



BEING EURASIAN IN HK

“The mixing of races in Hong Kong became inevitable when a largely male population of Europeans found itself thousands of miles from wherever home was and unable to contemplate any other forms of marriage or union than with females of the indigenous people.”

Robin Hutcheon 1989 (husband of Bea Greaves)

While researching the genealogy of my mother’s family and relations – I constantly ran into roadblocks, complications and diversions caused by husbands having children with partners other than their wives. To borrow from Peter Hall’s title, I was in danger of becoming entangled ‘In The Web’. My great great grandfather from Scotland – William Patterson, sired five children with Wong Mui-kiu, my great grandfather Cameron Lang sired at least two daughters with Sai Ma Fung Sin, and my maternal great grandfather Edulgi Kotwall had a daughter later in life with a concubine. And these are only the relationships that avoided being lost to the mists of time, skeletons that have escaped the family closet. It was certainly common practice for men who could afford it to have more than one concubine. The practice was unwittingly encouraged by the trading companies who denied their employees the right to marry within five years of employment overseas. In the early days of the Treaty Ports, foreign women were not allowed to be brought into the ‘factories’.

“This attitude may have led to the formation of such establishments as the Diocesan Home & Orphanage in 1869 (genesis of the Diocesan Boys and Girls Schools?), when the number of children originally attending was 23 (14 boys of whom 12 were Eurasian and nine girls, of whom six were Eurasian). William Keswick, the Taipan of Jardine, Matheson & Co., was the first honorary treasurer.”

In The Web p.2

The literature uses many different words to describe these extra marital partners. Protected women, concubines and mistresses being some of the more circumspect. For me the obvious question was, why didn’t these European men marry their Chinese mistresses? And if already married, why couldn’t they keep their trousers zipped? Were I to be in a room with any of the above male relations and pose this question, I wonder what the answer would have been? Phrases such as ‘cultural norms’ and ‘cultural relativity’ echo from mostly forgotten university ethics classes, and perhaps go some way to excuse. The thought that I wouldn’t exist goes a ways to mollify. My guess is that Bill Paterson, once recovered from indignant spluttering, would have ordered me from the room; but perhaps I do him an injustice.

Bruce Chan with whom I share a common concubine great great grandmother tackles this issue, aided with facts obtained through assiduous research. In his book *Forbidden Merchandise* he has managed to portray vividly what it was like to have been one of these protected women. Did Wong Mui-kiu feel abandoned when Bill skedaddled back to Scotland to sire a ‘legitimate’ family, leaving her with five young children? Was love and jealousy part of the equation? Was



use of the prefix ‘Tai’ in the naming of her children a way of remembering Bill’s Tai Pan status? Lot’s of questions, but few answers. I hope the following quotes I have garnered from various sources convey some sense of cultural norms, and what it was like to be Eurasian at different periods in Hong Kong’s history.

“The foreign element in Hong Kong and the Treaty Ports in the 1850’s was not greatly different sociologically from people in the UK during the same period. One main difference was that once the concubine had been accepted into the household by the wife, the children of concubines were recognized as part of the family. Whereas in the UK children born out of wedlock were classified as illegitimate.”

“According to traditional Chinese law, a man could legally and with full social approval take as many concubines as he could afford to support. However, the husband had first to obtain permission of his wife. Children of a concubine then had equal legal status with the wife’s children. Having a Chinese name certainly had its advantages.”

“The concubine (Tsip Sze), literally meant the wife’s attendant. While the wife was head of the household, the concubine waited on the husband and had the partial status of a servant. In Hong Kong she was given statutory recognition, provided she could show that she had entered into a valid union of concubinage prior to the 7th October 1971, after which date concubinage became illegal.”

Peter Hall, *Inside The Web*

By 1990 when Peter Hall was researching the Hong Kong Eurasian community for his book, attitudes were less accepting and more ‘Western’. Many Eurasians had married outside the Eurasian community and were resistant to having their pasts dredged up for all to see. Phone calls were not returned, Peter was avoided on the street and a threat to sue was made. Even the traditional publisher for such books, the Hong Kong University Press, refused, without removing paragraphs. No one wanted his or her family ‘bogeys’ exposed, as my mother expressed in her diary (December 1st 1945). Countering this is the desire of the younger generation to understand their past.

