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Hong Kong's place in South East Asia

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Chapter 2 Asia's Global Trade and Port Cities

Trading of one kind or another had been going on south and west of Hong Kong for centuries and this trade was global long before the latecomers, Westerners, arrived. Even then, after European traders appeared in Asia increasingly from the sixteenth century, and the British in full force from the late eighteenth century, Hong Kong was an afterthought on the map of Asian exchange. We look here at how that happened, in order to understand where Hong Kong's peoples came from. This chapter argues that Hong Kong's emergence was only possible thanks to particular pre-existing figurations, namely, patterns of commodity exchange practised by long-standing and far-flung networks of peoples from across Eurasia. An imperial power did not suddenly appear, run up a flag and start a city. On the contrary, the port city of Hong Kong grew out of, and was foreshadowed by, scores of earlier port cities across the world, where a wide range of peoples, of different faiths and living practises, came together and exchanged goods, ideas and even genes. This chain of trade and human connection was never seamless or safe, nor was it a uniform process with fixed rules. But the logic of trade required networks of inter-connected people (often families, dynasties and faith-tied groups) to pursue it.

Political structures prevalent at the time – a weak China, a powerful imperial thrust from Europe, a diverse spray of countries and cultures to south and west – all enabled the founding of Hong Kong. But while Empire may have been the rallying call of the opium traders, that loosely-run structure could only function on the back of Asian trading diasporas with all their knowledge, experience, alliances and linked port-cities. It suited the power-holders to welcome migrant communities, to give them space and freedom to run their cross-border lives. Without them, trade would not take place. A mutual balance was required of information and support, between rulers and trading networks. After all, those networks both predated and outlasted changing ruling patterns.

Trade and its Peoples

Back in the ninth century, a thriving exchange was underway between Canton and civilisations as far away as western India and Persia. Long before the more northern

Chinese joined in, Persian, Sanskrit and other influences had been spreading through India into commercially linked centres in South and Southeast Asia.⁸⁸ Hinduism and Buddhism co-existed and with spiritual figures on the move came traders and the exchange of material goods across the Indian and Malay seas. A revolution in the production of wet rice and the spread of prosperity along developing trade arteries challenge the Chinese perception of the world, with itself as the centre. From the tropics came the pattern of strategic river ports in which outlets for rich commodity production upriver became centres for sending out that produce to markets to the north and west. These ports were often highly cosmopolitan, welcoming Chinese, Indian, Arab and Malay traders, and Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim teachers.⁸⁹

By the 800s, Arabs had routes across the Arabian Sea to Indian ports such as Quilon or Calicut, through the straits between India and Ceylon to Aceh, the northern tip of Sumatra. This was already an established route before the Chinese of the Song thought about joining in. Once Canton was added as a destination, and if the pirates of Malacca and around Singapore could be managed, the route was extended northwards. Ships either sailed up the coast of Champa, the Gulf of Tonkin and Hainan to China. Or they took the more dangerous but bountiful route along the north coasts of Borneo, the western Philippines to southern Taiwan and Fujian. Once the Spaniard conquest of southern America had spurred the extraction of silver which then reached Spanish Philippines, the route would take in Manila too, a vital link in the chain from the 1570s.

A great deal of specialized production was going on, of metal tools, ceramics, textiles and Indian cotton. China's Southern Song era (1127-1280), placed unprecedented attention on maritime routes to the South, and finally Chinese shipping could be seen joining the trading networks of the region (just as its overland routes through Central Asia were falling apart, accelerated by the fall of Baghdad in 1258). Chinese actively spread themselves southward: 'for the first time in Chinese history the revenues from trade and customs exceeded the land revenue. Much of this contact was with the southern borderlands, and the island countries beyond them...'⁹⁰ This

⁸⁸ Reid, *Critical Crossroads*, p34. Note Sheldon Pollock's term, the Sanskrit Cosmopolis, for a wide spread of Indian culture across southern Asia from around the fourth to fourteenth centuries.

⁸⁹ Reid, *Critical Crossroads*, p45.

⁹⁰ Fitzgerald, *Southern Expansion of the Chinese People*, p15.

contact made Chinese influential in the Srivijaya kingdom (Sumatra and Malaya), altering control of sea routes between India and China, and where merchants came from all over and met each other: Arabs, Chinese, Indians, Malays, Bugis and more.

Now Southeast Asia entered its 'Age of Commerce' lasting from the 1400s well into the 1600s. Go-to places were Pegu in Burma (Myanmar), Ayuthaya in Siam (Thailand), Phnom Penh on the southeast Asian mainland, Palembang in Sumatra, Malacca (Melaka) on the Malay Peninsula, Banten in West Java, plus Brunei, Cebu, Manila, Ternate and Banda. A 'highly organised system of entrepot trade'⁹¹ involved successful diaspora capitalists such as the Chettiars of south India and the Gujarati sharafs of the north. Chinese traders were integral once Quanzhou (Chinchew) and Guangzhou (Canton) joined this cosmopolitan world during the Southern Song era. Muslim Arabs were in Canton from the mid-800s; after all, the Indian Ocean trade was essentially an Islamic network 'increasingly intersecting with the other networks based in the ports of China'.⁹² As usual, Arabs married locally and spread the word. Islam was the natural faith of commerce as it offered a portable trading vocabulary and legal framework. The Muslim 'treasure ship' Admiral Zheng He left behind significant groups of Chinese Muslims in the various ports he visited. Yet the powers in the region at the time were Siam, Champa and Java.⁹³

European powers

The Chinese state was far less important in regional trade than were its peoples. Acknowledgement of Chinese suzerainty occurred to varying degrees in Malaya, Burma, Sukothai, Khmer, Champa, Annam, and Java. From 1350 on, however, successive Chinese revolts meant 'control over south China was lost', presumably including the area now known as Hong Kong; and, 'As on previous occasions the decline of Chinese power meant that the kingdoms of the south were left to their own quarrels without any fear of Chinese intervention'.⁹⁴ Trade and the nodes it nurtured, carried on regardless. Now Malukan spices were reaching Venice through Cairo (by 1490s) and by 1498, Vasco da Gama had found a new route to Calicut from

⁹¹ Reid, *Critical Crossroads*, p63.

⁹² Reid, *Critical Crossroads*, p69.

⁹³ Fitzgerald, *Southern Expansion of the Chinese People*, wonders if the Ming Expeditions, 1405-1433, lacking conquest and official trade were about power or curiosity, pp87-89, 92-100.

