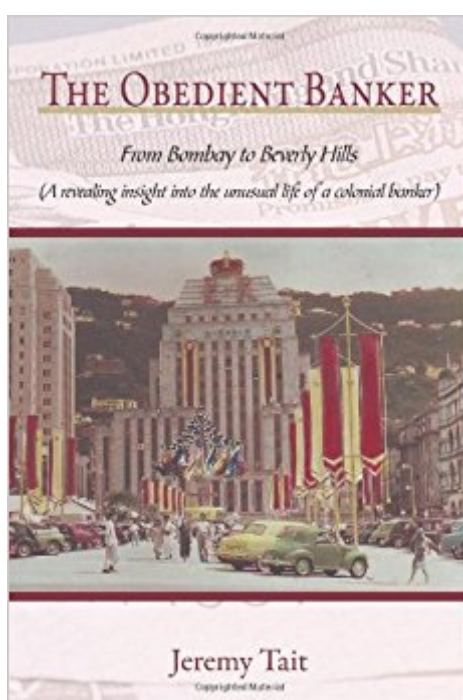


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The Obedient Banker: From Bombay To Beverly Hills (a Revealing Insight Into The Unusual Life Of A Colonial Banker)



Synopsis

The Obedient Banker is the true life story of a young man who in 1951 at the age of twenty joins the London City branch of a colonial bank (later to become HSBC) as a trainee officer and after five months finds himself thrust into a strange world in the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong, which was far removed from the quiet West Sussex village where he was brought up and the elite public school in Oxford where he was educated. Many of Jerry's fellow trainee officers had similar backgrounds and upbringings which helped them to adapt to new lifestyles which required complete obedience to the Bank's rules and regulations. Hence the title of the book. One critic writes: "It is almost impossible for the reader not to identify with the struggles and successes of a young aspiring banker whose initiatives are so often tempered by the restraints imposed upon him by a highly regulated colonial system which he feels obliged to adhere to. Far away from his homeland and confronted with unusual situations which demand solutions beyond his capabilities, the obedient banker treads a tightrope between convention and innovation that only commonsense and self restraint can resolve. From taipans to tigers, from Japanese geishas to Indian princesses, from charging picket lines to illicit distilling and from the squalor of Bombay's slums to the affluence of Beverly Hills, Jerry has captured it all in his fascinating book". Apart from numerous amusing anecdotes and unusual banking procedures, of considerable historical interest are the illustrations and the detailed accounts of the 1955 bank strike in Japan, the Sino-Indian War in 1962 when Chinese troops crossed the McMahon line, the fall of Saigon to the VC in 1975, the atrocities in Chile in 1976 under their military dictator General Augusto Pinochet and the closure of the bank's branches in Yemen in 1980.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Mr. Tait has written a tremendously fun memoir. He is a long time international banker with a knack both for fun and for being posted to countries undergoing radical political change as the world around him experiences various kinds of "liberation" and Cold War struggle. Starting on a British steamer in the early 50's going to Hong Kong via India as a British colonial banker, and winding up in the jet set era going between Beverly Hills and Dubai in the 1990s, Tait's life spans a fascinating time of change. It felt rather like a trip from the world of E.M. Forster to that of John Le Carre. Throughout, Mr. Tait and his fellow bank bachelors struggle to protect the bank's interests, facilitate the growth of global trade and put together cocktail parties while the countries around them experience revolutions of every sort (Sri Lanka, India, Singapore/Malaysia, Yemen, Chile, post-War Japan, the very last moments of South Vietnam and China...). Through it all, it turns out there are pink gins and dancing girls to be found. We don't get much discussion of the personal emotional events of his life. It's not that sort of book. Nor is it about detailed political and social analysis of the various revolutions and political changes. But what is left to enjoy are the social details and conventions of the era that are so often missing from political histories (and which can do so much to fill out the picture of tumultuous times), plus numerous amusing anecdotes that make it quite a fun ride. It felt rather like a British "Mad Men," played out across the capitals of Asia and the Middle East.

Great glimpses of British late-colonial-era life in Hong Kong and interesting memories of working for HSBC in some of its other exotic locales. The perspective happens to be from that of a fun-loving, hard-drinking banker, but banking is almost a secondary theme. If you want pure, dry bank history specifically about HSBC, digest (or try to) Frank King's volumes. If you want to know what life as a banker or businessman could be like before computers and the stress of working for impersonal, behemoth corporations (in other words, when work was actually fun), give this book a go - it shouldn't disappoint.

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