It’s not clear how many Eurasians there were in occupied Hong Kong. One source, (Snow, 2003) gives a figure of 614 not in camps in early 1943, but this seems far too small, perhaps because of a very strict definition of ‘Eurasian’. Mum considered herself British, and held a British Passport, but was considered Eurasian by birth (nationality British, race Eurasian)

“The word ‘Eurasian’ covers a wide variety of ethnic mixes: one commentator has even suggested that it should be defined as exclusion from all the main ‘one race’ communities – Eurasians were not accepted by either the Chinese or the British but were not, for example, seen as Indian. However, until such time as we can do without the word completely it’s probably best to refer to a person whose parents were of two different races, one of them Asian. To stay in touch with the older sources we need to be as vague as that: one of the people discussed below, Sir Robert Hormus Kotewall, is almost always referred to as Eurasian even though his mother was Chinese and his father Parsee.”



“...the general situation of Eurasians in pre-war Hong Kong, where they were generally mistrusted, discriminated against and even despised. To marry a Eurasian (a fortiori a Chinese of course) meant an immediate fall in social status. ‘White’ reaction could be extreme. Eurasians in a European social gathering created a climate of unease and psychological tensionEven highly educated Europeans reacted strongly against mixed marriages. Not surprising then that there was little socializing between ‘whites’ and Eurasians.”



Sir Robert Kotewall

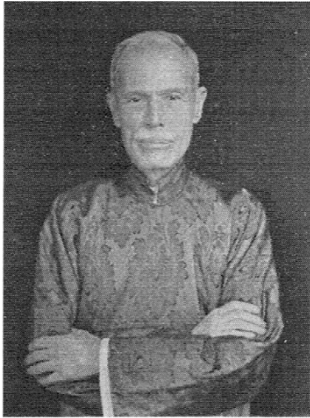
Eileen, daughter-in-law of Sir Robert was Mum’s bosom friend and died in the war. Mum connected with Connie Kotewall, Eileen’s sister in 1963 during a family trip to HK with myself and my sister Antonia. See letter dated 6th August 1963.

See Kotewall genealogy at the end of this chapter

“.....However, there’s more to the situation of Eurasians than this. There was, for example, a complex relationship with the Chinese, who made up the vast majority of the Colony’s population. On the one hand, Governor Stubbs (Governor of HK 1919-1925) reported in 1920 that ‘pure-bred Chinese referred to Eurasians as bastards’. On the other, some Eurasians, preferred to live as Chinese rather than tolerate the racism of ‘whites’.

“In spite of this double-sided weight of prejudice, a few wealthy Eurasians had a great deal of influence in the Colony and in their case it can be said that economic factors outweighed racial ones....Sir Robert Ho-tung, for example, the only non-white allowed to live legally on the Peak, was one of the most important men in Hong Kong. Sir Robert Kotewall..... was another figure of importance in HK serving as ‘unofficial member’ of the Executive Council”.

Above quotes from ‘*The Dark World’s Fire: Tom and Lena Edgar in War.*’



Sir Robert Ho Tung, a prominent HK Eurasian

“It’s been suggested that the Eurasians as a whole had prestige in old Hong Kong because of their association with the ‘European’ community – most of them were at least part white after all! One writer has stated that the Japanese occupation, with its deliberate policy of humiliating ‘whites’, led to the end of a ‘privileged and gracious era’ for Hong Kong Eurasians.

“My only certainty was that the privileged existence we’d always known would be no more”

“My life in Hong Kong was wonderful in every way.... ‘Life could not be more perfect’, I’d say to Arthur on these family picnic days, and we’d take time to thank God for our privileged lives. In the colony of Hong Kong we felt safe (from the European war). Our lives of affluence and freedom changed little, though we felt concerned for the people of Europe.”

