

# **Patterns of Integration: The Indian, Jewish and Muslim Trade Diasporas in Hong Kong**

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## **Keywords**

Indians - Muslims - Jews - Trade Diasporas - Identity

## Abstract

This paper discusses the influences interregional trade had on the development of the Indian, Jewish and Muslim communities in Hong Kong<sup>1</sup>. Emphasis is on stressing the dichotomy between trading opportunities, or business contacts, and the wish of these communities to maintain their distinct cultural orientations, as well as on the larger theme of integration into Hong Kong society. The perspectives of this paper are: (1) the influence of trading/ business networks upon identity formations, (2) the influence of the cultural orientations of these communities upon the formation and maintenance of business networks, and (3) the processes of adaptation and/or resistance of Indians, Jews and/or Muslims to new cultural surroundings. This paper is based on on-going research that started four years ago. The time period examined is the last one hundred and fifty years. The methodology is socio-historical and as a matter of availability of resources, it has a particular focus on prominent individuals, as well as on some of the associations these communities formed. The paper draws on material from archive research, including the resources of associations these migrants founded in Hong Kong, on interviews, as well as on historical accounts of Hong Kong.

In order to detect patterns of integration into Hong Kong society, this paper discusses the relations members of these three communities established with the Chinese and British residents in Hong Kong. To examine these relations, attention is placed on discussing how the migrants have shaped their identities in order to build up their economic, political and cultural lives in Hong Kong. Transnationalism<sup>2</sup> is an important element in discussing how Indians, Jews and Muslims sought to establish relations with Chinese and British residents in Hong Kong: Answers to the questions of why, how and when members of these communities used the experiences, knowledge and/or contacts acquired in places of previous residence in order to build-up their lives in Hong Kong serves to discuss their relations with the host societies. This is because such transnational strategies illuminate both processes of integration and/or resistance.

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<sup>1</sup> These communities are distinguished through either their ethnic origins (Indian), or through their religion (Jews, Muslims), although a number of Muslims in Hong Kong were of Indian ethnic origins, and a number of Jews also came to Hong Kong after living some time in India.

<sup>2</sup> I use the term transnationalism despite the fact that relations between the different regions I refer to, such as China, Britain, Hong Kong, India and Pakistan, were not always purely "transnational", given that some of these regions were part of the British Empire and that Hong Kong remained a British colony until 1997. In this sense, it would be more appropriate to speak of "transregionalism". However, since these regions became nations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term transnationalism is more appropriate.

In the conclusions, this paper suggests that there are three stages in how Indians, Jews and Muslims built up their lives in Hong Kong, although these processes were not always con-comittant in the three communities, and they were sometimes more accentuated in one community than in another. They started with (1) an increasing emphasis on the importance of trade which neglected the assertion of cultural identities. This was followed by (2) the feeling that a loss of a cultural identity is undesired and that in addition to trade, a sense of cultural origins and distinctiveness in relation to the surrounding society needs to be maintained. However, (3) such aspirations clashed with the demands of transnational trade and business, and cultural distinctiveness became most remarkably asserted in family and diasporic community life.

### **The Parsees: from "middle-men" origins to developing transnational cultural identifications**

Indian, Jewish and Muslim traders started settling in Hong Kong when the British occupied the island in 1841 as a result of the First Opium War. They started to set up offices in Hong Kong, taking advantage of the relative stability this new British outpost provided. For a number of years, Jews, Parsee and Borah Muslims<sup>3</sup> (who came from India) had already been trading in the nearby Chinese city of Canton (Guangzhou), or in the neighbouring Portuguese enclave of Macau<sup>4</sup>, specialising in the trade of opium, cotton and other merchandises between China, India and the West. There were numerous regional and religious groups of Indians that came to Hong Kong in the last 150 years. This paper, however, focuses on Parsees, since they present a particularly interesting case of community development in Hong Kong, given their strong preference for marrying only among Parsees.

To understand how Parsees in Hong Kong have related to the British and Chinese host societies, it is useful to have first a brief look at Parsee history. With the invasion of the Muslims of Persia, the adherents of the then dominant religion in Persia, the Zoroastrians, were faced with the prospects of being forced to convert to Islam and some of them migrated, or fled. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, a number of Zoroastrians settled in the Gujarat Province on the Western coast of

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<sup>3</sup> Muslims world-wide can be grouped into a majority of Sunni Muslims, and a minority of Shi'a Muslims. Borah Muslims are a branch of Shi'a Muslims.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, C. (1995), "The Establishment of the Parsee Community in Hong Kong", in: Smith, C. (1995), *A Sense of History: Studies in the Social and Urban History of Hong Kong*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Education Publishing Co., 390.

