The Empire and the Harbour Folk: Comparative Historical Trajectories of the Parsi Communities of Southern China and Hong Kong

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Section I
Introduction

The Parsis are considered by many to be among the final living legacy of the old Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism in the world. Primarily centered in Bombay, today's Mumbai, the Parsis are historically known as a mercantile and entrepreneurial diaspora community that set foot on a great many shores around the world. While forms of Zoroastrianism had maintained a long presence in Chinese history already, it was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth century that Parsi merchants found their way from Bombay to the ports of southern China. They proved to be commercially savvy, generating a sizable amount of wealth in commerce and industry, and establishing Parsi communities in Chinese port cities such as Guangzhou, Shanghai, Macao, and Hong Kong. However, during the twentieth century, the Parsi communities of southern China experienced a series of disruptions that led to their eventual departure from the Chinese mainland. Hong Kong remained a notable exception, with the Zoroastrian community of Hong Kong still active to this day. One may begin to wonder: what caused this decline in the Parsi communities of southern China? How is it that the community of Hong Kong experienced considerably different outcomes?

This research paper is, fundamentally, dedicated to the analysis of the role of the withdrawal of the British empire from southern China in the historical trajectories of the Parsi communities in southern Chinese ports and Hong Kong. This paper holds itself to several primary objectives.

Firstly, it means to assess and compile the most salient literature on the topic, which, as it is, is relatively sparse and dispersed across academic and non–academic mediums. Through the collection and systematising of the information available to us on this rather understudied subject of research, this research paper hopes to provide a comprehensive timeline on the development and historical trajectories of the Parsi communities of southern China and Hong Kong, and the role of the British empire in this development.

Secondly, it will conduct a comparative historical analysis of the historical trajectories of the Parsi communities in southern China and Hong Kong, particularly their patterns of development and their responses to societal and political upheaval, in an attempt to identify broader trends in the Parsis' historical community development in southern China. The analysis will be conducted through the lens of the withdrawal of the British empire. Finally, based on this comparative analysis, this paper seeks to offer an interpretation and explanation as to how it is that the Parsi communities in southern China have mostly gone during the twentieth century, while the community in Hong Kong not only remains active, but is currently expanding. Following this structure, this research paper seeks to contribute in the illustration of the complex history of the Parsis in southern China, and particularly their

relationship with the British empire, by mapping their historical development. So doing, it hopes to provide insight into the study not only of Parsis and contemporary Zoroastrianism, but also the study of diaspora communities and colonial legacies around the world.

Section II
Methodology

Methods and Theory

In order to engage with the topic of this research, this paper will utilise a variety of qualitative methods. The first of these is historiographical synthesis, which will be applied in this paper's efforts in integrating and evaluating the disparate research written on the topic. The purpose of this is to compile the existing literature available to us on this the Parsis of southern China into a comprehensive narrative and to situate them within a broader historical context. The second method that will be applied is historical pattern analysis. Once the historical trajectories of the Parsi communities of southern China and Hong Kong have been sufficiently illustrated, this paper will attempt to identify patterns within the case studies of these communities and provide explanations as to why these patterns have formed. Thirdly, and finally, this research paper will apply a comparative historical analysis to place these patterns into a broader historical context, and to compare the historical trajectories of the Parsi communities of Hong Kong and southern China. Through this diachronic approach, this paper hopes to identify points of divergence and similarity in the development of these communities, examined specifically through the lens of the influence of the British imperial authority and its withdrawal from southern China and Hong Kong. This research paper will be situated on the intersection of diaspora studies and imperial history, focusing its attention on the role played by British imperial structures in the community formation of the Parsi diaspora communities in Hong Kong and southern China, and the divergent trajectories these places experienced after the empire's withdrawal. So doing, this paper seeks to examine how the Parsi communities in Hong Kong and southern China have interacted with societal upheaval, and the severing of the colonial relationships which, in part, formed the basis of their flourishing in southern China.

Limitations

There are several methodological limitations that this research paper is forced to contend with. Firstly, in part as a result of the rather esoteric and narrow nature of this academic topic, this research paper has limited access to primary sources. Consequently, one of the primary limitations of this research is its reliance on secondary sources. While research has been done into the histories of the Parsis in southern China and Hong Kong, this remains rather sparse, leading to the creation of a closed scholarly ecosystem of academic literature which leans primarily on the same sources. This research paper attempts to partially mitigate this limitation by incorporating sources that have not been extensively explored and cited by other authors writing on this topic. Nevertheless, a certain reliance on

existing literature is difficult to avoid when it comes to this particular area of inquiry.

It was the initial hope of this paper to focus exclusively on the contemporary Parsi community of Hong Kong, as little has been known about how this community has developed in post–Handover Hong Kong, and the scarce academic coverage has primarily dedicated itself to historical analyses. This sort of inquiry, however, would rely on data and observations made in the field, through correspondence with or visits to the community itself. However, a common finding for scholars who have sought to study the Zoroastrian community of Hong Kong in recent years is that it is relatively insular and wary of allowing outside observers into their community. While attempts were made to establish contact, these proved to be unsuccessful. It was such logistical considerations that necessitated the shift to the more historical analysis ultimately furnishing the pages of this paper. It also explains the general dearth of primary sources and the generation of new data on this topic, and the subsequent reliance on secondary sources.

Secondly, there exists somewhat of an imbalance in the sources available to us, as the history of the Parsi community in Hong Kong is considerably more extensively documented than the history of the Parsis in places such as Guangzhou or Shanghai, and especially Macao. This is a limitation within which this paper's comparative analysis is inevitably situated, and one that must be considered.

Finally, it must be noted that a precedent exists within which the contemporary Parsi community of Hong Kong engages with its own history in a manner that is, at least in part, informed by a distinctly hagiographical approach to historiography. Consequently, this particular lens which has on occasion influenced the writing of Parsi history in southern China, is present in other work produced on this topic. Note that this in no possible manner invalidates these sources, or any other work drawing from it, nor does it render more hagiographical expressions Parsi historiography 'ahistorical'. Nor is this approach to historiography unique to the Parsis – but considering its precedent, this hagiographical approach is something to be considered throughout this research.

Section III
The Parsis and the British Empire

Commercial Relationships in Bombay

While Zoroastrianism has maintained a presence in China since the Tang Dynasty, it was not until the Qing dynasty that the Parsi communities of the world can be observed finding their way into southern China. By many, the commercial successes of the Parsi community in Southern China has been attributed to their close relationship with the British Empire. There is truth in this assertion: from the sixteenth century onwards, the Parsis developed close relations with the English, made efforts to Europeanise, and were even considered as "His Majesty's subjects" by the British.[1] This relationship with the hegemony of the British Empire did in fact afford them unique commercial opportunities and social status, and it is a relationship with a considerable history.

During the seventeenth century, Bombay became the primary trading post of the British East India Company after replacing Surat as the centre of British trade in the region in 1687. As Bombay slowly developed into a trade centre, it became a popular destination for Parsis, who started to settle in Bombay in considerable numbers. Many of them were drawn to the security and commercial opportunities provided by the British colonial presence in Bombay, which led to the emergence of an influential commercial Indian class in Bombay, which included the Parsis.[2] Guo describes this as a turning point in the history of the Parsi people, as it facilitated the beginning of a relationship with the British that would last for several centuries.[3] Guo describes the relationship between the British in India and the Parsis as one of existential mutual dependency. The British relied on the Parsis to gain a foothold in Bombay, and the Parsis relied on the British presence in Bombay for their own development.[4] Local community leaders, such as the notable Parsi Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, navigated within the colonial frameworks in a way that was most conducive to Indian and Parsi interests. They worked to shape a colonial culture that would be of mutual benefit to British and Indian interests: one that facilitated the development of a stable socio–political environment, that would improve the standing of local families and individuals, and that would promote social welfare.[5]

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[1] Guo Deyan 郭德焱, *Qing Dai Guangzhou de Basi Shangren* 清代广州的巴斯商人 [Parsee Merchants in Qing Dynasty Guangzhou] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shu Ju 中华书局): 29.

[2] Jesse S. Palsetia, "Partner in Empire: Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy and the Public Culture of Nineteenth Century Bombay," in *Parsis in India and the Diaspora*, ed. John R. Hinnells and Alan Williams (Routledge, 2008): 84.

[3] Guo, *Qing Dai Guangzhou de Basi Shangren,* 29.

[4] Guo, *Qing Dai Guangzhou de Basi Shangren,* 34.

[5] Palsetia, "Partners in Empire," 83.

In the British colonial endeavour in India, the British Empire relied heavily on relationships with local collaborators, and the emerging commercial class of Indian and Parsi community leaders in Bombay provided a more fruitful opportunity for collaboration than the firmly established Indian elite and nobility. The Parsis in particular were known for cultivating such commercial relationships with the British Empire, and Indian businessmen such as Jejeebhoy soon assumed a position of intermediaries. [6] This had been the case before 1687 as well, when the East India Company operated from Surat: notable Parsis often served as mediators between the British and the Mughals, facilitating the establishment of British trade in Surat. The Parsis later followed the Company to Bombay, where their close partnership proved to be a driving factor in the development of the city.

The Parsis were described as economical, industrious, adept in trade, and extremely ingenious craftsmen. With assistance from the Parsis and their skillful craftsmanship, the British started building warships in Bombay.[7] According to Guo, their meticulousness and efficiency earned them the respect of the British. They were also known for their loyalty and willingness to cooperate with the British even in difficult ventures, such as trading British goods across an oftentimes inhospitable Indian hinterland.[8] In this sense, Parsi merchants displayed a willingness to function as guarantee brokers to British traders, by shouldering the greater part of the risk associated with such less secure commercial endeavours.[9] Parsi merchants would oftentimes work alongside British agency houses: in Jedeebhoy's case, providing resources such as cotton and opium in exchange for financial compensation, as well as bearing the largest financial, legal, and logistical risks associated with the opium trade.[10] Guo concludes that if it were not for the loyalty and courage of the Parsis, British trade would not have been nearly as successful in India, as he claims that "the history of commerce in Bombay is a history of commerce by Parsis."[11]

Into Southern China

In 1715, the British had established a commercial outpost in Guangzhou (Canton). The Parsis' central role in mediating for the East India Company and facilitating British trade led to them being sent to Guangzhou as commercial affairs officers. The first Parsi thus arrived in China in 1756, a man by the name of Heerjee Jeevanjee Readymoney. He is said to have come to the South China Sea with two

[6] Palsetia, "Partners in Empire," 84.
[7] Guo, *Qing Dai Guangzhou de Basi Shangren,* 30.
[8] Guo, *Qing Dai Guangzhou de Basi Shangren,* 30.
[9] Rusheed R. Wadia, "Bombay Parsi Merchants in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *Parsis in India and the Diaspora*, ed. John R. Hinnells and Alan Williams (Routledge, 2008): 125.
[10] Palsetia, "Partners in Empire," 84.
[11] Guo, *Qing Dai Guangzhou de Basi Shangren,* 32.

ships, named the *Hornby* and the *Royal Charlotte*, the nature of his trade unknown.[12] And more followed soon. Where direct trade with the west was monopolised by the East India Company, and the Red Sea area was known for high rates of piracy, China was seen as the most profitable market in the region.

