

# Understanding South Asian Minorities in Hong Kong

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## 2

# A Cultural History of South Asians in Hong Kong

### Introduction: Retelling the Histories of South Asians in Hong Kong

Before probing into the situation of South Asians in Hong Kong, it is necessary to establish the diverse histories of South Asian settlement in the region. One common problem when studying the histories of EMs in Hong Kong is that the literature about their settlement does not measure up to the number of years they have been in the territory, nor does it fully reflect the contributions they have made to society and to the economy. This is especially the case with South Asians in Hong Kong, whose forebears landed on Hong Kong soil for various reasons. To date, while there are several books on the history of Indians in the territory (notably White, 1994; Kwok and Narain, 2004; and Vaid, 1972), there is little work devoted to the histories of Pakistani and Nepalese residents. Scholarship is also lacking on the different journeys that brought immigrants to Hong Kong.

This chapter, then, aims to uncover the *histories* of the settlement of South Asians in Hong Kong. It aims to defy an essentialist notion of “History” (i.e. history with a capital letter “H”) by asserting (i) that the so-called “history” of the ethnic groups we focus on (i.e. Indians, Pakistanis and Nepalese) is diverse; and (ii) that a myriad historical sources exist beyond ‘official historical records.’ Especially with regard to this second point, this chapter concentrates on other accounts such as institutional and personal histories to fill the gaps of official history and to enrich our understanding of the ways in which earlier South Asian settlers negotiated life in a foreign land, and of their subsequent contributions to a place their descendants now call “home.” It argues for a cultural history approach to retell the histories of Indians, Pakistanis and Nepalese residing in Hong Kong. In the following section, we start with a brief history of these three ethnicities as told in the official literature.



## **A History of Indian, Pakistani and Nepalese Residents in Hong Kong**

### ***Fighting for the British Colonial Army—Indians and Nepalese***

The earliest settlement of South Asians in Hong Kong had largely to do with the expansion of the British Empire. There were four major reasons for South Asian settlement in the early history of Hong Kong: military service, labor, trade, and the need for government clerks (Weiss, 1991, 420). Barbara-Sue White implies that trade was the foremost factor that connected British and Indian interest in Hong Kong (White, 1994, 12).<sup>1</sup> It was also trade (especially in opium) that led to war between Britain and China (and later sealed the fate of Hong Kong). The first Indians (and later Pakistanis) and Gurkhas who settled in Hong Kong were recruits of the British army; they arrived as the British government acquired the island in 1841 as a result of the Opium War of 1839–42. Vaid remarks, “It was only in defence and security services that the British either did not desire or could not find Chinese recruits, and they sought to meet this need by bringing in Indians” (cited in Weiss, 1991, 426). However, it could be the same distrust that led the British to recruit Gurkhas as separate military units.<sup>2</sup> The Gurkhas (formed mainly from Gurung, Magar, Limbu and Rai ethnicities in Nepal) had a reputation for bravery, loyalty and fierceness, and they fought for the British first under the East Indian Company Army (since 1817) and then as part of the British Army during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. The increasing unrest near the Chinese border led the British colonial government to deploy the Gurkhas there to combat illegal entry into Hong Kong. The Nepalese resided in barracks in Jordan, Shek Kong and Yuen Long. Some also lived in Wan Chai.<sup>3</sup> They remained stationed in Hong Kong until 1997 when British rule ended. While some remained in Hong Kong as residents, many were stationed elsewhere, and others returned to Nepal. In the 1990s, the UK government extended a nationality package to the Nepalese Gurkhas and their descendants as recognition of their longstanding service, causing an exodus of Nepalese from Hong Kong.