India, where they came to be known as Parsees. The origins of the name Parsees are not entirely clear. There is certainly relation with the observation that most of the Parsees who migrated to India came from the Pars (or Fars) province in Persia. Moreover, there is strong co-relation between the names Persia and Pars. It is however unclear whether their name was coined by the Muslim invaders in Persia who called them Parsees, because they lived in the Fars province, whether the Parsees adopted this name when they settled in India, or whether the Indians called them Parsees. In any case, it appears that the name Parsees served to deflect some attention from their distinct religion. Even though Parsees were allowed to settle and trade in India, there were a number of restrictions placed on them<sup>5</sup>. This partial exclusion was one of the reasons why the Parsees were keen on co-operating in trade first with the Portuguese and then with the British who settled in Bombay (now Mumbai). They acted as middle-men between the Indians and the foreign traders and this promoted Parsees into dominant trading positions. Parsees not only prospered as merchants and established their reputation as bankers or financiers, they also became famous for building and owning ships which they were willing to deploy for the British, especially for trade between India and China. Their economic and social ascendancy in India co-incided with their Westernisation. Parsees started to speak English, learned Western manners, and became very loyal to the British. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the Parsees greatly helped the British to establish trade in India and between India and China. In order to outline their willingness to help the British, a number of Parsees in India adopted English names which outlined their professional specialisation, such as Captain, Readymoney, or Engineer. When Parsees came to Hong Kong they continued processes of Anglicisation, as it is for example indicated by further changes of their names. For example, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Kotwalls in Hong Kong had changed to this name from their 19<sup>th</sup> century surname Kotwaj<sup>6</sup>. Answering the question of why a number of English names appeared in the membership registry of the Hong Kong Parsee Cricket Club at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Master and Cooper, a Parsee later explained:

"They were not English, but Parsees working for English firms, so they took the name of the firm as their own name." <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For example Parsee women needed to change their dress and wear the traditional Indian saris, Parsee wedding ceremonies also needed to include a part in the Indian Sanskrit language and needed to be performed in the evening, Parsees were not allowed to carry arms and most importantly, Parsees were not allowed to convert people to Zoroastrianism. This last restriction, although there is Indian blood among the Indian Parsees, is seen by a number of Parsees as the main reason for why their numbers are shrinking.

<sup>6</sup> Hall, P. (1992), *In the Web*, Wirral (UK), Peter Hall, 188.

<sup>7</sup> Hall, P. (2000), *150 Years of Cricket in Hong Kong*, Sussex (UK), the Book Guild Ltd., 148.

Although Parsees maintained their esteem of and loyalty to the British, in 20<sup>th</sup> century Hong Kong, they no longer functioned as middle-men as they did in India, as well as in 19<sup>th</sup> century Hong Kong, when they emphasised their usefulness for the British in the India - China trade by stressing their knowledge of and networks in India<sup>8</sup>. However, with the gradual cessation of the opium trade between India, Hong Kong and China in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Parsee connections in India became less important for the British. Parsees in Hong Kong had begun to invest in other trading ventures such as for example dealing with properties and stocks<sup>9</sup>, while often maintaining their trade in the import and export of textiles.

Despite the decreasing importance of trading links with India, the connections of Hong Kong Parsees with India remained important for explaining the ways in which they established relations with British and Chinese residents in Hong Kong throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Parsees in Hong Kong relied strongly on the Parsee communities in India to find spouses. The number of Parsees in Hong Kong has never been over two hundred individuals and there are around a 194 Parsees in Hong Kong today<sup>10</sup>. But at the beginning of the 1950s, there were only around 80 to 90 Parsees in Hong Kong<sup>11</sup>. Since many of them came to Hong Kong from Shanghai in the late 1940s, their number in Hong Kong must have been significantly smaller in the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The small size of the Parsee community was obviously a reason for why its members needed to find spouses from outside that community. Today, for example, the Parsee community in Bombay (Mumbai) numbers 76,000 individuals<sup>12</sup> and the close links between Hong Kong and Indian Parsees is illustrated in the explanation that "all Hong Kong Parsees have relatives in India"<sup>13</sup>. However, the practice of finding spouses in India is foremost motivated by Parsee beliefs and customs, which do not approve marriages with non-Zoroastrians and they also do not allow conversions<sup>14</sup>. Parsees in Hong Kong remained very strict about maintaining the distinction of who is, or is not, a Zoroastrian: only children born to a Zoroastrian father can become Zoroastrians. In cases where a Zoroastrian marries a non-

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<sup>8</sup> Plüss, C. (2000b), "Transnational Identities: Hong Kong Indians", *International Scope Review*, Vol. 2, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Personal communication from G.

<sup>10</sup> Directory of Hong Kong Zoroastrians, 2001-2002.

<sup>11</sup> Ingrame, H. (1952) *Hong Kong*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, presumably London, 248.