In 1809, there was but one British merchant recorded in Guangzhou, but seven Parsis. In 1833, thirty-five British and fifty-two Parsi merchants. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the Parsis consistently constituted over a third of the British population in China – and they were, as previously alluded, considered British.[13] In Chinese records from this period, the Parsis were sometimes referred to as 英夷 (*jing*^{1}*ji*^{4}) in Cantonese. With 英 (*jing*^{1}) referring to the Chinese word for 'England' or 'English', and 夷 (*ji*^{4}) meaning 'barbarian' or 'foreigner', this phrase bears a meaning which approximates 'English barbarian', or 'English foreigner'. Since many Parsis came to southern China, and particularly Hong Kong, through the British Empire, Chinese officials oftentimes did not make a clear distinction between British people and the Parsis. As such, 英夷 (*jing*^{1}*ji*^{4}) was a term which was a testament to the relationship between the Parsi community and the British imperial authority.[14]

In the early nineteenth century, while the East India Company had been partially responsible for bringing the Parsis to the ports of Southern China, the relationship between the commercially savvy Parsi merchants and the Company soon became more complicated. The Parsis were unhappy with the firm restrictions on their trade. Sectors such as tea, cotton and silk trade between Bombay and China were highly lucrative, and they were primarily facilitated by Parsi merchants on Parsi–built ships, yet the Company's monopoly meant that it was forbidden for private Parsi merchants to conduct their own trade. Soon, however, an opportunity presented itself to the Parsi merchants in the ratification of the Treaty of Singapore in 1819 and the subsequent establishment of Singapore as a British free port. It did not impose the same sort of restrictions on private trade that the East India Company did, and with Singapore now being a British commercial centre, there was no need for the Parsis to risk their established relationship with the British Empire. As such, Parsi merchants swiftly established their presence in the newly established free port of Singapore, using it as a centre from which to conduct their own trade with southern China, thereby shattering the monopoly of the East India Company on the trade between Britain and China.[15] From Singapore, the improved position of Parsi merchants allowed them to even begin competing with the East India Company. Opium and

[12] John R. Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora: Religion and Migration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 159. Hinnells derives these claims from his conversations with Jamshed Pavri, a major figure in the Hong Kong Parsi community, who had taken extensive notes on the history of the community during the many years he spent in Hong Kong. These notes, now known as the 'Pavri Papers' also formed the basis of Vaudine England's chapter on the Hong Kong Parsi community.

[13] Guo, *Qing Dai Guangzhou de Basi Shangren,* 32.

[14] Aoki, "Zoroastrianism in the Far East," 154.

[15] Guo, *Qing Dai Guangzhou de Basi Shangren,* 77.

cotton were particularly valuable: by the year 1834, these two commodities alone, their trade, for a significant portion facilitated by the Parsis, accounted for nearly half of India's total exports.[16] Parsi families such as the Banaji, Dadabhoy, Readymoney, Jejeebhoy, and Tata families were particularly significant players in the trade of opium, and later cotton, with southern China.[17]

Soon after, however, there occurred a sudden and catastrophic market failure in the trade of raw cotton, which forced both the Parsis and the East India Company to focus on the trade of opium instead. Circumventing the East India Company's monopoly on the trade of opium from Bombay, the Parsis attempted to cater to the Chinese demand for cheaper sorts of opium than those offered by the EIC with its monopoly. Despite the strict restrictions imposed by the Company, they started to smuggle Malwa opium into China illegally.[18] For the first decade, the East India Company tried to combat this illegal supply of opium, but the introduction of Malwa opium had altered the market too substantially, and it soon proved to have become a Sisyphean task. By 1831, the Company was forced to lift its restrictions on the private trade of Malwa opium, though they did demand a transit duty for every chest leaving Bombay.[19] The Parsis largely were able to challenge the Company because of their firm integration with the private sector of British traders and their valuable connections in colonial British Singapore.[20]

The Parsis' reputation for maintaining a close relationship with the colonial authorities was exacerbated by the fact that Parsi merchants supported the British Empire quite significantly during the First- and Second Opium War. Their trade of opium into China benefited the British Empire by contributing to a more favourable British balance of trade. During the Opium Wars themselves, however, Parsi merchants of opium suffered significant financial setbacks. As the result of a combination of competition with other private traders after the annulment of the EIC's monopoly, the collapse of earlier partnerships with the British colonial authority and thus commercial opportunities and assurances, and reliance on high–interest, short–term loans, the opium trade gradually grew less and less profitable during the 1840s. Most of the Parsi firms and families involved in the opium trade to southern China were forced to withdraw from, and focus instead on the trade of other commodities, and, most notably in southern China, the cotton mill industry.[21]

During the Opium Wars, several Parsi firms have been recorded to have participated in arms trade as well, supplying the war effort that would lead to the further opening of southern Chinese ports to foreign trade more directly. When the war was done, and the Treaty of Nanjing was signed in 1842, it seemed as though their intuition had been correct. Part of the stringent terms of the treaty was

[16] Guo, *Qing Dai Guangzhou de Basi Shangren, 77.*
[17] Wadia, "Bombay Parsi Merchants in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," 124.
[18] Guo, *Qing Dai Guangzhou de Basi Shangren, 78.*
[19] Guo, *Qing Dai Guangzhou de Basi Shangren, 79.*
[20] Guo, *Qing Dai Guangzhou de Basi Shangren, 79.*
[21] Wadia, "Bombay Parsi Merchants in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," 124.

the opening of southern Chinese ports, and the subsequent expansion of the Parsis' commercial ventures to include Hong Kong and the five treaty ports stipulated by the treaty: Guangzhou, Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou, and Xiamen. The treaty had cracked southern China open, and soon it was that Parsi merchants started establishing a presence across southern China more broadly.

Section IV
The Parsi Communities of Southern China

The nineteenth century saw the greatest influx of Parsis into southern China, with most of them following the British trade lanes used by the empire and the East India Company. Within early Cantonese texts emerging from southern China, the Parsis were referred to by a great many terms, among which the phonetic approximations of 巴士 (*ba*[1]*si*[1]) and 叭史 (*ba*[1]*si*[2]). Another term used to refer to the Parsis in Southern China is 港脚人 (*gong*[2] *goek*[3] *jan*[4]), which is a particular southern Chinese turn of phrase that can be translated as "harbour people", "port dwellers", or "those who frequent the harbour". Whereas "英夷", or 'English foreigner', referred to both British and Parsi merchants, "harbour people" or "harbour folk" was a term specifically used to refer to Parsis, as it was often used alongside the word for 'English'.[22] The term became even more fitting after the Opium Wars, when Parsis also settled in Hong Kong: as the character 港, translated as 'harbour', is also the second character in the name Hong Kong.

The Parsis of Guangzhou

The locus of Zoroastrian activity in southern China, for much of the nineteenth century was in Guangzhou, which is known to have hosted the largest Parsi community in the area. The presence of Parsi merchants in Guangzhou is traced back to the early eighteenth century, swiftly after the British Empire established a trading post there in 1715. Heerjee Jeevanjee Readymoney was the first Parsi merchant to travel to Guangzhou in 1756 with his two vessels, the pioneer of Parsi commercial activities in southern China. The firm he established in Guangzhou, then known as Canton, was the first Parsi firm in China.[23]

Jamsetji Jijibhoy was another early Parsi trader in the region, making five visits to southern China between 1799 and 1807. Through his personal relationship with English businessman William Jardine, Jijibhoy came to be director of Jardine Matheson and Co., the largest British firm facilitating trade with China in Canton.[24] The firm operated from Whampoa and was a key player in the import of opium into China during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Parsi merchants were conscientiously involved in the trade of opium in southern China during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, most of which was conducted through the port of Guangzhou. When the Daoguang Emperor sent commissioner Lin Zexu to combat the trade of opium in Canton in 1839,

[22] Guo, *Qing Dai Guangzhou de Basi Shangren,* 152
[23] Wadia, "Bombay Parsi Merchants in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries", 123.
[24] Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora,* 160.

resulting in stringent measures against the import of opium, records tell us that Parsi merchants were directly involved. Of the twenty-thousand crates of opium commissioner Lin famously had burnt in Canton, several thousand belonged to Parsi merchants. Thirty-eight Parsis were placed under house arrest in Canton in 1839, and four were kept as hostages. A number of Parsis signed petitions against Lin Zexu's relentless attempted dismantling of the opium trade, and sought recompensation from the British government.[25]

In 1847, the Zoroastrian community in Guangzhou had expressed their desire to construct a Tower of Silence, made out of bamboo. However, this idea was firmly rejected by the local Chinese population. Instead, a Parsi cemetery was erected on a hill in current-day Shenjing Village (深井村 *sam¹zeng² cyun¹*), just outside urban Guangzhou.[26] Today, this hill is still known as 巴斯山 (*ba¹si¹saan¹*), which means 'Parsi Hill' and uses one of the Chinese transcriptions for the word 'Parsi' (巴斯 (*ba¹si¹*), the use of which has precedence in older Cantonese texts referring to the Parsis as well. This cemetery on Parsi Hill, which is no longer in use, still serves as a reminder of the historical presence of a Zoroastrian community in Guangzhou. The cemetery consists of a collection of twelve cenotaphs: nine for adults, two for children and one for a stillborn child, arranged from north to south.[27] Notably, it is said that after the Zoroastrian community of Guangzhou left the city, much of the knowledge and records were lost. Allegedly, the location of the Zoroastrian cemetery of Guangzhou was entirely unknown to the Zoroastrian communities in Hong Kong until it was eventually rediscovered serendipitously in 1999. The Hong Kong Anjuman then contacted the Guangzhou Bureau of Culture and Guangzhou Commission of Antiquities, and the local government then uncovered and restored the cemetery. In 2008, a group of trustees of the Hong Kong Zoroastrian Association then visited the site to pay their respects.[28]

In 1861, the Parsis in Guangzhou constructed a 'Parsi building' in the Huangpu district. Huangpu, also known as Whampoa, hosts both this Parsi community building as well as the hill upon which the Guangzhou Parsi cemetery is situated. Huangpu island is positioned where the Pearl River enters Guangzhou and hosts the large Huangpu shipyard, making it a historically crucial location for Guangzhou's economy and commercial enterprises, Whampoa was also where the Jardine Matheson and Co. trading firm, headed by Parsi merchant Jijibhoy, was situated.

