A closer look at how diasporic networks mediated between transnational, colonial and local political identities would help show the constraints and opportunities of now. Christopher Bayly has also shown that not only ideas, but peoples, jump across oceans and borders, requiring the history of connections to be both lateral and vertical.⁶

Work on inter-Asian intimacies and the wide range of affective relationships to be found within colonies also has relevance here. Laura Stoler concluded after studying Michel Foucault that the many worlds of sex and sexuality were clearly a domain of control; Batavia already had a prison for married and unmarried European women in 1642, she noted, in a discussion of the now well-known subject of the use by colonial powers of ideas of racial and female purity to bolster ideas of empire. 'These concerns over racial and cultural hybridity fuelled the administrative and practical fears of a heterogenous European community that its boundaries needed policing in ever more intimate ways,' wrote Stoler.⁷ She rightly noted how attitudes shifted over time: 'Thus, concubinage was still seen to uphold a European middle-class standard in the 1880s but seen to undermine it two decades later.'⁸ Jean Gelman Taylor has looked closely at the changes in Indonesia's colonial culture from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries through the shifting ambiguities of racial and gender distinctions.⁹ Ann McClintock, Catherine Hall and Philippa Levine have each made pivotal contributions to the field, bringing to the fore issues of gender, sexuality, racism and power. As Tony Ballantyne has noted, the emphasis in earlier colonial historiography on narratives of achieving nationhood or on merely the power of the metropole long ignored the much richer fields of cross-cultural engagement, the bundled relationships, the networks, mobility and all the exchange going on. In his deconstruction of notions of Aryanism he discovers empire to be not a spoked wheel with the metropole as hub, but a web of personal ties, circulations of ideas, intermingling of peoples, reinforcing Bayly's point about lateral connections.¹⁰

⁶ Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, pp4-5.

⁷ Stoler, *Race & the Education of Desire*, p46.

⁸ Stoler, *Race & the Education of Desire*, p113.

⁹ Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia, Europeans and Eurasians in Colonial Indonesia*.

¹⁰ See, amongst other works in the Bibliography, Tony Ballantyne's *Orientalism and Race*; Antoinette Burton's *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities*; Ann McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*; Philippa Levine's *Gender and Empire*; Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose's *At Home with Empire*.

But in my notes made back when I first read such sources (in 2014-15), I continually scribbled: What about Hong Kong? What were the laws on race in Hong Kong, how did they evolve? Was interracial sex or marriage banned? How was European status defined? How were mixed-race offspring defined, what rights did they have? Again and again, even new research on colonial lives seemed to ignore Hong Kong. One clue to this gap might be found in Stoler's inability to accept the evidence provided in an interview with a former Indonesian housekeeper to a Dutch colonial family who longs for a return to that colonialism as she missed the work and her place in the household. Stoler treats as a revelation the fact that colonial lives must have been more subtle and complex than 'we' thought of those 'with whom we do not sympathize, politically or otherwise.'¹¹

How much more problematic would she and many other theorists find the reality of Hong Kong, a place to which millions of people moved in order to willingly place themselves under British colonial rule! Every specialist likes to see their own subject as *sui generis*; in Hong Kong, however, it is hard to deny the challenge it poses to traditional ideas of post-colonialism as its post-British life is not 'liberation' or independence but a new colonialism under the Chinese Communist Party.

Another reason, perhaps, for the paucity of work on Hong Kong's colonial existence in general, and on the rich world of the multiple lateral lives being lived, is that Hong Kong does not fit into preconceived academic categories. It falls beyond the boundaries of Area Studies as it fails to settle wholly in the 'Area' either of 'China' or of 'Southeast Asia'. As will be seen, if Hong Kong is viewed only through the prism of Chinese Studies, much of its locally-generated nuance is lost. In recent years, this erasure has become more deliberate as the Beijing government tries to tie Hong Kong into its own ethno-nationalist sphere. Traditional definitions of Southeast Asia also neglect Hong Kong as the area encompassed usually stops at north Vietnam and fails to reach further north to Hong Kong. As island, peninsula and mainland, Hong Kong also falls outside the long-running discussion within the field about differences between archipelagic or mainland Southeast Asia. Hong Kong is both China and Southeast Asia, and both mainland and archipelago.

¹¹ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain – Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, p238.

Work which has focused in intimate detail on just who did what has been more useful, such as that of Chie Ikeya in her close-up examination of women as the intermediaries between the local and the global during Burma's (Myanmar's) time under British colonial rule. She rightly puts Burmese women and men at the heart of moves towards education, new media, multiple expressions of modernity, and an active engagement with the foreign. She agrees with Barbara Andaya's identification of the hegemony of the national epic in which a few heroic men achieved independence for a colony as a key cause of the historiography going off track. Instead, Ikeya finds in colonial Burma, 'a society shaped by its openness to and participation in a culture and a world above and beyond the local or the national'.¹²

This 'world above and beyond' is what I have found in Hong Kong too. Here was interaction, collaboration and literal cross-fertilisation between not only 'Chinese' and 'Europeans', but a variety of people and networks from far and wide. Once in Hong Kong, these peoples went forth and multiplied, in business and pleasure, in their own communities and with others. These new webs of engagement created a (widely defined) Eurasian community, more than a mere meeting of East and West.

The message demands its own methods

My effort here is concentrated on tracing some of Hong Kong's earliest families, their origins, their networks and their progressions, often but not always into the early twentieth-century elite in Hong Kong. I rely on self-identifications by those people as 'Portuguese', 'Parsi', 'Armenian', 'Jew', and others, all prevalent at the time. As for the term 'Eurasian', I offer a new, much broader definition than commonly used in Hong Kong in order to demonstrate how important were individuals and networks from across the wider Eurasian continent (thus incorporating Armenia, Iran, India and parts of South East Asia) to the making of Hong Kong.

This work requires a specific set of tools (or methods) which I describe below and which rely, to some extent, on my early journalistic training. Starting with a curiosity about particular families and personalities, I have tracked down descendants through my extensive network of contacts gleaned from decades as a journalist and

¹² Chie Ikeya, *Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma*. Also, Andaya, Barbara. *The Flaming Womb - Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia*.

author in Hong Kong and South East Asia. This forms part of a research methodology -- here identified as prosopography -- to examine what became a series of interlocking networks in Hong Kong.¹³ Prosopography is the practice of identifying and describing people and the groups or networks they form within a particular historical context. It requires looking at their origins and genealogies, their interactions and various iterations. The Oxford-based expert on prosopography, Katharine Keats-Rohan, cites Lawrence Stone's definition of it as 'the investigation of the common background characteristics of a group of actors in history by means of a collective study of their lives', and Paul Magdalino's definition of it as 'a means of profiling any group of recorded persons linked by any common factor'.

My methods include extensive archival research and oral history work. A first key tool has been the interviewing of various community members and family descendants, often repeatedly, via personal meetings, email and extended correspondence over several years. I have interviewed as many of these descendants of the families under study as time, family sensitivities and geography have allowed. The apparent emphasis here on families which are either middle class or have eventually become wealthy members of the elite is because these are the people who are becoming open to discussing their pasts. Several approaches to members of families which were not so obviously successful were rebuffed. This has the disadvantage of skewing results to suggest that all mixed-origin people were successful, which is clearly not the case. Instead, the hope must be that as more elite families become open to their own histories -- and specifically to banishing the taboo against admitting that one's great grandmother was probably a sex-worker -- other families will more readily follow.