Edith Hansom, HK Eurasian

Jean Gittins’ family was much more socially elevated than the Hansoms – her father was Sir Robert Ho-tung himself. Her description of ‘ten completely happy years’ married to another Eurasian suggests that pre-war racism didn’t always spoil the lives of its victims. It seems that in her working life Ms. Gittins was lucky enough to find a niche in university circles that were relatively free of racial discrimination. In 1941 Jean approached Mum to join DOGA (Diocesans Old Girls Association). As a fellow university educated Eurasian she must have been an influence in Mum’s life, although she was at least 10 years older. Jean went on to write a memoir of her time in Stanley Camp ‘*Behind Barbed Wire*’ in which she shares some memories of being Eurasian before and during the Japanese Invasion.

Jean Gittins on the cover of her book ‘*Behind Barbed Wire*’





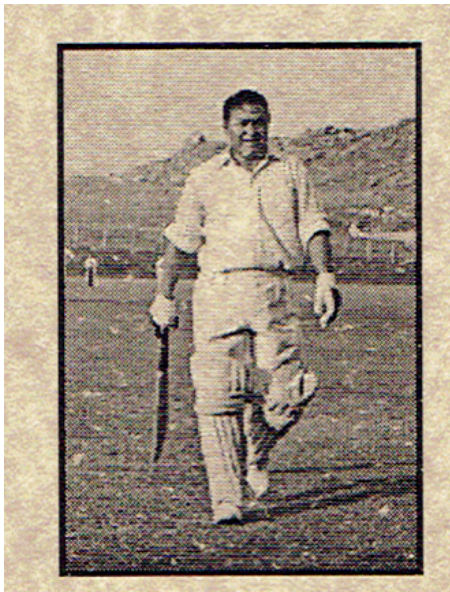
“The battle of Hong Kong proved a turning point for Chinese and people of a mixed Anglo-Chinese ancestry, many of who claimed British nationality while most regarded themselves as Chinese. The tragedy of it all was that until after the Second World War, when so many of the local community died for the Allied cause, racial discrimination was such that they were accepted by neither British nor Chinese”

“We were now a Japanese colony – so different from Britain’s peaceful occupation exactly one hundred years before”

Gittins 1982:24

Jean says of the Japanese:

“Under a thin veneer of Western civility their instincts were hostile and savage”



Another relatively race-free area of activity was sport. Mum’s future brother in law Eddie Gosano, who married her younger sister Hazel, was of Portuguese extraction and was classified under the perverse colonial bureaucracy as non-British, and thus Chinese. Eddie, apart from being a doctor, was a very accomplished cricketer – in fact all the boys of his family were accomplished athletes. This enabled Eddie to mix with the Brits, and to some extent be accepted.

Eddie in cricket whites

“It is, therefore, important to bear in mind the fact that the Eurasians weren’t the most ‘despised’ and disadvantaged group in old Hong Kong, and that some Eurasians played an important role in the Colony’s affairs, that the community was the victim of Chinese as well as British racism, and that nevertheless some members managed to carve out decent lives for themselves and even felt ‘privileged’. All this changed when the old order was turned upside down following the Japanese invasion.”

“Ultimately, except for farmers and hawkers, all residents were forced to work for the Japanese public or private bodies or to starve, unless they were fortunate enough to have a sufficient supply of gold ornaments.”

“Sir Robert Kotewall, a senior member of the Eurasian community was regarded as a traitor by many British people during and by some after the war. Kotewall didn’t actually do anything but



'hedge' in occupied Hong Kong. He shouted 'Banzai' at public meetings but never betrayed anyone to the Kempeitai or helped the Japanese war effort directly, which were more or less the only reasons for post-war prosecution....in addition Sir Robert had to keep his nine daughters safe from Japanese attentions, and had his house placed under Japanese military jurisdiction for much of the occupation."

Above quotes from *'The Dark World's Fire: Tom and Lena Edgar in War - a critic of Gerald Horne's Race War The Eurasians.'*

".....the relatively sympathetic reception of Japanese efforts to discredit colonialism by at least some HK residents probably contributed to attempts in the post-occupation years by British officials to moderate any colonial assumptions, especially since they were able to remind survivors of the occupation years about the harshness of the Japanese style of colonialism. Indeed, much of the remainder of the century, as far as both formal and informal education (and many other aspects of life) were concerned, consisted of progress towards "applied decolonization", followed by the experience of post colonial realities."