The Parsi Building was reconstructed in 1923 and, according to contemporary Chinese sources, served not only as a space for community gatherings and activities for the Zoroastrian

[25] Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora,* 164–165.
[26] Aoki, "Zoroastrianism in the Far East," 154.
[27] "巴斯教徒墓地", *HKTrip*, accessed April 24, 2025.
https://hk.trip.com/review/parsi-cemetery-15385256-11586713?locale=zh-HK&curr=USD
[28] Mishi Saran, "Parsis: A small but vibrant community in 19th century," *Shanghai Daily* (November 14th, 2016).
https://archive.shine.cn/feature/art-and-culture/Parsis-A-small-but-vibrant-community-in-19th-century/shdaily.shtml

community, but also as a meeting place for – notably – the British Consulate of Guangzhou, as well as other commercial institutions.[29] This once again highlights the intrinsic relationship between the Parsi communities in southern China and the British political authorities, as well as their deep integration into the commercial industries in the region. The Building was abandoned by the Guangzhou Parsi community in 1938, and today, the building is used by the Huangpu Shipyard to house its archives.[30] Whereas for most of the nineteenth century Guangzhou remained the centre of Zoroastrian activity in southern China, this gradually changed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the second half of the nineteenth century, many Parsi merchants in Guangzhou were reportedly pushed to move their operations to Shanghai instead, in the face of competition from Jewish and Hindu 'rival' merchants.[31] Hinnells notes that by the 1870s, Parsi firms in Guangzhou were forced to diversify and pivot out of the trade of opium, trade in Guangzhou began to be dominated by the Baghdadi Jewish Sassoon family.[32] This diversification, however, according to different sources, had already started several decades earlier, during the first Opium War.[33] The Parsi families adapted and continued building their presence in Guangzhou throughout the nineteenth century.

The Parsis of Shanghai

The 1842 Treaty of Nanjing, forced upon the Qing Dynasty after its defeat in the first Opium War, stipulated that five ports would be opened up to foreign trade. Among these five 'treaty ports' was Shanghai, and so it was that after 1842 that the Parsis first expanded their business into Shanghai. More would follow soon, after several firms elected to move out of Guangzhou and into Shanghai in search of better commercial opportunities. Later records recall that the Parsis who came to Shanghai around this time, would come for life, and the contracts given typically lasted for at least twenty years. It swiftly became clear that Shanghai, much like Guangzhou and Hong Kong, was to be a long term investment – and not only financially. A community formed.

Parsi merchants from Guangzhou joined with those from Hong Kong in establishing an anjuman in the port city of Shanghai. In 1854, following a generous donation of the Guangzhou anjuman, a plot of land was bought and a Zoroastrian cemetery was established. It was only twelve years later, in 1866, that the Shanghai Parsi community built a fire temple next to the cemetery, to be used for religious purposes and community gatherings. Both the cemetery and the Parsi building were located at convenient distance from the Shanghai Bund business quarters, near the intersection of

[29] "巴斯楼", *Baidu Baike*, accessed 24 April, 2025. https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%B7%B4%E6%96%AF%E6%A5%BC/15706003
[30] "巴斯楼", *Baidu Baike*, accessed 24 April, 2025. https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%B7%B4%E6%96%AF%E6%A5%BC/15706003
[31] Aoki, "Zoroastrianism in the Far East," 155.
[32] Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 164.
[33] Wadia, "Bombay Parsi Merchants in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," 124.

Foochow Road (now Fuzhou Road 福州路) and Thibet Road (which was also known as Defence Road at the time, but is now Xizang Road 西藏路).[34]

Also in 1854, along with the establishment of the Parsi cemetery, the Shanghai Parsi Cemetery Trust Fund was founded to oversee and maintain it. In 1934, a book was published meant to outline the history of the Shanghai Parsi Cemetery Trust Fund, and provides valuable insight into the development not only of the cemetery in Shanghai, but also its Parsi community at large. This book, titled *A Review of the Origins and Growth of the Shanghai Parsee Cemetery Trust Funds*, 1854–1934, was written by several of the then trustees of the Trust Fund as a record of its past and a homage to its previous trustees, and was printed in China in 1934. The book was not published publicly and was only meant for private circulation. The book details all those who were buried in the Shanghai cemetery between 1859 and 1932. There are 34 names listed, along with their ages and dates of birth, which makes the Shanghai Parsi cemetery rather large in comparison to those in Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macao. The book includes a photograph of the cemetery, taken by C. H. Wong, presumably commissioned by the Shanghai Parsi Cemetery Trust Fund. The photograph shows a total of 36 epitaphs, arranged neatly, well–maintained, in white marble. Six of them seem to feature stone coffins raised above the ground, similarly to the cemeteries in Guangzhou, Macao, and Hong Kong. The others seem to be regular graves meant for interment. [35]

One of the authors of the book in question is one Sorab Maneckjee Talati, who was a trustee and president of the Shanghai Parsi Cemetery Trust Fund at the time the book was published in 1934. The Pavri Papers used by Vaudine England state that he was appointed as president on March 8th, 1925. They also confirm that at this time, there was only one Talati family in Shanghai.[36] Talati's family had been established in Shanghai for some time: one of the people recorded to have been buried at the cemetery was his unnamed baby daughter who died at birth, and was buried in 1928. There is another Talati stipulated as being buried at the cemetery: Jal Sorabjee Talati, who died at the age of 4 months and was buried in 1922. The name, along with the fact that there was only one Talati family in Shanghai at this time, confirms that this is Sorab Maneckjee Talati's young son.

Also among the authors of this book was mister Bejan Dadabhoy Tata, also a trustee of the Shanghai Parsi Cemetery Trust Fund around 1934. A member of the influential Tata family which was firmly rooted in Hong Kong and especially Shanghai, he came to Shanghai in 1904 to represent the firm of his cousin, Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata. In time, however, he found his own way and went on to own and manage two cotton mills in Shanghai, employing a few thousand people and investing heavily

[34] Sorab Maneckjee Talati, Ruttonshaw Hormusji Ragi, Bejan Dadabhoy Tata, and Rutton Viccajee, *A Review of the Origin and Growth of the Shanghai Parsee Cemetery Trust Funds, 1854–1934* (Wah Yang Printing Co., 1934).
[35] Talati et al. *A Review of the Origins and Growth of the Shanghai Parsee Cemetery Trust Funds.*
[36] Vaudine M. England, "Hong Kong's Place in South East Asia" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2024), 104, https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4107972.

in local Chinese industries as well. Business was profitable in Shanghai: it is reported that the investments made by Parsi firms more than doubled between 1919 and 1925.[37] In 1926, mister B.D. Tata procured a piece of land in the western districts of Shanghai's International Settlement, not too far from the French Concession, and the Tata family home was built there, a large mansion and several outhouses meant for mister Tata's children. It would go on to house two generations of the Tata family, a symbol of the fruits of Parsi entrepreneurial labour in Shanghai and beyond.[38]

The Parsis of Macao

The Parsis of Macao, regrettably, have not been the subject of as much inquiry as the Parsi communities of Guangzhou, Shanghai, or Hong Kong. While reports exist of Parsi merchants already having arrived in Macao during the eighteenth century, specifically the year 1738, the first recorded presence of Parsis in Macao originates in the year 1825. The firmly regulated trade system in southern China required foreign traders to contend with a mandatory off–season, six months during which no trade was permitted within Chinese ports. Macao's position along the Pearl River and proximity to Guangzhou made it an apt and common destination for foreign merchants, so too the Parsi merchants conducting business in southern China at that time. But the Parsis' presence in Macao did not remain one of mere necessity and transience, as Parsi firms found their way to Macao as well on a more permanent basis. The Rustomjee family is reported to have maintained a presence in Macao, and the Wadia family owned factories and warehouses there.[39]

In 1829, a Zoroastrian cemetery was established.[40] The first to be buried in the Macao cemetery, in 1829, was mister Cursetjee Faramjee Wadia, who was also said to be the first Parsi to have been buried in China.[41] The cemetery itself still lies on top of Guia Hill in Macao, with its entrance located at 'Parsi Street', Estrada dos Parses. Its layout is modeled much like a garden, and it contains a total of fourteen empty granite cenotaphs, all oriented towards the east. Among the more recent monuments placed in the cemetery is one dedicated to Pestonjee Cawasjee Darabsha Sethna, the founder of successful Parsi firm 'Cawasjee Pallanjee & Co.' who passed away in 1842. The monument was erected by his descendents many years later, in 1919, just before the cemetery fell out of use. Today, the cemetery remains owned and maintained by the Incorporated Zoroastrian Charity Funds of Hong Kong, Canton and Macao.

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[37] Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora,* 170–171.
[38] Mishi Saran, "A house for Mister Tata: An old Shanghai tale", *Quartz* (May 15, 2015). https://qz.com/india/405665/a-house-for-mr-tata-an-old-shanghai-tale
[39] England, "Hong Kong's Place in South East Asia", 88.
[40] Aoki, "Zoroastrianism in the Far East," 154.
[41] England, "Hong Kong's Place in South East Asia", 88.

