

002-01 ECONOMY : OPIUM AND EMIGRATION 经济：鸦片与移民

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经济：鸦片与移民

Hong Kong was founded primarily for trade, which indelibly (adv.)不可磨灭地；持久地 shaped (v.) its historical development.

Example 1. 案例

indelible

→ in-,不，非，-delib,删除，抹去，词源同 delete.引申词义难以磨灭的。

Although the colonial government initially **had a hard time** attracting large Chinese merchants to Hong Kong, its promise of free trade, along with easy access (n.) to markets in China, attracted (v.) a wide range of 各种各样的 foreign merchants **involved mainly in** the China trade (n.) in silk, tea, and opium; **in** the international trade; **and in** insurance and shipping.

尽管殖民政府最初很难吸引大型华商来香港，但它所承诺的自由贸易，加上进入中国市场的便利条件，吸引了各种各样的外国商人，这些商人主要从事与中国的丝绸、茶叶和鸦片贸易、国际贸易、以及保险和航运业务。

主 The British firm 后定说明 most **closely tied to** Hong Kong' s economic history 系 was *Jardine and Matheson*, but 主 other prominent British firms 谓 included *Dent* (Jardine and Matheson' s main rival 竞争对手；敌手) and *Butterfield and Swire*, which did not arrive until 1870 /but quickly developed interests 业务；利益 in trading, shipping, and sugar refining 精炼；提炼.

与香港经济史联系最紧密的英国公司, 是"怡和洋行", 但其他知名的英国公司还包括"颠地洋行" (怡和洋行的主要竞争对手) 以及于1870年才进入香港的"太古洋行". 太古洋行虽进入较晚, 却迅速在贸易、航运和制糖业拓展了业务。

Example 2. 案例

Header 1	Header 2
Jardine and Matheson	<ul style="list-style-type: none">怡和洋行名称直译："Jardine" 和 "Matheson" 均为创始人姓氏，无字面含义。其中文名"怡和"取自"和悦安乐"之意，为音译兼意译。

Header 1	Header 2
	<div data-bbox="592 136 1021 353" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="592 383 1442 483">怡和洋行（英语：Jardine Matheson，前名渣甸洋行）是著名老牌英资洋行，远东最大英资财团。"怡和洋行"除了对香港早年发展有重要的作用外，亦是首家在上海开设的欧洲公司，和首家在日本成立的外国公司。</p> <ul data-bbox="643 512 1442 936" style="list-style-type: none"> • 由两位苏格兰人威廉·渣甸（William Jardine）和詹姆斯·马地臣（James Matheson）于1832年在广州创立。早期主要靠鸦片和茶叶贸易发家。中英《南京条约》后，它是第一批在香港购买土地并设立总部的公司，香港著名的“渣甸山”（Jardine's Lookout）就是以它命名的。 • 现状（2026年）：依然极其强大。现在的怡和控股有限公司（Jardine Matheson Holdings Limited）是一家庞大的跨国企业集团。 <ul data-bbox="727 775 1422 936" style="list-style-type: none"> a. 它旗下拥有：置地公司（Hongkong Land）（中环的大地主）、文华东方酒店（Mandarin Oriental）、惠康超市/万宁（牛奶公司 Dairy Farm）、怡和机器等。 b. 目前的重心已转向了地产、零售、酒店和基建。
Dent	<ul data-bbox="643 999 1422 1088" style="list-style-type: none"> • 宝顺洋行（又称颠地洋行） • 名称直译：源自创始人姓氏 Dent（颠地），其中文名"宝顺"寓意吉祥。 <p data-bbox="592 1117 1442 1218">Dent & Co. 宝顺洋行，又名颠地洋行、甸特洋行、邓特洋行、甸德洋行（Dent & Co.），是十九世纪中叶在华最主要的英资洋行之一，是英资"怡和洋行"和美资"旗昌洋行"的主要竞争对手，主营业务是鸦片、生丝和茶叶。</p> <p data-bbox="592 1225 1442 1326">颠地洋行在中国通行的中文名称“宝顺洋行”，主要取其“宝贵和顺”的意思，以期望在中国本地的发展有所顺利。十九世纪时，它在香港、上海、天津、台湾等也设有商行。</p> <ul data-bbox="643 1355 1442 1630" style="list-style-type: none"> • 历史背景：由托马斯·甸（Thomas Dent）创立。在19世纪中叶，它的实力几乎能与"怡和"并驾齐驱。甚至在1841年香港第一批土地拍卖中，它抢到的地段（现在的中环告罗士打大厦一带）比怡和还要好。 • 现状：已倒闭。在1866年爆发了全球性的金融危机（由于过度投机和棉花泡沫破裂），宝顺洋行由于资金周转不灵，于1867年宣布破产。它的退出直接让出了香港的市场份额，给后来的汇丰银行和太古洋行腾出了空间。
Butterfield and Swire	<ul data-bbox="643 1677 1422 1805" style="list-style-type: none"> • 太古洋行 • 名称直译：源自创始人姓氏 Butterfield 与 Swire。其中文名"太古"（意为"宏大久远"）为Swire家族选定，与Butterfield无关。 <p data-bbox="592 1834 1442 1899">今日太古集团已是一个多元化的环球集团，旗下核心业务多设于亚太区，其中香港及中国大陆为太古业务的主要营运地。</p> <ul data-bbox="643 1928 1442 2128" style="list-style-type: none"> • 历史背景：约翰·施怀雅（John Samuel Swire）于1870年才正式入驻香港，虽然起步晚，但眼光极准。他迅速投资了轮船航运、制糖业（著名的太古糖厂）和造船厂。 • 现状（2026年）：极其活跃且成功。现在的太古集团（Swire Group）是香港最具影响力的英资财团之一。