<sup>12</sup> The number of Parsees in Bombay (Mumbai) and in India are drastically falling, given the prohibition of conversion of outsiders and their migration to other countries, see: Taraporevata, S. (2000), *The Zoroastrians of India: Parsis*, Mumbai, Good Books.

<sup>13</sup> Personal communication from B.

<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, there is Indian blood among Parsees in India.

Zoroastrian, it is less damaging for the number of the community, which is altogether shrinking world-wide, if a Zoroastrian man marries a non-Zoroastrian women, than if a Zoroastrian women marries a non-Zoroastrian man. However, the argument can be made that to assure the passing on of a distinct tradition, it is more important that the mother is a Zoroastrian. However, the Parsees' transnational marriage practice also indicates some degree of exclusion from a very close social acceptance by the British. This is for example indicated by the observation that marriages between the Parsees and the British only started to take place towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Marriages between Parsee men and Chinese women, however, were a little more frequent, both in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, indicating a higher degree of social permeability. Homaje Kotwaj in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and then his son Samuel Kotwall in the 20<sup>th</sup> century both had an ethnically Chinese spouse<sup>15</sup>, and so had Dhunjisha (Dhun) Ruttonjee in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

An example giving insight into how a prominent Parsee family in Hong Kong has integrated into Hong Kong society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are the Ruttonjees. In 1886, Hormusjee Ruttonjee came to Hong Kong from India and soon started a business as a wine merchant<sup>16</sup>. With the help of his son Jehangirjee, the business prospered and the Ruttonjees established the Hong Kong Brewery. Jehangiree Ruttonjee also became a property owner in Hong Kong. An indicator of how Jehangirjee Ruttonjee related to Hong Kong is his philanthropy of which the biggest project was the establishment an Anti-Tuberculosis sanatorium in Hong Kong in 1948. With support from the Hong Kong government, it became the Ruttonjee Tuberculosis Sanatorium. The sanatorium indicated the support of Jehangirjee Ruttonjee of the whole of Hong Kong society without favouring any particular group. This is not to say, however, that he wished to distance himself from his Parsee heritage, nor from his links with India. He maintained close links with the Parsee community in Hong Kong. For example, during World War II, he housed nearly the entire Parsee community in his residence in Dudell Street, Diana House<sup>17</sup>. He also supported some of those Indians who were interned by the Japanese during their occupation of Hong Kong by sending them food parcels<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Hall, P. (1992), *In the Web*, Wirral (UK), 188.

<sup>16</sup> Pavri, J. K. (no date) Honourable Dr. Dhunjishah J. H. Ruttonjee O.B.E., C.B.E., J.P. of Hong Kong, unpublished typescript.

<sup>17</sup> Pavri, J. K. (no date) Honourable Dr. Dhunjishah J. H. Ruttonjee O.B.E., C.B.E., J.P. of Hong Kong, unpublished typescript.

<sup>18</sup> Personal communication from C.

An encompassing support of Hong Kong society was also typical of the identity of Jehangirjee Ruttonjee's son, Dhunjisha (Dhun) Ruttonjee, who was born in Hong Kong in 1903, where he spent nearly all his life and died in 1974. He had among his closest friends both Chinese and British residents on Hong Kong, such as the two financiers George Kwok and Noel Croucher, with whom he regularly played poker<sup>19</sup>. His encompassing interest in Hong Kong and the friendships he established helped him to be elected on the Urban Council in Hong Kong from 1950 to 1957, and to become an Unofficial Member (advisory member) of the Hong Kong Legislative Council for 15 years, that is, from 1953 to 1968 (Pavri, n.d.: 2). Dhun Ruttonjee was also involved in numerous other important Hong Kong associations, such as serving as the Chairman of the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, or holding the prestigious appointment of being a Stuart of the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club for ten years<sup>20</sup>. These examples indicate the close acceptance by Dhun Ruttonjee by the elite of Hong Kong society, where the British were dominant. Dhun Ruttonjee, however, also established himself a reputation for outspokenness in what he perceived to be the interests of Hong Kong and this was said to have prevented the award of a British knighthood<sup>21</sup>. Indication of this feeling of belonging to Hong Kong society, as well as of his cosmopolitan nature, was Dhun Ruttonjee's marriage to an ethnically Chinese woman. Despite constituting a break with Parsee orthodoxy, it did not prevent Dhun Ruttonjee's commitment to the Parsee community, wherein he served two terms as the President of the Hong Kong Zoroastrian association<sup>22</sup>.

The example of the Ruttonjee family illustrates the trend of Hong Kong Parsees to become more cosmopolitan throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in their economic and political orientation towards Hong Kong society. Although the strong preference among Hong Kong Parsees to marry Parsee spouses remained, the cosmopolitan element into the Parsee community in Hong Kong was also introduced by the fact that Parsees from Hong Kong, as well as from India, migrated to Europe, North America and Australia. Parsees in Hong Kong kept close contacts with former members of the Hong Kong Parsee community. The latter are, for example, listed in the directory of Hong Kong Parsees. The increase of links with overseas Parsee communities is concomitant with the

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<sup>19</sup> Personal communication from C.