The interviews often took many hours over weeks and months, based on relationships of trust I have built up over years. Only then, have individuals become comfortable with sharing details of often contested pasts and complex intimacies. Often lunch with one family member would lead to conversation with another; contacts also jumped over apparent boundaries of distinct communities, such as when a 'Portuguese' would introduce me to his Parsi friends, or an apparently 'British' source insist on my meeting his Chinese forebears. Such conversations, and

¹³ K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, ed., *Prosopography Approaches and Applications*. See also, Lawrence Stone's 'Prosopography' in *Daedalus* (1971) and Magdalino in Cameron's *Fifty Years of Prosopography*.

continued personal contact, offer new insight into diverse groups and families; they have also given me access to privately held records, and the gifting of unpublished research material. I have personally visited the cemeteries (in Hong Kong, Britain, Romania and beyond) and family homes of those people under discussion. Private family records, previously unpublished, have been shared with me, including a 510-page compilation of data on the Parsi community of Hong Kong and South China.

Such conversations also carry hazards, familiar to me from my decades in journalism: people's memories are faulty, and interviewees massage or improve on the facts of their stories, sometimes unconsciously but also deliberately. Versions of personal history remain disputed between siblings, within families, and across communities. In some cases, one family member has granted permission to cite family records, only to be contradicted by other relatives. In this and all cases, I have checked and double-checked with all interested persons (not just the writer of a family record but often with the people about whom he or she has written) to secure permission for any quoted material. Where permission has not been possible, or has been retracted, I have deleted that material. I promise confidentiality to everyone I interview and pledge that any citation of their words will be checked with them to confirm my right to use it. Most of these interactions were recorded digitally; both the sound files and my transcriptions are maintained on private computer backups.

Primary source material lies in rare oral histories of multi-generational families, and in the collections in community centres (such as Hong Kong's Jewish History Centre, and the Zoroastrian Trustees of Hong Kong). I have worked in the Archives of the University of Hong Kong Special Collections, the Hong Kong Public Records Office, the HSBC Archives, the Hong Kong Heritage Project (the Kadoorie family archive), the Jardine Matheson Archive held at Cambridge University, the (British) National Archives and a range of private collections footnoted throughout. Family collections I have been given access to include photo albums, diaries, unpublished papers and detailed genealogies. A key archival source has been the Carl T. Smith Collection, with which I have been engaged through various projects since 1979. This comprises detailed notes on almost all individuals of early Hong Kong, traced through Land Registry records, church records and newspapers. This prosopographical and empirical focus is what takes me beyond theories and categories into real lives.

A constant task has been the checking of what I am told against what has been recorded, and vice versa. Different versions of family histories have been checked as far as the records allow; in some cases no definitive facts have survived and in others, new facts have emerged. Despite the challenges integral to the collection of family records, this has remained an important part of this thesis, not least because the written records remain scarce. Sometimes the persistence of conflicting records about the same person or situation is revealing, in itself, of the complex factors at work in both the living, and the describing, of truly Eurasian lives. Hopefully, further research will enable any necessary corrections and illumination of memories.

Defining scope and language

Here, 'Hong Kong' (Heung Kong, or Fragrant Harbour, perhaps named after the incense traded there) does stretch back into Chinese history, but coalesces when the outside world arrived, circa 1841. The Hong Kong people discussed here, similarly, include some Chinese but largely comprise the many non-Chinese peoples who went into the making of Hong Kong. I am not for a moment denying the centrality of Chinese peoples (in all their diversity) as the majority of people in Hong Kong before, during and after Hong Kong's British period. The importance of Chinese state actors, and even more of the many millions of Chinese workers, traders and families is indisputable. So too is the primary importance of the Chinese workers who literally built Hong Kong – its port, roads, buildings and more, and as 'coolies' loading and unloading ships, investing in produce and marketing it worldwide. I am here deliberately concentrating on the communities less covered. Many of these, too, arrived with little, worked hard and got ahead – it is these peoples and processes I aim to untangle here.

A key concept is that of the Eurasian person(s), personality, community. Narrow definitions in common usage describe the offspring of (typically) a Western man and a Chinese (or Asian) woman. My definition is far broader than this, encompassing not merely mixed-race union, but the range of peoples from across the Eurasian continent, from the Caucasus and the Black Sea, through Middle and Near East into South and Southeast Asia and so into new combinations with Chinese and others. This geography of Eurasia includes those who reached Hong Kong from Yerevan or Julfa, Calcutta and Canton– the Armenians and Baghdadi Jews, Parsis and Indians,

Malays, 'Manilamen' and others – as well as those products of relationships between different 'Asian' men and women, many different 'Chinese' and 'Westerners' and more. These people formed the functioning core of early Hong Kong.

Such people are boundary-crossers, taboo-breakers, middlemen, translators, multi-cultural operators and bricoleurs, people who improvise (from the French verb *bricoler*, to tinker). The term applies to the use of found objects in art or architecture to anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's creation of mythical thought which he sees as originating in a 'heterogenous repertoire'; one must make from this, and make do.¹⁴ Where engineers move from goals to means, bricoleurs re-use available materials to solve new problems, trying, testing, playing around. In cultural studies it can refer to the acquisition of objects, even identities, across social divisions. Artist John Akomfrah described his aesthetic for a new work for the 2024 Venice Biennale, *Nine Cantos*, as bricolage: 'Bits and pieces of my heritage and identity make up a, not seamless, whole, yet I make sense of myself' in order to 'find a way of banishing difference, by getting fragments to agree to a momentary union. When that happens, it's beautiful.'¹⁵ So too with Hong Kong's lateral thinkers. When Muslim neighbour interacts with Jewish trader in a Chinese warehouse, via an Armenian or a Parsi, diverse pools of knowledge and multiple identities create ever-more syncretic iterations; they are all bricoleurs.

In Hong Kong, in contrast to more ordered, racially-defined Singapore and the Straits Settlements, there was more room for migrants to make their own way. The colony's first administrators were startled by just how many people were turning up from different places; it had not been part of the plan which was initially for a floating opium warehouse and little more. As will be seen, the first British, Parsi, Portuguese and other settlers on Hong Kong island focused simply on continuing the trade they knew from Canton. Importing this or that ethnic group for particular tasks, or anything like adding glory to the 'Raj', was not on the agenda. This left a lot of room in which people could go their own way and create their own connections and communities. Thus, the British let the Armenian Paul Chater reclaim the harbour because his plan worked; he chaired the elite Hong Kong Club because he

¹⁴ This is a brutal summary of his *Le Pensée sauvage*, Paris, 1962, *The Savage Mind*, Chicago, 1966.

¹⁵ John Akomfrah spoke to Maya Jaggi in 'John Akomfrah on exploring colonialism, migration and globalism through "bricolage".' *Financial Times*, 9 November 2023.

made it more aspirational; then he fashioned a university out of Parsi, Chinese and Southeast Asian friendships. After all, the British were bricoleurs too: they were easily racist when it suited them, but innovation and improvisation, so long as it did not conflict with imperial interest, were allowed to shine.