Header 1	Header 2
	<p>a. 它旗下拥有：国泰航空（Cathay Pacific）、太古地产（Swire Properties）（如太古城、太古广场、太古里）、太古可口可乐（大中华区的主要装瓶商）。</p> <p>b. 它是四大洋行中，品牌形象维护得最好、也最被普通大众熟知的一家。</p> <div>   </div>

怡和与宝顺在19世纪为竞争关系，同为早期鸦片贸易的重要商行。

太古洋行虽成立较晚（1866年成立，1870年进入香港），但逐步涉足贸易、航运（太古轮船）、制糖（太古糖业）等领域，成为香港主要英资财团之一。

Among the American trading companies was Russell, a Boston firm whose partners 合伙人；合作伙伴 included Warren Delano, grandfather of future American president Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

German traders did not arrive until the 1850s, but firms such as Siemssen soon became active in the China trade.

Several important Portuguese 葡萄牙的 firms, such as J.J.dos Remedios, moved to Hong Kong from Macau.

In the mid-1840s, approximately 大约；近似 one-quarter of the foreign businesses in Hong Kong were Indian, **either** Parsee 印度拜火教徒；帕西人 **or** Muslim.

An ethnic 种族的；民族的 and religious minority who had come to Bombay from Persia, the Parsees **played a large role** in the early China trade, especially in opium.

帕西人是一个从波斯来到孟买的少数民族和宗教，他们在早期的中国贸易中发挥了重要作用，尤其是在鸦片贸易中。

Example 3. 案例

时间线:

-----had come to Bombay (移居孟买)-----played a large role (参与对华贸易) -----

Large Parsee firms included D.Ruttonjee.

Indian Muslim firms, which had been in Canton since the late 1700s, also settled in 定居于 Hong Kong after the cession 割让；转让.

Among these was Abdoolally Ebrahim.

主 Sephardic 西班牙系犹太人的 Jewish firms such as D.Sassoon, established in Canton in the early 1840s, 谓 had a prominent position in the opium trade.

Example 4. 案例

Hong Kong was founded primarily for trade, which indelibly shaped its historical development.

Although the colonial government initially had a hard time attracting large Chinese merchants to Hong Kong, its promise of free trade, along with easy access to markets in China, attracted a wide range of foreign merchants involved mainly in the China trade in silk, tea, and opium; in the international trade; and in insurance and shipping.

The British firm most closely tied to Hong Kong's economic history was Jardine and Matheson, but other prominent British firms included Dent (Jardine and Matheson's main rival) and Butterfield and Swire, which did not arrive until 1870 but quickly developed interests in trading, shipping, and sugar refining.

