

HONG KONG
Culture and Society

Islam in Hong Kong

Muslims and Everyday Life in China's
World City

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Introduction: Oi Kwan Road

When we think of Hong Kong, Islam is not something that springs to mind. Popular images of Hong Kong portray hyper-modern skyscrapers, Chinese signs in bright neon, a place of commercial and gastronomic delights. The Hong Kong that is popularly imagined evokes an association of dynamic cultural fusion, the exotic yet familiar, a cocktail of tradition and innovation. Islam does not share these associations. More typically Islam is considered a traditional and monolithic religion and ideology. Islam in Hong Kong is therefore an issue and topic that sounds unusual. If you are unfamiliar with Hong Kong, the words simply seem mismatched, a random juxtaposition of un-related terms. If you know Hong Kong well and have lived here all your life you may associate Islam with the Kowloon Mosque on Nathan Road, or the many Indonesian women who populate Causeway Bay on Sunday mornings. Some might think of Chungking Mansions, a place popularly associated with ethnic minorities, or perhaps the Pakistani security guard at their residential complex. But very few would acknowledge Islam as having played an important part in the history of Hong Kong or as having a living vibrant role in the city today.

Over 220,000 Muslims live and work in Hong Kong and as a group they account for 3% of the population (*Hong Kong Yearbook* 2009b). They come from many different backgrounds and are involved in a variety of trades and pastimes in the territory. In my travels beyond Hong Kong I have had an array of curious reactions from Muslims and non-Muslims alike about this topic. Most typically, people wonder, sometimes with worried frowns, who actually are the Muslims of Hong Kong? I have also fielded many questions about Islam in Hong Kong. Are there any terrorists? Are they all Chinese? Surely, there can't be many of them? What these questions have taught me is that people are curious about Muslims in Hong Kong. Even those who do not know Hong Kong are intrigued by the experience of life for minorities in this fascinating city.

The truth is that Islam has long been a part of the Hong Kong story. Indian Muslims and traders were present in the South China Sea during the first Opium Wars, and have lived and worked in the territory in a variety of different roles ever since. Chinese Muslims, or *Hui*, have also come to Hong Kong during various periods of political oppression on the Mainland. Now they number around 30,000 and have their own organisations. In recent years the largest population of Muslims in Hong Kong have been Indonesian, totalling 148,000. These are foreign domestic workers who have come on a short-term basis to provide domestic support for Hong Kong families. South Asian Muslims, the majority of whom are Pakistani, number over 17,000 (*Hong Kong Yearbook* 2009a). It is the *Hui* and Pakistani communities that account for the largest number of locally-born Muslims. Muslims in Hong Kong represent a sizeable minority in the city of 7 million people.

Oi Kwan Road

Hong Kong is a small but densely populated territory in Southern China. It is located in the southeast of the Pearl River Delta in the South China Sea. It is unique, having both a colonial history and special status as a recently re-incorporated region of the People's Republic of China. The northern part of Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon peninsula comprise the urban heart of Hong Kong. The Central District rests on the northern shore of Hong Kong Island opposite the southern tip of the Kowloon peninsula, Tsim Sha Tsui. This district is the financial and commercial heart of the territory. Victoria harbour, which separates Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, provides one of the world's most striking city skylines. Towering skyscrapers are over-shadowed only by the dramatic lush green hills of Hong Kong. East from Central is the Wanchai district, famous for its nightlife and entertainment. It was here that the well-known book and film *The World of Suzie Wong* was set. Wanchai still attracts all manner of tourists across the globe and is one of the most cosmopolitan parts of Hong Kong, with a vast array of different cultural groups and social classes rubbing shoulders with one another in everyday life. Oi Kwan Road is one rather small area of Wanchai and is at first glance quite unremarkable. Yet it is here that I have come to observe, over many years, not simply the comings and goings of Muslims attending prayers

in the local mosque, but also their participation in the daily melange of everyday life in Hong Kong.