### ***Maintaining Law and Order—Sikh and Muslim Indians (and Later Pakistanis)***

The British also needed South Asians for law enforcement in the acquired territory. The Hong Kong Police Force, formed in 1844, comprised 35 policemen. Sikh Indians, who were believed to be brave and strong fighters, were recruited as

**Table 2.1**  
A Comparison of the Salary Level of Police Constables in 1855, 1885, and 1915 across Ethnic Groups

Year	Ethnic Groups		
	European	Indian	Chinese
1855 (British Pounds)	47.10	20	13.15
1885 (HKD)	480	150	108
1915 (HKD)	100 (Pounds)	150	150

Source: *The Hong Kong Blue Book*, 1855, 1885, and 1915. Figures show the lowest pay within the rank (cited in Ho and Chu, 2012, 46).

policemen to maintain law and order in the culturally foreign Chinese territory of Hong Kong. They were also known for their reliability in comparison to the other contingents (such as the Bombay unit, who were described in a long report to the Colonial Office as a “failure”) (Crisswell and Watson, 1990, 49). In 1906, the Hong Kong Police Force expanded, comprising 128 Europeans, 511 Chinese and 411 Indians, according to a similar racial ratio determined in 1898 (Pluss, 2004, 162). While European policemen occupied more senior positions, the Chinese and Indians usually remained at the constable level. Table 2.1 shows the income differences between the nationalities in early times:<sup>4</sup>

The British government’s multi-national recruitment policy stemmed from its distrust of the Chinese constables (who were seen as distant because of the language barrier and who were notorious for being corrupt) (Weiss, 1991, 430; Pluss, 2004, 161; Crisswell and Watson, 1990, 47). As a policy to further “dilute” the composition and impact of Hong Kong Chinese policemen, or of one single ethnicity, the British colonizers recruited police staff from Guangdong and Shandong provinces, and later from Russia as the males there were considered

**Table 2.2**  
The Number of Policemen in Hong Kong by Ethnicity from the Late Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Century

Ethnicity	Year				
	1867	1881	1908	1927	1946
European/Caucasian	89	103	131	246	377
Indian	377	194	410	753	325
Chinese from Guangdong	132	351	501	600	1630
Chinese from Shandong	-	-	-	216	305

Source: Ho and Chu (2012, 41)

to be physically strong and brave (Ho and Chu, 2012, 41). Table 2.2 shows the changing population of Hong Kong's police force by nationality/ethnicity.<sup>5</sup>

The decline of Indian recruits immediately after the war may illustrate two issues: (1) the rise of casualties among Indian policemen even during peacetime; (2) an exodus of Indians from Hong Kong especially after the war (as India gained independence from British rule and went into one of its most tumultuous political phases, leading to the Partition in 1947) (Ho and Chu, 2012, 34). After the Partition, the British government continued to recruit Pakistanis into the Hong Kong Police Force to combat the growing crime, drugs and triad activities in the territory. Meanwhile, in Mainland China, increasing political instability after the Civil War caused rampant illegal cross-border immigration, which further justified an expansion of the Hong Kong Police Force. The Sikh police continued until the 1950s when they were gradually replaced by local Chinese constables. While some found new jobs as security guards, others opened their own businesses, transforming their regimented roles to more commercial ones (Pluss, 2004). Punjabis, now known as Pakistanis, were recruited for a decade more, the last contingent of forty-six men arriving in 1961 (Weiss, 1991, 434).

Besides being hired as policemen and prison guards, Indians (particularly Punjabis, Sikhs and Muslims) were employed in "hybrid" forms of policing: joining security forces, or working as detectives or watchmen. According to the 1872 census, 68 Indian watchmen were enlisted. By 1901, this figure had risen to 202 non-Chinese watchmen; there were 177 Chinese watchmen at that time (Hamilton, 2008, 102). These watchmen were mainly employed to patrol private companies and commercial enterprises (such as Jardines, Butterfield and the Swire Dockyards), hospitals, and public service points (such as Tung Wah Hospital and the University of Hong Kong). They were particularly hired to patrol the dockyards, as pirate activities became rampant in the early twentieth century. As such, South Asians played an integral role in military positions, as well as the maintenance of law and order in Hong Kong.