<sup>20</sup> Dhun Ruttonjee was also much involved in the hospitals his family helped to establish, such as being the Chairman of the Ruttonjee Sanatorium, the Chairman of the Grantham Hospital, as well as serving as Chairman of the Hong Kong Tuberculosis, Chest and Heart Diseases Association (Personal communication from C).

<sup>21</sup> Personal communication from Mrs. Anne Ruttonjee.

<sup>22</sup> Today, this association of the Parsees in Hong Kong is called the Incorporated Trustees of the Zoroastrian Charity Funds of Hongkong, Canton and Macao.

changing economic role of Parsees in Hong Kong, where their economic activities were not very different from those of members of other communities. This movement towards a higher degree of cosmopolitanism among Hong Kong Parsees is also substantiated in the observation that a number of those who came to Hong Kong in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the later parts, have made no detectable effort to further anglicise their surnames, keeping Persian and/or Indian sounding ones, such as Parekh and Pavri. This keeping of surnames also indicates that the characteristics of Hong Kong's social life had become more cosmopolitan.

Despite the more cosmopolitan elements in their identities, the majority of Hong Kong Parsees today advocate that the group they feel closest to are the Parsees in India, followed by Indians from the Gujarat province both in Hong Kong and in India. As a prominent Hong Kong Parsee woman explains:

"Parsees are first Indians"<sup>23</sup>.

Points of communality do not at least derive from the observation that most Parsees in Hong Kong speak Gujarati, however with some more inclusions of English words, and Parsee food is also similar to Gujarati food. The importance of Indian food articles is also highlighted by the fact that the Hong Kong Zoroastrian directory lists Indian provision stores, as well as Indian restaurants in Hong Kong. Parsees charity work is also much directed towards India, sponsoring Indian Parsee children for overseas university education or building housing for Parsees in India. Evidence of the Parsees' affinity with Indians is the involvement of Parsees in Hong Kong Indian associations, such as the India Club in Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Indian Women's Club, which does charity work both in Hong Kong and in India. A Parsee woman, Parviz Shroff, is currently the president of the Hong Kong Indian Women's Club.

If Parsees are asked the question of what ethnicity and nationality their five closest friends in Hong Kong are, as well as their five most important local professional contacts, Parsee respondents always include other Parsees among their five closest friends, but they did not often list Parsees among their five most important professional contacts<sup>24</sup>. This observation indicates the strength of both social and emotional ties among Hong Kong Parsees, as well as the cosmopolitan nature of their working life. The strength of Parsee ties is also supported in the claim that in the last couple of years, there was only one divorce among Hong Kong Parsees, and there are currently 51 Parsee families in

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<sup>23</sup> Personal communication from B.

<sup>24</sup> The sample so far includes five Parsees.

Hong Kong<sup>25</sup>. Hong Kong Parsees emphasize the warmth and willingness of community members to help each other, independently of whether they are much involved in Zoroastrianism or not. The appreciation of warmth of Parsee community life is clearly indicated by the observation of a non-Parsee woman, who had a Parsee husband, that Parsees now are her closest friends remaining in Hong Kong<sup>26</sup>.

This discussion indicated that links with India of Hong Kong Parsees in the 20<sup>th</sup> century played no crucial role in fostering their place in Hong Kong's economy. However, these links came to serve more and more as a marker of group identification, whereby Hong Kong Parsees relied on the Parsee communities in India, especially in Bombay, to assure the continuity of their community. In this sense, transnationalism came to serve served as an essential factor in cultural identification, and for maintaining an identity apart from Chinese and other groups in Hong Kong's population.

### **Indian Muslims: Geographical Shifts in Identifications**

Like the Parsees, the emphasis in the identities of the first Indian Muslim migrants who came to Hong Kong as traders was on their India connections and this was helpful to foster their economic niche<sup>27</sup>. The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century however marked significant changes in how they thought of themselves. A number of Indian Muslim traders started to de-emphasise the importance of their Indian roots and to accentuate their business connections with various groups of people in different geographical regions, indicating a movement towards constructing more global identities. In addition to these geographical changes in identities, some Muslim traders also loosened some of their traditions insofar as they were perceived as hindering trade.

The geographical shift in the identities of the Muslim traders is evident by looking at how they were represented in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in an association called the Trustees of the Islamic Community. This organisation was formed in the 1850s in order to answer to the Hong Kong government for the use of a piece of land it had given to the Muslims so that they could build the first mosque in Hong Kong. Since the first Trustees had all died by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, new ones needed to be appointed. The way in which the new set of Trustees represented Muslims

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<sup>25</sup> Personal communication from D.