Oi Kwan Road is opposite the north entrance to the Happy Valley racetrack and is situated near the Sikh Gurdwara. The road houses the Osman Ramju Saddick Islamic Centre and Mosque, the Queen Elizabeth Stadium, Tang Chi Ngong public health clinic, four schools, and a public swimming pool complex. The southeast corner of this road has a public park that includes a children's playground and a skateboard and bicycle track. The road is in many senses representative of Hong Kong, a compressed urban space. It also has a variety of public services, businesses, and private apartments. Most importantly, from our point of view, it houses a significant place for Muslims to meet, pray, eat, and celebrate.

The Islamic centre is home to one of Hong Kong's five main mosques. The building itself is an inconspicuous high rise, unlike the Kowloon mosque in Tsim Sha Tsui which follows a more traditional design and can house 3,500 worshipers. The eight storey building in Wanchai has a library, a kindergarten, a restaurant and prayer halls for men and women that can accommodate up to 1,500 people. The many people that use the facilities here are also commonly found in other parts of Oi Kwan Road. Pakistani women with their infant children attend check-ups at the health clinic, and Muslim men can often be found sitting on the benches of the park.

Like the city of Hong Kong, the park on Oi Kwan Road has multiple lives. It is frequented by young children throughout the day and dominated by a mix of adolescents in the evening when skateboarders of all types of ethnicity and age are a common sight. Other groups of teenagers gravitate to this same space, some huddle around mobile phones or MP3 players, smoke, or flirt with one another. Often, elderly Hong Kong citizens perform evening exercises in their pyjamas. Some visitors come to collect clippings from plants that grow in the garden while, at other times, a swarm of people occupy the park as they attend a Cantopop concert or sports tournament in the adjacent stadium. In the daytime, foreign domestic workers meet each other when they bring the children in their care to play in the playground. Occasionally, an elderly Chinese woman swiftly hunts through the bins to collect drinks cans for recycling earning herself a meagre wage, while a smartly dressed office worker sits on the wall and steals a cigarette break.

I have passed the park and seen visiting American professional skateboarders film a video. On another occasion, a fashion shoot for a magazine took place in which a scantily clad model posed languidly on the back of a motorbike in the bright sunlight and dense humidity. More often though, you can see young Pakistanis running around with school friends playing chase and dodging skateboarders, or practising their bowling in a makeshift game of cricket while their fathers attend Friday prayers at the nearby mosque. The park has a rhythm that is determined not only by the time of the day, but also the day of the week, and by the people who use the surrounding facilities and who live in the area. It is just one small area of Hong Kong, not representative of the territory as a whole, but certainly representative of its compressed space and cultural mix.

Sharif, a 14-year-old Pakistani boy, spends much of his time in the locale of Oi Kwan Road. His family originate from a village in the Attock district of Pakistan's Punjab province. For many years his father has worked in Hong Kong as a night watchman, a job common for many Pakistani men in the territory. At the age of eight, Sharif came to live in Hong Kong permanently along with his mother and elder brother. He has since come to regard Hong Kong as his home and he aspires to live and work here as an adult.

Sharif visits the Wanchai mosque situated on Oi Kwan Road many times each week. Along with the Qur'anic lessons he receives at school, Sharif is also training to be a *hafiz*, a person who has committed the Qur'an to memory. It is a respected title among the Pakistani community and one that has already been attained by Sharif's elder brother. The mosque is the place where this specialised recitation is practised. After these lessons Sharif spends time at the local park where he meets friends and plays games of cricket and chase, sometimes late into the evenings. On Fridays in particular, the Muslim holy day, much of his time is spent around Oi Kwan Road. Nearby the mosque there is a Pakistani takeaway where inexpensive meals and snacks are provided. Sharif occasionally visits this establishment. This takeaway 'Osman Kebab' is also well known to him as it is owned by the father of one of his classmates.

It is on Sundays that Amisha, a 31-year-old Indonesian foreign domestic worker, spends most of her time at Oi Kwan Road at the Islamic Centre. She leaves the home of her employer, a Singaporean Chinese family, by 10 a.m. and makes her way across town. At the Islamic Centre



Figure 1 ‘Osman Kebab’ halal takeaway next to Cantonese street food just off Oi Kwan Road in Wanchai (photo by author)

she meets with friends and prays in the mosque. She also attends lectures on Islam that are frequently given on Sundays and are very popular among Indonesians. She, like many of her friends, turns out weekly in her best clothes, modestly dressed with colourful headscarves. Sunday has become her holy day in Hong Kong and she devotes it to the Islamic Centre on Oi Kwan Road. Here, amidst the eight different floors she can learn Arabic, study books from the library, and even dine at the halal restaurant. More often than not, ever conscious of her budget and wishing also to eat some authentic spicy Indonesian food, she brings her own to share with friends. Climbing the stairs of the Islamic centre on a Sunday you will encounter many Indonesian women like Amisha, eating, phoning home, and reading the Qur’an.