⁹⁴ Fitzgerald, *Southern Expansion of the Chinese People*, p85.

Lisbon, so that Lisbon began replacing Venice. When Portugal took Malacca in 1511, the displaced Muslim community there carried on in Sumatran and other ports. Spain took Cebu in 1565 and Manila in 1570 - so that ships from Mexico brought not only silver but also chili, papaya, maize and tobacco to Asia. The Dutch then barged in and were trading 22 ships through Southeast Asia by 1598, taking Ambon in 1606, Jakarta in 1619, Banda in 1621, and Formosa (Taiwan) in 1624-62 and 1664-68.

The Chinese were only just entering this rich new world of southern trade pioneered by other civilisations. Hong Kong was nowhere on this map in the pre-modern era. Up until about 1400 all Southeast Asian trade goods were foraged from the wilds — elephant tusks, rhino horns, aromatic woods, incense, cloves, nutmeg, gums, resins, Birds' nests, bird of paradise and much more. But now, China needed silver from Manila (and Japan), Europe needed Southeast Asian spices and Chinese silk and ceramics, and everyone needed India's cotton. A shift to commercial agriculture produced spectacular growth in pepper and sugar cultivation in 'the lands below the winds' (under the sway of monsoons). Tin mining took off too. Huge temporary populations of traders between monsoons were turning up from everywhere, spurring the growth of cosmopolitan trading hubs across the region. 'Most Southeast Asian maritime cities, and all of those which served the long-term trade with India and China, had hectic periods when merchants from both China and India were in port, which reminded Europeans of the trade fairs of their continent.'⁹⁵

It was China's decline and growing distaste for maritime trade that let it slip out of government hands into those of private merchants. Ming emperors 'did not have contact with men from the real [further] south... These northern men of slight education had no personal knowledge of the south, the sea, or indeed of any region of China other than their native place and the palace at Peking.'⁹⁶ Their focus was always the pressing dangers looming from the north. Chinese maritime power was a Sung phenomenon, which faded out thereafter. Once all trade, for example with Japan, was ruled illegal, it was taken over by 'smugglers' and 'pirates'.

This abdication by the Chinese state was taking place just as more aggressive figures were making inroads from the West, leading to the granting of the monopoly on

⁹⁵ Reid, *Critical Crossroads*, p80.

⁹⁶ Fitzgerald, *Southern Expansion of the Chinese People*, pp106-7.

foreign trade to Canton and the rise of Western dominance there. As Fitzgerald notes, the thought was not to oppose trade but to control it 'at a point far removed from the northern provinces, and at the same time nearest to the countries from which the foreigners came. By making Canton the sole port, there was no reason for foreign shipping to move further up the coast, and contacts with potential dissidents could be minimised.' Thus, 'The abdication of all sea power by both Japan, following the seclusion policy adopted by the Tokugawa Shoguns, and then by China under the Manchu dynasty was the origin of the Western ascendancy in the Far East.'⁹⁷

From 1750 to 1850, when the idea of a settlement on Hong Kong island arose, trading patterns across Southeast Asia were diverging. Anthony Reid posits a decline in Southeast Asia after the sixteenth century and asks if this divergence between East and West was due to European monopoly-based colonialism, to culture, or the fall in silver production. Victor Lieberman says that the entire Eurasian continent, East and West, suffered similar crises (with important distinctions to be made between mainland and archipelagic Southeast Asia). Kenneth Pomeranz shifts the moment of divergence to 1750-1850, blaming it on Asia's exhaustion of land and energy while Europe had coal and forests available in the New World. Reid sees this as an impressive argument but one which discounts the importance of China's silver import strategies, and says the crisis affected Southeast Asia more than elsewhere because of the region's high exposure to the expanding global trade cycle. As the West's ships took control, many Southeast Asian cosmopolises were lost; European militarisation and monopolies ensued.

What historians agree on is that there were significant climate changes, patterns of disease, military innovations and shifts in global commercial cycles, as well as new intellectual trends which would change the shape of the playing board. 'By the eighteenth century the items of greatest interest to world trade were no longer Southeast Asian, but had shifted to the cotton cloth of India, the tobacco and sugar of the New World, and the silks, porcelains, and tea of China.'⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Fitzgerald, *Southern Expansion of the Chinese People*, p112, p113.

⁹⁸ Reid, *Critical Crossroads*, pp147-148. See also, Lieberman, Victor. *Strange Parallels*, and, Mainland Mirrors. Pomeranz, Kenneth. *The Great Divergence*.

Movements of People

Already by the fifteenth century, Chinese traders had been moving southwards in greater numbers. This movement both pre-dated, and strengthened, British, Dutch and other Europeans empire in Asia. Once new Qing/Manchu rulers reversed Ming rules against travelling abroad, its traders were now seen as useful to have around.

As Wang Gungwu has outlined, two Chinese communities abroad at the time that Ming China had closed its maritime gates, were stuck abroad: one on the northeast coast of Java, described as Muslim, and the other of Guangdong and Fujian descendants of Chinese sojourners who had traded regularly at Palembang. There were probably more, in Champa, Siam, Malay, Sulu, and Borneo. 'Thus, before the arrival of the Europeans, a chain of small port communities of Chinese traders was servicing a thriving trade that many people in eastern and Southeast Asia were actively seeking to expand,' says Wang, citing Ming Veritable Records.⁹⁹ 'The Hokkiens ... were the majority of the overseas traders between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries. They were also the most successful. They emerged as a coherent trading force on the China coast earlier than the Portuguese did on the European coast.'¹⁰⁰ When the Ming had tried to shut them down in 1368 they carried on regardless, survived on their own outside the law. Skilled ship-builders, wealthy clansmen and literati relatives, home and village networks — all survived, providing a wealth of long-time knowledge and experience of Southeast Asia.

Kwee Hui Kian explains how successive waves of Chinese throughout 1400-1850 populated the region. They gradually inserted themselves into regional trade and local markets; they even started producing key commodities such as sugar, gambir, pepper, rice and tin. Clan origins gave them networks abroad; meanwhile whoever was in charge (originally indigenous power-holders and later colonial) allowed, even encouraged, them to occupy strategic commercial positions. Kwee notes that it was not some innate "Chinese-ness" that made these communities succeed. Rather, 'what gave them [the Chinese] decisive advantage over other groups of Asian and European commercial agents were the specific characteristics in the development of the Southeast Asian economy during the early modern period. This momentum was

⁹⁹ Wang Gungwu, *Merchants without Empires* Ch. 13, in Tracy, *Rise of Merchant Empires*, p408.