The Parsis of Hong Kong

Partly as a consequence of their historically close relationships with the British colonial authority, the Parsis were among those to benefit quite substantially from the 1842 Treaty of Nanjing. With many Parsis in southern China being merchants by trade, the unequal terms of the Treaty allowed for more direct trade with the Chinese population, and it is said that the Parsis procured significant capital after 1842. It seems that a number of Parsi merchants established themselves in the newly founded colony of Hong Kong rather quickly, right from its establishment in 1842.

The Parsi trader Faramji Meherwanji Talati was one of the British merchants present for the raising of the British flag, signalling the British taking official possession of Hong Kong on January 26, 1841. Talati's family firm was the second firm to settle in the newly established colony.[42] Parsis came to Hong Kong from Guangzhou as well as from India, trading opium, silk, and cotton. According to scholar Vaudine England, it was a coalescence of a tight network of familial and business ties, skillful industrialism and entrepreneurialism, and close ties with the British colonial authority that contributed to the Parsis' deeply rooted position in Hong Kong society.[43] A Zoroastrian Charity Fund had already been founded in 1823, which would later come to be the Zoroastrian Charity Funds of Hong Kong, Canton, and Macao, and provided institutional support for the development of the Parsi community as an exemplary case of the Parsis' strong familial and business relations.

In 1852, the Parsis of Hong Kong were granted a piece of land in the neighbourhood of Wongneichong for a Zoroastrian cemetery, demonstrating that the Parsis had already begun to put down strong roots in Hong Kong some ten years after it became a British colony.[44] It saw its first burial in 1858, and a few decades later, in 1889, the Hong Kong Parsis requested permission to remodel and beautify their cemetery, changing its layout into that resembling a garden – not unlike the cemetery in Macao.[45] The Zoroastrian cemetery is still there today, and on its walls, the following phrase can still be read in Chinese: "Inside this cemetery is where the Parsi people bury their own – it is not permitted for others to intrude and bury here." By the year 1860, Hong Kong had a total of seventy–three businesses operating within the bounds of the newly established colony. Seventeen of them, almost a fourth, were headed by Parsis.[46]

In 1861, close to the Zoroastrian cemetery, the Hong Kong Parsi community opened a community building. Similarly to the Parsi buildings in other cities, it was meant for both community affairs and gatherings, and religious purposes. It was in use as a community space for over sixty years,

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[42] England, "Hong Kong's Place in South East Asia", 103.
[43] England, "Hong Kong's Place in South East Asia", 77.
[44] Aoki, "Zoroastrianism in the Far East," 156.
[45] *Parsee Cemetery; Wongneichong*, 1889;1858, Carl Smith Collection, Hong Kong Government Records Service, accessed April 24, 2025. https://search.grs.gov.hk/en/searchcarl.xhtml?e_k=0&q=parsee&rpp=10&page=1
[46] Guo, *Qing Dai Guangzhou de Basi Shangren,* 133.

until it was replaced by a new building in 1923.[47] Seventy years after this, in 1993, this building, too, was deconstructed and a new building built in its place – not a piece of colonial architecture this time, but a soaring skyscraper with the winged image of the *faravahar* on the front.

Charitable giving and philanthropy is an exceedingly prominent topic in the discourse surrounding the world's communities of Zoroastrians, and the community in Hong Kong has been no exception to this general trend. A significant amount of wealth from the Hong Kong Charity Fund was directed at Bombay, reinforcing a pattern of charity that can be traced back to Jamsetji Jijibhoy's very first travels to southern China. Indeed, many Anjumans were founded with the intention of delegating any earnings that exceeded expenditure to charity.[48] Much of these earnings generated by Parsi commercial activities in Hong Kong also found their way into the development of the city, which further entangled the Parsi community with the development of Hong Kong at large. Indubitably the most notable figure in this is sir Hormusjee Naorojee Mody, who came to Hong Kong from Bombay in 1860 as a trader of opium. After arriving in Hong Kong, Mody shifted his business to focus primarily on land investment and development instead.[49] Mody's legacy lies in the very concrete and stone of the city of Hong Kong. The University of Hong Kong (HKU), which remains the city's highest rated institution of higher education, was founded in 1911 on a sum of money donated by Mody. His bust still adorns the university's main academic building. Additionally, Mody's generosity played a part in the foundation of both the highly influential Hong Kong Jockey Club, as well as the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC).

Beyond sir Mody, Jehangir Hormusjee Ruttonjee was instrumental in his founding of the Ruttonjee Hospital, which remains a reputable medical institution in Hong Kong to this day. Another well–known Hong Kong institution that bears the signature of the Hong Kong Parsi community is the Star Ferry, which still ferries tens of thousands of Hong Kongers across Victoria Harbour every day, and was founded by Parsi merchant Dorabjee Nowrojee Mithaiwala in 1888. The Parsi community of Hong Kong, although small in number, left its mark on Hong Kong through such investments in the cityscape throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and so doing entrenched themselves in the very fabric of the rapidly developing British colony. As can be seen in the numerous streets bearing Parsi names, the influential institutions that emerged partly due to Parsi contributions, and the Zoroastrian community which still remains, much of their material legacy endures to this day.

[47] Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora,* 175.
[48] Leilah Vevaina, "Trust on the monsoon winds: Parsi transnational religious philanthropy", *Ethnography* (2022): 9.
[49] Vevaina, "Trust on the monsoon winds", 12.

Section V
Upheaval and the Withdrawal of Empire

In treaty port cities such as Shanghai and Guangzhou, the withdrawal of the British empire from southern China followed a roughly similar general trend. This withdrawal of British colonial authority from Chinese territory will be salient in contextualising the developments in the Parsi communities in southern China during the twentieth century.

The British access to the treaty ports was primarily a result of the British victory during the First Opium War, and the consequent 1842 Treaty of Nanjing which had the additional function of ratifying the British acquisition of Hong Kong. In Chinese historiography, this event is considered to have been the start of the Century of Humiliation (百年国耻 *bǎinián guóchǐ*). This period of roughly a hundred years started with the unequal Treaty of Nanjing forced upon them by the British in 1842, and was a period characterised by conflict with foreign powers. These conflicts were seen as humiliating and exploiting China, subjected as it was to both military foreign aggression as well as mercantile exploitation in the form of unequal treaties, such as the Treaty of Nanjing, which whittled away China's territory and autonomy. The resulting privileged position of Britain in the treaty ports is often considered to be an 'informal empire' supported by the treaty–port system as well as the principle of extraterritoriality: all British nationals in China would be tried under the legislative system of Britain, not China. Note that since many Parsis during the nineteenth and twentieth century in China did hold a British passport, making them subject to the same legal assurances.[50]

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the relationship between Great Britain and China gradually moved towards a discussion about the withdrawal of British colonial presence in China. Several factors have been offered as contributors. Firstly, after the First World War, Chinese society was characterised by a passionate surge of nationalist and anti–imperial sentiments, which reached its height during the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Secondly, the First World War established the Republic of China as friendly to the Allied war efforts, and concessions were necessary in the British attempts at conciliation with the Republic of China and Chiang Kai-shek's nationalists. Thirdly, Japanese aggression in China significantly impaired the British colonial venture in southern China, as it did the functioning of the concession territories of all foreign powers in China. Before the outbreak of the Pacific War, Japanese aggression surrounding the British territories in China continually threatened their functioning, with Japan attempting to exert small degrees of control over them.[51] When war was

[50] Wang Zhaodong, "Reviewing the 1943 Sino–British Treaty Negotiations: The United States' Role in Ending British Imperialism in China", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 49, no. 5 (2021): 966.
[51] Wang, "Reviewing the 1943 Sino–British Treaty Negotiations", 968.

declared between Japan and Britain, British presence in China was almost entirely destroyed. Despite this, however, the British treaty rights remained firmly in place on paper.

It was the United States who largely spearheaded the abolition of extraterritorial rights for western powers in China. Negotiations were held between the United States and Britain during the height of the Second World War. Britain preferred limiting the discussion only to the matter of extraterritoriality and not any rights to treaty ports in China, but was eventually forced to concede. After intense negotiation over commercial regulations, dual nationality, and other matters between China, the United States, and Britain, an agreement was reached in the autumn of 1942. Hong Kong remained the exception, as it was to remain proper British territory for ninety–nine years after the lease of the New Territories in 1898.[52] In 1943, the Sino–British Treaty for the Relinquishment of Extraterritorial Rights in China was signed. It is widely considered to be the formal end point of British imperialism in China, as it formalised the annulment of British claims for its treaty privileges in China.

Guangzhou

In Guangzhou, several events presented the Parsi community in the southern Chinese port city with impactful social and political upheaval. The first of these came in the period around the First Opium War (1839–1842) and the Second Opium War (1856–1860). The second came in the form of the arrival of the Second Sino–Japanese War, which proved especially destructive for the city of Guangzhou and led to its occupation by Japanese forces. These two majorly disruptive events ultimately forced the Parsi community of Guangzhou to relocate, relinquishing its community spaces in Guangzhou and finding security and opportunity elsewhere.

Firstly, the Chinese crackdown on the trade of opium in Guangzhou affected the Parsi traders present in the port considerably. In 1839, just preceding the first Opium War, imperial commissioner Lin Zexu's drastic measures saw the Parsi traders of opium facing Chinese aggression, detention, arrests, and confiscation of wares.[53] The petition drafted by several Parsi merchants did little to sway Lin's perspectives. In 1857, the Anjuman of the Hong Kong community of Zoroastrians gathered to discuss the increasingly volatile situation for Parsis in Guangzhou. In the face of increasing commercial competition in the trade of opium in particular, and an unstable socio–political situation between the First and Second Opium Wars, attendants agreed that shelter must be arranged for any Guangzhou Parsis looking to settle in Hong Kong. Several years later, the Anjuman purchased a property in Hong Kong for this exact purpose.[54] A year after their meeting in 1857, their safety concerns were proven right in a destructive manner when the Second Opium War erupted between Britain and China. This

[52] Wang, "Reviewing the 1943 Sino–British Treaty Negotiations", 979–981.
[53] England, "Hong Kong's Place in South East Asia", 98.
[54] England, "Hong Kong's Place in South East Asia", 111.

period of time saw a considerable outflow of Parsis from Guangzhou, with many of them heading for the trading port of Shanghai instead.[55] Others found themselves moving towards Hong Kong, where a young British colony provided ample opportunity and an established presence of Parsi merchants who were swiftly starting to establish a community there.