Sometimes on weekday evenings Benny, a 52-year-old *Hui*, makes his way to the Islamic Centre to dine with fellow Chinese Muslims and partake in discussions about community events. He looks indistinguishable from other Hong Kong Chinese. He works as a salesman in a finance group located less than a mile from Oi Kwan Road. He is eager and enthusiastic to talk about how easy it is to obtain halal food in China, unlike Hong Kong. In the Mainland he informs me, many people recognise that

halal food is carefully prepared and can be trusted. Many non-Muslims therefore eat it as well as Muslims. His wife is not Muslim and his teenage daughter is largely indifferent to religion. This, however, is fine with him for the time being as he believes that her studies should take priority.

These are just a handful of the different Muslim characters for whom Oi Kwan Road is an important place. These brief vignettes show that religious and ethnic minorities in Hong Kong have daily lives that are entwined with both Hong Kong culture and their religious practices. This overview provides a necessary starting point to this book; one that brings life to the phrase 'Islam in Hong Kong'.

Introducing the participants

Before exploring the history of Islam in Hong Kong, let me explain the origins of this project. I first came to Hong Kong in 1999 with my wife who was born in the territory. At that time I was involved in research for my master's degree on British Muslims and the pilgrimage to Mecca. I was intrigued to stumble upon the Jamia Masjid on Shelley Street while travelling on the escalators in the Mid-Levels. This old and ornate mosque, tucked away inconspicuously, piqued my curiosity about Islam in the territory. Visiting it was the catalyst for what has turned out to be a long and fascinating project. The bulk of this research took place over the last eight years. It includes a variety of interviews, observations, and discussions with numerous Hong Kong Muslims and much of it was undertaken as part of my doctoral research. It has since been expanded and adapted in order to write this book. A total of 37 informants provided interviews. In addition, I conducted numerous informal discussions with a variety of Muslims throughout Hong Kong. I spoke to Imams, businessmen, housewives, retired bank managers, youth workers, domestic helpers, and musicians. The participants included 22 Pakistanis, 7 Indonesians, 1 Sri Lankan, 2 Indians, 2 Somalians, 1 Ghanaian, and 2 Hong Kong Chinese; of these 22 were female and 15 male. The majority of the participants are young Muslims from working-class homes where only one parent works (in all cases the father). Out of the 22 Pakistani respondents, only 4 had fathers who were not engaged in menial labour, and they were salesmen. Many working-class South Asian families in Hong Kong have low incomes and South Asian men in Hong Kong often encounter numerous

difficulties in obtaining work. Just before the peak of the global economic downturn in 2008 reports show that 20% of South Asian men in Hong Kong were unemployed compared to just 5.1% of the general population (Ng 2010). Therefore, the family and domestic context of many of these participants varies considerably from the more general Hong Kong Chinese population who have grown up amidst a wealth of employment opportunities, good education and a recreational environment where material consumption is a cornerstone of everyday life.