¹⁰⁰ Wang in Tracy, *Rise of Merchant Empires*, p419.

then carried over into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when they were serving as trade intermediaries especially for the European merchant houses'.¹⁰¹

It was a happy confluence of time and place. Chinese settled down and opened shops from the early 1400s in entrepôts or port towns in north Java, Palembang and Siam. A century later, Chinese shipping to Southeast Asia had increased massively and was now reaching Malacca, Patani, Brunei and Banten. Chinese also operated within enclave European ports once they appeared and were soon the dominant local intermediaries in Manila and Batavia.¹⁰² By the eighteenth century, Chinese junks were visiting port towns in Cochin China, the Mekong delta, Siam, Indochina, Songkhla, Cebu, Sulu, Trengganu, Pahang, Johor, Riau, Siak, Aceh, Brunei, Banjarmasin and Makassar. Kwee says they were just as dominant in inter-insular trade through Southeast Asian seas, as well as upstream into rural hinterlands. They traded all the usual forest and marine products and grew rice too. They also gained political influence, as port masters, revenue farmers and even foreign ministers.¹⁰³

In considering why Chinese were so good at all this, Kwee notes their adaptability, peddling skill, advanced credit systems, and petty currency trade. Above all, however, what made them pre-eminent was European reliance on them (seen, for example, in the rule by the Dutch trading company, Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie or VOC). China's growing demands on the region and increased European demand for Southeast Asian products, intensified the need for trade intermediaries. Unlike local groups, the Chinese could stand apart from local conflicts and competition. Far better to use outsider-Asians – and the Chinese soon outpriced and outpaced others such as groups from the Middle East or South Asia.

¹⁰¹ Kwee, in Henley and Schulte Nordholt. *Environment, Trade and Society*, p150.

¹⁰² There were about 30,000 Chinese in Manila in the 1600s and about 3,000 in Batavia in 1627. 'These two port towns also witnessed a novel development in the history of Chinese migration: While they had previously visited Southeast Asia primarily for commercial reasons, Chinese migrants began arriving at these European settlements not only as traders but also as craftsmen, market gardeners and sugar producers.' Kwee in Henley and Schulte Nordholt. *Environment, Trade and Society*, p151.

¹⁰³ In the 1600s, Chinese leased rights to birds' nest collection and cotton textiles from Javanese rulers, thus gaining a monopoly over these commodities; by the third quarter of the eighteenth century, Chinese traders were also dominating trade in Java tobacco, timber, palm sugar, salt. 'In fact they had effectively penetrated the hinterland economy of Java'. Kwee in Henley and Schulte Nordholt. *Environment, Trade and Society*, p155.

At the same time, China's need for regional products was rising – products such as pepper, or exotics such as tortoise shells, resins, sandalwood, rice, timber, sea cucumber. Getting these goods for the Chinese market meant competing with Europeans and working around restrictions, with no imperial support from the Chinese motherland. This was private enterprise and required engaging with the local authorities and making one's own deals, creating monopolies via money not military force. These Chinese could then do the relay shipping, taking tin or pepper from one port to the next within the region, and they could solve production squeezes by importing Chinese labour into Southeast Asia to grow the rice, the pepper and the cash crops, and to do the mining. The concomitant commercialization of Southeast Asian production thus left key products and trades in Chinese hands.

This was a clear example of how the combination of, on the one hand, European empire and, on the other hand, Asian communities of varied insider / outsider status, formed new networks of trade and power. As will be seen, Hong Kong would offer new variations on this theme.

Chinese and British interests

This new dynamism of Chinese trading communities coincided with, on the other side of the world, Britain's. The British had finally won their Napoleonic wars, and had already gained rich Asian experience through their brief tutelages of Manila (1762-64), Malacca and Padang (1765), Maluku (1796 and 1810) and Java (1811-16). The new British presence gave Asian rulers a chance to throw off Dutch or Spanish yokes. A profound distinction that the British brought to the playing board was what they called 'Free Trade'. The Portuguese, Dutch and Spanish had each tried to gain sole control of a key commodity and enforce a monopoly which produced violent punishments of transgressors. The British ideology of 'free trade' required not monopoly but preferential access through special relationships and being faster on their feet. Penang and Singapore became powerful magnets for producers to exchange anything from rice, sugar, tin, coffee and pepper, for manufactured items, Indian cottons, firearms and opium. Anthony Reid reports that this new ideology seemed to work: Singapore's trade with independent entities such as Siam, Vietnam, Aceh, and Bali at least doubled, if not tripled, between 1825 and 1845.

With the British came a new focus on the trade in firearms and opium which the newly establishing states of mainland Southeast Asia and Qing China found deeply tempting. Free trade ports such as Singapore, and soon Hong Kong, earned revenue not by taxing trade, but by taxing opium. The Opium Farm - the farming of revenue by contracted agents — took on a new form as the Chinese allies of the British and the Dutch across Southeast Asia brought in their people to labour, to consume opium, to gamble, and to pay tax on it all. 'The battles for control of new frontiers of mining and plantations in the [Malay] Peninsula and Borneo were often about which Chinese tax-farmer would act on behalf of which ruler'.¹⁰⁴ Opium farmers were given legitimacy through native titles and Dutch or British colonial councils. China's tribute system through which Southeast Asian kingdoms paid court to the Chinese empire had lost all economic meaning by the start of the 1800s. Instead, the specific task of revenue farming quickly became the prerogative of Chinese throughout the region, providing ready access to huge profits, as well as a closeness to the governing power on whose behalf the revenue was being farmed. The farm was invariably allocated (or auctioned) to an influential Chinese so that the British could out-source all that tiresome and expensive business of debt collection and drug distribution. Siam, Johor, Singapore and, later, Hong Kong could not have survived without their opium farms.

The arrival of Europeans in Asia's midst did not by itself change or cause everything.¹⁰⁵ By the eighteenth century, no matter how hard the Europeans tried, the British and the Dutch could still not find a way to compete effectively with the Gujaratis on trade through the Red Sea. They could only make inroads in commodities which the Gujaratis found uninteresting, such as spices and coffee. What mattered was cotton cloth and the Gujaratis controlled that.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, although competition was fierce there was always collaboration too. Europeans had the guns and well-armed shipping; Indian merchants also hired European captains and sailors, sharing knowledge and co-financing trips. Asian merchants moved eastwards from Bengal in the late seventeenth century, trading with Arakan, Pegu,

¹⁰⁴ Reid, *Critical Crossroads*, p203.