Among the American trading companies was Russell, a Boston firm whose partners included Warren Delano, grandfather of future American president Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

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Sephardic Jewish firms such as D.Sassoon, established in Canton in the early 1840s, had a prominent position in the opium trade. 香港的建立主要以贸易为目的，贸易对其历史发展产生了不可磨灭的影响。尽管殖民政府最初难以吸引大型中国商人来港，但其自由贸易的承诺以及便捷的进入中国市场的便利，吸引了众多外国商人，他们主要从事丝绸、茶叶和鸦片等对华贸易；国际贸易；以及保险和航运业务。与香港经济史联系最为紧密的英国公司是怡和洋行，其他著名的英国公司还包括登特（怡和洋行的主要竞争对手）和太古集团。太古集团直到 1870 年才抵达香港，但很快便在贸易、航运和制糖业领域崭露头角。美国贸易公司中包括波士顿的罗素公司，其合伙人包括沃伦·德拉诺，即未来美国总统富兰克林·德拉诺·罗斯福的祖父。德国商人直到 19 世纪 50 年代才抵达香港，但像西门子这样的公司很快就活跃于对华贸易中。一些重要的葡萄牙公司，例如 J.J. dos Remedios，从澳门迁至香港。19 世纪 40 年代中期，香港约四分之一的外国企业是印度企业，包括帕西人和穆斯林。帕西人是来自波斯的少数民族，他们从波斯来到孟买，在早期对华贸易中扮演了重要角色，尤其是在鸦片贸易方面。大型帕西企业包括 D.

Ruttonjee. 自 18 世纪末以来就扎根广州的印度穆斯林企业，在割让后也迁至香港。其中就包括 Abdoolally Ebrahim。像 D. Sassoon 这样的塞法迪犹太企业，于 19 世纪 40 年代初在广州成立，在鸦片贸易中占据着举足轻重的地位。

Although 主 *the opening* of the Chinese treaty ports 通商口岸 after the opium wars 谓 also benefited (v.) British firms, Hong Kong remained a more reliable 可靠的；可信赖的 commercial base /because Britain enjoyed (v.) full political control over the colony.

Hong Kong soon became the Asian headquarters 总部 for many British firms that had powerful economic and political connections with London.

Similarly, 主 local Chinese merchants' connections (n.) with the overseas Chinese trade 谓 made Hong Kong *a commercial base* for trade with Southeast Asia.

Hong Kong's economic development moreover 此外；而且 **benefited (v.) from a steady 稳定的；持续的 supply of cheap labor from China /and from the numerous 众多的；许多的 services** that arose (v.) to support (v.) the colony's trade: banking, insurance, shipping, shipbuilding, and ship repairing.

Example 5. 案例

Although the opening of the Chinese treaty ports after the opium wars also benefited British firms, Hong Kong remained a more reliable commercial base because Britain enjoyed full political control over the colony.

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Similarly, local Chinese merchants' connections with the overseas Chinese trade made Hong Kong a commercial base for trade with Southeast Asia.

Hong Kong's economic development moreover benefited from a steady supply of cheap labor from China and from the numerous services that arose to support the colony's trade: banking, insurance, shipping, shipbuilding, and ship repairing. 尽管鸦片战争后中国通商口岸的开放也使英国企业受益，但由于英国对香港拥有完全的政治控制权，香港仍然是一个更为可靠的商业基地。许多与伦敦有着强大经济和政治联系的英国公司很快便将香港作为其亚洲总部。同样，香港本地华人商人与海外华人贸易的联系也使香港成为与东南亚贸易的商业中心。此外，香港的经济还受益于来自中国的廉价劳动力的稳定供应，以及为支持殖民地贸易而兴起的众多服务业，例如银行业、保险业、航运业、造船业和修船业。

主 **More important** for Hong Kong's economic prosperity 繁荣；昌盛 **than** any of these factors, however, 系 **were** opium and Chinese emigration.

With the exception of 除了.....之外 two American companies run by Quakers 贵格会教徒，公谊会教徒，主 all major foreign firms in early Hong Kong 谓 dealt (v.) in 经营；买卖 opium.

Between 1845 and 1849, three-quarters of India's opium crop 作物；收成 passed through 经过；穿过 Victoria Harbour, and an average of forty thousand chests 大箱子；柜 of opium were stored 储存；贮藏 in Hong Kong warehouses 仓库；货栈.

Although the British government had initially considered (v.) **banning** (v.) opium ships **from** mooring 停泊；系泊 in the harbor, colonial officials insisted (v.) that /this would only divert (v.)使转向；转移 the trade elsewhere.

Not only was *the opium trade* highly lucrative (a.)获利多的；赚大钱的, **but** colonists 殖民地居民 also often **contrasted** (v.)对比；对照 *the calming* 平静的；镇静的 *effects of opium* on Chinese laborers **with** *the violent effects of alcohol* on the local European working class.