The fieldwork involved the recruiting of young participants from a collection of schools throughout the territory with sizeable Muslim student populations. These schools were identified because they cater for Hong Kong's ethnic minorities, providing government-subsidised education in English-medium institutions. Contacts were made with three schools and volunteers were recruited from randomly chosen classes, with the assistance of school teaching staff. In-depth individual interviews were then arranged which focussed on the spectrum of everyday experience of being Muslim in Hong Kong. In two schools, additional focus groups were organised to enable the participants to discuss particular issues together. The bulk of these interviews took place over a two-month period in 2006 and again in 2011. Some additional interviews were arranged through the Wanchai Mosque and their Islamic Youth Association, and through contact with some parents I already knew in the Islamic community. In approaching adult Muslims, more informal interviews were arranged. I spoke with a variety of Muslims at Chungking Mansions and Indonesians around Causeway Bay. In both cases, I spent considerable time in these areas observing social interactions and soaking up the rhythms of everyday life. Along with these core interviews I also spoke extensively to a collection of individuals from Islamic community organisations and those involved in the education and welfare of young Muslims. These interviews enabled me to construct a context for identifying the more general culture of Islam that exists in Hong Kong and recognising distinctions between different Islamic communities in the territory. All of the participants in this work are Sunni Muslims, though I do touch upon some of the different Islamic sects that exist in the territory and have had some indirect contact with one Shia contributor to this project. My fieldwork also included participant observation and the scrutiny of particular urban zones that became part of my own everyday life. I took time to frequent and observe spaces

important to everyday scenarios of the Muslim community. In doing so, I was able to recognise particular patterns regarding the use of space, language, and consumption of food as well as gain insight into some of the gendered differences in the lives of young Muslims in Hong Kong.

Out of the 37 core respondents, 10 have lived in Hong Kong their whole lives, a further 12 have lived in the territory for over 10 years, and only 4 participants have been in Hong Kong for less than 3 years. So this work is representative of a permanent Muslim population and is supplemented with insights from new arrivals and those who plan to stay for just a few years. A total of 26 of the participants are in full-time education. There is also a varied spread of ages; 22 are aged between 13 and 17, the rest are aged 18 to 52. This sample provides a basis for insight into young Muslims in Hong Kong, but also balances their responses with feedback from some older Muslims, too. All the names in this book are pseudonyms provided to protect the identities of the respondents.

Hong Kong

Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region of China in 1997 after 156 years of British colonial rule. The territory has a population of over 7 million people and one of the highest population densities on earth with 53,110 people living per square kilometre in the Kwun Tong district of Kowloon (*Hong Kong Yearbook* 2009a). Nearly 95% of the population are of Chinese descent, and the remaining 5% are ethnic minorities.

The territory is comprised of Hong Kong island, the Kowloon peninsula, the New Territories that extend beyond Kowloon and towards Mainland China, and over 200 outlying islands. The territory totals only 426 square miles and of this land just 25% is developed. Much of Hong Kong is rural while the urban areas consist of tightly nestled high-rise buildings. Urban Hong Kong is thus a compression of residential and commercial space entwined with public amenities.

Politically, Hong Kong enjoys a high degree of autonomy from Beijing. The Basic Law agreed upon by Britain and China in 1984 ensures that the capitalist system on which the territory has thrived remains in place for 50 years following 1997. The Chief Executive of Hong Kong is elected by an electoral committee of Hong Kong people, appointed by the central Mainland authorities. Under the current system it would be

virtually impossible for a candidate to become Chief Executive without the approval of the Chinese government. Full democracy, although continually debated, remains to be awarded to the territory. However, a limited form of democracy is in place in the public election of some of the members of the legislative council. This body passes new laws, debates important topics for Hong Kong society, approves government budgets, and appoints some senior judges.

Situating Islam in Hong Kong

In a great many ways Hong Kong is not a multicultural city, especially when we see the territory from the viewpoint of its Hong Kong Chinese majority population. The great bulk of Hong Kong's Cantonese population are either immigrants or the descendants of immigrants from the Mainland. However, Hong Kong has a deeper sense of mix and cosmopolitanism than many may immediately perceive. For instance, 30% of the Hong Kong Chinese population hold foreign passports and English and Putonghua are spoken alongside Cantonese. Unlike other multicultural cities, Hong Kong is not characterised by ghettoisation. As a result, different communities live with one another and simply have to engage in everyday affairs. Combining these factors with the colonial history of the territory, it is easy to understand why words and phrases such as 'cosmopolitan', 'cultural fusion', and 'hybridity' are so often used to describe Hong Kong. It is all of these things and more. Yet, Hong Kong is not typically multicultural, a descriptor that has not been adopted in either the political or popular contexts. Minority rights, fought for and protected in multicultural nations such as the UK, Australia, Canada, and Singapore, carry little political weight in Hong Kong, despite the protestations of concerned non-government organisations (NGOs) and individuals.