Secondly, in the early twentieth century, China found itself enveloped in a war against the Japanese empire. Guangzhou, which the Japanese aimed to blockade in an attempt to hinder trade coming in through the Pearl Delta, as well as cut off Chinese communication with the outside world by isolating it from the British territory of Hong Kong, was particularly affected by the war. Estimates say that the population of Guangzhou was halved during the Japanese bombings of 1938, with several thousands killed and 600.000 of its residents fleeing the deliberate targeting of civilians by the Japanese air force. Later this year, Guangzhou was occupied by the Japanese empire, which it would remain for almost seven years. This same year also saw the Zoroastrian community of Guangzhou relocating in the face of this destruction and abandoning its community centre in Whampoa, with many Parsis returning to Bombay and many others moving to Hong Kong instead. Hong Kong found itself under Japanese occupation three years later as well, in 1941.

Shanghai

In Shanghai, while business had already proven most profitable for the Parsi firms operating from the bustling port city during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it would soon reach its pinnacle. When Chiang Kai-Shek's nationalists moved the Chinese capital to Nanjing in 1927, foreign trade increased significantly in Shanghai due to its proximity to the newly established national capital city. It is reported that the Parsi firms' investments doubled once again between 1925 and 1934, and by 1934, this Parsi community in Shanghai had grown to a reported 124 people.[56] It was only three years after this, however, that the Second Sino–Japanese War found its way to the city of Shanghai as well. In 1937, the Japanese imperial army set its sights on the economic hub of Shanghai. The battle for Shanghai lasted some three months, and was particularly destructive. Eventually, the Chinese National Revolutionary Army succumbed to the protracted assault despite its superior numbers, and Shanghai was occupied by Japanese forces.

An account of Jehangir Bejan Tata, a scion of the Tata family living in Shanghai at the time of the Japanese occupation, recounts that his father shared the concerns of other members of the Shanghai Parsi community – that they would find themselves in Japanese internment camps during the occupation, since many in the Parsi communities bore British citizenship at that time. However, the

[55] Aoki, "Zoroastrianism in the Far East," 154.
[56] Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora,* 170–171.

Japanese had deemed all Indian peoples in China, including the Parsis, as non–belligerent enemies, and so they managed to avoid internment during the occupation.[57]

The occupation affected the Parsis in different ways, however. During the occupation of Shanghai by Japanese forces during the Second Sino–Japanese War, the influential Tata family was forced to relinquish ownership of its textile and cotton factories between 1937 and 1945.[58] Their cotton mills were confiscated as well, and suddenly many Parsi firms found themselves unable to function in occupied Shanghai. Jehangir recalls that many in Shanghai, instead, sustained themselves on the informal trade in daily commodities which had become in high demand – sugar, eggs, flour.[59] His elder brother, Sam Bejan Tata, was a photographer at the time. In an interview, Sam recalls that during the initial phases of the battle, many Chinese in Shanghai sought shelter in the International Settlement and French Concession at the time, which were initially not targeted by the Japanese. When asked whether he had photographs from during the occupation, Sam denied. "When the Japanese were there you wouldn't dare go out and photograph", he said. "The Japanese were very violent. They'd take you in, beat you up, perhaps chop your head off."[60]

The ratification of the 1943 Sino–British Treaty for the Relinquishment of Extraterritorial Rights in China promptly ended the British extraterritorial rights in Chinese treaty ports, including Shanghai. The Tata's cotton mills, as well as other Parsi firms, suddenly found that the agency agreements that kept them running were no longer in force after the withdrawal of the British agencies from Shanghai.[61] When Shanghai was liberated from the Japanese occupation after the empire's capitulation in 1945, all International Settlements and foreign concessions in Shanghai were definitively and formally abolished.

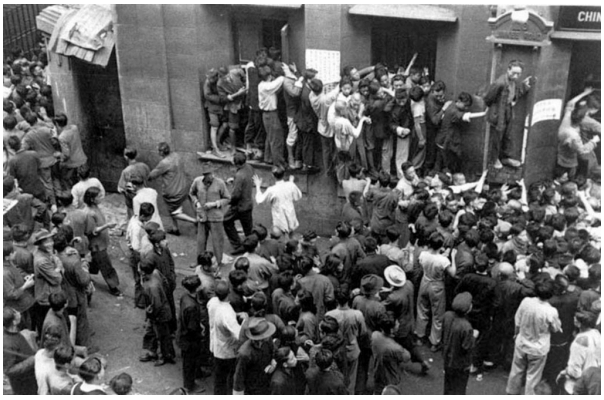

Figure 1.
People in Shanghai gather outside of a railway station in the hopes of acquiring tickets out of the city.
Photograph by Sam Tata, 1949 (Source: Virtual Shanghai).[62]

[57] Saran, 'A House for mr. Tata'.
[58] Saran, "Parsis: A small but vibrant community in 19th century."
[59] Saran, 'A House for mr. Tata'.
[60] Sam Tata, "Pour réussir un portrait," interview by John K. Grande, *Vie des Arts* 41, no. 168 (autumn 1996). https://www.virtualshanghai.net/references/biography?ID=12.
[61] Saran, 'A House for mr. Tata'.
[62] Virtual Shanghai, "Sam Tata (1911–2005)", *Virtual cities Project*. https://www.virtualshanghai.net/references/biography?ID=12

In 1947, India gained its independence, and Sam Tata left Shanghai for India with the hope of documenting the developments there. Two years later, in 1949, he returned to Shanghai to document instead the final years of the Chinese Civil War in Shanghai and the final struggle between the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Parsis throughout southern China faced increased pressure from the newly formed communist government. The young People's Republic of China intensified the persecution of organised religion as well as the struggle against elements of capitalism in the country. While most of the Parsi community of Guangzhou had already left the city around the year 1938, the departure of Parsis from Shanghai was slightly more gradual. In 1949, Jehangir Bejan Tata's British passport was in need of renewing at the British consulate in Shanghai, the sole remainder of British political authority in the city. His request was refused. "'They said, you are now Indian," he recalls. "They said that 'India is now independent' and all that. So I took up the Indian passport – my whole family took up the Indian passport at that time."[63] Many foreigners, including members of the Shanghai Parsi community and the remaining Tatas themselves, left Shanghai burdened by the many regulations imposed by the new government on them being there. Jehangir, along with his wife and his brother Sam, moved out of the Tata family home in Shanghai, and sailed for Hong Kong. They left the home under the maintenance of a British real estate agency: but several years later, all foreign real estate agencies were forced to cease their activities in Shanghai. After 1949, thus, while a portion of the Zoroastrians present in China at that time elected to return to Bombay, a large proportion of them found themselves settling in Hong Kong. Several members of the Parsi community in Shanghai, instead, opted to move to the United States.

The Cultural Revolution, between 1966 and 1976, damaged the already highly limited Zoroastrian presence left in Shanghai quite substantially. The Tata family lost their home, fruit of the labours and commercial savviness of their family, as it was seized by the Communist Party.[64] Furthermore, during this period of political and societal unrest, the Zoroastrian cemetery of Shanghai was confiscated by the Chinese Communist Party, and the Zoroastrian temple of Shanghai, which had been standing since 1866, was destroyed.[65] Now, after the departure of the Parsi community from Shanghai, the cemetery of Shanghai has "melted into the urban landscape".[66] Their fire temple and community centre at Fuzhou Road has since been demolished, and a hotel has been built in its place.[67]

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[63] Saran, 'A House for mr. Tata'.
[64] Saran, 'A House for mr. Tata'.
[65] Aoki, "Zoroastrianism in the Far East," 155.
[66] Christian Henriot, "The Colonial Space of Death in Shanghai (1844–1949)", in *Twentieth Century Colonialism and China: Localities, the Everyday, and the World*, ed. Bryna Goodman and David Goodman (London: Routledge Press, 2012).
[67] Saran, "Parsis: A small but vibrant community in 19th century."

Hong Kong

Upheaval: The Occupation of Hong Kong

On December 8th, 1941, the Japanese imperial army commenced its assault of the British colony of Hong Kong. The colony's geographically isolated position relative to other British territory made the defence of Hong Kong a challenging matter from the start. The British defenders engaged in brutal fighting for seventeen days, but were finally overwhelmed and forced to surrender on Christmas Day, after having suffered some 2.200 casualties.[68] The loss of the battle for Hong Kong was a significant blow to the British Empire. Not only did it serve to shake the British political and military power in the region to its core in a practical sense, it also shattered the British Empire's reputation of being a dominant colonial power in the region. As expressed by Steve Tsang, the loss of Hong Kong was the first major event that destroyed the perception of the Empire's invincibility and the myth of its colonial superiority.[69] Furthermore, the loss of Hong Kong had been the first time the British Empire was forced to renounce a colonial territory since the American independence in 1782. British confidence was shaken, and the question whether Hong Kong would ever go back to being a British territory, even after liberation, suddenly grew rather palpable. A considerable number of Chinese politicians assumed that Hong Kong would be to return to China after its liberation, and several United States representatives reportedly did not seem to support the return of Hong Kong to the British Empire after the war.[70]

As to the Parsi community of Hong Kong, the subsequent occupation of Hong Kong, which spanned the time between December 25th, 1941 and August 30th, 1945 had considerable impact on the existence of the community in the now Japanese colony. Internment camps were established for the British prisoners of war and their allies. While Indian populations in Hong Kong, in this instance including the Parsis as well, managed to largely avoid the civilian internment camps, their known affiliation with the British imperial authority did them few favours during the Japanese occupation. A strict curfew was in place, and many Parsis' financial assets were frozen. Ruby Master, a Hong Kong Parsi from the Master family, recalls that their family sustained themselves primarily through selling the valuables remaining in their family home. When the war arrived in Hong Kong, she remembers, many of her Indian, Portuguese, and Eurasian friends in school fled Hong Kong with her family.[71] A notable number of Parsis did the same, fleeing to Shanghai and relocating their funds to Guangzhou.[72]

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[68] Steve Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007): 123.
[69] Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong*, 125.
[70] Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong*, 125.
[71] Hong Kong Heritage Project, "The Parsees: Hong Kong's Disappearing Community", *Hong Kong Project Past & Present* (June 28, 2019). https://hongkongrefuge.wordpress.com/2019/06/28/hong-kongs-disappearing-communities/
[72] Vevaina, "Trust on the monsoon winds", 9.