鸦片贸易不仅利润极高，而且殖民者还常拿两种效果做对比：鸦片能让中国劳工变得平静温顺，而酒精则会让欧洲本地工人变得暴躁暴力。（以此为鸦片贸易做合理化辩护。）

And even 主 colonial officials who later considered (v.) *curbing* 控制；抑制, *the opium trade* 谓 realized that /主 any attempt to control the influx 大量涌入；流入 of opium 谓 would be blocked by the government of British India.

Example 6. 案例

More important for Hong Kong's economic prosperity than any of these factors, however, were opium and Chinese emigration.

With the exception of two American companies run by Quakers, all major foreign firms in early Hong Kong dealt in opium.

Between 1845 and 1849, three-quarters of India's opium crop passed through Victoria Harbour, and an average of forty thousand chests of opium were stored in Hong Kong warehouses.

Although the British government had initially considered banning opium ships from mooring in the harbor, colonial officials insisted that this would only divert the trade elsewhere.

Not only was the opium trade highly lucrative, but colonists also often contrasted the calming effects of opium on Chinese laborers with the violent effects of alcohol on the local European working class.

And even colonial officials who later considered curbing the opium trade realized that any attempt to control the influx of opium would be blocked by the government of British India. 然而，对香港经济繁荣而言，鸦片和华人移民比上述任何因素都更为重要。除了两家由贵格会教徒经营的美国公司外，早期在香港经营的所有主要外国公司都从事鸦片贸易。1845年至1849年间，印度四分之三的鸦片作物经由维多利亚港运往香港，平均每天有四万箱鸦片储存在香港的仓库中。尽管英国政府最初曾考虑禁止鸦片船停靠在港口，但殖民官员坚持认为，这样做只会将鸦片贸易转移到其他地方。鸦片贸易不仅利润丰厚，而且殖民者还经常将鸦片对华工的镇静作用与酒精对当地欧洲工人阶级的暴力影响进行对比。即使是后来考虑限制鸦片贸易的殖民官员也意识到，任何控制鸦片流入的尝试都会遭到英属印度政府的阻挠。

Opium was **so** lucrative 获利多的；利润丰厚的 **that** 如此...以至于 from 1845 to 1941 the Hong Kong government derived 获得；取得 much of its revenue 财政收入；税收 from the trade.

Indeed, writes (v.) historian Christopher Munn, “the opium trade and Hong Kong are **so** obviously intertwined (a.) 缠绕的；紧密相连的；交织在一起的 **that** it is hardly possible to consider (v.) the early history of the colony **without some reference** 提及；涉及 to the drug: the colony was founded because of opium; it survived its difficult early years because of opium; its principal 主要的；最重要的 merchants 商人；批发商 **grew rich** on opium; and its government subsisted (v.) 维持生存；维持生活 on the high **land rent** 地租 and other revenue 后定说明 made possible by the opium trade.”

事实上，历史学家克里斯托弗·穆恩写道，“鸦片贸易和香港是如此明显地交织在一起，以至于在考虑殖民地的早期历史时，几乎不可能不提到毒品：殖民地的建立是因为鸦片；因为鸦片，它挺过了艰难的早年；它的主要商人靠鸦片致富；政府靠高额地租和鸦片贸易带来的其他收入维持生计。”

In the nineteenth century, most of this revenue **came from** taxes on the processing 加工；处理 and retail 零售 of opium, **granted** 授予；给予 to the highest bidder (投标人；出价人) 出价最高者；最高竞标者。

19世纪，这笔收入的大部分来自鸦片加工和零售税，这些税权被授予了出价最高的人。

When 主 **the Hong Kong government**, under orders (n.) from the British government in 1908, 谓 **reluctantly closed** (v.) opium divans 鸦片馆；吸烟室, the British government had to reimburse (v.) 偿还；赔偿 the colony for its losses 损失；损耗.

Example 7. 案例 divan

(n.) a long low soft seat without a back or arms (无靠背和扶手的) 矮长沙发



reimburse

~ sb (for sth) : (formal) to pay back money to sb which they have spent or lost 偿还；补偿
→ re-, 向后，往回，-im, 进入，burse, 钱包。引申词义偿还，补偿。

Wealthy Chinese businessmen argued that /although **banning (v.) the sale of opium** would be good for the Chinese public, it would hurt (v.) both government and merchant revenues.

Even after the export of opium to China 谓 was ended in 1913, 主 **the monopoly 垄断；专卖权 on opium** 后定说明 consumed (v.) 消耗；消费 within Hong Kong 谓 **provided a** substantial 大量的；实质性的 source of government revenue.