Islam is, however, an important part of the Hong Kong story and a visible part of everyday life in the territory. In the next chapter, I provide a history of Islam in Hong Kong and show how Muslims have lived, contributed, and shared in the development of the city. Situating Muslims in Hong Kong involves challenging our ideas about Muslim minorities. The fact that Hong Kong is a place of mixed heritage, a vibrant setting that is able to bridge and suture together disparate people and cultures should not be dismissed. Hong Kong culture is a cocktail of East Asian,

Chinese, and Western values, commodities, social mores, and tradition. Muslim youth in the territory experience this and similarly contribute to it. The Hong Kong environment places the young Muslims in this study in a unique social situation. Sharif, for example, has a very different type of intercultural experience in comparison with his Muslim peers in the West. He is taught in English and yet attends a school where over 80% of the students are Chinese. By a different measure he has freedoms entirely foreign to his life in Pakistan.

No doubt, many who read this book will also be interested in positioning Muslims in Hong Kong in the broader debate of Muslims as minorities in countries like the UK and the United States. It is therefore helpful to provide a brief discussion on the discourse of Muslim minorities. This, to clarify, is simply an overview and does not go into a great deal of depth but it provides a way to contrast the context of this work with what is now a significant and established literature on Muslims as minorities.

The discourse of Muslim minorities

Communities of Muslims in the West are currently pathologised as a deviant group for whom multiculturalism is particularly problematic. From this has emerged an association of Islam being in conflict with the West. Sardar (2009, p. 13) comments that 'in contemporary Britain being a Muslim is a problem no matter what you do as a human being or British citizen'. This is said with good reason because while minority communities in the UK, such as the Chinese or the Jewish, have maintained their ethnic distinctiveness they have not strived to alter British life. The perception of Islam, however, is that it has global political and ideological resources that are 'capable of overtaking and displacing indigenous identity', that Muslims want a 'superior position' in society (Sardar 2009, p. 15).

The political context of work on Muslim communities as minorities is entwined in a variety of issues such as post-colonialism, cultural difference, and notions of ideological extremism. Accordingly, these themes have influenced the way in which young Muslims are discussed and understood. In media, policy, and academic work, Muslim youth are approached in a qualitatively different manner from other minority youths, such as Afro-Caribbeans in Britain, or Koreans and Japanese in

the United States. It is clear that terrorism and 11 September 2001 have become the dominating themes articulated in contemporary work on minority Muslim youth (Fekte 2004; Poynting and Mason 2007). This pervasive focus has meant that work on the identity and culture of Muslim youth in the West has been largely replaced by enquiries into terrorism, social justice, nationalism, and racism (Turner 2003, p. 415; Maira 2005). From this is deduced, quite erroneously, that terrorism and 9/11 are the most pressing and immediate issues for Muslims. Consequently, there are concerns that while the culture and identity of other minority youths are still discussed, the topic of Muslim youth is debated using a qualitatively different approach which defines young Muslims in a post-9/11 frame; one which may be of little relevance both to the lives they lead and their self-conceptualisation. It hardly seems likely that every Muslim on the streets of London, Paris, Sydney and New York is animated and occupied by 9/11 and suicide bombings. Yet the intense focus of media, policy and research on precisely these issues has inflated a notion of Islam in the non-Islamic world dominated by these themes. A body of research has identified that media representations of Islam in non-Islamic countries is 'overwhelmingly negative' (Hopkins 2009, p. 35). In light of this information, one important exercise to perform is a revision of the circumstances surrounding these contemporary developments in order to understand their setting and emergence.

Some scholars argue that the origins of the discontent between Islam and the West extend back to medieval Europe and the spread of Islam. Huntington's (1993) widely read essay on the clash of civilisations argues that there is an ingrained cultural conflict between Western and Islamic cultures. In contrast, Ballard (1996) suggests the medieval European understanding of Islam can be viewed as a distorted polarisation of Christianity. This perspective sees Muhammad as the alternate Christ and focuses on the Prophet as a warmongering licentious beast (Ballard 1996, p. 25). Ballard's discussion highlights the legacy of European ignorance of Islam that Said's *Orientalism* thesis similarly identifies, that the close monotheistic similarities between Christianity and Islam have for a long time gestated a conflict.

