

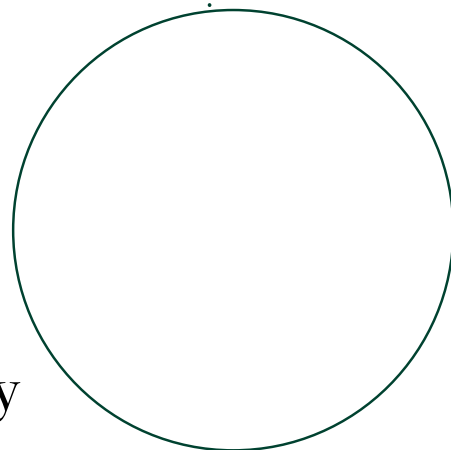
Chapter. 1

CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS



Born in a POW camp, a True Hongkonger

George Cautherley



George Cautherley was born in the Japanese internment camp in Stanley in September 1942. He is the sixth generation of his family to live in China. His ancestors founded one of the most important early American trading firms in China.

“Hong Kong is where I feel most comfortable,” Cautherley said in an interview at the pharmaceuticals company he owns in Chai Wan. “This is where most of my friends and my interests are. To move at my age is very difficult. Hong Kong is my home.” George is a true Hong Konger.

His arrival into this world could scarcely have been more dramatic. He was conceived at his parents’ home on Mount Austin Road in November 1941. His parents knew it was merely a question of time before the Japanese occupied the city and that they would be interned. “We would need something to focus on during internment,” his mother said.

At the time of the surrender, Christmas Day 1941, she was working as a nurse and her husband as an officer in the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (HSBC). In January 1942, the couple were taken to the Stanley camp. “When I was due, my mother was suffering from malaria and anemia. There was a typhoon, which delayed my father’s arrival by her side. The doctors said that she needed a blood transfusion; she did not have a common blood type. ‘Without a transfusion, she will die. With one, she may die,’ the doctors said.”

Somehow, they found the necessary blood and George was born. He was one of 52 babies born in the camp, between January 1942 and the Japanese surrender in August 1945; he is one of two still living in Hong Kong.

During the internment, his parents were ill much of the time. One rare pleasure was to go to Tweed Bay in Stanley to paddle in the water. “One day I was playing outside. My mother grabbed me and took me inside. I later learned that the Americans had bombed and missed and hit a bungalow not far from where we were.”

To feed the infant boy, over the next three and a half years, his

mother sold all her jewellery to buy food. HSBC staff outside sent food parcels, including baby food and quality items, to supplement the rations served in the camp. In early 1946, George, three and a half years old, was taken to see a pediatrician in Britain. He said that the boy was very healthy. It was a miracle caused by the love and care of his parents and many others.

Pioneer in China Trade

The history of George's family stretches back to 1801, with the arrival of Daniel Heard, the eldest of his great-great-great uncles in Whampoa with a cargo to trade. On January 1, 1840, Augustine Heard, the youngest of his great-great-great uncles, set up a trading company named after himself in Guangzhou. He was one of several members of the Heard family, from Massachusetts, who went there to expand their business.

For the next 34 years, Augustine Heard & Company was one of the largest American trading companies in the China trade. Helping Augustine was his nephew John Heard – the great-great grandfather of George Cautherley. John arrived in China in 1841, aged 17; by the age of 21, he had earned US\$10,000, an enormous sum at that time, and received a 20 per cent equity in the firm.

He stayed in China for 11 years before making his first return to the USA, via Europe. There he met leading citizens, including the Duke of Wellington and author William Makepeace Thackeray.

George's lineage is through his mother's side. The father of his maternal grandmother was Richard Howard Heard, son of John Heard and a Chinese lady. After the trading company went bankrupt, the family went to the U.S. and Europe. In 1880, Richard Heard returned to Hong Kong, to work for Jardine's. In 1882, at the Catholic Cathedral in Caine Road, he married Mary Purcell, daughter of an Irish soldier in the British army; she had been brought up in a Catholic convent in Hong Kong. All their children were born in Hong Kong, including

Cautherley's grandmother.