By applying prosopography, by which I mean tracking the people involved, and discovering precisely who moved to, and thus formed, Hong Kong, this port city's role as stimulus to 'brilliant bricoleurs' emerges.¹⁶

One caveat must be added: this story cannot be told in numbers. The numerical majority of Hong Kong people has always been Chinese but my focus is specifically on the Other. We can trace individuals and families of diverse origins and ways of life but only through the tools of family and oral history, and by looking through the gaps in the records. Those records, such as the Censuses produced in Hong Kong from the 1850s onwards, only delineated undefined groups, such as 'Europeans', or the 'Indians' in the armed forces. Parsis and Armenians were not counted and nor were the many stateless people or those of diverse Jewish roots. (Only during World War Two, in the details of those resident in the Rosary Hill refuge run by the International Committee of the Red Cross, was an attempt at finer distinctions made, in forms outlining 'ethnicity' and 'nationality' – see Chapter 7, pp208ff.) The number sometimes given by the Hong Kong government for a similarly undefined category of 'Eurasians' was always very small as few people, even well into the twentieth century, voluntarily identified themselves as such. These are indeed in-between people often categorised as on the margins who, in the course of helping Hong Kong into existence over almost two centuries, gradually become central to it.

Hong Kong in Chinese historiography

This is not the story conventionally told of Hong Kong's emergence. Amid China's nationalist myth-making it is easy to forget that 100 years ago it was deep in a vicious, long-running civil war.¹⁷ Its capital city was contested and central state control extended barely south of the Yangtze, certainly not to Xinjiang, Taiwan,

¹⁶ I am indebted to Professor Henk Schulte Nordholt for this imagery.

¹⁷ States in Asia only recently became finite entities with clear lines drawn between them, with national myths to match. See Winichakul, Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*.

Hong Kong or any Nine-Dash Line.¹⁸ Such elasticity makes finding Hong Kong on old Chinese maps problematic – it just isn't there. One of many barely known islands strung off the coast, Hong Kong was unknown and unremarked.¹⁹ Wade concludes that incorporation of areas south of the Yangtze into the Chinese state only accelerated in the eighth and ninth centuries CE. C.P. Fitzgerald agrees.²⁰ Roderich Ptak has traced the routes used between China and Southeast Asia in the fourteenth century. Nowhere does Hong Kong appear.²¹ The discovery of Southern Song-era pottery during the construction of a new rail link in Kowloon²², and more recently the remains of a similarly dated water reservoir system, offer clues to prior settlement on the mainland (not the island) of Hong Kong. Accounts following the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong from Britain to China in 1997 claim that Tuen Mun and other now major areas of Hong Kong were part of a thriving Chinese trading hub one thousand years ago.²³

A more measured description can be found in the annotated Chronicle of Peace County, where Peter Ng suggests the Chinese government's opinion of Hong Kong at the time of its cession to Hong Kong (1841-2) was probably little different to that of Britain, namely disdain: 'But to the Chinese Emperor in far off Beijing Hong Kong was an insignificant rock in an undesirable sea off the coast of a minor county on the fringes of his empire... indeed in the 1822 edition of the Guangdong provincial gazetteer the map of the county of Xin'an in which Hong Kong lay did not show the island at all.'²⁴ The first edition of this Gazetteer dates to 1688; the 1819 gazetteer of Xin'an County is the only comprehensive work on the area before the coming of the British.²⁵ But Ng concludes the maps were not useful — 'the island of Hong Kong

¹⁸ Geoff Wade notes a 5th-century BC map which gives no southern border; by 200 BC, a southern border roughly matched China's borders as asserted today. In the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 AD) the border reached Hue and north Myanmar. Wade in Evans, Hutton, & Kuah, p35.

¹⁹ 'The degree to which Chinese political control was exercised over the areas depicted on these maps as being "within" China remains contentious.' Wade in Evans, p35.

²⁰ Fitzgerald, *Southern Expansion of the Chinese People*, pxix.

²¹ Ptak, Roderich. 'From Quanzhou to the Sulu Zone', and, 'The Ryukyu Network'.

²² *South China Morning Post*, 6 July 2014.

²³ K.C. Chan, *South China Morning Post*, 1 January 2000, p1: 'Like Hong Kong today, the region in 1000 had recently been re-integrated into China', and was 'a key salt production and pearl harvesting centre, as well as a major custom duty-collection post for international trade'; an elaborate tomb of a Han official 'bears witness to the existence of a sizeable imperial administration in Hong Kong some two millenia ago'.

²⁴ Ng, Peter, *New Peace Country*, p1.

²⁵ Krone, 'A Notice of the San On District'; Sung Hok-p'ang, 'Legends and Stories'; Balfour, 'Hong Kong before the British'; Baker, 'The Five Great Clans'; Hayes, 'The Pattern of Life', and 'The San On Map of Mgr Volontieri'; Ronald Ng, 'The San On map of Mgr Volonter'.

did not appear as such on them... the island merited no special mention... The very way in which the administrative subdivisions of the county were arranged indicated how insignificant this part of its territory was felt to be.²⁶ Ng opines: 'Without the British intervention, 'the Hong Kong region would doubtless have remained in obscurity'.²⁷

So much for Chinese imperial ideas of Hong Kong at its birth in 1841 as a Port City. But though absent, was it somehow 'always Chinese'?

The official Chinese line is that Hong Kong was never a British colony, merely occupied territory, which 'was built and made prosperous on the blood, sweat and corpses of Chinese coolies'.²⁸ Textbooks now state: 'Even [though] Britain occupied Hong Kong... the Chinese Government did not recognise such unequal treaties and insisted [on] her sovereignty over Hong Kong. Therefore, Hong Kong did not satisfy the condition of "a country losing sovereignty" and was not a colony.'²⁹ China's representative to the United Nations, Huang Hua, said this in 1972, but was largely ignored – except in Beijing. Chinese scholars discount Hong Kong's multi-ethnic cosmopolitanism; it is thanks to modern China's management that Hong Kong has been able to thrive, not its rich history in Asia and its diverse peoples and ideas.

States Liu Shuyong: 'Hong Kong has been part of Chinese territory since ancient times. Before the British occupation, Hong Kong had achieved considerable development in agriculture, fisheries, the salt industry, transportation, cultural undertakings and education. It was by no means a desolate and barren land at that time.'³⁰ Change has come in the past 150 years, 'particularly since China's execution of the policy of reform and opening-up', in contrast to early British rule (1840-60) when they simply made it into 'the biggest depot for opium smuggling in East Asia', and 'employed bandits to abduct labourers...'

²⁶ Ng, Peter, *New Peace Country*, p1.

²⁷ The 'New Territories' leased by Britain in 1898 was the least settled 'three-fifths of Xin'an', with a population of about 100,000. 'Local government, in fact, was very much left in the hands of the people themselves...hence receives little mention in the gazetteer.' Ng, *New Peace Country*, p66.