'Education in HK 1941 to 2001' by Anthony Sweeting pg 3

"Looking back I realize that the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong was a true turning point in the lives of my family and the whole Eurasian community. In some ways it no doubt brought us closer together, as we helped each other through the hardships caused by the war. However, it ultimately caused us to scatter and heralded the end of a gracious lifestyle that had its roots in the very social foundation of Hong Kong."

Being Eurasian: Memories Across Racial Divides' by Vicky Lee

See also a letter from Kenneth to Mum in the diaries dated 11th September 1946 for a Lang family members view of being Eurasian.

Next, Eddie Gosano talking about his wife Hazel (Mum's younger sister Jo) upon their move as refugees to Macau. The two, Mum and Hazel, looked similar and were sometimes mistaken for each other.



What a blow this would be
Hazel (Jo) Mum's sister

"Sharing the fate of refugees is one way to level class distinctions. Such an infrastructure had been apparent in HK's polyglot culture before the War. There was to some degree a mutual awareness of class between Eurasians and Portuguese. Hazel, being Eurasian, meant in HK a person of possibly one-half English or non-Latin European, and one half Chinese. The Eurasians were generally of Protestant background."

From Eddies bio *'Hong Kong Farewell'* pg. 30.



Mum (top left) with DGS Hockey Team



Mum (right) and Hazel with friends. These men served with the HVDC – and most died defending HK during the invasion. Pc. Antonia in conversation with Robin Lang



DGS Softball Team includes Visa (Viza) 3rd from left, Bea Greaves far right, Kit Bush, June Dulcie Hall, Vivienne Churn, Eva Churn. Bea Greaves is the Bea mentioned in Mum's Diary – see 'Bea's Experience'

Joyce Symons, Eurasian and fellow DGS student (later headmistress) whom Mum shared a cabin with on the Strathmore – describes being Eurasian thus:

“All my life I have felt slightly uneasy, for to be Eurasian – certainly when I grew up – has been like suffering from an emotional form of Aids. I was not totally accepted by either culture, nor totally despised at worst. It was a feeling I leaned to live with.”

“I once described myself at a social gathering as being ‘a human cocktail’, because of my descendants’ colourful history. I wondered whether those present considered me British or Chinese. They had not seen a Eurasian before. On another occasion in a Chinese restaurant, the waitress said to me in English ‘you half half?’ I replied in Cantonese ‘not quite’.

“Because expatriates found themselves Chinese ‘wives’, the children born illegitimately could choose to take either the father’s Western surname or the mother’s Chinese name, which meant there were many ‘aliases’. The typical Eurasian life-style, food, and, certainly female dress, were mainly Chinese, but some expatriate ideas and habits were admired, and gradually assimilated when a family could afford to move up the social (and financial) scale. This pattern of grafting a Western culture onto the indigenous ethnic culture was evident for many decades in Hong Kong and the ports of Shanghai....”

All above quotes from Joyce's memoir *Looking at the Stars*.



The Churns were a Eurasian family who were close friends with Grandma Susie. Two daughters, Vivienne and Eva (see DGS softball team photo. above) receive several mentions in Mum's Diary. A Major Churn also receives mention in Joyce Symons biography *Looking at the Stars*. This picture is believed to be Eva Churn who was in London with Mum when they visited Oxford in 1948 to visit Uncle Osman, a student there. Mum remarked in a letter:

"being a country bus the conductor packed us all in. Eva and I sat on the stairs. Eva carried on a shrill discourse in Cantonese and I felt so conspicuous they looked at us as if we were from Mars!"

Peter Hall in his book 'In the Web' attempts to document all the most notable Eurasian families of HK in the 1940's. Following the Japanese invasion they were 'scattered to the winds'.

"Today as our society disintegrates under the impact of change and evolution the old Eurasian families are taking up residence thousands of miles away in countries as far apart as England, the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Australia and New Zealand. Within a generation or two they will be lost in the growing mix of peoples who make up the population of these lands. Before the light goes out forever, Peter has turned it upon this unique and remarkable community of people who more than any others deserved to be called the real citizens of Hong Kong."