Several figures in the Parsi community who remained in Hong Kong were also known to have engaged in some manner of resistance during the Japanese occupation. Some of them were arrested for aiding the British during the defence of the city and during the occupation. Several Parsi families were reported to have lost their homes during the occupation and were housed in the homes of other members of their communities for the duration of the Japanese rule of Hong Kong. Two members of the Ruttonjee family, father and son, were arrested by Japanese authorities in 1944 on the charge of aiding civilians interned in the Stanley Internment Camp.[73] They were interrogated and tortured, and subsequently sentenced to five years in prison. They were freed from prison when Hong Kong was liberated some nine months later, on August 30th, 1945.[74]

While the Japanese surrender of Hong Kong was supposed to be presented to Chiang Kai–shek, who had been appointed Generalissimo of the regional theater of the war by the United States, the British government instead sent Admiral Cecil Harcourt to sail to Hong Kong immediately after Emperor Hirohito's announcement of Japan's unconditional surrender. Harcourt's fleet sailed into Victoria Harbour on August 30th, 1945.[75] Ruby Master, in a recounting of her experience of the Japanese occupation during an interview, recalls that her family joined other Parsi families in welcoming the British forces arriving in Hong Kong after the Japanese capitulation two weeks prior. "We were all on the waterfront waiting to cheer them," she recounts. "Oh, that was a wonderful day."[76]

The Japanese capture and occupation of Hong Kong presented a major upheaval to both the British Empire as well as the Parsi community of Hong Kong. It shook the Empire's political influence, military power, and international esteem in the region, and prompted initial discussions surrounding the future of Hong Kong under British imperial power. The occupation of Hong Kong disrupted the Parsi community's commercial activities in many instances and impeded their civil freedoms in major ways. The assurances they had enjoyed under the British colonial government could no longer be counted on during the occupation. The occupation left a considerable impression on the Parsi community, reshaping the community's perceptions of themselves and their attitude towards their future. This fits into a wider trend in Parsi communities in Asia: after the Second World War, scholar Tanya Luhrmann observes a distinct shift in such attitudes in the Parsi communities of Asia, and Bombay in particular, with anxieties surrounding community decline and dwindling numbers of Zoroastrians markedly risen.[77]

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[73] Hong Kong Heritage Project, "The Parsees: Hong Kong's Disappearing Community".
[74] Hugh Farmer, "Jehangir Hormusjee Ruttonjee – founder of Hong Kong Brewers and Distillery Ltd," *The Industrial History of Hong Kong Group* (May 26, 2020).
https://industrialhistoryhk.org/jehangir-hormusjee-ruttonjee-founder-of-hong-kong-brewers-and-distillery-ltd/
[75] Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong*, 134.
[76] Hong Kong Heritage Project, "The Parsees: Hong Kong's Disappearing Community".
[77] Tanya M. Luhrmann, *The Good Parsi: The Fate of a Colonial Elite in a Postcolonial Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996): 143.

The Handover of Hong Kong

While the loss of Hong Kong during the Pacific War had already served to engender doubts about the colony's future under the British Empire, it was not until several decades later that the British colonial presence definitively withdrew from Hong Kong. After several years of negotiation between the People's Republic of China and the United Kingdom, the Sino–British Joint Declaration was signed in 1984.. This declaration stipulated the formal transfer of sovereignty over the territory of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China at midnight of July 1st, 1997. It also included several conditions to this handover: Hong Kong was to retain its current form of government and economic system for fifty years, under the principle of 'one country, two systems (一国两制)', as well as its legislative systems and all the accompanying rights afforded to the people of Hong Kong.

It was around the time of the ratification of the Sino–British Joint Declaration of 1984 that John Hinnells conducted his research into the Zoroastrian community of Hong Kong. His findings may help us in developing a valuable, if limited, glimpse into the Zoroastrian community of Hong Kong during the years of his visits, between 1983 and 1987. The survey included matters such as the community's demography, religious practices, and perceptions of the future.

Firstly, with regards to demographics at the time of his visits, Hinnells reports that there were an approximate 120 Zoroastrians in Hong Kong, sixty-six of whom responded to his survey. It found that while about a fourth of the respondents was born in the region, the majority of the respondents was born in India. Around a third of the respondents had moved to Hong Kong prior to 1960, which, along with the finding that over thirty percent of the respondents was over the age of fifty-five, paints the picture of a community that is relatively aged.[78] Secondly, Hinnells' survey explores religious practices within the community between 1983 and 1987. It reports that there are, in comparison with other diaspora communities, relatively high rates of members who identify as religiously non-practicing. Simultaneously, it describes a community in which the celebration of seasonal religious festivals, or *gahambar*, is done more consistently than in other communities. This is something that Hinnells attributes to the accessibility of the Zoroastrian Building in Hong Kong as a community centre. Furthermore, Hinnells describes a greater awareness of death ceremonies and higher rates of members who report praying for the deceased, and attributes this to the Zoroastrian Building's proximity to the Zoroastrian cemetery, which the community priest visits regularly.[79]

Thirdly, and perhaps most insightfully for the purposes of this research, Hinnells also conducted private conversations with several members of the Hong Kong Zoroastrian community, during which he discussed the interviewed members' perception of the future of Hong Kong and their community, particularly in the face of the now legally ratified Handover on the horizon. These conversations provide a small glimpse into the attitudes present in the community during this

[78] Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora,* 157.
[79] Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora,* 158–159.

turbulent time. Hinnells describes that several members of the community have considered the possibility of having to leave Hong Kong for political reasons.[80] This observation aligns with the statements of Ruby Master, who mentions that during the 1990s, there were a number of Parsis who left Hong Kong in anticipation of the Handover. Precise details and numbers are, as of yet, unknown.[81] Both Hinnells' and Master's accounts of such attitudes within the Parsi community do indicate the presence of such serious concerns at the prospect of living under the People's Republic of China rather than a British colonial authority. In Hinnells' survey, some of the members who reported to have considered moving out of Hong Kong due to the prospect of the Handover, have indicated that few would actually consider moving to India, to Bombay where the most sizable Parsi community is located. Instead, they expressed that they did not think of themselves as particularly Indian. Destinations that were considered most were Australia, the United States, and most prominently the United Kingdom, which was named as a primary choice at least partially by virtue of the British passports held by most Parsis in Hong Kong during this time.[82]

In 1998, a year after the Handover, Hinnells briefly returned to Hong Kong and continued these private conversations. With regards to the socio-political situation and the future of the community, Hinnells reports that at that time, most community members he talked to did not expect their situation in Hong Kong to change much in the next decade, and many believed there would be no drastic change for even longer – the Chinese government did promise a 'one country, two systems' transitionary period of fifty years, after all. Simultaneously, however, Hinnell reports that out of the members he has spoken to, "few saw the prospect of a Parsi community beyond fifty years". The precise reasons for this belief are not explicitly elaborated on, but it is implied that this is related to the globalisation of overseas trade and the consequent shifting role of the small entrepreneur.[83] Since Hinnells' visits to and inquiry of the Zoroastrian community of Hong Kong during the 1980s, very little has been produced academically regarding the development of the community in a post–1997 Hong Kong.

[80] Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora,* 186.
[81] Hong Kong Heritage Project, "The Parsees: Hong Kong's Disappearing Community".
[82] Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora,* 186.
[83] Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora,* 186.

Section VI
Comparison, Discussion, Implications

This section of the thesis will analyse and compare the historical trajectories outlined in previous, identify common themes, similarities and dissimilarities between the development of the Parsi communities in Hong Kong and southern China. In this comparative analysis of four major themes identified by this paper, the overarching question will be the following: considering the fact that part of the Parsis' commercial success in southern China was due to their favourable relations with the British Empire and the East India Company, how significant is the fact that the Parsi community of Hong Kong developed under the British imperial authority for considerably longer compared to other Parsi communities in southern China, in producing diverging historical trajectories and outcomes between these communities?

Parsi Cemeteries as Cultural Anchors

The first notable pattern of similarity in the developmental trajectories of the Parsi communities in southern China is the central role played by the cemeteries during the early development of Parsi presence in the given location. They were usually one of the first religious community spaces to be established in these foreign trading ports, sometimes decades before the emergence of a proper Zoroastrian Building or fire temple as a community space.

The oldest Parsi cemetery in southern China can be found in Macao, and was established in 1829. It emerged as the first geographical centre of Parsi presence in the city, and still remains there to this day when nearly all other traces of the Parsi community have gone.

In Guangzhou, it was the Parsi community's initial intention to construct a tower of silence, in keeping with traditional customs of managing the departed. After being refused this request by the local population, a cemetery was constructed in 1847, indicating a willingness to adapt to the hostland's funerary practices.. It was not until the year 1861 that a Zoroastrian Building or fire temple was established by the Guangzhou Parsi community. Once again, the only cemetery remains today, perched on Guangzhou's Parsi Hill.

In Shanghai, the Parsi cemetery has played a significant role in the historical trajectory of the Shanghai Parsi community. It was founded in 1854, the land it occupies financed by the Guangzhou anjuman, and it saw its first burial five years later in 1859. Along with the establishment of the cemetery came the establishment of a fund with the purpose of maintaining and managing it. It was oftentimes headed by influential figures in the Shanghai Parsi community, and its eighty–year history was documented in a book meant to honour the efforts of previous trustees to maintain this central

piece of heritage. The book describes the cemetery as "a glorious and monumental work as a precious heritage, which is destined to cast great lustre on them all and confer great benefits upon the indigent section of their co–religionists all over India and Persia for many years to come".[84] The cemetery in Shanghai predates the fire temple and community building, which was constructed alongside the cemetery in 1866, by twelve years.