¹⁰⁵ See Kling and Pearson, *The Age of Partnership*. In the 16th century, the Portuguese modified existing patterns in the Asian spice trade but did not replace them. The Portuguese taxed most of Gujarat's external trade (in northwest India) but they cooperated with wealthy Gujaratis too.

¹⁰⁶ For Gujarati merchants in the Red Sea Trade, see Das Gupta in Kling and Pearson, pp123-158.

Siam, Manila and Sumatra, shipping was also run by Armenian merchants, many based in Hugli and Balasore port (part of what we now call Calcutta/Kolkata).

Within Southeast Asia, as important as the Chinese traders were Bugis from South Sulawesi, commanding a long-established trading network through Riau. When the British appeared, they bought opium off the Bugis and sold it on to the Chinese in the South China seas at a profit; at the same time the Bugis bought tin and pepper produced from Johor, Palembang, Bangka and Riau and sold it on at a profit to the British, Portuguese and Chinese. They sold textiles from Bengal and Surat to Westerners and also to the indigenous traders who were bringing in the tin and pepper. Chinese junks bringing China goods, as well as Siamese, Cambodian, Malay and Acehnese boats, came for tin, pepper and opium.

Meanwhile, English interest was only growing and the search for a settlement was underway from the 1770s. In 1772, Edward Mockton had tried for a defensive alliance with the Bugis with permission for a military post at Riau, an exercise of dubious value given the Dutch had expelled the Buginese from Riau by 1784 and Buginese appeals to the British against the Dutch went unheeded. Raffles lost four children and sent his wife insane by thinking that Bengkulu, on the south coast of Sumatra, would be the future way-station of world trade. His second guess turned out better, in Singapore, taken officially in 1819.

As for the Chinese, 'it might be said that increasing numbers of south coast Chinese now understood that it was too difficult to realize maritime China on Chinese soil itself and began to bring their own private versions of maritime China with them overseas,' noted Wang Gungwu.¹⁰⁷ For these Chinese who had, between the 800s until 1368, eagerly gone abroad to join the Asian trade before Ming era restrictions quashed them, the arrival of the Europeans in the region was a good thing. Now the Chinese who had stayed out of China all those years were important again, needed by the Europeans as local allies across the region. And these overseas Chinese had learned the business. They were now more confident, experienced and knowledgeable of foreigners' ways and laws. 'Before the opening of the Treaty Ports after 1842, when the Westerners could have direct access to China, the half century

¹⁰⁷ Wang and Ng, *Maritime China in Transition*, pp10-11.

or so may be described as the golden age of what might be called “sojourner networking” [when the overseas Chinese] gained an autonomous place’.¹⁰⁸

Back in Canton, it had been a terminus of the Asian trade since at least the 900s; this was not a town suddenly thrust into the modern era by the British guns firing off the ‘Opium War’ of 1839-42. As Paul van Dyke has convincingly shown, Canton’s life blood was not merely the thirteen foreign factories, not at all. Scores of junks headed out from Canton every season, funded both by foreigners and Chinese, going to Batavia, Cochin China, Siam, Cambodia, Passiak, Caucong, Cancou, Palembang and Manila.¹⁰⁹ These were Chinese-managed junks which were competing with Macao (i.e. Portuguese) ships and European ships, actively engaging in the Asia trade. The English trade through Canton was the only one which came near this primarily regional Canton trade.¹¹⁰ The junks had lower storage capacity continuing the tradition of separated water-tight compartments, and so were 35 per cent less efficient than English company ships. However, they employed a lot of people, about 175 crewmen each, and so were massively important to the Canton economy. Somehow despite their higher costs they charged lower rates, competing actively with the foreign traders. Macao too was trading actively, running sandalwood out of Timor and ships as far afield as the Malabar coast. It received little support from Lisbon (suffering under the effects of the monstrous 1755 earthquake) and had to be sure of avoiding any upsets with the bosses of Canton, thus avoiding the provision of too much competition to Canton’s vital regional trade.

The century just before Hong Kong’s birth saw major commercial expansion in the region. Li Tana noted this upsurge in Southeast Asian regional trade directly before the birth of Hong Kong.¹¹¹ Chinese in Bangkok were travelling all over the region, collecting local, British, and Indian products for local as well as Chinese markets. By 1828, up to 70 per cent of the coins in circulation in Guangdong were cast in Vietnam. By the 1830s, Singapore Chinese played a growing role in the Saigon trade, drawn by the gains possible in speculation in rice. These traders took British cotton manufactures, especially grey shirting, to barter it at a loss for rice which was then sold on several times before delivery, at Batavia. ‘It was not by accident that the rice

¹⁰⁸ Wang and Ng, *Maritime China in Transition*, pp12-13.

¹⁰⁹ Wang and Ng, *Maritime China in Transition*, p152. See also, Dyke, *The Canton Trade*.

¹¹⁰ Wang and Ng, *Maritime China in Transition*, p156.

¹¹¹ Wang and Ng, *Maritime China in Transition*, pp261-270.

trade was handled only by the most prominent merchants in all the port cities — Singapore, Saigon, Bangkok, and later Hong Kong. Due to the requirements of large capital outlay and storage facilities, as well as the risks involved in shipping, the rice trade could only be controlled and speculated in by these most powerful Chinese.¹¹²

The founding of Singapore sealed an informal compact between Chinese and British. 'Together they found that they could carry on as stewards of international commerce in the Malay world without the Malays or Bugis who had once dominated that trade.'¹¹³ That symbiosis included Penang funnelling products extracted from Siam, Sumatra and northern Malaya into Singapore and so to China. Chinese traders made this happen. Chinese planters grew the pepper (in Brunei, Cambodia, Chantaburi,) and the gambir in Riau and Johor and the sugar in Siam and Vietnam. Chinese miners extracted the tin from Phuket and Kelantan, Bangka and Borneo. By the end of the eighteenth century, a whole new economic map had been drawn across Southeast Asia. The Chinese junk trade underwent its greatest expansion and settlements in Southeast Asia only grew. This growth was inextricably intertwined with the growth of British settlement at Singapore and up the Malay peninsula. This would 'set the stage for British capital to take control of both the financing of the production and, the purchasing of the products'.¹¹⁴ None of this could happen without the active collaboration of overseas Chinese and other trading networks.