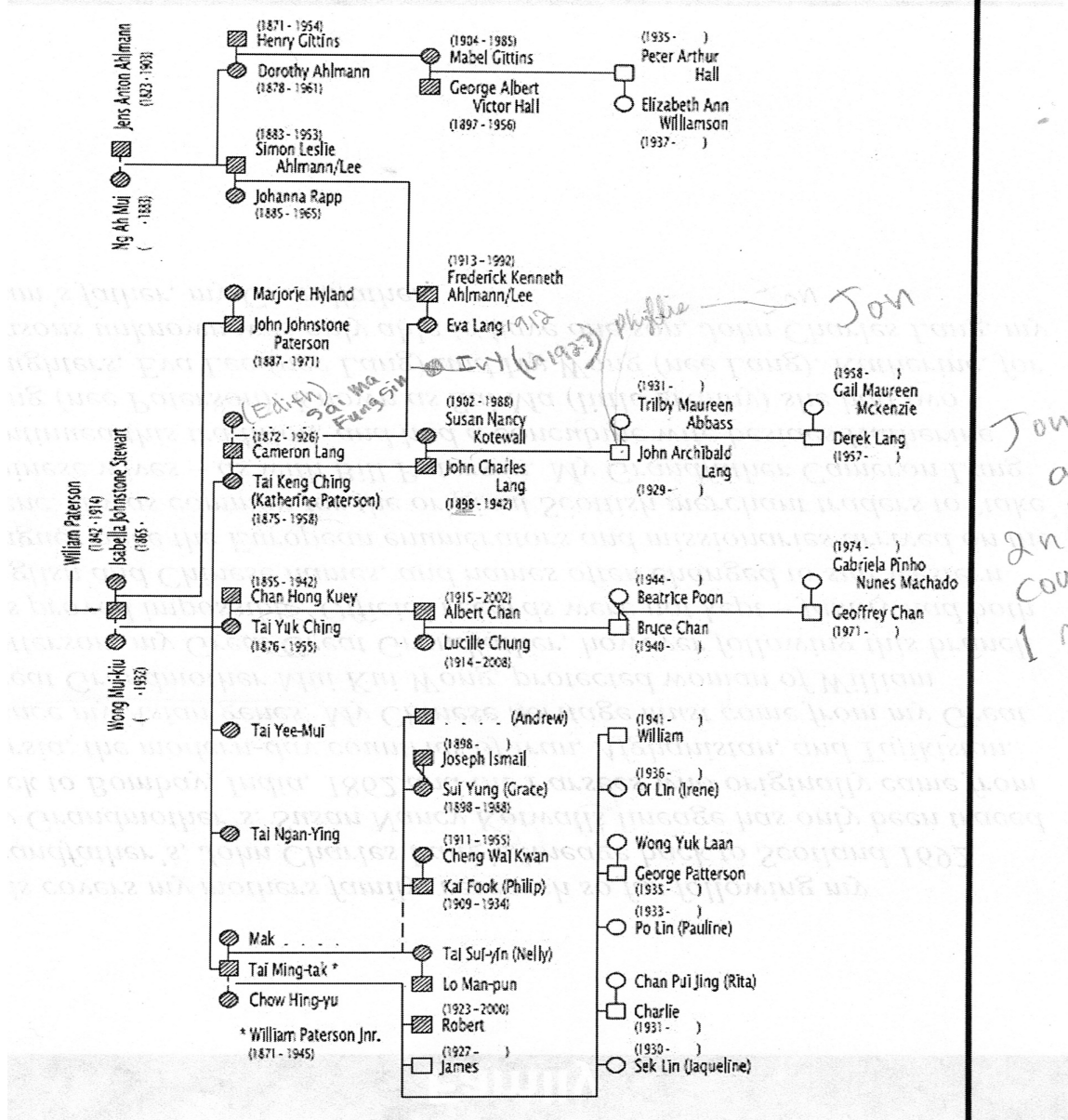
Robin Hutcheon, December 1989

Apparently not all the Caucasian men headed home to Blighty, abandoning their Chinese concubines and families, and some did marry Chinese women. As expressed in a wonderful (non-pc) line from Peter Hall's In The Web:

".....a few of the British would prefer to be buried in a palm grove within sound of the surf and mourned by their progeny and half-bred sons than face English cold, English haste and English women."