In 1893, Richard Heard was transferred to Shanghai. He and his wife liked their life there; both died and were buried in Shanghai. In 1912, George's mother, Dorothy, was born in Shanghai; she was one of four children born in the city. To confirm his ancestry, George did DNA tests and put the information on Ancestry platforms on the Internet. From these, he learnt that he is one per cent Chinese and one per cent Spanish and that the children of Roger Lobo are his fourth cousins.

HSBC Marriage Rules

His mother grew up with her siblings in a comfortable home in Shanghai; they had 12 servants. She received her education there and visited Britain only two or three times. In 1931, she was one of the first group of women hired by HSBC in the city; to prove their worth and overcome the prejudice against them, they had to work twice as hard as the men.

Also working in the bank was Joe Cautherley, George's future father. He had moved to Shanghai in 1927, after joining the bank in London. After different postings, he was sent to Hong Kong in 1936. In the same year, Dorothy was evacuated to Hong Kong to work for the bank there from Shanghai to escape an imminent Japanese attack. It was there she met Joe again; the relationship blossomed.

"To marry, a HSBC expatriate officer had to have served 10 years and receive the approval of his superior. If he did not give it and the officer went ahead with the marriage, he had to resign. Before the women chose their dates, they checked on the length of service of potential husbands." In 1938, the two married in St John's Cathedral in Shanghai.

After leave in the UK, Joe was posted to Bombay for a short while and then back to Hong Kong, living on Peak Road, now Mount Austin Road. In 1940, in the expectation of a Japanese attack, the

government evacuated the expatriate women and children to Australia. But Dorothy did not want to leave her husband so soon after their marriage. She signed up as a volunteer nurse, an essential service; so she was allowed to stay in Hong Kong. When the hostilities started, HSBC was requested by the Governor to keep the bank operating, so half of its expatriate staff were retained to maintain bank operations, while the other half were released to participate in the defence of Hong Kong; Joe was among the first group. The British Army had mounted guns close to the apartment building where the couple lived. Without a concrete base, the guns had sunk and clipped off the corner of the building. The British Army gave them seven minutes to clear the building, then blew it up. So the couple lost everything.

Parker Pen from a Hong Kong Film Star

After the Japanese surrender on August 15, 1945, George and his parents were released from the camp. They went straight to a transport ship. When they reached the Suez Canal, the Red Cross gave them winter clothes. So, when they arrived in Southampton in southeast England on October 24, 1945, they were warmly dressed. The family went to live with Joe's mother in Royston, near Cambridge.

At the end of October 1946, George's younger brother, Simon, was born. "My father was a dedicated banker and a very loyal person," said George. "He insisted on going back to Hong Kong to work for HSBC. My mother also wanted to return."

In February 1947, the family came back and lived on Waterloo Road. His father was posted to the Kowloon office of the HSBC, in one of the wings of the Peninsula Hotel. "He liked to visit clients and sometimes took me with him," said George. "We went to see tailors and jewellers in Tsim Sha Tsui and factory owners in Tsuen Wan. His policy was to lend to reputable industrialists from Shanghai, even if they had no collateral. He was proved right. The only loan that went bad was to a trader who lost the money gambling. Those in industry



September 2, 1945, George Cautherley and his parents at Stanley. (© George Cautherley)

paid theirs back.

A highlight was a dinner in the large home of a wealthy industrialist on Castle Peak Road. His wife was a film star [Hu Shui-wah] known as 'Butterfly' Wu, who gave me, then a boy of just 11, a Parker 51 pen. That was the height of luxury!"

He attended primary school at Kowloon Junior. In 1951, his father sent George to a boarding school in Sussex in the south of England. It had beautiful grounds and three lakes, where the students ice-skated in the winter. For three consecutive summers, he came to Hong Kong for the holiday; it was a three-day journey by four-engine propeller plane.