²⁸ For this and other examples of the Marxist post-1949 Beijing School, see work from the Academy of Social Science in Beijing, especially Ding You. This is preoccupied with the opium wars, and the firm view that Hong Kong from its earliest times has been sacred Chinese territory.

²⁹ Cited by *Financial Times*, 15 June 2022.

³⁰ Liu Shuyong, 'Hong Kong', p583. He deliberately elides mainland and island of Hong Kong.

His claim of earlier 'cultural undertakings and education' is evidence-free, while the proven record of colonial educational and other projects is ignored. He also cannot deny that, 'On the eve of liberation of China's mainland, there had emerged a considerable exodus of capital, equipment, technicians and managerial personnel from China's inland provinces to Hong Kong...'³¹

Above all: 'The Chinese government has helped maintain Hong Kong's political stability and provided it with powerful economic support in a spirit of giving due consideration to history and maintaining the status quo. Hong Kong has thus benefited from long-standing preferential treatment.'³²

Similarly 'patriotic' historiography is under way in the huge new 'Chronicles of Hong Kong' project, a HK\$780 million, eight-year project launched on 28 December 2020. It aims to tell stories of Hong Kong as part of China from ancient times to 2017 over 66 volumes, to reconnect people with their Chinese roots. Organizers, led by Hong Kong's first post-handover appointed Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa, insist the project is not politically driven. Instead it is something the community has longed for over many years, said (the half-Thai) Executive Councillor Bernard Chan.³³

Hong Kong in British historiography

With its pre-colonial existence in doubt, credit for founding Hong Kong, if such it is, surely goes to aggressive opium trading conglomerates chafing at the rules of the Canton trade, such as Jardine Matheson & Co., bolstered by the new British ideology of 'Free Trade', and British arms superiority in the first Opium or Anglo-Chinese War (1839-1942). Beyond that, debate persists over what the British contribution really was. Did London sit down and plan it all? Did men from the City of London go out to make it a petri dish for Gentlemanly Capitalism? Or was there a more nuanced reality in which developments took place quite differently on the ground?

³¹ Liu Shuyong, 'Hong Kong', pp587-8.

³² Liu Shuyong, 'Hong Kong', p591. He notes the talent, hard work of ethnic Chinese but not others.

³³ See an online lecture given to the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 14 May 2021 by Professor Lee Chak Fan, Chief Convenor of the Editorial Committee, Hong Kong Chronicles.

Theorists such as J.A. Hobson in the 1890s-1900s, argued that imperial expansion was necessary for lack of investment opportunities at home. V.I. Lenin agreed, that 'monopoly capitalist' firms had to go abroad, helped by state powers who then competed with each other and so went to war. Mercantilism, the idea that wealth and trade were finite entities which had to be held from rivals, with force if need be, was one motivation. 'Free Trade' was another, enabling industrialists to help break the British East India Company (EIC) monopoly on trade with China (by 1833). P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins wrote several highly influential and controversial articles in the *Economic History Review* in the 1980s.³⁴ They saw the British empire as rooted in the City of London, home to merchant banking, investment, insurance, mercantile marine and communications services. They tied imperial expansion to processes at work within Britain, the metropole, as new men emerging from the industrial revolution aimed to get rich and so acquire the status of 'gentlemen'. Certainly, newly elite networks of capitalists emerged. Certainly, too, the empire expanded in Southeast Asia when its bureaucrats developed close links with British commercial enterprises, as in Malaya, Borneo, Burma and Siam. But breaking the EIC monopoly and other changes on the ground were fuelled more by Asia-based 'country traders' than by the City of London. It was clear that the metropole mattered, but only as part of a far larger whole.

Anthony Webster finds³⁵ the idea of Informal Empire invented by Gallagher and Robinson in the 1950s more helpful: 'The British market therefore became important for the prosperity and survival of local ruling elites in many developing states. In this war [way?] many less developed countries outside the formal British empire became economically dependent upon Britain.'³⁶ Formal though the appurtenances of power were in the status of the British Governor, his councils and ceremonies, Hong Kong manifested aspects of informal empire. Although the British market mattered and services emanating from the City of London were central to major firms in Hong Kong, here was no huge native population to suppress and only one city to build.

³⁴ 'The political economy of British overseas expansion' (1980), 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British overseas expansion', Parts One and Two (1986, 1987). Leading critics were D.K. Fieldhouse (1994), Geoffrey Ingham (1995). See also Anthony Webster (1998, 2006).

³⁵ Webster, *Gentlemen Capitalists*, p6.

³⁶ Webster, *Gentlemen Capitalists*, p7.

As will be seen, there was also a certain disinterestedness in London's attitude to Hong Kong, a lack of commitment in Britain's imperial project to a full-bodied inclusion of Hong Kong. London was initially dismayed to find it had got Hong Kong instead of more settled and thriving ports further up the Chinese coast. London was also determined the Hong Kong would pay its own way, and frequently railed against the costs of the ever-growing community which seemed to be growing regardless upon what London had thought was a barren island.

In contrast to other British colonies in the region such as Singapore, Hong Kong seen from London was on the periphery of empire. Interventions in Hong Kong were less formal (than, for example, the import of Chettiars to Malaya). The perpetuation of British power can better be found, says Webster, in delicate collaborations between British interests and local elites, again prioritising lateral, local ties over periphery-metropole rules.³⁷ More significant too were pre-existing networks and patterns of trade in Southeast Asia that connected Hong Kong into the regional pattern, as will be seen in this thesis: 'These networks displayed various characteristics, such as the prevalence of trade in Asian products like opium; the enduring importance of trade links within the Asian world, notably between Southeast Asia, India and China; and the prominence of Asian mercantile organisations such as those of the Chinese.'³⁸

Just how different Hong Kong's genesis was to that of other British colonies can be seen where early notions of 'empty lands' justified colonial incursions into territories ranging from Australia to Africa. The most famous claim to Hong Kong being empty land came from the British foreign secretary, Lord Palmerston, who in 1841 disparaged this 'barren island with hardly a house upon it'. But this political claim aimed to quash the pretensions of those who he felt had exceeded his authority. Paradoxically, his claim of barrenness was intended to delay, even cancel, colonization, not its opposite. In the event, as so often, pronouncements from London had little to do with what took off in Hong Kong. Britain did not even build it before all manner of people came.

³⁷ Webster *Gentlemen Capitalists*, p8. He cites Ian Brown of SOAS, Anthony Reid's *Ages of Commerce*, new work on the Nanyang Chinese, Trocki's work on opium and Ray's 'Asian Capital' and more.

³⁸ Webster, *Gentlemen Capitalists*, p21. The assumption that when the EIC lost its monopolies, that Britain would lose these older commercial networks was thus also entirely wrong.

Hong Kong in Asian and Hong Kong historiography

Proving Hong Kong was at least as much part of Southeast Asia as it ever was of China is easy with early Chinese definitions of anything south of the Yangtze River as 'Southern'. Geoff Wade and Sun Laichen find a 'Greater Southeast Asia' in place by 221 BCE, with the Yangtze River as the dividing line with China.³⁹ The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia agrees.⁴⁰ Sun Laichen, in a *longue durée* over two millennia, offers an 'Upper Southeast Asia' which includes today's Hong Kong; China's control 'was nominal, superficial, indirect and cursory.'⁴¹ But finding a place for Hong Kong within the usual boundaries of Southeast Asia is difficult. Hong Kong simply falls between the two stools – of Chinese Studies to its north, and Southeast Asian studies to its south.