<sup>26</sup> Personal communication from C.

<sup>27</sup> Plüss, C. (2000a), "Hong Kong Muslim Organisations: Creating and Expressing Collective Identities", *China Perspectives*, 29, May-June.

of Indian origins in Hong Kong - the emphasis was on representing the Muslim traders<sup>28</sup> - indicated a clear shift away from their linkages with India, and emphasised the importance they gave to establishing links with China<sup>29</sup>. The new Trustees no longer represented Indian Muslims with reference to any geographical regions in India, nor with reference to their role in trade between India and Hong Kong. What the new choice of Trustees asserted, besides representing the two main streams of Indian Muslims in Hong Kong - that is, four Trustees for Sunni Muslims and two Trustees for Shi'a/Borah Muslims<sup>30</sup> - was the distinction that they represented Indian Muslims according to whether they were engaged in trade with China, or not. This distinction was expressed in the decision that the Indian Sunni Muslims would be represented by four Trustees, two of them for Muslims who were members of another Muslim organisation in Hong Kong, the Islamic Union, and two for non-members of the Islamic Union. The aim of the Islamic Union, founded in 1905<sup>31</sup>, was to promote the trade of Indian Muslims with China. Through this distinction, Indian Muslims created a novel and secular element in their identities, which emphasised their wish to increase trading relationships with China. Indication of the strength of their identification with trading prospects with China is the name of the association Indian Muslims formed to further these prospects: the Islamic Union. This name is curious, because by itself, it rather indicates a religious purpose of the organisation. However, since its aim was an economic one, the name indicates the great amount of importance the Indian Muslims attributed to their China trade prospects: religious meanings and business activities came to denote nearly the same understanding.

The shift of transnational identification of Indian Muslims co-incided with the rapid expansion of Shanghai as the trade capital of Asia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and Shanghai is in geographical proximity of Hong Kong. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a number of Indian Muslims in Hong Kong had also established closer relationships

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<sup>28</sup> Muslim soldiers were taken care of by the British Garrison, where they had their own prayer facilities and eventually their own cemetery.

<sup>29</sup> Plüss, C. (2000a), "Hong Kong Muslim Organisations: Creating and Expressing Collective Identities", *China Perspectives*, 29, May-June.

<sup>30</sup> Toraval, J. (1991), "Zhang li yu qi dao an pai: Xiang gang mu si lin ji jin zong hui li shi gai mao" (Managing death and prayer: A historical sketch of the Board of Trustees of the Hong Kong Muslim community (1850-1885)), *Guangdong min zu yan jiu lun cong* (The Collection of Studies of Ethnic Groups of Canton), n° 5: 225.

<sup>31</sup> The Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community Fund of Hong Kong, (1985), *ITICFHK*, Hong Kong, The Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community Fund of Hong Kong: 8.

with Chinese culture because they had married Chinese women<sup>32</sup>. It is interesting to observe that despite the fact that Indian Muslims in Hong Kong increased their trading connections with China, they did not establish significantly closer relations with the growing number of Chinese Muslims in Hong Kong<sup>33</sup>. For example, even though in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese Muslim started to use the mosques the Indian Muslims had built, and therefore paid subscriptions to the Trustees, the proposition in the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century to include a representative for the Chinese Muslims in the Board of Trustees failed<sup>34</sup>. Perhaps it was the distrust of both British and Chinese non-Muslims that partly explains why neither Indian nor Chinese Muslims thought that there was not much to be gained from establishing closer relations. This, of course, would also indicate the pre-dominance both groups accorded to their trading relations. Certainly, there were also cultural and language differences that did not facilitate closer contacts. The shift from India and Hong Kong to Shanghai in terms of trade was possibly also supported by the feeling of Indian Muslims that there was some advantage in shifting their trading expertise away from British controlled territories. With the exception of the Borah Muslims, relations between Indian Muslims and the British were sometimes a little strained because some Indian Muslims blamed the British for their declining influence in India.

Like the Parsees and other communities in Hong Kong in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Muslims became more and more involved with world-wide trade and professionalism, interacting with individuals from all over the world. More often than not, strict adherence to Islamic eating and especially drinking laws, such as the prohibition of drinking alcohol, complicated interaction with non-Muslim colleagues and clients and a number of Muslims became less observant. On the other hand, a number of voices among Hong Kong Muslims of Indian/Pakistani origins had also become increasingly concerned about the secularisation of their co-religionists. They expressed concern over the facts that attendance in the mosques was low, that Muslims frequently consumed alcohol and that there was little Islamic teaching for children. In order to strengthen the practice of Islam in Hong Kong, especially the education of Muslim children,

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<sup>32</sup> See: Weiss, A. (1991), "South Asian Muslims in Hong Kong: Creation of a 'Local Boy' Identity", *Modern Asian Studies*. vol. 25, n° 3. Most of these marriages were with Chinese women who were not Muslims, but who took up the religion before they married.