Ahlmann



Jon & Bruce
are
2nd
cousin
I removed

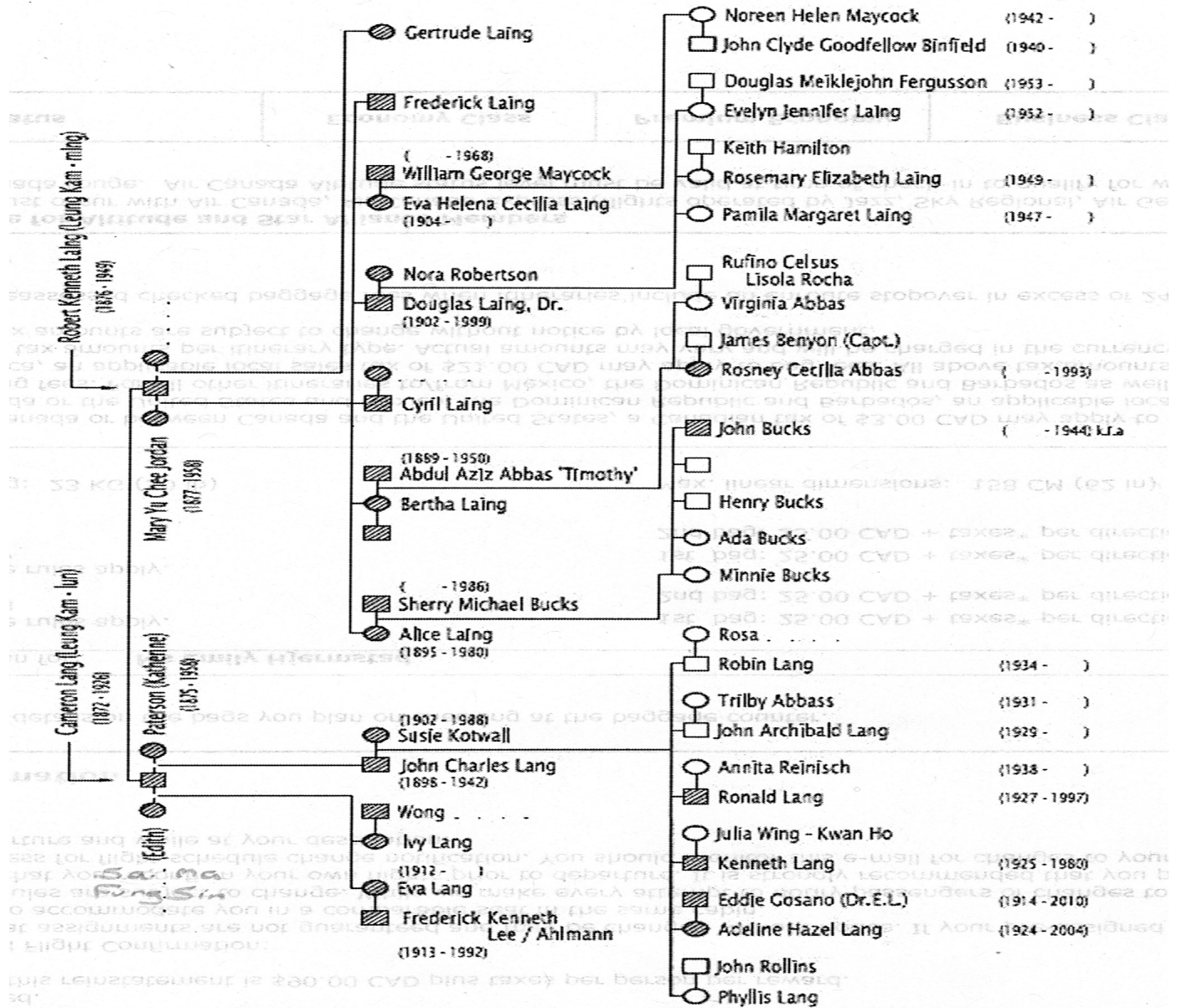
Paterson

Ahlmann / Chan / Lang - link

Paterson family tree composed to illustrate Derek Lang (authors' cousin) and Bruce Chan's (author of Forbidden Merchandise) pedigrees. Note Wong Mui Kiu, concubine of William Patterson and Sai Ma Fung Sin (not named) concubine of Cameron Lang – daughters Eva and Ivy (not named). From *In The Web* Peter Hall. Tai Yuk Ching is Daisy To's mother.