Bird saliva and other glues

Michael Walter Charney has argued convincingly that people often study either the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia or they study the Indians / Armenians / Persians / Europeans of the Western Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal.¹¹⁵ But to understand the emergence of Hong Kong, we need to do both. One way to trace this is through the things being traded.

Charney's example of birds' nests illuminates one of many so-called 'country trades' that would later shape the emergence of Hong Kong. He describes a triangular

¹¹² Li Tana in Wang and Ng, *Maritime China in Transition*, p267. She names some of these Chinese.

¹¹³ Lieberman, 'Mainland-Archipelagic Parallels and Contrasts', in Reid, *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies*, p44.

¹¹⁴ Trocki, 'Chinese Pioneering in Eighteenth Century Southeast Asia' in Reid, *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies*, p98.

¹¹⁵ Charney in Wang and Ng, *Maritime China in Transition*, pp 245-259.

network trading in bird products, especially nests but also eggs, feathers and skins, which were produced and exported from British Burma, through Penang to southern China. This trade increased dramatically in the early nineteenth century, partly because British expansion into the Straits Settlements in the 1790s and coastal annexation of coastal Burma 1826 and Lower Burma 1852 meant that 'commercial intelligence-gathering rapidly increased'.¹¹⁶ More significantly, a growing Chinese domestic demand pushed nest-harvesters further afield to work harder. For example, the Governor of Cochin China (south Vietnam) sent an embassy to Burma in 1820-21 to get permission to buy esculent birds' nests on the Tennasserim coast to sell in China; the officials went up the Straits of Malacca via Singapore, Malacca and Penang.¹¹⁷ When the British occupied Tenasserim in 1824 as part of the First Anglo-Burmese War 1824-26, their plan was to develop local commerce with Chinese merchants especially from the Straits and Penang. There was even a farm or contracted monopoly for birds' nests, bid for in five-year periods.¹¹⁸ By the early 1840s, Chinese junk fleets were going further northwest beyond Tavoy and Mergui to the Ramree Islands, in central Arakan, for birds' nests and fish. There was also tin from Mergui and Penang, shipped on to China, India, and London. Chinese demand pre-dated the British presence, but the British presence expanded the trade and hinted at a British and Chinese needs for new trading places (such as the future Hong Kong) through which to trade.¹¹⁹

Roderich Ptak also focuses on the items traded to gain insight into the networks formed. Fujian and Guangdong were the most important producers of tea - especially a zone south of the Pearl River known as the 'thirty-three settlements'. Tea was also brought from inland to Guangzhou and at first was shipped up to Amoy in

¹¹⁶ Charney in Wang and Ng, *Maritime China in Transition*, p247.

¹¹⁷ Charney in Wang and Ng, *Maritime China in Transition*, p248.

¹¹⁸ The highly profitable Tavoy Farm was run by a Chinese. The Mergui Farm went to the Armenian Sarkies, later famed for their hotels including the Raffles (Singapore), the Strand (Rangoon) and the Eastern & Oriental (Penang).

¹¹⁹ Reyes, Raquel, 'Glimpsing Southeast Asian Naturalia in Global Trade, c. 300 BCE-1600 CE', Ch. 7 in Henley and Schulte Nordholt, *Environment, Trade and Society*, pp96-119. Reyes takes the trade in luxury goods back to the 3rd century, when southern China imported aromatic clove from the Moluccas. By the 13th century, trade between China and the Malay Peninsula focused on jungle products — beeswax, lakawood, gharuwood, ebony, camphor, ivory, rhino horn, in exchange for pongee parasols, silk thread, rice, salt sugar, porcelain, earthenware bowls. Archaeologists see a Southeast Asian interest in foreign goods back to the 4th century. A key source for Sung traders was the *Chu-fan-chi*, or *Record of Foreign Countries* written by Chao Ju Kua, published as a handbook in 1226. This described people and cultures along the sea routes of Asia, coastal Africa, Mediterranean, and a methodical account of principal items of maritime trade, p117.

Fujian for export from there. By the end of the seventeenth century, British traders were shipping tea from Amoy and the Zhejiang coast. 'From 1699, the British ships would appear in Guangzhou to load tea too. By 1704, Britain was importing about 20,000 pounds sterling worth of tea from China; this would expand five-fold. While Guangzhou turned into the most important port in tea trade with the British and EIC, the British shipments from Amoy had ceased completely by 1715.'¹²⁰ Of course the Dutch, Portuguese and French were engaged too, but growing purchases of tea by the British (and their packing it in boxes to hold the flavour on the long journey to Europe) cut into Dutch dominance. In 1721 and 1722 the British sent three times as much tea to Europe as did the Dutch VOC, until Amsterdam decided to ship direct from Guangzhou too. Amsterdam sent two ships at once, one loaded with silver and the other with commodities; the European products would be sold in Batavia in exchange for products that China needed, and then those products would be used in Guangzhou to buy Chinese goods. It worked for a while.

More importantly, argues Ptak, it showed a better way to pay China for tea: to give it products it wanted. This was a next step in the pathway towards the founding of Hong Kong. Crucially, these were not European products but Southeast Asian products desired by the Chinese. Thus European ships had to engage in Southeast Asian trade to collect the Asian products to take to China. It is vital to note here that this trade in Asian products - from birds' nests to tea, from ivory to sea slugs - long predates the trade in opium which would later dominate the China trade.

'The new trend was the British *country trade*, in other words, the trade carried out by private British traders who did not work for EIC and were noticed in Guangzhou after 1730 due to their strong competition. Both regular EIC ships and those of British *country traders* sailed frequently within Southeast Asia searching for commodities which would enable them to buy tea in China as VOC used to do.'¹²¹ It was the marauding Dutch and English who saw (more than the Portuguese did) that the key to avoiding dependence on Spanish silver was to engage in this intra-Asian Country Trade'.¹²² Profits from the country trade eventually replaced home-base subsidies to pay for war fleets and fortresses.

¹²⁰ Ptak, 'The Chinese, the Portuguese and the Dutch in the Tea Trade', p6.

¹²¹ Ptak, 'The Chinese, the Portuguese and the Dutch in the Tea Trade', p15.

¹²² Tracy, *The Rise of Merchant Empires*, p8. See also, Chaudhuri *Trade and Civilisation*.