<sup>33</sup> Tang, K. & Tian Y. (1995), "Xiang Gang yi si lan jiao de qi yuan yu fa zhan" (The Development of Hong Kong's Islam), *Dong nan zu yan jiu lun cong* (Southeast Asian Studies), n° 6: 51.

<sup>34</sup>Toraval, J. (1991), "Zhang li yu qi dao an pai: Xiang gang mu si lin ji jin zong hui li shi gai mao" (Managing death and prayer: A historical sketch of the Board of Trustees of the Hong Kong Muslim community (1850-1885)), *Guangdong min zu yan jiu lun cong* (The Collection of Studies of Ethnic Groups of Canton), n° 5: 227-231.

Muslims of Indian/Pakistani<sup>35</sup> origins worked out a proposal in the 1960s to join hands with Chinese Muslims to support Islamic education<sup>36</sup>. By the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese Muslims had become the largest Hong Kong Muslim group. Although there is no yearly information either on numbers of Muslims in Hong Kong, or on their break-down into ethnic groups, the Hong Kong Government Annual Report for 1980 estimates that out of the 50,000 Muslims in Hong Kong, 30,000 were Chinese; 12,000 were Pakistanis; 5,000 were Hong Kong born descendants of Indian or Indian/Chinese Muslims, nicknamed "local boys"<sup>37</sup>; and 3,000 were of other nationalities. Despite the strong interest of all Hong Kong Muslim groups to support the initiative to further Islamic education in Hong Kong, the proposal was to achieve this aim by committing the associations of both Indian/Pakistani and Chinese Muslims to put their assets together in a common fund. But the associations refused, indicating significant differences between them, which even the goal of supporting the practice of Islam in Hong Kong could not overcome. Since none of the Hong Kong Muslim associations was large enough to provide pupils to fill an Islamic primary school, the schools supported by them could not continue to focus on Islamic education, since the majority of their students were non-Muslims<sup>38</sup>. Nevertheless, Islamic education was fostered in Hong Kong mosques, where weekend classes were offered to both Muslim children and adults, the teachers or Imams usually coming from the country of ethnic origins of the majority of the Muslims frequenting a mosque.

Hence, links with countries of ethnic origins and religious identifications were crucial for the Muslims' social and cultural links. However, given that the Muslims are a much larger and much more diverse group than the Parsees, the significance of their linkages with places outside Hong Kong was different. Since they migrated to Hong Kong from a variety of places, these links were a strong factor for the perpetuation of significant differences between Muslims of different ethnic origins, or from different Islamic traditions. These differences were accentuated especially between Muslims of Indian/Pakistani ethnic origins and Chinese Muslims. However, religious identifications, to a lesser extent, also worked towards overcoming ethnic differences. Especially since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, religious identification with Saudi Arabia and the Middle-

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<sup>35</sup> At the end of the rule of the British Empire in India in 1947, India was divided into India and Pakistan. This partition served to provide a Muslim country: Pakistan.

<sup>36</sup> Plüss, C. (2000), "Hong Kong Muslim Organisations: Creating and Expressing Collective Identities", *China Perspectives*, n° 29, May-June: 3.

<sup>37</sup> On "local boys" see: Weiss, A. (1991), "South Asian Muslims in Hong Kong: Creation of a 'Local Boy' Identity", *Modern Asian Studies*. 25 (3).

<sup>38</sup> Personal communication by E.

East<sup>39</sup> served to build bridges between some Hong Kong Muslims of different ethnic origins together, especially between those who travelled to Saudi-Arabia in order to perform religious duties. In this sense, transnational religious identifications can be regarded as elements uniting Muslims of different ethnic origins, especially Chinese Muslims and Indian/Pakistani Muslims.

### **Sephardic Jews: Anglicising identities**

This section on Sephardic Jews<sup>40</sup> pertains foremost to the second half of the nineteenth century, and hence it illustrates the first two processes which this paper regards as stages in building diasporic communities. These are the emphasis on business dealings versus the assertion of distinct cultural identities, as well as the desire to foster distinct identities in relation to Hong Kong society. The Sassoons, a Jewish trading family of Baghdadi origins who came to Hong Kong after some time of residence in India, provide a particularly illuminating example for the processes of both adapting to the British host society in Hong Kong, as well as of finding ways in which their Jewish origins could be made more acceptable to the British administrative elite in Hong Kong. The Sassoons, while building an vast trading networks that spanned from Japan to England, engaged both in processes of Anglicising their identities, as well as in finding ways of making their Jewish heritage, with which they did not wish to part, more acceptable. They opened a branch of their family in Hong Kong in the 1850s, and they styled their enterprise as a Jewish family business. Being very successful in trade between Asia and Europe, the family patriarch - David Sassoon - emphasised that the success of his business was attributed to the fact that he was blessed with eight sons, who were fully devoted to him and whom he rotated as directors in the various branches of the family firm, called David Sassoon, Sons & Co. The importance of the family's cohesiveness for the success of their trading empire was recognised by the West, giving the Sassoons' the nickname "the Rothschilds of the East"<sup>41</sup>. The coining of this nickname indicated that accentuating the Jewish heritage was acceptable to the British insofar as

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<sup>39</sup> In addition, Saudi-Arabia has also financially supported a number of Muslim projects in Hong Kong, such as renovation projects of mosques.