Rather than a new era, the aftermath of 9/11 is more accurately an escalation and mutation of a long existing tension between the Western and Muslim communities. Young Muslims have accordingly come to be

studied in a dominating context of conflict that permeates all levels of enquiry about them, from national and political discussions to debates on identity and belonging, and inclusion within schools. The fact that Muslim communities are and have been living as minorities in countries throughout the world for centuries indicates that cultural conflict is an inadequate model for such enquiry. However, in many works that look into the experience of being a Muslim minority in a multicultural society there is an enduring binary analysis. While the label of 'between cultures' is increasingly shunned, the conceptual thinking underpinning it endures. There is a paucity of work that acknowledges the cultural mix of Muslims as denizens within urban multiculturalism. Muslims tend to be seen as separate from the 'multiculture', not participating, not mixing, and not being influenced by Western culture. The purpose of looking at accounts of young Muslims in Hong Kong as complex social actors involved in cross-cultural communication and learning is to present a balance to the abundance of works that dismiss these types of issues.

The very simple issue here is to acknowledge that this book, solely because of its topic, is associated with some complicated political baggage that is not immediately relevant to Hong Kong. Particularly when considering media reportage from Britain, the United States, and Australia there is a very discernible negative representation of Muslims. In some cases the politics of the Middle East, and the plight of American and British troops, or the threat of Al Qaida tend to be seen as more relevant and of more immediate concern to the identity of Muslim minorities than their citizenship, the country in which they have been born and raised, and the community to which they belong. The prevalence of contentious representations of Islam in the media assures that this book will be associated with terrorism, 9/11, and religious extremism. On many occasions during my research colleagues and acquaintances have commented on how topical Islam is and how worrying the issue of international terrorism has become, as if the two were synonymous. These geopolitical issues and events are simply those that have come to be associated with Islam; they are not representative of the daily lives of Muslims in Hong Kong, or around the globe. This indicates that within research on Muslim minority communities a powerful discourse of deviance has occluded the more prosaic analysis of Muslims in our societies. It is a point that Hopkins elucidates and urges should be addressed.

We rarely read accounts or see images associated with the standard everyday practices of Muslim families and communities, such as those associated with the compassion and warmth experienced by Muslims attending the local mosque, Muslim young men who train hard every week as part of their football team, Muslim families who work long hours to make sure their parents and children can live decent lives. Academic research has a role to play here too, as work here tends to focus on the margins ... When Muslims are not being represented through negative images and discourses they tend to be absent. (Hopkins 2009, p. 36)

For Hopkins it is in the domain of the everyday where the necessary renegotiation of the representation of Islam needs to occur. The dynamic is quite clear in his analysis; positive accounts of Muslims exist but are simply not represented in the media, explored by academics, or supported by funding. There is thus an absence of accounts of Muslims being shown in a 'positive light' (2009, p. 28). Therefore, the role that everyday sociology must take is not to aggrandize Muslims and provide alternative accounts which celebrate them, but to be candid and provide a quotidian representation of their lives, pastimes, concerns, and aspirations. The task is quite simply to present a balance to the profusion of work that recycles and arguably reinforces the Islamic social problems of our era. In Section 3 of this book I explore these very simple everyday practices. Considering how Muslim youth use space (Chapter 11) in their recreation is one way in which we can come to understand these youngsters beyond their religious beliefs and practices and learn more about simply 'what they do'. A more contentious topic is that of racism, very much an everyday encounter for ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.

Part of the task of overcoming the powerful stereotypes of Islam is to shed the focus on Islam defining every aspect of a Muslim's life. Lewis (2007, p. xiii) argues that in his previous work on Islamic Britain he was concerned with the lack of consideration placed on religion in academic work on Muslims; now, in the wake of 9/11, he argues that Muslims need to be understood beyond religion. It is therefore key to represent Muslims through a 'democracy of the senses' (Back 2007, p. 8) that engages with referents such as culture, space, linguistics, experiences of prejudice, along with religious practices. Of course, such a focus delivers us into the world that Muslim minorities occupy and, in Hong Kong, one that is a cultural hybrid. Therefore, these 'everyday' representations of Muslims

also tell another story, contributing to the broader focus on the diversity of our contemporary communities and lived accounts of cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and hybridity. The everyday is thus a focal point of this book. It presents the mundane aspects of the participants' lives, but it also delivers a political message about what the challenges are for young Muslims in Hong Kong.