Once again, this trade, albeit enabled and expanded by the workings of European empires, was not possible without local alliances, knowledge and skills. Nor was it possible without the active engagement of trading diasporas – not merely the Chinese but the Asian and Eurasian trading networks of old.

Asian trades, Asian traders

Asian traders did not wither away once the Europeans joined in. Arasaratnam shows Coromandel traders sold cloth into Thailand and drove Europeans out of that market. Europeans did best when they had a naval force at their disposal, although they did not master every sea, and force was sometimes counter-productive. Notes Pearson, 'More broadly speaking, the fact that Europeans prospered at least as much through association with Asians as through competition against them has led some scholars to characterise the period from 1500 to about 1750 as "an age of partnership".'¹²³ Amid all this movement of goods, people also moved.¹²⁴ This world came about because different groups of individuals and communities knew how to make it work. Gujarati Muslims inherited some of the capital accumulation methods of the Hindu sharafs, as part of a ready exchange not just of goods but of ideas. While the Chinese system of weights entered the Southeast Asian lexicon, so did Indian and Arab terms needed for effective commerce enter Malay.¹²⁵

Already in the 1600s, foreign merchants 'were constantly being incorporated into local society through the medium of marriage and adoption of local language and dress norms'.¹²⁶ It was a hybrid world, and the word 'foreign' did not mean 'westerner' but included even those Southeast Asians operating just outside their own home area. From this time until the 1840s, shipping that had previously been in Arab and Asian hands was now in Chinese. Placing the traders at the centre of this matrix shows the great extent to which Europeans in general, and the late-arriving British in particular, had to build on what was already there.

¹²³ See Pearson and King, *The Age of Partnership*.

¹²⁴ Cushman and Wang, *The Changing Identities of Chinese in Southeast Asia*.

¹²⁵ Controversy surrounds the discovery that Islam might first have reached Java from Sunni Muslims in China's Quanzhou trading in South Eastern oceans. Reid, *Critical Crossroads*, p102.

¹²⁶ Reid, *Critical Crossroads*, p92.

As John Wills found, 'Historians have understood for many years that the Europeans first established themselves as non-privileged participants in the multi-ethnic life of the Southeast Asian ports and even when they came to wield ultimate power made use of indigenous structures and practices to control Asian traders and settlers.'¹²⁷ He says it makes no sense to think in terms of European intrusion followed by Asian response – it was interaction that mattered. 'From the beginning, Indians did not just tolerate the Europeans; they employed them, rewarded them with revenue rights, and sought their protection in trade, in the process teaching them how to exploit the immense talents of the Indian peoples for production, commerce, and welfare.'¹²⁸

As a result of this active interaction, a wide range of trade links and societies evolved which connected Southeast Asia with southern China and the Indian subcontinent.¹²⁹ This in turn forged a new hybridity in Asian places, seen in the determination of western colonialists to marry their local partners, not simply cohabit. Women had long been the intermediaries between native and outside traders and this was not only to do with sex. Many Southeast Asian women were the acknowledged lead trader in a family, responsible for the marketing, and management of money. Sex was important though and the concept of temporary marriage meant that women conducted a kind of serial monogamy, marrying a trader for the duration of that man's residence in port, parting amicably when that time was up and when he had paid or given whatever had been promised. This system enabled women to move on without shame. 'Hybridity was therefore the norm for these cities, up to the point when communication with the homeland became so well established that its prejudices were imported.'¹³⁰

Freelance prostitution is not mentioned by travellers. Instead, there was 'temporary marriage'. As described by a Dutch captain in Patani, foreigners were free to choose from women who presented themselves... 'provided they agree what he shall pay for certain months. Once they agree about the money (which does not amount to

¹²⁷ Wills, 'Maritime Asia', p99.

¹²⁸ Wills, 'Maritime Asia', p86.

¹²⁹ For routes between Chinese and Southeast Asian ports in 14th-17th centuries, see Mills, 'Arab and Chinese Navigators' and 'Chinese Navigators in Insulinde'. Ptak looked at routes thru Sulu and Moluccas in 'The Northern Trade Route to the Spice Islands'. More recently, Tagliacozzo's edited *Asia Inside Out* volumes tell more, particularly *Changing times* and *Connected Places*.

¹³⁰ Reid, *Critical Crossroads*, p126.

much for so great a convenience), she comes to his house and serves him by day as his maidservant and by night as his wedded wife. He is then not able to consort with other women or he will be in grave trouble with his wife, while she is similarly wholly forbidden to converse with other men, but the marriage lasts as long as he keeps his residence there, in good peace and unity. When he wants to depart... she may look for another man as she wishes, in all propriety, without scandal.'¹³¹ Reid adds: 'Because Southeast Asian women played a dominant part in retailing, such contract wives were doubly valued by traders to help them sell their goods.'¹³²

Reid sees Southeast Asian women as 'pioneers of cultural interaction', a role usually ignored by historians or by the nationalists or imperialists of their own countries. Since at least the seventeenth century, it was the women who learned the necessary languages, and women who would advise foreign trading partners and act for them in their absence. They were of vital importance as negotiators also 'presumably because women were accustomed to bargaining and compromising by their commercial roles, where aristocratic men were constrained by fear of compromising status'.¹³³ A long run of impressive women in trade and diplomacy peopled the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries until European Christian hegemony, with its related obsessions with monogamy and racial prejudice, took hold. Barbara Watson Andaya accepts these generalized truths, while requiring more nuance and exceptions. It remains problematic that arguments about Southeast Asian women having more agency are based, perforce, on scarce evidence.¹³⁴

In the tropics, cultural hybridities appeared in language as Portuguese acquired Creole variants, Malay tangled with Arabic, Hokkien with Dutch. Clothing was multi-coloured and textured, with cloth from around the world combined in fabulous ways. Performance styles in theatre and music combined vastly contrasting traditions. The first westerners to make their homes in these Asian cities survived and made fortunes if they found local allies, male or female, and if they adapted their behaviour to local conditions. They brought new discoveries and demands from Europe and they were open to new products and ways of life in the East.

¹³¹ J. van Neck 'Journal' in Foreest, *De Vierde Schipvaart*, p225.

¹³² Anthony Reid, 'The Organisation of Production in the Pre-colonial City', Ch. 2, in Broeze, *Brides of the Sea*, p64.

¹³³ Reid, *Critical Crossroads*, p127.

¹³⁴ Andaya, Barbara Watson. *The Flaming Womb*, and 'Studying women and gender'. See also, Taylor, 'Finding Women in Southeast Asian History', in Owen, *Routledge Handbook*.