<sup>40</sup> Jews can be grouped into their Ashkenazim or Sephardim. In an oversimplified way, Ashkenazic Jews can be regarded as "Western Jews" and Sephardic Jews can be seen as "Eastern Jews".

<sup>41</sup> The West has attributed the source of the large fortunes the Rothschilds made in Europe to their family cohesiveness. See:

Kranzler, D. (1976) *Japanese, Nazis and Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945*, New York, Yeshiva University Press, 45.

this symbolised a successful business strategy and a source of large fortunes. The connections between business success and partial acceptance by the British colonial administration in Hong Kong is also emphasised by the historian Frank Welsh, who writes that prominent Jewish traders were accepted within British colonial society insofar as they were "admissibly rich"<sup>42</sup>.

It was for economic reasons that the British administration in Hong Kong also accepted, at least to some extent, that the Sassoons identified with India were the headquarters of their trading company remained. Having their ears close to the ground in India meant that the Sassoons knew when and where the best and cheapest merchandise would become available in India, enabling them to make some of the best purchases for export to the Far East, especially of opium. This knowledge was recognised with respect by the British and American traders with whom they competed. Thus, it was legitimate for the Sassoons to emphasise their connections with India since they were perceived as contributing to the success of Hong Kong. Even though the overt emphasis on Jewish tradition, as well as on Middle-Eastern and Indian roots, differentiated the Sassoons from the British residents of the colony, the family's enormous financial success and connections promoted the appointment of one of David Sassoon's sons, Frederick David Sassoon, to become an Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong<sup>43</sup>. The colonial government wished to have closer connection with successful traders in Hong Kong who did not have British origins. The appointment of Arthur Abraham Sassoon to the provisional committee to set up the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, which was the first bank that was based in Hong Kong, was also recognition of the Sassoons' business acumen<sup>44</sup>. However, despite the fact that the business success of the Sassoons facilitated their promotion into the administration of Hong Kong and into important institutions in the colony, their emphasis on their Jewish heritage also made for exclusion of the family from the British elite in Hong Kong. For example, Frederick David Sassoon, despite being in the Legislative Council, did not make it into the pivotal point of social life in the colony, the Hong Kong Club.

The Sassoon brothers reacted towards this social exclusion by starting to present more Anglicised identities, which, at times, stood in contradiction with the more traditional identities they needed to present to their father. They, for example,

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<sup>42</sup> Welsh, F. Welsh, F. (1977), *A History of Hong Kong*, London, Harper Collins, 380.

<sup>43</sup> Endacott, G. B. (1964), *Government and People in Hong Kong, 1841 – 1962: A Constitutional History*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 103.

<sup>44</sup> King, F. (1988) *The Hong Kong Bank in the Period of Imperialism and War, 1885 - 1918*. Volume Two of the History of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. New York, Cambridge University Press, 54.

adopted Western style dress and Anglicised their names. Abdullah Sassoon changed his name to Albert Sassoon in Hong Kong. However, in front of his traditional father, he was careful to maintain his Middle-Eastern first name<sup>45</sup>. Abraham Sassoon changed his first name to Arthur Abraham. Moreover, the Sassoons were very involved with establishing horseracing in the colony - this sport had been introduced by the British - and they had their own stables. Nevertheless, this process of Anglicisation could not overcome social prejudice and the historian Colin Criswell explains that the Sassoons reacted towards this partial exclusion from the Hong Kong elite by opting for an unostentatious life style. In his view, this display of modesty was rather a strategy of the Sassoons on how to cope with exclusion. The author claims that this modesty was not their natural inclination and as proof he cites the fastidious lifestyle the Sassoons adopted once they moved to England and the fact that they became part of the entourage of the monarchy<sup>46</sup>.