An area studies approach helps insofar as it offers a view of connections beyond Hong Kong, but is not a strong enough historiographical vessel in which to examine all of Hong Kong's aspects. This is partly because Southeast Asian studies has its own problems. Scholars have long debated whether, as political scientist Donald Emerson says, Southeast Asia is just the space between China and India, or a cohesive region which, as Webster argues, 'enjoyed a distinct cultural and geographical identity long before the period of European incursion'.⁴² Ambiguous borders and scholarly insecurity, notes Heather Sutherland, have led the search for a legitimising lineage by equating Southeast Asian seas with the Mediterranean.⁴³ Reid, Lombard and others stress diversity, networks, openness, tolerance, and syncretism as (positive) shared characteristics of the region.⁴⁴

Hong Kong historiography adds a lot of the so-far missing human depth, but precisely for its focus on the local, it misses a wider appreciation of the global

³⁹ Sun Laichen in Wade & Sun, *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century*, pp44-45.

⁴⁰ Tarling, *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Vol 1, p56n1. See also, pp107ff.

⁴¹ Sun Laichen in Wade & Sun, *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century*, pp46-47.

⁴² Webster, Anthony, *Gentlemen Capitalists*, p2. See also Donald Emerson, Norman Owen.

⁴³ See Sutherland, 'Southeast Asian History and the Mediterranean Analogy'; here, R. Bin Wong finds a 'Chinese Mediterranean', p14, and backs Takeshi Hamashita's depiction of three zones. Van Leur denied this, in *Indonesian trade and society*, p147. See also, Ptak (2001): 3-4.

⁴⁴ Reid, *Critical Crossroads*, and *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, etc. Henley and Schulte Nordholt offer 'environmental change as an underlying pacemaker of economic and political cycles', *Environment, Trade and Society*, p11. See also, Kratoska, Raben and Schulte Nordholt. eds. *Locating Southeast Asia*.

character of Hong Kong, offering only a limited perspective on the port city.⁴⁵ Christopher Munn describes the 'Colonial School' of history where Whites led and Chinese were a homogenous mass with criminal tendencies. Tales start in the glory-days of Canton, romping through the opium wars into the founding of Hong Kong (be it accidental, mistaken, fortuitous or all three). Works in this category clearly have their conceptual limitations but several key works remain must-reads, and influential.⁴⁶ The 'Marxist, post-1949 Beijing School' narrative of colonial exploitation and oppression places the Chinese as victims of grotesque European plots. Munn notes similarities with the Colonial School in a reliance on officials and statistics, and in taking the opium wars as starting point. The acts and feelings of Hong Kong inhabitants barely rate a mention in either metropole.

'The Hong Kong School', by contrast, focuses on complex social and political dynamics, asking new questions about race, class, gender and identity. It works from the realities of Hong Kong - its peoples, where they come from, what they do, where they are going - offering many surprises. Henry Lethbridge in the 1970s was the first to look at class and race; he considered Eurasians a much-neglected component of Hong Kong; he also tackled Poor Whites or Beachcombers, ignored by official colonial histories for lowering imperial prestige, and the evolution of the Po Leung Kuk and Tung Wah groups and District Watch Committees.⁴⁷ He offers no systematic study of his 'Eurasians' however. W.K. Chan's *The Making of Hong Kong Society* showed that class divisions within the Chinese community as well as the British were more significant than racial division, as Chinese and European merchant elites combined against labourers.⁴⁸

Discovering the human fabric of Hong Kong has been made possible partly thanks to the obsessive curiosity of genealogist and theologian-turned-historian, Revd Carl T. Smith. He spent decades scouring every available record from old newspapers to Land Registry documents to compile his famous Index Cards detailing, individual by individual, the rich and interesting lives lived beyond the small circle of the tight

⁴⁵ Munn, *Anglo-China*, pp 1-18.

⁴⁶ For example: E.J. Eitel's *Europe in China*, J.W. Norton-Kyshe's 1898 two-volume *The History of the Laws and Courts of Hong Kong*, Guy Sayer, G.B. Endacott, Frank Welsh and Michael Sheridan.

⁴⁷ Lethbridge, *Stability and Change*, Ch. VII "Caste, Class and Race in Hong Kong before the Japanese Occupation", Ch. VIII "Condition of the European Working Class in 19th Century Hong Kong".

⁴⁸ Chan, W.K. *The Making of Hong Kong Society*.

colonial elite. He showed how Hong Kong was made in what colonialists saw as the borderlands, those rough districts on the 'edge' of town, the unknown worlds of the Parsi opium warehouse or Chinese temples, the Portuguese printing works or the sailors' mosque, the obscure sanctuaries of Christian mission-work or the good-time bars along the western end of the city's main artery (Queen's Road).⁴⁹

Elizabeth Sinn picked up Smith's baton and ran with it through studies of Chinese community organization.⁵⁰ Sinn notes, 'Like other frontier towns, where the social structure was still fluid, the young colony allowed marginal people with energy and daring — those adept at seizing opportunities as well as creating them — to get ahead.' She adds: 'Though never a level playing field, Hong Kong as British colony provided enough flexibility and openness for people of different backgrounds to exert their entrepreneurial vitality...'⁵¹ Munn's *Anglo-China* details how both Chinese 'criminality' and British 'justice' have been woefully misunderstood, and how complex it was to merge Chinese and British ways of running societies. John Carroll's *Edge of Empires* outlines the creation of a late nineteenth century 'Chinese' elite (in fact, largely Eurasian), noting 'Colonies were not just about exploitation; they were also about how people learned to work within the cracks.'⁵²

While early narratives sometimes spoke of Hong Kong surviving despite its 'precarious balance' between China and Britain, Ming Chan focuses on Chinese merchants who 'survived and thrived not despite but because of Hong Kong's "precarious balance": its strategic position at the geographical, political, and cultural borders of the British and Chinese empires.'⁵³ Bernard Luk shows how the goal of educational curricula in colonial Hong Kong was to create 'a bilingual, bicultural elite to function as middlemen between British traders in Hong Kong and merchants and mandarins of China'.⁵⁴ Tsai Jungfang, Michael Ng and others have pointed out how politically aware so many Hong Kongers were, from the early nineteenth

⁴⁹ Smith, Carl T. 'The Chinese Settlement of Hong Kong', *Chung Chi*, p 27. Also, Smith, *Chinese Christians, Elites, Middlemen*; Smith, *A Sense of History*; and, *English-Educated Chinese Elites in Nineteenth-Century Hong Kong* in Topley, *Interaction of Traditions and Life in the Towns*, pp65-96.

⁵⁰ Sinn, *Between East and West*, 1990; Sinn, Wong and Chan *Rethinking Hong Kong*, 2009; *Power and Charity*, 1989; *Pacific Crossing*, 2013; *Multicultural Encounters in Hong Kong*, 2017.

⁵¹ Sinn, *Pacific Crossing*, p30, and p41.