The case study of Hong Kong fits neatly within this trend. The Zoroastrian cemetery was established only several years after the British takeover of the territory in 1842, while the Hong Kong Zoroastrian Building finished construction only in 1861. Hinnells' inquiry revealed that at the time of his research, the cemetery still served a crucial role in the religious life of the community as the head priest would make it a habit to visit the cemetery regularly. Hinnells theorised that this, along with the cemetery's proximity to the Zoroastrian Building might indicate that the Hong Kong community may be uniquely aware of death ceremonies.[85] Considering the central role that the cemeteries have played in all Parsi communities in southern China, however, this uniqueness could be debated. Analysis of the communities in question reveals a trend wherein the Zoroastrian cemeteries seem to fulfill several different functions.

Firstly, the Zoroastrian cemeteries in southern China served practical and pragmatic considerations, particularly for a religious and ethnic minority group which traditionally has different mortuary practices. The establishment of a cemetery also Secondly, beyond such practical considerations, having a separate cemetery reserved for a particular religious and ethnic minority group connects the minority group with the place of establishment, and indicates a more permanent, long–term investment in the place of establishment. Shanghai, for instance, featured separate British, French, and Japanese cemeteries, and a Parsi cemetery grants the Parsis a similar 'status' as other groups. It is a way to indicate the presence of the Parsis in these places, to ground them in this environment which is otherwise foreign to them. Alistair Hunter has named cemeteries "the deepest and most permanent foundations for settlement and belonging of migrants and subsequent generations".[86] Thirdly, the Zoroastrian cemeteries in southern China served the function of the cultural hearth of the Parsi diasporic communities, a site of cultural production and diffusion which embodies the cultural origins and traditions of a particular group. In southern China's Parsi communities, the cemeteries seem to fulfil a similar role: it is the first material space that captures the Parsis' cultural traditions and a connection to their origins in an otherwise foreign environment. It is only after the symbolic 'grounding' that the community expands and organises further, with the establishment of Zoroastrian Buildings and fire temples. Fourthly, the cemeteries constructed and maintained by the Parsi

[84] Talati et al. *A Review of the Origins and Growth of the Shanghai Parsee Cemetery Trust Funds.*
[85] Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora,* 158.
[86] Alistair Hunter, "Deathscapes in diaspora: contesting space and negotiating home in contexts of post–migration diversity", *Social & Cultural Geography* 17, no. 2 (2016): 249.

communities of southern China served as a site of intergenerational remembrance. Cemeteries are inherently a form of intergenerational memory and community building, and the Zoroastrian cemeteries of southern China are no exception to this. They connect the achievements of previous generations of Parsis to the contemporary Parsi community, extending the community into the past.

Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire*, 'places of memory', provides a useful framework through which to analyse the case study of Parsi cemeteries in southern China. According to Nora, *lieux de mémoire* are places, objects, or practices which embody and represent a particular strand of collective memory.[87] Nora describes how *lieux de mémoire* are created when seemingly functional objects or places, such as a cemetery, come to be imbued with symbolic meaning. As such, *lieux de mémoire* consist of three dimensions, necessarily and inexorably: a material dimension, a functional dimension, and a symbolic dimension.[88] In the case of Zoroastrian cemeteries in southern China, these would almost certainly be exemplary of the concept of *lieux de mémoire* as they clearly fulfill all three functions. Firstly, with regards to the material dimension, the Zoroastrian cemeteries provided a material and geographical presence of the Parsi community, anchoring the memory of the community's narrative in a tangible place and collection of monuments. Secondly, with regards to the functional dimension, the Zoroastrian cemeteries actively transmit memory through the social and religious function they fulfill in the daily existence of the Parsi communities. Burials, rituals, and active communal remembrance serve to reinforce the process of community identity formation through these *lieux de mémoire*. Thirdly, with regards to the symbolic dimension, the Zoroastrian cemeteries serve not only to facilitate remembrance, but also to transmit values, narratives, perceptions of self, achievements, traumas, and identities to the Parsi communities.

Shaping Southern China

The second consistent theme in the historical trajectories of the Parsi communities in southern China is the community's role in shaping the environment they found themselves in. This research paper would argue that, due to Hong Kong's divergent history from other trade ports in southern China, the Parsi community in Hong Kong may have had a more formative role in the development of Hong Kong as a city, relative to the Parsi communities in Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Macao. There are several factors that could explain why the Parsi community of Hong Kong may have had a more formative influence on the development of Hong Kong than the Parsi communities elsewhere in southern China had on their respective places of residence.

Firstly, Hong Kong, particularly in comparison with Guangzhou or Shanghai, is a young city. It only entered its transformation into a major regional trading hub, and its trajectory of rapid

[87] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", *Representations*, no. 6 (1989): 12.
[88] Nora, "Between Memory and History", 19.

economic development, after it was formally recognised as a British colony in 1842. Whereas cities such as Guangzhou and Shanghai had already been established as some of China's chief trading ports by the time any Parsi merchant had set foot in its harbours, Parsis entered the fabric of Hong Kong society directly at its establishment, right at the beginning of its trajectory of development. Considering that the Parsis swiftly became an undeniable commercial and industrial force in the new colony, their contribution to the initial development of Hong Kong was likely far more substantial than in the established ports of Guangzhou and Shanghai.

Secondly, on a similar note, the amount of Parsi funds invested in the development of the city of Hong Kong was considerably larger than investments or philanthropic donations finding their way into Guangzhou or Shanghai. At the first land auction in Hong Kong, the Parsis purchased a considerable part of the waterfront of Hong Kong island for development. [89] Eighteen years after the establishment of Hong Kong, the Parsis owned nearly a fourth of all businesses in the colony. Much of their profits found their way back into the colony. Additionally, figures such as Mody and Ruttonjee invested great amounts of their wealth in the development of Hong Kong, aiding towards the establishment of hospitals, the development of a large portion of Hong Kong real estate, and the city's preeminent educational institution in the form of the University of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) is one of the largest banks in the city to this day. Many of these institutions quite simply did not exist in Hong Kong before the contributions of members of the Parsi community, indicating that the relative youth of Hong Kong as a city provided greater opportunity for the Parsi community to contribute to its development.

Finally, the status of Hong Kong as a British colony would have afforded the Parsi community of Hong Kong with certain securities and opportunities which could not be afforded to the Parsis in ports such as Guangzhou and Shanghai, which were not formally under British jurisdiction. In Guangzhou and Shanghai, Parsi influence was certainly notable within trade and commercial value, owning multiple influential firms and maintaining a close relationship with the British consulate in Guangzhou, but less so in the administrative and urban development of these places, which was headed by the Qing Dynasty itself. Partly as a result of the political system in place in Hong Kong, it was that the Parsi community was more directly involved in administrative and political matters in the colony. For instance, Dhun Jehangir Ruttonjee is an example of a member of the Hong Kong Parsi community who served in the Hong Kong colonial government, in the Legislative Council of Hong Kong, between 1953 and 1968. Such direct involvement in colonial politics would not have been possible in Qing Guangzhou or Shanghai, and it exemplifies the more direct contributions of the Parsi community in Hong Kong to the city's development.

[89] Vevaina, "Trust on the monsoon winds", 13.

Shelter from the Storm?

Considering its unique geopolitical position as a British colony, nineteenth and twentieth century Hong Kong was sheltered from many societal and political upheavals occuring in the mainland during this time, particularly affecting southern China. These events would not have affected the Parsi community of Hong Kong in the same manner as it would have their mainland Chinese counterparts, as its status as a British colony, despite facing its own disruptive events, provided some manner of a buffer between its residents and these sources of upheaval. The southern Chinese port cities such as Guangzhou and Shanghai simply provided a less stable and more volatile environment for the Parsis' commercial and community endeavours in the long term.

During the nineteenth century, southern China was affected by several staggering events of societal and political upheaval. The first came in the form of heavy Chinese crackdowns on the trade of opium, which significantly affected Parsi traders in that particular business in Guangzhou. In 1839, many Parsi merchants of opium were met with hostility, from the confiscation of their wares to being placed under house arrest. The Opium Wars also contributed to a sense of insecurity in Guangzhou. In Hong Kong, however, the situation was far more stable. It presented the Parsis with ample opportunities, partly a result of their close relationship with the British authority, to conduct their trade with relatively little disruption. The second source of upheaval came during the Taiping Rebellion, which proved incredibly destructive to most of southern China for fourteen years. Estimates say that the Taiping Rebellion killed several tens of millions, and while the inland areas of southern China were more significantly affected than port cities such as Guangzhou and Shanghai, it is known to have had an impact on trade in the region and to have spurred a great deal of unrest in the area. The sources on the Parsis in southern China make no explicit mention of this event in relation to the Parsis, but it seems reasonable that the resulting unrest may have contributed to the concerns surrounding the volatility of Guangzhou which emerged during the 1850s and 1860s. The young British colony of Hong Kong, in contrast, remained largely unaffected by the violence unfolding to the north.

The third disruptive event in southern China came in the form of the Second Sino–Japanese War. Shanghai was occupied by the Japanese imperial army in 1937, after a three–month battle and countless bombing raids which were particularly destructive. Many members of the Parsi community lost ownership of their firms and livelihoods. The repressive Japanese occupation lasted eight years. Guangzhou found itself enveloped in the Second Sino–Japanese War in 1938. The Japanese bombings of Guangzhou were rather brutal, as was the occupation that followed, which lasted almost seven years. It was the intensity of the violence that led the Parsi community of Guangzhou to abandon the city entirely in 1938. Hong Kong was occupied by the Japanese as well, several years later, in 1941. The occupation of Hong Kong proved no less impactful to the Parsi community there, as they in some

instances faced imprisonment and torture, as well as the confiscation of their firms and homes. The difference lies in the fact that, while the occupation of Hong Kong was a catastrophic disruption to the Parsi community in Hong Kong, the occupation was relatively short compared to those in Guangzhou and Shanghai. While faced with its own brief but catastrophic disruption between 1941 and 1945, Hong Kong provided an otherwise rather well insulated environment of commercial opportunity and stability throughout the twentieth century.