In addition to the Sassoons, the other prominent Sephardic Jew in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century Hong Kong was Emanuel Raphael Belilios. He was born in Calcutta, India, to a Venetian father who married a daughter of the Ezra family, a prosperous Jewish family in India with origins in Baghdad<sup>47</sup>. He came to Hong Kong in 1862, a little later than the Sassoons, but like the Sassoons, he prospered immensely and wished to strengthen his position in Hong Kong by achieving social and political recognition. In order to establish closer association with the political elite in Hong Kong, Belilios pursued a somewhat different strategy from that of the Sassoons. He opted for an ostentatious life style. For example, he constructed a summer residence, next to the Governor's summer residence on the Peak mountain in Hong Kong. Being impressed with the achievements of the Jewish British Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, who managed to reach this high political office without having to deny his former Jewish roots<sup>48</sup>, Belilios sought to establish association with Benjamin Disraeli. He proposed to construct a marble and bronze statue of Disraeli in Hong Kong, but Disraeli declined the offer. Nevertheless, Belilios found another way to honour the Prime Minister by constructing a beautiful row of houses that carried the name of the Lordship Disraeli received, the Beaconsfield Arcade<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Jackson, S. (1968) *The Sassoons*, London, Heineman, 43.

<sup>46</sup> Criswell, C. N. (1991) *The Taipans: Hong Kong's Merchant Princes*, Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 137-139.

<sup>47</sup> Like many of the Jews of Middle-Eastern origins who migrated to Asia, the Ezras and the Sassoons were related (*The Jewish Chronicle*, 27 July, 1900).

<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, Benjamin Disraeli had converted to Catholicism, what Belilios was not inclined to do.

<sup>49</sup> Benjamin Disraeli became Lord Beaconsfield.

Perhaps partly motivated by the project to gain recognition from the British administrative elite in Hong Kong, Belilios was a generous philanthropist, supporting many segments of Hong Kong society through establishing scholarships, Belilios's mix of business success and philanthropy promptly gained him recognition: he was the first Hong Kong resident to be awarded the British title of a CMG<sup>50</sup> and he was also appointed an Unofficial Member of the Legislative Council<sup>51</sup>. Whereas the Sassoons worked hard on integrating both their success in business and religious identity into the ways in which they sought to gain recognition from the British elite in Hong Kong, Belilios did not as much emphasise how his Jewish identity helped his trading ventures, rather he tried to be establish association with the image of Benjamin Disraeli who established a high degree of recognition in Britan that was not hindered by his Jewish origins, however, Disraeli had converted to become a Catholic. Both members of the Sassoon family and Belilios were very rich and highly established traders in Hong Kong and this appears to have been one of the reasons of why they did not establish much contact with the Chinese population in Hong Kong and sought acceptance foremost from the British elite in Hong Kong, on which they relied most.

## Conclusions

The focus of this paper was foremost on cultural processes that accompanied interregional trade. The example of Parsees showed how they shifted their cultural identification in 20<sup>th</sup> century Hong Kong. They changed from seeking to have very close relations with the British and becoming quite Anglicised (if not cosmopolitan), to asserting that their closest identification were with the Parsee communities in India, as well as with Indians from the Gujarat province. These latter two identifications were concomitant with the changing economic role of Hong Kong Parsees: Working together with the British was no longer so important for their economic prospects. The limits of social acceptance of Parsees by British residents in Hong Kong possibly supported the pride with which Parsees identified themselves as members of a distinct community. Social relations with the Chinese population in Hong Kong appeared to have been a little closer, but Parsees remained a group differentiating itself clearly from "outsiders". The identities of the Parsees towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century remained predominantly characterised by their wish to maintain their distinct tradition, while relatively freely interacting with the Chinese and other communities in

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<sup>50</sup> CMG is a honorary title and stands for Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George.

<sup>51</sup> Endacott, G. B. (1964), *Government and People in Hong Kong, 1841 – 1962: A Constitutional History*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 104.

Hong Kong, taking up economic pursuits that were similar to those of the members of other Hong Kong communities.

The example of Muslim traders of Indian/Pakistani ethnic origins in Hong Kong showed that shifts in their trading patterns strongly influenced their identities. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their identifications with India weakened while their business aspirations with China increased. The interesting point about this change is that despite trading relations between Muslims of Indian/Pakistani ethnic origins and Chinese individuals increased (both in Hong Kong and in Mainland China), relations between Muslims of Indian/Pakistani origins and Chinese Muslims in Hong Kong did not become much closer. This points towards the interpretation that neither Indian/Pakistani, nor Chinese Muslims, sought to establish close relations in terms of a shared religion, and this emphasised the significant cultural differences both sides felt they had. Similarly to the Parsees, cultural identification came again to be quite strongly established with places of ethnic origins.

The example of the Sephardic Jewish traders in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century suggested that identification with places of origins supported economic success and these identifications were especially accentuated in the ways in which the Sassoons shaped their business identities. However, on a social, political and cultural level, the relations between links with places of origins and integration into Hong Kong society were more complex. Accepted, on the one hand, for their economic success - and in the case of Belilios, also philanthropic contribution - Sephardic traders were also marginalised for their differences from the British and they reacted by partly anglicising their identities.

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