⁵² Carroll, John, *Edge of Empire*, p10.

⁵³ Ming K Chan, *Precarious Balance*, p59.

⁵⁴ Luk, Bernard, *Chinese Culture in the Hong Kong Curriculum*, 654, 658-660. Candy Chan finds Hong Kong's Foreign Communities; Chu offers a ruthlessly unequal entrepôt, in *Building Colonial Hong Kong*.

century. Tsai shows labour unrest, splits within the Chinese between conservative and pro-western elite, and the influence in Hong Kong of Chinese political movements; he proves the Chinese are not apathetic and that colonial times offered partnership and collaboration as well as conflict and social crisis.⁵⁵

Tsai also insists on Hong Kong's roots being found in Southeast Asia: 'The growth of Hong Kong after 1842 into an entrepot owed a great deal to the interregional and international trades already developed in the region centuries before the Opium War. In fact, British Hong Kong inherited these trades, which had long been carried on, with Canton and Whampoa as a transshipment port for commodities from various parts of China, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Western world. The historic Nanyang trade figured prominently in the region, with the Teochiu (Chao-chou), Hoklo (Fulao, Hokkien, Amoy) and Cantonese merchants taking active parts in it. The Nanyang trade loomed large in the background of the flourishing Teochiu and Hoklo business circles in colonial Hong Kong... In short, underlying Hong Kong's development as an entrepot was a long history of overseas trade with Canton as a transshipment port.' He adds: 'The prosperity of Hong Kong was linked to the Chinese communities overseas, which retained close ties with their homeland... The Chinese communities abroad clung to the Chinese way of life, and Hong Kong became the centre of an international trade catering to their needs.'⁵⁶

Law Wing Sang denies a narrative of success based on a neutral non-interventionist colonial administration, as it ignores the politics. He applauds Ngo Tak-wing who shows Hong Kong people were not apathetic, rule was less laissez-faire than assumed, conflict was ever-present. In his construction of Collaborative Colonialism he finds 'convenient but often-neglected access to understanding the irregularly shaped cultural landscapes of Hong Kong.'⁵⁷ He agrees Hong Kong is a product of pre-colonial trading patterns, particularly Southeast Asia's coastal cities, and sees a chauvinist victimhood among nationalist Chinese historiographers who deny British colonialism paved the way for Hong Kong, where 'A new settlement of overseas Chinese had been created, which in many respects had more in common with any

⁵⁵ Tsai Jung-Fang, *Hong Kong in Chinese History*; Ng and Wong, *Civil Unrest and Governance*; Ngo Tak-wing, *History, State and Society under colonial rule*; Law Wing Sang, *Collaborative Colonial Power*.

⁵⁶ Tsai Jung-Fang, *Hong Kong in Chinese History*, p17 and p26.

⁵⁷ Law Wing Sang, *Collaborative Colonial Power*, p5. Also: Ngo Tak-wing, *History, State and society*.

Chinese community in Southeast Asia than with imperial China itself.⁵⁸ He adds Hong Kong's elites have always sought approval from elsewhere, open to collusion with whoever was in power.

Hong Kong historiography adds vital depth and breadth to any study of the place. But again it is limited – confined to looking either at local people without their global networks, or to the territory's place in the world without any focus on its people. This thesis aims to pull these elements together by showing how a close-up analysis of Hong Kong's peoples, communities and networks – the prosopography – gives us new insight into Hong Kong's larger role, not just locally, or regionally, but globally.

Hong Kong stands in a global chain of Port Cities

New imperial histories offer new structural perspectives and allow subaltern voices to be heard, providing a larger framework. But these are still restricted by their scope in which empire is defined as the main frame.⁵⁹ Only by taking a deeper look at the world pre-dating Hong Kong and the connections created through global networks of trade and migration, is Hong Kong's place in the world finally enabled to emerge. Global historians offer a wider view across Asia encompassing the entire Eurasian continent, helping to show how even such a late developer as Hong Kong can trace its roots back to Venice and Baghdad, through Sokotra and Calicut, and on through Surat to Singapore.⁶⁰ Their work enables local history to be seen in a global context, and allows Hong Kong to join a long-standing network of Port Cities.

Firstly, Janet Abu-Lughod⁶¹ disputes Wallerstein's claim of a growing integration of regions and societies around 1450, by showing so much was happening before the

⁵⁸ Law Wing Sang, *Collaborative Colonial Power*, p28. Closer examination of miscegenation offers new postcolonial historiography; 'manifold interrelationships' between colonial and nationalist projects, p209, help show 'the multifarious colonial makings of the Hong Kong Chinese'. p210.

⁵⁹ Howe, Stephen, *The New Imperial Histories Reader*.

⁶⁰ Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*; Bentley, *Old World Encounters*; Hopkins, *Globalization in World History*; Wesseling, *Imperialism and Colonialism*; Wesseling, *A Cape of Asia*; Wesseling, *Expansion and Reaction*; Osterhammel, *Transformation of the World*; Osterhammel, *Colonialism*; Goody, *The Eurasian Miracle*; Lombard and Aubin *Asian Merchants and Businessmen in the Indian Ocean and the China Sea*; Tagliacozzo and Chang, *Chinese Circulations*, pxii. Baghdiantz et al, *Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks*.

⁶¹ Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*.

West arrived, at least back to the 1200s.⁶² Then Bayly's outline of early modern globalization highlights the period just before the birth of Hong Kong as one of global imperialism, increasing hybridities and inter-racial sex. 'Large Eurasian, Afro-Asia, and later, Euro-Australasian communities developed across the world... Neither race nor nationality, as understood at the end of the nineteenth century, was yet a dominant concept.'⁶³ He adds: 'Chinese merchants in port cities adapted these Eurasian and Islamic categories to their own concepts of refinement and barbarity... Caste as a global measure of embodied status... operated at a deeper level than nationality, which remained a flexible and rather indistinct category at this point.'⁶⁴

Work by Hopkins et al shows the cosmopolitanism of earlier eras of archaic and proto-globalisation. Even though mixing was later corralled by national interest, 'continuities were striking everywhere because the European empires were built on the archaic foundations and proto-globalizing tendencies of the societies they subordinated... the structure and evolution of colonialism itself were heavily influenced by the resilience and continuing dynamism of indigenous institutions.'⁶⁵

Hong Kong stands out as having, in 1841, very little 'society' for new imperialists to exploit or manipulate. This is why its emergence was so reliant on older patterns of cosmopolitan diasporas, integral to world trade across Eurasia for centuries. The British were one globalizing force to birth Hong Kong, but two non-European globalisms, Islam and Diaspora, played key roles too. 'The continuing vitality of the borderless world of diasporas was thus of key importance in maintaining the global economic system that is usually seen as being the product of the West.'⁶⁶ Bayly outlines key aspects of archaic globalizations that prefigured the evolution of the modern world (and so the birth of Hong Kong), noting the centrality of merchant diasporas and how a maritime bazaar economy, and the land caravan trade, underpinned capitalist expansion in the colonial period. Important traders were Armenians from Persia through the Ottoman world to Burma and beyond. Bayly

⁶² Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System* University of California Press, 1974. Abu-Lughod, 'Discontinuities and Persistence: One World System or a Succession of Systems', in Frank and Gills, *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand*, pp278-91, p283. See James Chin Kong *Merchants and Other Sojourners*. Frank's *ReOrient* claims 15th century Southeast Asia 'was one of the world's richest and commercially important regions', pp92-3.