Everyday hybridity and Hong Kong's Muslim youth

Hong Kong is for many who live beyond the territory, a quaint oddity, a peripheral location notable for its unique history and combination of Eastern and Western cultures. For the residents of the territory, both present and past, these signifiers of Hong Kong are familiar but coexist with an array of others contextualising the complexity of the city and its cultural connections. What is seldom addressed, and what is a concern in this study, is that Hong Kong possesses prized circumstances for doing social research. Particularly in the present world in which the boundaries between the East and West have become increasingly blurred, Hong Kong offers circumstances that are both different and relevant. Post-colonial migration to Britain created these circumstances for much of the Muslim community, including the younger generation of Muslims currently living there. In a similar way, colonial connections brought Muslims to Hong Kong, and continue to influence their status and opportunities in the territory. Research on Muslims in Hong Kong is relevant to work on Muslim minorities throughout the West contributing not only to the debate on Islam, but also multiculturalism, migration, and Asian culture.

The critical perspective of this book is everyday hybridity which traces a path between the social theory of everyday life, as popularised by writers such as Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre; and, on the other side, by the sociology of multicultural politics and identity studies. My conception of everyday hybridity works by taking the cues provided by everyday life theorists, that the everyday is a site of revolution (Lefebvre) and that individuals find a variety of ways to disrupt the order and uniformity imposed on them (de Certeau 1984). But my interests in the politics of everyday life also move in another direction. I would like to see everyday life as a type of prefigurative politics where what people do is the most important analytic issue. Prefiguration encourages change by being

directly located in the ethos of personal politics. 'By fully embodying the change, you make change' (Maeckelbergh 2009, p. 66), I therefore wish to read everyday actions as the tokens through which the principles, values and aspirations of these youths can be understood. In analysis this means moving away from identity studies, where we look at what individuals say and their introspective appraisal of culture, ethnicity, and religion. In looking at the everyday we engage with a person in action, what they do and how they live. In this sense, prefigurative politics meet de Certeau's circumvention (1984, pp. 24–36). Rather than everyday tactics and practices being a tool of the weak and the dispossessed, they are actually nascent and progressive political developments. The mundane becomes the radical. What is now mundane was, in many cases, once radical. This is certainly observable when we consider technology, gender relations, race, dress, beliefs, and the behaviour connected with all these things. So in presenting the everyday life of young Muslims in Hong Kong, I am also presenting a politics of hybrid Hong Kong, of minority youth and their values and pastimes.

Occasionally throughout the text, I highlight themes of everyday hybridity that are entwined with a variety of dissimilar topics, sometimes ludic and sometimes sobering. Ultimately, they serve to put a simple conceptual frame around the often complex cultural convergences that occur.

Overview of the book

The scope of this book is broad and it attends to many issues under the rubric of Islam in Hong Kong. I do not, however, discuss the theological components of Islam. At times, I do expand on some specialised religious issues when they are relevant to the story of a particular respondent. Anyone looking for an introduction to Islam, though, should not start here. Fundamentally, this is an ethnographic work and is centred on the experiences of Muslims rather than their core beliefs.

That being said, this work will address the curiosity that people have about Islam in Hong Kong. Historical facts and demographics are included, as is a great deal of social commentary relevant to contemporary Hong Kong. Underlying these themes are hopeful accounts about Muslims, their lifestyles, and their future in Hong Kong. Throughout the writing of this work a great many changes have taken place in Hong Kong

society that directly affect Muslims growing up and working in the territory. Examples include the Racial Discrimination Ordinance and very recent moves by the police to open up new levels of recruitment for ethnic minorities. These have an impact on the quality of life for Muslims in Hong Kong. The accounts that are given in this book are also relevant beyond the region and relate to our understanding of religious and ethnic minorities, urban living, and cultural globalisation across the globe.