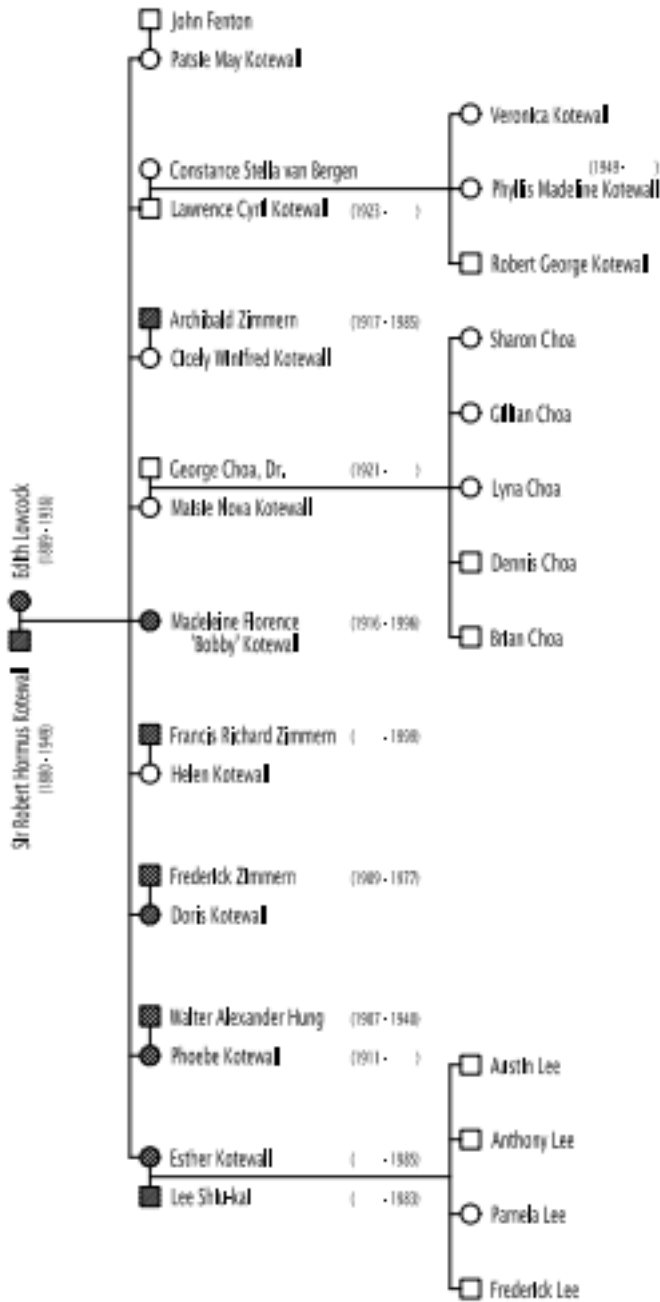
Pedigree Charts



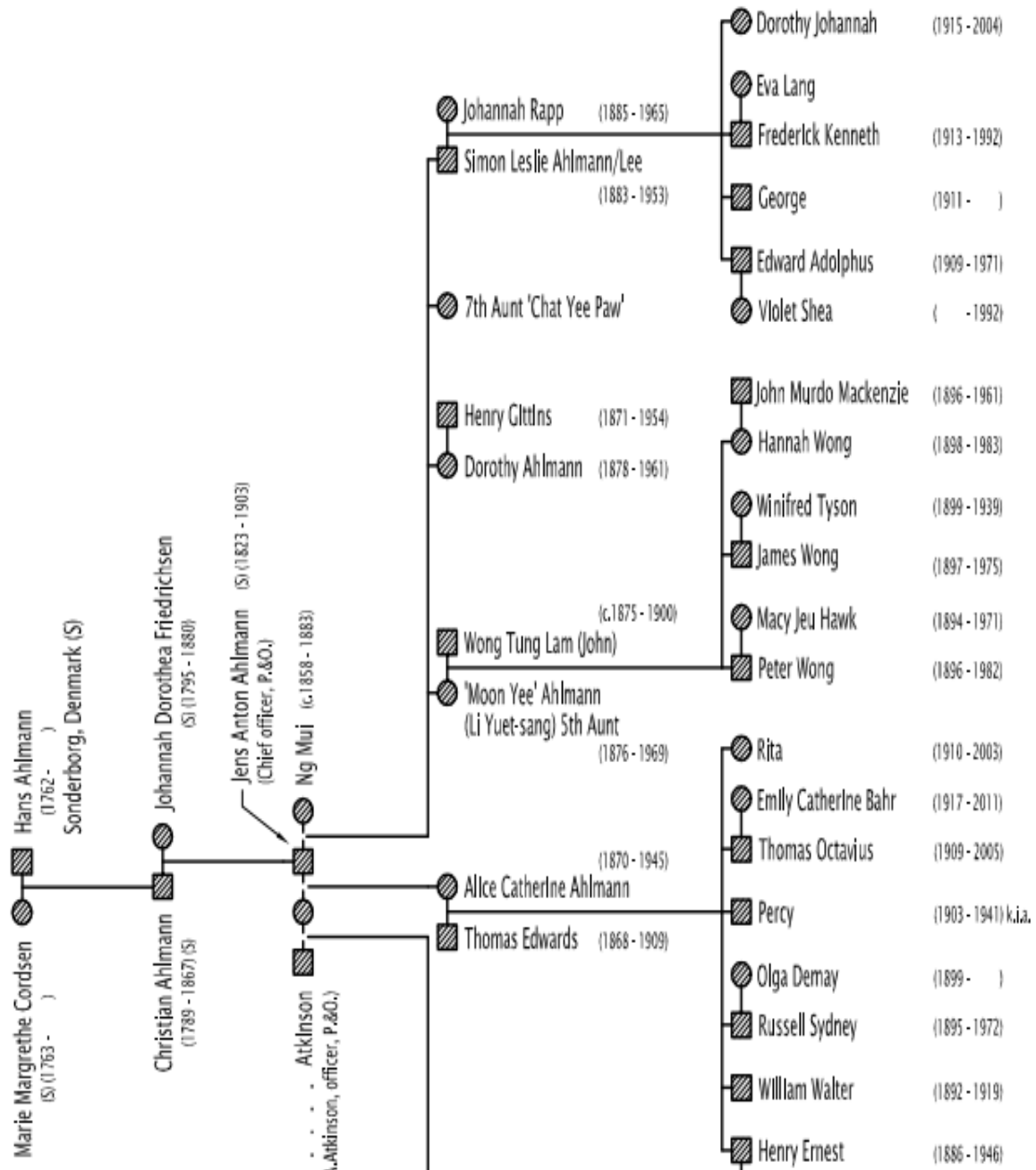
26. Lang / Laing

Frederick Lee / Ahlmann, son of Simon, younger brother of Dorothy Ahlmann, Peter's maternal grandmother.

Note Sai Ma Sin (named Edith) and Ivy and Eva. Also, unbeknownst to myself and my sister, this chart indicates our Uncle Kenneth was married (Julia Wing-Kwan Ho). Authors parents, John and Phyllis bottom right. From *In The Web* Peter Hall



Kotewall family (with an e) – note Cicely, Bobby, Connie, Choa and Archie mentioned throughout Mum’s Diary (see photo. below)



Part of Ahlmann Pedigree from In the Web; note Eva Lang and above her Dorothy Johannah who is in fact Dorothy Lee!



Back row: Francis Zimmern third from left, Ernie Zimmern fourth from left and Archie Zimmern, back row right.

Donald Anderson Front row second from left

1940 Victorious Softball Team (Kowloon Cricket Club) Photo from Gwulo, Stephen Rapley



Archie Zimmern back row third from left, Ken Baxter eighth from left. Seated Donald Anderson second from left

The Cricket Party (Royal Scots vs. HKVDC) December 1940