### *Indian and Pakistani Traders—Economic Settlement*

In addition to their employer-employee relationship, the British and South Asians were also trading partners during the early colonial era. South Asian traders capitalized on the relative political stability in Hong Kong under British colonial rule, as well as on the British trading activities in the South China Sea region. When the East India Company's trade with China reached its peak in the early

nineteenth century, South Asian seamen were recruited to work on the ships that brought them to the shores of Hong Kong, then a tiny seaport and outpost for the burgeoning British trade in the area. Some individuals migrated to Hong Kong as sailors or traders. Among them were Parsees and Bohra Muslim traders who followed the British to Hong Kong to take advantage of the new economic opportunities. By 1898, the number of Indians was counted at 1,348, which included those working for the police. Their population soared from 7,000 in the early 1900s, to 20,000 in the 1960s (Ho and Chu, 2012, 76). Parsees and Bohra Muslim traders opened offices in the territory, followed by Indians from the provinces of Sindh and Gujarat (who were mostly Hindus). Thus, entrepreneurs of different South Asian origins used Hong Kong as an entrepôt for trade in opium, silk and cotton with China, or opened stores supplying provisions to the soldiers of the British garrison (Pluss, 2004, 156).

The heavy economic involvement of Sindhi and other Indian entrepreneurs caused a few Indian families to prosper. Among them were the Harilela and Gidumal families. The Harilela family is one of the most prominent Indian families in Hong Kong. The father of the current patriarch of the family, Hari, came to Hong Kong from Sindh, with humble beginnings. He engaged in the business of sewing machines and tailoring during the Japanese occupation, after which he was commissioned to make army uniforms for the British army. In the 1950s the Harilelas branched out into the property market, snowballing their business into a million-dollar empire and managing hotel chains across Asia.<sup>6</sup> The Gidumal family, on the other hand, rose to prominence by setting up provision stores that served the British as well as the local Indians. By the 1960s they had become leading Indian traders as they set up organizations to facilitate trade with the British and with China.

Apart from these more prominent families, by the 1950s, many more Indian businessmen had migrated to Hong Kong as Sino-Indian trade flourished. The Indian Chamber of Commerce was established in 1952 to represent the interests of all Indian traders in the territory (Pluss, 2004, 166). This played a significant role in fostering trade between India and Hong Kong, which was experiencing its economic takeoff, as shall be elaborated later. As Hong Kong's economy went full steam ahead in the 1970s, the Hindu and Muslim traders flourished in business and gained a higher economic and political status in Hong Kong society. Those South Asians who were in professions related to security, defense and law and order remained in that socio-economic echelon (a position they are adversely still in) and faced gradual replacement by local Chinese counterparts. The influx of

Pakistanis from the 1990s onwards, in addition, seems to have driven home the view that the majority of this ethnic group in Hong Kong falls into a lower socio-economic class, whereas some Indians tend to be better off.

In addition to these prominent businessmen, many other Indians in Hong Kong were involved in small-scale trade. In fact, running small businesses and shops is seen as typical of a diasporic population (Portes and Bach, 1985). The first Indian settlers concentrated in the Tsim Sha Tsui and Jordan areas, which also housed some of the richest Indian traders in Hong Kong (Kwok and Narain, 2004, 119). They had businesses such as restaurants, tailor shops, and import/export firms, but mostly ran multi-purpose retail stores (including mail-order services) (Vaid, 1972, 72).