‘There was more contact and knowledge than in earlier periods, more mutual respect and curiosity than in later ones,’ concluded Reid.¹³⁵

Amid the variations of mixing between men and women, was the growth in new mixtures of men in general — including trading networks from across the Eurasian continent, from the Armenians to the Jews, from the Parsis to the Malays. Gujarat Muslims sold cotton to Red Sea port of Mocha, paid for with silver from Egyptian coffee traders (thus via Venice); the coffee was re-exported to Europe. ‘Armenian merchants, who had developed close ties with the English through the trades in English broadcloth and Persian silk, used their own ships to send the brightly coloured cloths of the Coromandel Coast from the English outpost at Madras to the Philippines, again in return for Mexican silver..¹³⁶

Armenians had been trading since the ninth century with Russia and Bulgar. During the Middle Ages they were middlemen between Italy and Mongolia. By the sixteenth century they were concentrated at Julfa, along the axis of the Araks River, thus Russia, Turkey, Iran. They also sustained communities in Amsterdam, Venice, Livorno, Ukraine, Crimea, Moldavia, and Persia. Akbar the Great was even encouraging Armenian traders to settle in India. Early 1600s, Shah of Persia deported inhabitants of villages along the Araks, during his campaign of 1603-04 against the Turks. If not deported, then epidemics or sold as slaves. Many settled against their will south of Caspian Sea. Only the nobility, and only to a limited extent, were respected by the Shah and were allowed to settle near Isfahan, thus founding a suburb of New Julfa.¹³⁷

Trade was now encouraged again by the Shah; he wanted to enrich Persia through the silk trade, sending silk to Europe in return, he hoped, for science and technology. With New Julfa as a main base, Armenian trading networks spread to Basra and Baghdad, as gates to Ottoman Empire; to Hormuz and Bandar Abbas at entry to Persian Gulf; to Agra (where an Armenian church has stood since 1567), and on to Delhi and Lafore, Diu, Cambay and Bombay; to Malabar and the Coromandel coasts, especially Madras in the 1500s-1700s; on to Bengal, Saidabad, Chinsura, Hugli and

¹³⁵ Reid, *Critical Crossroads*, p141.

¹³⁶ Tracy, *The Rise of Merchant Empires*, p1.

¹³⁷ See Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean*.

Calcutta (where an Armenian tomb dates from 1630); to Burma - Pegu, Ava, Syriam, Rangoon - trading with Madras and Calcutta and also in service locally as highly influential counsellors, interpreters and tax collectors; to Siam, and the Malayan coast, settled by Armenians during the 1500s; to Batavia, since 1636; to Manila from the 1600s, selling cloth from Madras, for gold and silver (and benefitting from the embargo against Protestants and Muslims by obtaining navigation rights from Spain); and so to Canton, where they appeared in 1720, in tea.¹³⁸

'In general, Armenian merchants in Asia practiced all forms of commerce (caravans, peddling, large-scale retailing, large-scale trading)... They used the same commercial techniques as the Europeans. And when they felt it necessary, they did not hesitate to embark on a coordinated political and commercial strategy directed by the leading citizens of New Julfa. They prospected new markets and new trade circuits. They took advantage of competition or rivalry that arose between their European partners... One of the reasons for the success of the Armenians was the atmosphere that prevailed at the heart of this merchant community: a great sense of solidarity based on kinship ties or marriage and one contractual relations, especially relations of trust, which did not exclude recourse in case of disputes to an informal system of arbitration and, more rarely, to systems of local justice.'¹³⁹ Armenians had good knowledge of the land, itineraries, sources of goods, conditions of sale, continuous exchange of information, adaptability to shifts or crises in trade, absence of proselytism, and experience. They were proficient in accounting too. Along with stubbornness and courage, scholars have remarked on their solidarity with each other. They spent a lot on charity and piety, building churches and printing presses. Although geographically extended they were socially integrated.

The Hanseatic League, a northern European trade network, also linked a Jewish Diaspora. Iberian Jews were central to world trade, one of few activities available to them. Ashkenazi Jews of northern Europe and Sephardi Jews of Iberia were both persecuted, with converted Jews called Marranos in Spain, and New Christians in Portugal. From 1500 on, even these Jews had to flee Spain (they had to emigrate or burn, literally); Portugal took them in at first, but from 1536 a much worse

¹³⁸ Translated from Michel Aghassian and Keram Kevonian, 'Le commerce armenian dans l'océan Indien ans XVII et XVIII siecles', in Tracy, *The Rise of Merchant Empires*, pp270-273.

¹³⁹ Tracy, *The Rise of Merchant Empires*, Ch. 8 Frédéric Mauro, pp266 ff., p273.

Inquisition took root there. And when Philip II of Spain became King of Portugal in 1580, the New Christians fled to overseas territories too, settling into their own areas ('nations') within big trading cities, such as Antwerp, and Livorno. There they could parlay their special knowledge of bills of exchange and double-entry book-keeping.

Other merchant communities present before the Europeans, across most of the maritime space from Africa to Japan was Muslim-dominated trade. This included Ismaili groups such as the Bohra (who would also appear, much later, after the founding of Hong Kong). The Bohra (which in Gujarati simply means trader or merchant) came originally from Arabia, via Yemen, to Bombay before travelling further eastwards; many were Hindus who had converted to Islam and all were firmly against trading in opium or alcohol. Sikhs and Hindus who settled far from their Indian homes often prayed at the same temple. The Sindhi diaspora, one of many out of India, found a place in ports from Aden to Malacca and beyond. In various parts of the British empire, leading roles in finance would be delegated to the Indian Chettiar community.

A less known yet central role was taken by the Parsis, followers of the Zoroastrian faith who fled Persia for Surat in northwestern India before settling around what became Bombay – long before European traders landed there. They were among the first Indians to take an interest in the China trade and were indispensable to the growing wealth of the east Asian trading world. They owned the ships and provided the interface for foreign traders, for example between the Portuguese (and later the British) who arrived on India's north-western shore and wanted access to the produce of inland markets. They controlled that access to products (such as spice and opium), they moved the goods on their own ships, and crucially, they developed financial systems to extend credit to other traders, making themselves central to extensive trading networks.