In 1955, his father reached retirement age; the bank offered him the chance to manage a small branch in Brunei. So, for three years, Cautherley went there for his summers. In 1960, his parents retired and went to live in the family home in Royston. Since George felt weak

academically, he did not go to university. He tried different jobs but liked none of them.

Return to Hong Kong

Then his uncle, in Hong Kong, sent a cable inviting him to join his medical products business. “I did not hesitate. Hong Kong was a nice place. It was time to buckle down.” In October 1964, he took a VC-10 and landed at Kai Tak airport, where his uncle met him. “When I felt the spray on my face on the ferry to HK side, I thought: ‘I am back home.’”

Born in Shanghai, his uncle had moved to Hong Kong in 1949 and ran two companies, one general trading and the other medical products. George had to learn a new business quickly; he visited hospitals and other customers. “That is the environment of Hong Kong. You learn quickly and make friends. It was a lot of fun.” In 1971, he became a managing director of the firm.

His first girlfriend was an English lady; she returned home after six months. After that, all his girlfriends were Chinese. It took four years, helped by his future mother-in-law, to persuade his favourite, Ruby, to accept him.

His father-in-law had grown up in Singapore and moved to Hong Kong. He was an Administrative Officer who worked for the Commissioner of Prisons. George and Ruby married in 1972. George paid for the cocktail reception at the wedding and his father-in-law the Chinese dinner that followed. Their son Julian was born the next year.

Ruby took over the graphic design company of her brother-in-law when he retired. So, with both working, the couple decided to have no more children. In 1979, George’s uncle retired and sold his business to Jardine’s. Since George did not wish to work for a big corporation, he set up a new company, also in medical products, with a British trading firm; he owned 25 per cent of the equity.

In 1987, he and Ruby paid HK\$1.2 million for a 1,500-square-foot



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apartment in Baguio Villas. In 1991, they went one better – they sold the Baguio apartment and paid HK\$7.8 million for an apartment on Mount Kellett Road, with 2,500 square feet and built in 1972. HSBC gave a mortgage to cover 70 per cent of the purchase price.

Their son Julian studied Business Management at City University in London. He returned to Hong Kong and, although he undertook a small project for each of his parents' businesses, which he executed well, he did not find their businesses suited him.

Then he found his vocation was making films. He did internships on film productions in Hong Kong; in 1998, he went to the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts. After graduation, he made a short film that won several awards. This enabled him to obtain a "talent" visa that allowed him to remain in the U.S. In 2003, he set up his own film production company; he married an American lady and they are settled in Los Angeles. George's younger brother has lived in Britain since he was eight years old; he has never married.

George has enjoyed a prosperous business life. In 1983, he bought the 75 per cent share he did not already own of the company he was working in. He expanded it. At its peak, it operated two factories, one in Shenzhen and one in Hainan Island, each with 60 employees, and a sales force of over 100 people in China. During the 1990s, his firm sold the highest-selling drug in the Chinese market – "we had 60 imitations," he said.

Over the last 10 years, he has reduced his workload; he comes to work half-time. He sold his business in medical and dental equipment but retained the pharmaceuticals. This part of the business is run by a partner, Daniel Ng, who first joined the firm in 1975 as a young salesman and later returned as sales manager.

In 1993, George spun out his pharmaceutical division into a separate company and gave his sales manager a 50 per cent share. The firm employs over 80 people at its Chai Wan office and factory in Hainan. George is a director in SinoMab BioScience Limited a biotech firm that is listed and has investments in other biotech firms.



George Cautherley and the staff of his Shenzhen factory. (© George Cautherley)

Making Policy

In 1989, George joined the newly founded Hong Kong Democratic Foundation, a bi-lingual political group that later turned into a public policy think tank. In 1992, he was elected vice-chairman and held the post until 2016. He was active in research and drawing up public policy proposals. This enabled him to build up a large network of contacts within the government and professional communities. "I am still involved in public policy, I think there are things I can do," he said.