The Indian community in Hong Kong engaged in different industries, such as accountancy, insurance, education, and medicine, as well as banking and finance (Kwok and Narain, 2004, 105–110). The contributions of Indian businessmen to the economy of Hong Kong has been especially notable in the promotion of import and export trade, and in the transformation of Tsim Sha Tsui from an army base into a burgeoning shopping area, supporting Hong Kong's main tourist economy (Kwok and Narain, 2004, 284). While small trading firms were located on Hong Kong Island, most small businesses and shops were concentrated on the Kowloon side, especially in Tsim Sha Tsui. Moreover, many tended to converge (as they do now) along particular roads, such as Mody Road and Nathan Road, and in buildings such as Chungking and Mirador Mansions, which were built around 1961<sup>7</sup> and acquired their fame—or notoriety—in the 1970s (Mathews, 2011). Chungking Mansions stood out as a prime spot; up to the present it contains large assemblages of stores, ranging from small eateries, clothing shops, mobile phone shops, trading firms, retail stores, and tailors. Today, it stands as a landmark of multi-ethnic presence. Recent years have seen an increase of traders from African countries. They make bulk purchases from shops in Chungking Mansions and elsewhere in Hong Kong to be shipped back to their home countries. The growth of the African community has also become visible in shops, now selling African clothing and merchandise.

### ***Religion: Muslim Identity and Community***

Among the South Asian traders and businessmen, Muslims of Sunni origins were noted in Hong Kong for their piety. Muslims who worked as soldiers and policemen tended to be dispatched to particular police stations and quarters. While

the majority of Muslim police lived in the vicinity of the Central district (around Shelley Street), others were stationed in Tsim Sha Tsui, Castle Peak, Au Tau, Hung Hom and Sha Tau Kok (Weiss, 1991, 431). The Punjab Regiment, housed in the Jordan and Tsim Sha Tsui areas, petitioned and received land in 1884 to build a mosque close to where the Kowloon Mosque now stands (Weiss, 426). The earliest community of Muslim Indians consisted of traders, seamen and various security staff living in Central on Hong Kong Island. Another nucleus soon developed in Tsim Sha Tsui, after the British were ceded Kowloon, this time comprising soldiers and other traders. The Muslim seamen (who included “Pakistanis-to-be,” Indians, and Malays), on the other hand, formed themselves into well-knitted dormitory areas—an early version of the contemporary *deras*—in the Lower Lascar Row in Central. The area where Muslims practiced their faith soon became earmarked as a Muslim enclave, as Muslims would gather for their daily *salat* (prayers) and *Jamat* (gathering) (Weiss, 1991, 418).

Until very recently, scarcely any literature was dedicated to the socio-cultural life of Muslims in Hong Kong (O'Connor, 2012). However, maintaining the Muslim faith had been forming the backbone of the life of many South Asians in Hong Kong. This is especially true for Muslim diasporic communities who rely more on religion for spiritual support and compensation for being severed from “home,” if not for the strengthening of ethnic ties. Islam provided a stronghold for mostly Indians and Pakistanis, especially in the early period of their settlement (see O'Connor, 2012). First of all, the mosques did not just function as a place for worship and prayer, but also as a place for handling dead bodies (*Miyat*), and as a center for social and cultural life. The prayer sessions in the mosques united Muslim residents from different walks of life. Activities were organized around the Shelley Street mosque, for instance, where wells were built for a water supply and shops arose that sold halal meat.

Religious spaces, thus, became important sites for fostering religious and ethnic identities. In the case of Muslims, they would gather at the mosques for the *Juma* prayers. These prayers in Arabic became the unifying language among Indian, Chinese and Pakistani Muslims. Various mosques were built (in 1845, 1885, 1890, and 1895) to serve the several hundred Muslims residing in Hong Kong at the time (Ku, 2004, 97). These mosques, soon after they were built, became also important to “local boys”<sup>8</sup>—a generation of Muslims in Hong Kong that was born out of inter-racial marriages often between South Asian Muslim men and Chinese women—as they were carving out an identity distinct from that of their forefathers (Weiss, 1991).

The establishment of mosques also precipitated the formation of associations and community groups. The “Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community Fund in Hong Kong” (commonly referred to as the “Board of Trustees”) was formed to manage the mosques and Muslim cemeteries (e.g. to manage the burials of the Muslim soldiers, policemen and prison guards who perished in the territory). Besides religious functions, organizations such as the Islamic Union Hong Kong were set up in the early 1900s to promote trade with China (Pluss, 2004, 160). Several Muslim organizations were set up in addition to the Board of Trustees, including the Pakistan Association of Hong Kong, the Indian Muslim Association and the Hong Kong Dawoodi Bohra Association (Anjuman-E-Burhani). These earlier associations played a significant role in framing a sense of belonging in the host society of Hong Kong for the Muslim communities, especially forging a trans-local (hybrid) identity (beyond a religious identity) for the “local boys,” as shall be elaborated later.