Fourth, after the Second Sino–Japanese War, Parsis in southern China were faced with new major socio–political challenges in the face of the takeover of the Chinese Communist Party and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. While the community in Guangzhou had been mostly abandoned by this time, in Shanghai, the Parsi community was faced with increased pressure on their firms, strict regulations, and more hostile attitudes towards them as foreign communities. This pressure was the reason for many figures in the Shanghai Parsi community to depart from Shanghai. The Cultural Revolution, some decades later, saw the loss of Parsi property remaining in Shanghai, including homes, the Zoroastrian building and fire temple, and the cemetery. Hong Kong, being a British colony, was not directly affected by these radical socio–political changes altering the course of the Parsi communities on the Chinese mainland during the twentieth century. It remained under British rule until 1997, and maintained its capitalist system and its religious freedoms for several decades more.

Hong Kong Parsis and the Handover

In recent years in Hong Kong, attention has been drawn to Hong Kong's small Parsi community by a rather notable South China Morning Post Article. In 2020, an article by SCMP journalist Rhea Mogul titled "Parsis in Hong Kong: what's the secret behind their growing population?" was published in this major newspaper.[90] From what can be gathered from the sources available to us, the size of the Parsi community in Hong Kong indeed seems to be growing, rather than declining. Hinnells' inquiry, conducted between 1983 and 1987, reported a count of around 120 Zoroastrians in Hong Kong around this period.[91] In 2008, through the website Zoroastrians.net, the Incorporated Zoroastrian Charity Funds of Hong Kong, Canton and Macao stipulated that its directory reports approximately 200 members in Hong Kong.[92] Then, a later post on the same website dated back to November 17,

[90] Rhea Mogul, "Parsis in Hong Kong: what's the secret behind their growing population?" *South China Morning Post,* August 16, 2020.
[91] John R. Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora: Religion and Migration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 157.
[92] "The Incorporated Zoroastrian Charity Funds of Hongkong, Canton and Macao." Zoroastrians.net, last modified on June 9, 2008.
https://zoroastrians.net/2008/06/09/the-incorporated-zoroastrian-charity-funds-of-hongkong-canton-and-macao/

2015, claims that at that time there were 232 Zoroastrians in Hong Kong.[93] If these numbers are accurate, they would indicate a not insignificant increase in the size of the Zoroastrian community of Hong Kong over the past fourty years: which is a rather notable development as far as Zoroastrian diaspora communities are concerned: as many Zoroastrian communities around the world are facing dwindling numbers as a result of traditionally strict marriage laws and resulting low birth rates, historical restrictions on conversion, aging populations, and the common challenges which ethnic and religious minority groups are more generally presented with. Additionally, the withdrawal of Great Britain from Hong Kong in the 1997 Handover was, evidently, a source of profound insecurity in some aspects of the Parsi community of Hong Kong – yet the growth persisted throughout the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty–first century. It is a feature that sets the Zoroastrian community of Hong Kong apart from its counterparts in other parts of the world, as well as in southern China specifically, and something that merits deeper discussion.

A reasonable explanation might posit that the growing numbers of the Hong Kong Parsi community is driven by the inflow of Parsis from elsewhere in southern China. During the twentieth century, many Parsis originally part of the Guangzhou or Shanghai communities found themselves relocating to Hong Kong, after all, in the face of societal and political upheavals such as the Second Sino–Japanese War. This explanation is, however, in the estimation of this paper, insufficient: for the growth of the Zoroastrian community in Hong Kong was most significant several decades after the Second Sino–Japanese war, or even the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, despite the evidence indicating that the Handover of Hong Kong in 1997 had motivated a certain number of members of the Hong Kong Parsi community to leave, the general size of the community has increased, rather than decreased in the face of the uncertainty presented not only by the Handover, but the political restlessness of Hong Kong between 2014 and 2020. What, then, could explain the growth of the community?

It was the initial intention of this research paper to explore this notable development in the Hong Kong Zoroastrian community. Any attempts at communication with the community, however, found that the community is hesitant to allow external researchers in, particularly for extended, formal research. Despite this logistical challenge, the case study of Parsis in Hong Kong is rather unique as far as Zoroastrian communities are concerned, and definitely merits further discussion. This research paper would posit several possible explanations that explain why the Zoroastrian community in Hong Kong has not only managed to maintain itself in a global city such as Hong Kong, but has seen a numerical increase over the past few decades despite sources of insecurity and upheaval such as the 1997 Handover and the 2014–2019 protests. Why did the Hong Kong Parsi community not see a decline after the withdrawal of the British Empire in 1997, as was the case in cities such as Shanghai or Guangzhou?

[93] "Zoroastrians of Hong Kong." Zoroastrians.net, last modified November 17, 2015. https://zoroastrians.net/2015/11/17/zoroastrians-of-hongkong/

Firstly, this paper would argue that the terms of the 1984 Sino–British Joint Declaration, which formalised the Handover of Hong Kong, created a unique socio–political environment. Most notably, the principle of 'one country, two systems' allowed the economic, political, and legislative institutions that were put in place by the British colonial government to endure beyond its withdrawal from Hong Kong – in theory, for fifty years. Despite the increasingly muddled nature of the óne country, two systems' principle in recent years, it seems that it has served to extend the legacy of the British colonial authority with which the Parsis maintained favourable relationships. The question whether the gradual erosion of these institutions with British foundations, and the gradual transition of time towards the year 2047 which marks the end of the fifty years of 'one country, two systems', will see the societal position of the Parsis in Hong Kong continue as it was, is fascinating, but too speculative for this paper to comment on.

Secondly, in a similar sense, Hong Kong has retained its status as a major commercial and financial hub since the Handover in 1997, and continues to present commercial opportunities. Commercial opportunities are what led the Parsis to southern China and Hong Kong originally, and this trend seems to have continued. During his inquiry into the Parsi community of Hong Kong during the 1980s, Hinnells suggested that most of the growth of the community in the past decades is because of Parsis moving to Hong Kong from Bombay and elsewhere, young professionals deployed by their firms for the commercial opportunities Hong Kong still provides.[94] This would be supported by the general historical trend, and explain why the Parsi community of Hong Kong has not seen arrested development in recent years despite societal developments and insecurities within the community: the economic and commercial incentives remain.

Thirdly, the Zoroastrian community in Hong Kong is well–established and tight–knit, providing a convenient entrance for new Parsi arrivals into an existing social network containing some established, highly successful and influential individuals. As stated by Vaudine England, "being Parsi directly offered membership of a tightly–woven but cosmopolitan network – it was a ready–made ticket to ride".[95] Moreover, this is supported by the fact that Hong Kong has retained its protection of the freedom of religion for its residents, allowing the contemporary Parsi community to practice its faith and customs largely without interference.

[94] Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora,* 186.
[95] England, "Hong Kong's Place in South East Asia", 77.

Section VII
Concluding Remarks

The inquiry conducted in this research paper has attempted to fulfill the following objectives. Firstly, it has established the origin of the close historical relationship between the Parsis and the British Empire, which carried the Parsis from Bombay to southern China and Hong Kong, and facilitated a significant portion of their development as diaspora communities and as a commercial class during the nineteenth and twentieth century. Secondly, it has compiled the literature on the histories of the Parsi communities of southern China, particularly Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Macao, and Hong Kong as well, into what is, optimistically, a comprehensive overview of the historical trajectories of development and eventual decline of these communities. Thirdly, through a critical diachronic comparative analysis, this research paper has identified formative historical trends of divergence and similarity between the Parsi communities in the southern Qing Dynasty and the community in the British colony of Hong Kong, particularly through the lens of the Parsi relationship with the British empire and its withdrawal from these places. Finally, this paper has hoped to have provided insight into these trends and discussed its implications for the Parsi community which remains active in Hong Kong.

Salient conclusions that may be drawn from the analysis in this research paper are the following. Firstly, the Parsi communities of southern China and Hong Kong benefited greatly from their relationship with the British empire, which manifested itself considerably differently between the ports of southern China and Hong Kong. Secondly, the Parsis' processes of settlement in southern China and Hong Kong followed largely similar patterns, driven primarily by commercial opportunities and characterised by mutual financial support between anjumans, successful integration into local markets, and reliance on cultural sites such as Zoroastrian cemeteries in their attempts at community identity formation. Thirdly, Hong Kong's geopolitical position as direct British territory provided the Parsi community of Hong Kong with several favourable conditions that contributed to their extended presence in Hong Kong. They were largely insulated from disruptive events that affected the Chinese mainland, particularly relative to the communities in Guangzhou and Shanghai. Hong Kong provided the Parsis with unique opportunities to contribute to the building of the colony and playing a more formative role in its development – particularly in the form of philanthropic activities and investments into the city.

Finally, the Parsi community of Hong Kong is a highly unique case study of a community which, partly as a result of its direct relationship with and its existence under the British colonial authority, has managed to mitigate the upheaval presented by the withdrawal of the British empire. This may be in part explained by the general continuation of many of the colonial legacies in the form

of a political, legislative, and economic systems which have contributed to a favourable commercial ecosystem, which seems to remain the primary motivation for Parsi migration to Hong Kong. This is supported by a tightly knit community that presents immediate social integration and embeddedness in an established, largely very successful circle of co–religionists.

In the light of these conclusions, the analysis conducted in this research paper has emphasised several promising opportunities for further inquiry related to the Parsi communities in southern China. Evident from the historical overview presented in this paper, there are several significant gaps in the literature that merit further discussion in order to improve our understanding of the histories of the Parsis in southern China and Hong Kong. More detailed research into Parsi investments in Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Macao would prove to be highly insightful. The Parsi presence in Macao in its totality is, relatively, significantly understudied, presenting an incomplete illustration. Finally, despite the Hong Kong Parsis' unique position as an enduring Zoroastrian community in southern China, its contemporary development has been largely uncharted since the 1997 Handover. Its insular nature may prove to be a limitation, but great insight is still to be found here with implications not only for this community itself, but the study of Parsis, diaspora, and colonial legacies in China.

Ultimately, this research paper hopes to have done justice to the long and complex history of Parsis in southern China, and provided salient insight on the historical trajectories of development of this 'harbour folk' which has proven to be highly influential in nineteenth and twentieth century China and Hong Kong in particular. It can only hope to have made a worthwhile contribution to this understudied yet highly relevant topic.

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