即使在1913年停止向中国出口鸦片之后，香港对鸦片消费的垄断，仍然是政府收入的重要来源。

Example 8. 案例

the monopoly on opium 后定说明 consumed within Hong Kong

指的是当时香港政府实行的“**鸦片专卖制度**”。

在那个时代，鸦片贸易是合法的。香港政府并没有禁止鸦片，而是把它变成了一门垄断生意：

- **专卖权**：政府规定，全香港只有政府（或由政府授权的特定商人，称为“**鸦片包销商**”）才**有权合法进口、加工和零售鸦片**。
- **本地消费**：虽然 1913 年英国迫于国际压力，停止向中国内地出口鸦片（为了面子和外交），**但在香港内部，卖给本地居民吸食依然是合法的**。
- **财政支柱**：政府通过高价出售鸦片执照，或直接经营鸦片工厂（政府烟膏厂），赚取了惊人的利润。

政府通过垄断获取暴利 → 填补财政空缺 → 维持殖民统治
(如同中国政府不禁烟，而是从香烟销售上，赚取了大量税收)

Although the League of Nations 国际联盟 urged (v.) the British government after World War I **to end (v.) the monopoly** on opium /**and to criminalize** 使.....非法化；把.....定为犯罪 **smoking (v.) opium**, the Hong Kong government still **derived** (v.) (从.....中) 得到，提取 considerable 相当大的；可观的 revenues **from** the sale of opium.

The government monopolies (n.) 垄断 were not abolished (v.) 废除；废止 until after World War II, when opium smoking was also banned.

Example 9. 案例

Opium was so lucrative that from 1845 to 1941 the Hong Kong government derived much of its revenue from the trade.

Indeed, writes historian Christopher Munn, “the opium trade and Hong Kong are so

obviously intertwined that it is hardly possible to consider the early history of the colony without some reference to the drug: the colony was founded because of opium; it survived its difficult early years because of opium; its principal merchants grew rich on opium; and its government subsisted on the high land rent and other revenue made possible by the opium trade.”¹ In the nineteenth century, most of this revenue came from taxes on the processing and retail of opium, granted to the highest bidder.

When the Hong Kong government, under orders from the British government in 1908, reluctantly closed opium divans, the British government had to reimburse the colony for its losses.

Wealthy Chinese businessmen argued that although banning the sale of opium would be good for the Chinese public, it would hurt both government and merchant revenues. Even after the export of opium to China was ended in 1913, the monopoly on opium consumed within Hong Kong provided a substantial source of government revenue. Although the League of Nations urged the British government after World War I to end the monopoly on opium and to criminalize smoking opium, the Hong Kong government still derived considerable revenues from the sale of opium.

The government monopolies were not abolished until after World War II, when opium smoking was also banned. 鸦片利润丰厚，从 1845 年到 1941 年，香港政府的大部分财政收入都来自鸦片贸易。历史学家克里斯托弗·蒙恩写道：“鸦片贸易与香港的联系如此紧密，以至于在探讨香港早期历史时，几乎不可能不提及鸦片：香港因鸦片而建立；它因鸦片而度过了艰难的早期岁月；其主要商人靠鸦片致富；而香港政府则依靠鸦片贸易带来的高额地租和其他收入维持运转。”

¹ 在 19 世纪，这些收入主要来自鸦片加工和零售的税收，价高者得。1908 年，香港政府奉英国政府之命，不情愿地关闭了鸦片馆，英国政府不得不赔偿香港的损失。中国富商认为，虽然禁止鸦片销售对中国民众有益，但会损害政府和商家的财政收入。即使在 1913 年停止向中国出口鸦片之后，香港对鸦片消费的垄断仍然是政府重要的财政收入来源。尽管第一次世界大战后，国际联盟敦促英国政府取消鸦片垄断并将吸食鸦片定为犯罪，但香港政府仍然从鸦片销售中获得可观的收入。直到第二次世界大战后，政府才废除鸦片垄断，同时禁止吸食鸦片。

Apart from opium, the main source of early Hong Kong's prosperity 系 was Chinese emigration.

Chinese historians have often **argued that** /the emigrant (a.n.)移民的 trade, along with its often deplorable 令人震惊的；糟透的；应受到强烈谴责的；恶劣的，悲惨的 conditions, was the product of Western colonialism 殖民主义 /**and that** colonial governments and foreign merchants were the main beneficiaries 受益者；受惠人。

中国历史学家经常认为，移民贸易及其恶劣的条件，是西方殖民主义的产物，而殖民政府和外国商人是主要受益者。

Like opium, however, this was a trade 后定说明 **from which** foreign and Chinese merchants alike **benefited**.