⁶³ Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, p46.

⁶⁴ Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, p47.

⁶⁵ Hopkins, *Globalization in World History*, p8.

⁶⁶ Hopkins, *Globalization in World History*, p40.

says such agents of globalisation have long been treated as mere sideshows to the primary narrative of European expansion when they should instead be seen as integral to it all, part of a functionally coherent pattern of commerce and culture.⁶⁷ Wesseling showed that not only must imperial centres accept pre-colonial reality, but so must those colonized admit their own histories.⁶⁸ Henley and Schulte Nordholt note how a historiographic big picture can encompass rich fields of diasporic, migration studies, and cosmopolitanism, and that the longer view helps to ‘overcome the compartmentalization imposed by conventional historical periodization.’⁶⁹ At last, a perspective emerges in which Hong Kong might belong. Global history with a dose of *longue durée* shows East, Southeast and South Asia as deeply connected, interlocking zones of peoples, activities and polities.⁷⁰

Rajat Kanta Ray details the evolution of this bazaar, that expanding sphere between European corporations and subsistence or peddling trades.⁷¹ Ancient systems met, confronted, meshed and merged with western imperialisms. Thus, the ‘five great colonial port cities of nineteenth-century Asia – Shanghai, Hongkong, Singapore, Calcutta and Bombay – became the focal points of Asian trade and finance. The concentration owed as much to the expanding participation of the Jewish, Indian and Chinese merchant communities as to the influx of Western capital.’⁷² Specifically, port cities are where the bricolage – the mixing and migration - happens. The chain of global port cities is the pathway on which Hong Kong’s diverse peoples – its bricoleurs and Eurasians – travel. Port cities are the milestones marking their journey across the world, and port city networks are the highways on which they travel. This takes us far beyond the frames of British or Chinese historiographies, or the constraints of Area Studies or local Hong Kong historiography. Hong Kong’s Eurasians are Port City People.

⁶⁷ Bayly, in Hopkins, *Globalization in World History*, p64.

⁶⁸ See Wesseling, *A Cape of Asia* and, *Imperialism and Colonialism*.

⁶⁹ Henley and Schulte Nordholt. *Environment, Trade and Society in Southeast Asia*, p2. See also: Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia*; Cohen, *Global Diasporas*; Cheah, Robbins, eds. *Cosmopolitics, Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*; McDonogh, and Wong, *Global Hong Kong: Meter, Hong Kong as a Global Metropolis*; Hamilton, *Cosmopolitan Capitalists, Hong Kong and the Chinese Diaspora*.

⁷⁰ See Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era*; Conrad, *What is Global History*; Bellich et al, *The Prospect of Global History*.

⁷¹ Rajat Kanta Ray, ‘Asian Capital’, p455.

⁷² Rajat Kanta Ray, ‘Asian Capital’, p482. Hein says ‘Port-related flows of goods, people and ideas cross institutional boundaries and create complex, fuzzy territories’, in *The Port Cityscape*.

As Bayly's bazaar evolves into Asia's chain of port cities, Hong Kong's history makes more sense. Where once coastal towns fed inland agricultural produce to a maritime trading world, port cities featured a dominant power seeking monopolies over the trade in key commodities. British port cities, by contrast, eulogised a notion of Free Trade in which the more (trades and traders) was considered the merrier (or most lucrative). Su Lin Lewis describes port cities as 'nodes of commerce, communication, and power'; she finds 'the emergence of a nascent and cosmopolitan civil society in Asia in its multi-ethnic port-cities.'⁷³ Here the local and the global came slap bang up against each other, changing each other in the process. Colonial-era port cities 'were fraught with racial hierarchies and economic inequality, yet they were also incubators of modern sensibilities open to new ideas of political and social change, from democratic government to women's rights.'⁷⁴ She adds that port cities further east 'have been just as diverse, though the extent to which their inhabitants interacted and emulated each other is still up for debate.'⁷⁵ By the 1920s, port cities were 'dynamic environments in which Asians could re-imagine the world ... hotbeds for religious reformers, aspiring political leaders, new literati, and a rising middle class'.⁷⁶ But post-colonial states in Asia built on nationalist narratives, often obscuring the lateral links between trading and labouring classes beyond borders.

Harper aims to 'decentre our understanding of these larger processes' to tell 'of lives that were lived at the interstices of empires, and of struggles that did not see the nation-state as its sole end or as the natural ordering of a future world.' He cites Mas Marco Kartodikromo calling this 'the human nation of the world' and finds 'a time and a place between - or, perhaps more accurately, besides - empire and nation.'⁷⁷

Port cities also pre-date these definitions. Rhoads Murphey explains: 'Port functions, more than anything else, make a city cosmopolitan, a word which does not necessarily mean "sophisticated" but rather hybrid. A port city is open to the world, or at least to a varied section of it. In it races, cultures, and ideas as well as goods from a variety of places jostle, mix, and enrich each other and the life of the city'.⁷⁸

⁷³ Lewis, Su Lin, *Cities in Motion*, p2.

⁷⁴ Lewis, Su Lin, *Cities in Motion*, p2.

⁷⁵ Lewis, Su Lin, *Cities in Motion*, p8

⁷⁶ Lewis, Su Lin, *Cities in Motion*, p1.

⁷⁷ Harper, Tim. *Underground Asia*, pp xxvii-xxviii.

⁷⁸ Murphey, in Broeze, *Brides of the Sea*, p225.

The chief mark of success for a port city was its ability to attract trade and traders. It might or might not be a Treaty Port – a legally defined entity, akin to the earlier Capitulations of Ottoman times, offering extra-territoriality. The trade might be coastal, riverine, or international, ‘Yet all of them also exhibit a highly varied mix of peoples and cultures, reflecting their widespread connections...as cosmopolitan centres of ferment, social mobility, innovation, and stimulus, open doors on the world and major crossroads of its traffic in ideas and people as well as in goods.’⁷⁹ It was the people that made a port city.⁸⁰

Su Lin Lewis, Tim Harper, Sebouh Aslanian, Mark Ravinder Frost, and Sunil Amrith provide a framework in which Hong Kong can be at home.⁸¹ In particular, Harper has shown how insular Southeast Asia had always been global, constituting an axis between East Asia and India and the Middle East. Always porous, the region benefitted in many ways from colonial injections of vigour and modernity, leading to a revitalisation of old patterns, which, at least for the nineteenth century, maintained ethnicity as a malleable concept and migration as a core activity. By seeing how people actually lived, using biographies of key figures and an understanding of diasporic identities, one can, he argues, show how hugely complex layers of activity and belonging emerged around the great port cities of colonial Asia which remained largely ungoverned by the Europeans who thought they were in power.