So, with all of this in mind, let me explain what the rest of the book has in store. For ease the book is divided into three sections; the first looks at foundations regarding the topic of Islam in Hong Kong. This encompasses the history of Hong Kong that is covered in Chapter 2. It is here that I chart the origins of Islam in Hong Kong back to the Opium Wars and look at the development of an Islamic community with organisations, mosques, and cemeteries. This history deals essentially with the roles Muslims played in society, their jobs and status, during the colonial period. Chapter 3 begins by looking at the contemporary history of Islam in Hong Kong and charts the most important transformations that have occurred since the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China. One key aspect of this discussion is an exploration of the most recent and largest community of Muslims in Hong Kong, that of Indonesian foreign domestic workers. We learn much here about their lifestyles and the challenges they face in their work. Chapter 4 looks at present-day Hong Kong through the imaging of the iconic Chungking Mansions, a place widely associated with ethnic minorities, and by default Muslims. I explore the relevance of this building and discuss the experiences and understanding of Hong Kong with some Pakistani and African individuals who have daily lives connected to this place. I show how, despite the association of Chungking Mansions with Muslims in Hong Kong, it is actually a place that is in many ways cut off from the day-to-day life of the territory. It does, however, work as a metaphor for Hong Kong's flux and hybridity.

From this point on, the book looks exclusively at the experiences of Muslims living their daily lives amidst the broader Hong Kong Chinese culture of the territory. These accounts come mainly from the school-aged respondents and give a very vibrant picture of growing up as a Muslim in Hong Kong. The second section of the book deals with religious practice and its accompanying issues in Hong Kong. Chapter 5 focuses on how young Muslims come to learn about Islam. It asks what are the processes

and institutions that form their Islamic knowledge and influence their practice? We see the importance of the home, the mosque, and school in the teaching, learning, and acquiring of religious understanding. Chapter 6 discusses how Muslims engage in their daily religious practices. The respondents discuss how they make their prayers and also detail their experiences of Ramadan and fasting in the Hong Kong setting. Chapter 7 brings an even sharper focus to the discussion of religious practices by looking at the topic of halal food. It is here we come to understand the ambiguity of food choices in Hong Kong and the variety of conflicting decisions young people make about food. This chapter provides an unusual insight into the pastimes of local Muslims and how they integrate these with their Chinese cultural environment.

The final section of the book takes a step beyond religion and examines the fundamentals of everyday life for Muslim youth. It is here that the issue of being an ethnic minority comes into sharper relief. I discuss a series of topics that paint a representative portrait of the social issues that are key to Muslims growing up and working in the territory. Chapter 8 looks at the twin issues of language and education, where I discuss the complications that many Muslims have as ethnic minorities, in accessing suitable education in Hong Kong. The issue of Chinese-language education for these ethnic minorities is of acute concern. This is contrasted with the accounts of the respondents that detail the variety of languages spoken among the sample and their language experiences in the territory. Muslim youth are shown to be engaged in Hong Kong culture and to recognise the importance that learning Chinese holds for them. Chapter 9 engages with the accounts of two respondents: one a Pakistani Muslim, the other a *Hui*. Both of them can be understood as being Chinese, but in quite different ways. This chapter allows us to explore the identities of these individuals and understand the interplay between being Muslim, being Chinese, and being 'other' in Hong Kong. Chapter 10 presents the accounts of the respondents regarding the topic of racism. This chapter explores the ways in which many Muslims shrug off popular racism in Hong Kong. They make little fuss about the issue and explain how Islam is never focussed on as a reason for prejudice. The fact that Muslims in Hong Kong feel their religion is accorded respect, and that the territory delivers some very valuable and unique freedoms, enables them to be ambivalent about much of the racism that occurs. Chapter 11 explores

how Muslim youth engage with Hong Kong space. Looking at a number of gender differences, this chapter shows how and where Muslim youth tend to spend much of their recreation time. The home and public parks are key in this discussion, but so are a variety of spatial dynamics involving the accommodation of space, virtual space, and domestic space. In the concluding chapter, I discuss one further contributor to the project who sent me an anonymous letter. This frames my appraisal of the variety of experiences that the book covers and the everyday and tangible hybridity it demonstrates in the lives of those individuals whose accounts have formed it.

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