Although emigration was illegal under Qing law, Chinese authorities 当局；官方 **neither** tried **nor** could do much to stop it.

The border between Hong Kong and China was simply too porous (a.)渗透的；多孔的；管理松散的。

Example 10. 案例
porous

→ 来自pore,孔隙。

Apart from **generating (v.) trade**, emigration helped **relieve (v.)**缓解；减轻 **population pressures** along China's coast.

Most emigrants never reaped (v.)收割, 获得; 收获 the riches 财富; 财宝 they dreamt of, but many **sent (v.) remittances** 汇款 via 通过; 经由 Hong Kong **to** their families in China.

With money to be made 挣钱 at all levels, the **emigration trade** involved (v.) **an extensive (a.)**广泛的; 大量的 **network** of Chinese collaborators 合作者; 同谋者: labor recruiters (招聘人员, 征兵人员)劳工招募人员 **in mainland villages**, contractors 承包商 and other middlemen 中间人; 经纪人 **in Hong Kong and other ports**, interpreters 口译员 and overseers 监工; 监督者 **on board** 在船上 **the ships**, and large labor brokers 劳工经纪人, ship owners, and brokers 经纪人 **in Hong Kong**.

由于可以在各个层面赚钱, 移民贸易涉及一个广泛的中国合作者网络: 大陆村庄的劳工招聘者、香港和其他港口的承包商和其他中间人、船上的翻译和监工, 以及香港的大型劳工经纪人、船主和经纪人。

主 Two of the largest brokerage companies 经纪公司 in Hong Kong **that sent workers to California** 谓 were owned by local Chinese merchants.

Primarily 主要地 through opium and Chinese emigration, Hong Kong became a nexus 枢纽; 连接点 of five overlapping 重叠的; 交叉的 **trade networks** with China, Southeast Asia, India, Britain (and thus Europe), and the Americas.

Example 11. 案例

Apart from opium, the main source of early Hong Kong's prosperity was Chinese emigration.

Chinese historians have often argued that the emigrant trade, along with its often deplorable conditions, was the product of Western colonialism and that colonial governments and foreign merchants were the main beneficiaries.

Like opium, however, this was a trade from which foreign and Chinese merchants alike benefited.

Although emigration was illegal under Qing law, Chinese authorities neither tried nor could do much to stop it.

The border between Hong Kong and China was simply too porous.

Apart from generating trade, emigration helped relieve population pressures along China's coast.

Most emigrants never reaped the riches they dreamt of, but many sent remittances via Hong Kong to their families in China.

With money to be made at all levels, the emigration trade involved an extensive network of Chinese collaborators: labor recruiters in mainland villages, contractors and other middlemen in Hong Kong and other ports, interpreters and overseers on board the ships, and large labor brokers, ship owners, and brokers in Hong Kong.

Two of the largest brokerage companies in Hong Kong that sent workers to California were owned by local Chinese merchants.

Primarily through opium and Chinese emigration, Hong Kong became a nexus of five overlapping trade networks with China, Southeast Asia, India, Britain (and thus Europe), and the Americas. 除了鸦片之外, 香港早期繁荣的主要来源是华人移民。中国历史学家常常认为, 移民贸易及其通常恶劣的生存状况是西方殖民主义的产物, 殖民政府和外国商人是主要受益者。然而, 与鸦片贸易一样, 这种贸易也是中外商人共同获益的。尽管清朝法律禁止移民, 但中国当局既没有尝试, 也无力阻止。香港与中国大陆之间的边界实在太松懈。除了促进贸易之外, 移民还有助于缓解中国沿海地区的人口压力。大多数移民最终未能实现他们梦寐以求的财富, 但许多人通过香港向中国大陆的家人寄送汇款。由于各个环节都有利可图, 移民贸易涉及一个庞大的中国合作者网络: 大陆乡村的劳务招揽员、香港和其他港口的承包商及其他中间人、船上的翻译和监工, 以及香港的大型劳务中介、船东和经纪人。香港两家最大的向加利福尼亚输送劳工的经纪公司都由当地华人商人所有。主要通过鸦片和华人移民, 香港成为连接中国、东南亚、印度、英国(进而连接欧洲)和美洲的五大重叠贸易网络的枢纽。