Physical links strengthened the human networks too. Steamships sailed between Manila and Hong Kong, flights to London from Hong Kong flew via Penang, Masonic lodges overlapped from Hong Kong to Johor. South Asians came to Hong Kong because they knew Western rigging; Overseas Chinese returned to Hong Kong as the nearest safe place to China.⁸² Leonard Blussé argues in this context that compared to earlier port towns such as Canton, Batavia and Nagasaki, Singapore and Hong Kong marked a firm break with the past, being based not on monopolistic control of one or two commodities, but on the British concept of free trade.

⁷⁹ Murphey, in Broeze, *Brides of the Sea*, p236, and ff.

⁸⁰ Broeze, *Gateways of Asia*, p17. Sutherland refers to Berry, *Cities as Systems*. Paul Cohen argues littoral cities - Canton, HK, Shanghai, Ningpo, Foochow and Tientsin - had distinct cultures.

⁸¹ Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean*; Lewis, ‘Rotary International’s “acid test”’; Harper *Underground Asia*; Harper and Amrith, *Sites of Asian Interaction*; Frost, *Singapore, A Biography*.

⁸² Blussé, *Visible Cities*.

Port City Prosopography

By tracing the families, key personalities, their networks and fluid social zones, Hong Kong emerges as an Asian port city made by wider Eurasia at least as much as by China. In this thesis I discover the in-between people, who I also call Eurasian, who are essential to understanding the nature of Hong Kong.⁸³ Detailed empirical work is needed through a close reading of people and families as, so often, the records lead us astray. For example, Paul van Dyke notes that defining trade according to ships' flags has 'skewed our understanding of what was actually happening' as many financiers of voyages were based in India or Southeast Asia. 'Customs officials in China — as well as historians in the present day — have logically assigned the trade of those ships to the flags they displayed. This has kept the real owners in the shadows'. Even though a ship's captain might be European, the power sat elsewhere. Here again, the tools of prosopography can help by focusing on just who owned the ships, where they came from and where they went. By concentrating on these people, it is hoped to bring them from the margins of history to the centre where they more rightly belong.

Helen Sutherland explains these translator/interpreters were the 'Gatekeepers, capable of shaping both perceptions and policy. Their ability to bridge cultural divides was crucial, but consequently their identities could appear ambiguous and their loyalties uncertain...'⁸⁴ She adds: 'Such mediating roles demanded special skills, sensitivities, and connections, which were mainly to be found in the creole and mestizo communities that developed in the wake of European settlement.'⁸⁵ More specialized were banians of Calcutta, dubashes of Madras, or the comprador of the China Coast. Perhaps most under-rated of all were the women who often formed the first connections with new traders, in Hong Kong as across Southeast Asia.

Many of Sutherland's points about Makassar apply to Hong Kong. She notes how State Archives may be seductively coherent but ignore day-to-day routines, politics, and the internal life of Asian communities - dividing people by race, religion,

⁸³ Van Dyke & Schopp, *The Private Side of the Canton Trade*, p3, also see p5.

⁸⁴ Sutherland, 'Traacherous Translators and Improvident Paupers', p319.

⁸⁵ Sutherland, 'Traacherous Translators and Improvident Paupers', p324.

occupation and contracts when all such borders are permeable, ambiguous, flexible. Her tolken, as with Hong Kong's Eurasian core, were numerically small but central to urban life and the port city's functioning. Her tolken, as did Hong Kong's Eurasians, maintained their own networks of informants, clients, diplomatic relations and political intelligence. She finds, as do I, the symbiosis between these 'translators' and the powers that be. She also finds, as do I, that several families monopolized the tolken positions for generations, 'all part of an inter-connected complex of clans'.⁸⁶ And she notes how, as time went by, the space for negotiation, the lifeblood of such in-between communities, shrank.

Tracing the emergence of Hong Kong requires a close look at many of these in-between people.⁸⁷ Examining the daily life of diverse peoples will take us beyond the binary of 'Chinese city' or 'British colony'. In Hong Kong, newly inter-connecting people generated a fresh dynamic, a non-state entity with roots far across the Eurasian continent. Discovering how Hong Kong became an Asian port city gives Hong Kong the more-Asian identity that is its due. It also illuminates how and why Hong Kong was different to mainland China.

There is no one word for the essential people in trading settlements who are more than middlemen and women, more than translators or traders, more than mistresses or clerks. They might be each of these things when acting for the outside power, but also run their own businesses, their own property empires, nurture their own dynasties, forge their own networks. They are often more influential over a longer period of time than any passing British or Chinese administrator. They cross boundaries – of race, faith, class and gender. They cross borders in the simple physical sense - they are all, British and most Chinese included - migrants. They also break taboos - when a Parsi marries a Chinese, or a Briton speaks Hindustani and Portuguese, or a Muslim's three wives are each of a different faith and ethnicity, or an Englishwoman brings up her husband's half-Chinese children with care.

⁸⁶ Sutherland, 'Traacherous Translators and Improvident Paupers', p339. See Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia*; Kling & Peason *The Age of Partnership*; Bonacich, 'A Theory of Middleman Minorities'. Blalock's Middleman Minorities encompassed Chinese in Southeast Asia, Jews in Europe, Indians in East Africa, Armenians, Parsis. See Cheeseright, 'Mixed Blood: Discovering Eurasians'; Yap, 'Sex and Stereotypes'. Scammell, 'The Pillars of Empire: Indigenous Assistance'; Neild-Basu, 'The Dubashes of Madras'; Bosma & Raben, *Being 'Dutch' in the Indies*; Broeze, *Brides of the Sea*; Butcher & Dick, *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming*; Ross & Telkamp, *Colonial Cities*.

⁸⁷ Emma Teng's *Eurasian* offers only one Hong Kong example, the well-known Ho Tung family.

One learns who matters by what they do. Hong Kong's Eurasians found the gaps between empires and made them their own, becoming indispensable to any empire's functioning. By reading within a Global History frame — providing a wide angle lens to make comparisons, find similarities and note differences across times and spaces — this becomes clear. It also helps to understand the variety of peoples who have made Hong Kong home, by considering Hong Kong not merely a lonely Chinese land stolen by Scottish drug-traders, but a way-station on the routes of globalization over centuries. Any binary Tale of Two Cities forgets that many of these people were sleeping together most nights. It forgets the many other peoples who slept there too. It forgets Hong Kong's offer of new life to bricoleurs. They were not sent by the central imperial power to this 'outpost'; they were not already in Hong Kong when the European empires arrived. They moved.

The first generations of today's Hong Kongers' knew the way to Hong Kong, as Chapter 2 shows, from earlier trade links of which their forebears had been a part.

Chapter 3 meets the people arriving, trading and building lives under British rule.

Chapter 4 focuses on the Parsis - one of many groups with Asian roots who played a central role in Hong Kong.

Chapter 5 looks at the often-trafficked women who birthed Eurasian families and traces how they bore the seeds of a new elite.

Chapter 6 brings this web into the twentieth century when mixed-race families faced challenges of identity as the boundaries around them changed.

Chapter 7 shows how these networks adapted and survived World War Two.

Chapter 8 surveys recent changes as Hong Kong's history of absence continues: neither Britain nor China included Hong Kong people in talks over their fate.

Chapter 9 concludes this thesis with a summary of how Hong Kong only makes sense if seen as port city, and more so as a Eurasian port city.