Asian Port Cities

Hybrids need a home. Most of this trading, and the confrontation of different peoples and ideas, was happening in developing port cities. An over-arching power structure had come first from local and ancient houses or clans; then European military force brought the umbrella of empire. Neither form of power could function

without traders from all of Asia's worlds. Power needed people, and a port city was a mutable, useful site of interaction and exchange – of goods, and of peoples. That interchange relied on pre-existing networks, and forged new ones too.

The nuts-and-bolts daily business of an international port made a port city home to hybrid people: at least part of a port city had to be, by definition, open to the world. It needed to welcome different races, faiths, cultures, and ideas as well as goods from elsewhere. The chief mark of success was a city's ability to attract trade and traders. All port cities also offered a highly varied mix of peoples and cultures, notes Murphey, producing '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..¹⁴⁰ On offer through this intense mixing of peoples and products in an often confined space was upward mobility. 'Many, probably most, of the Asians who rose to wealth and prominence in the rapidly growing port cities were not only *arrivistes* but parvenus, people whose origins were humble or obscure but who made their way rapidly upward in the dynamic and fluid situation of the port cities where change was concentrated, progressively displacing formerly or traditionally dominant groups, first in these cities and increasingly in each country.'¹⁴¹ Some port cities might be royal enclaves with a port in their shadow.¹⁴² Many developed cultures quite different to that of their hinterland and/or retained traditional values and institutions.¹⁴³

A port city might be large or small, with or without a river-mouth, home to a handful of ethnic groups or more. Most important was its openness – to peoples, ideas, goods, languages, and multiple faiths. This was rarely found in capital cities of nation states (which anyway were rare state forms); a certain latitude was required. The best port cities ran themselves and displayed a distinctly non-state nature.

A port city was not necessarily a Treaty Port. The latter was a specific legal construct, akin to the 'Capitulations' governing Levantine ports through the Ottoman empire and beyond, in which foreign traders were granted the right to separate legal

¹⁴⁰ Murphey, in Broeze, *Brides of the Sea*, p236.

¹⁴¹ Murphey, in Broeze, *Brides of the Sea*, p237.

¹⁴² Wolters, *History, Culture & Region*, p 42.

¹⁴³ Tsai Jung-fang, *Hong Kong in Chinese History*, p9. He sees this in Hong Kong temples, lion dances, paper money-burning, triads etc, p10.

systems and rules of residence. Port cities might include areas delineated as 'Concessions' within which such rules might apply. Leonard Blussé argues that after early port towns such as Canton, Batavia and Nagasaki came a new type of place, such as Singapore and Hong Kong, based not on monopolistic control of one or two commodities, but on the British concept of free trade.¹⁴⁴ Port cities had a tendency, too, to become something other than first envisaged.

The British liked their port cities. When in 1786, Captain Light founded Penang, it was intended as a naval base to protect the route to China but became a trading entrepot for the Malayan peninsula. The British presence in Singapore for 50 years from 1819 led the British to extend their remit northwards in the name of stability. By 1895, the four sultanates of Perak, Negri Sembilan, Selangor and Pahang were combined into a Federation, and in 1909 the Thai King was induced to cede sovereignty over his four southern provinces to Britain, thus placing the entire Malay peninsula under British rule. In 1841 'Rajah' Brooke had given such valuable service to the Sultan of Sarawak that he became his heir.

In Burma, British imperialist expansion via India was akin to European expansion in Java during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The French meanwhile were expanding to take over Annam (in 1859), Saigon (1862), Cambodia (1864) and Laos (1890). Notably, the bulwark of Chinese imperial power remained silent — the Manchu might take a lofty tone but all this European expansion occurred on their watch, sometimes into areas previously claimed by the Ming.¹⁴⁵ Thus, British traders began toying with port city prospects on the China coast.

Hong Kong on the Map

By looking at the contextual and historical dynamics that facilitated the growth of Hong Kong, we have found Hong Kong's roots as an Asian port city in the trading world of all Eurasia. In 1841, Hong Kong joined the strong pre-existing chain linking ancient trading routes and changing commodities into a rich web of exchange. Southeast Asia was the central meeting point, through which traders from far and

¹⁴⁴ Blussé, *Visible Cities*.

¹⁴⁵ Takeshi Hamashita follows trade routes from Quanzhou/Fuzhou between Ryukyu, Taiwan and Sulu, and the western route from Guangzhou to 'find various hinterland relations with Hong Kong as the centre'. See Curley and Hong, *China and Southeast Asia*, pp28-9, p35.

wide had to travel and stay. Craig Lockard sees Southeast Asia and Southern China as 'part of the same canvas of interaction... a fluid multi-ethnic and dynamic transnational economic zone and flexible political boundaries.'¹⁴⁶ Sunil Amrith found centuries of participation, be it voluntary or not, in 'a sophisticated world of commerce across the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.'¹⁴⁷

We have seen that Hong Kong joined this world of global connectivity through the peoples of the wider Eurasian continent. Parsi networks brought Ruttonjee, Kotewall, Shroff and Master. The Armenian diaspora offered Paul Catchick Chater. From elsewhere in India came Mody, the Venetian Jew Belilios, and the Baghdadi clans of Sassoon and Kadoorie. From Malacca came descendants of the Kapitan Cina, namely Chui Leep Chee, whose offspring would intermarry with Hong Kong Eurasians of the Ho, Lo, and Ho Tung clans. From Macao and beyond came Portuguese. So too came Malays and Manilamen, Lascars and their recruiters, such as the ghaut serang, Sheikh Moosdeen, who would build Hong Kong's first mosque. These names spawned clans fundamental to the shaping of Hong Kong.

These networks did not disappear in the age of European conquest – more often they strengthened. The British Empire gave just enough structure, law and order to facilitate trade, leaving space for individuals and initiative. This loose imperium, overlaying long-standing networks of peoples and trade, was symbiosis: the British needed Asian networks in order to function, and these networks of diverse Asians and Eurasians needed that casual overlordship in order to thrive. Fixed nation-state boundaries and ethnic divisions were less relevant than the cross-boundary networks of trading diasporas and the multi-layered, multi-ethnic intimate connections between women and men (within and beyond Asia). By bringing Hong Kong into being, the British were able to capitalise on these pre-existing networks of trades and traders.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Lockard, *The Sea Common to All*, p221.

¹⁴⁷ Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora*, p20. 'Until 1820, the majority...were captives or slaves', p21.

¹⁴⁸ Tsai Jung-fang notes: '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... underlying Hong Kong's development as an entrepot was a long history of overseas trade...', *Hong Kong in Chinese History*, p17.