### *Interaction with Local Chinese*

Language barriers and cultural differences set the early South Asian settlers and the Chinese apart. The interactions between South Asians and the local Chinese varied according to their socio-economic roles. For those working in the law and order sector, this presented certain difficulties. A photo in the book *The Royal Hong Kong Police (1841–1945)* by Colin Crisswell and Mike Watson depicts the status of Sikh policemen in early Hong Kong well: two Sikhs watching over a Chinese criminal as he was publicly displayed. Maintaining law and order in a foreign culture created for the Indians a special functional existence in Hong Kong, but it also sparked uncourted tension between them and the local Chinese. Another photo in the same book portrays Sikh constables posing with “Luk-kong” (Shandong) colleagues, creating an impression of the calm relationship between the two ethnic groups (Crisswell and Watson, 1990, 55). In reality, however, there was little socio-cultural interaction between the two, a situation that could be attributed to the British colonial policy (and practice) of racial and cultural segregation.<sup>9</sup>

In general, the earlier South Asian settlers had little interaction with local Chinese, although the stories vary with different ethnicities and professions. Language, racial and religious differences made it inconvenient for both Chinese and Muslim Indians to interact. Even in the police force where Sikhs worked alongside Chinese, they were allocated to different quarters and thus did not

intermingle socially. The Sikhs' relation with the Chinese population was seen to be lukewarm as the latter largely considered the Sikhs as auxiliaries of the British. The Sindhis, who were traders, learnt Cantonese to be able to better communicate with Chinese businessmen. Yet, they did not interact with the Chinese outside of their business interactions, as both groups were seen as "conservative about maintaining their own cultures" (Pluss, 2004, 166). However, for the Hindus and Parsees that were economically better off, their more favorable economic position granted them more access and social interaction with the local community, although evidence shows that they "wished to preserve their core cultural characteristics in relating to both" (Pluss, 2004, 166). The tight-knit Parsee community received little social acceptance from both British and Chinese residents. It could, thus, be inferred that the interaction between South Asians and the Chinese was more economically driven, while their separate (or even segregated) ways of living could have religious and racial causes, and could be traced to the segregation policy of British colonial rule.

Intermarriage between South Asians and local Chinese varied with different ethnicities and religions. The Sindhi Indians, who were heavily involved in business and trade, were not interested in marrying local Chinese; according to some anonymous sources, the lack of interest was mutual (Pluss, 2004, 166). The Parsee communities, who were seen to be more tight-knit, relied on their kin to look for spouses. The Muslims, due to their religious and economic difference from the Chinese and other Indians, tended to remain distant too. That said, the Sunni Muslims were seen as less restricted by their religion than the Parsees, hence intermarriages with the Chinese (especially women) became more common (Pluss, 2004, 461). "Local boys," who were so termed because of their mixed lineage, were keener to integrate into the local Chinese culture. They were also seen as the "backbone of the Hong Kong Muslim community" as well as of organizations such as the Islamic Union of Hong Kong. However, some other "local boys" were seen to identify themselves more with Pakistanis (Weiss, 1991, 443).

The traditional historical accounts reviewed above illustrate that Indians, Pakistanis and Nepalese share a similar history. All were originally brought to Hong Kong by the British colonial government, for recruitment into the army, police and security sector. Yet, their different socio-economic roles set them apart, to some extent from each other as well as from the local Chinese. Religious and cultural differences have also meant different cultural practices. As much as these historical accounts reveal a substantial history of South Asians in Hong Kong,



they fall short of acknowledging the contributions of other institutions in shaping the communal lived experience of the South Asian communities. We now turn to the histories of such institutions as a means of providing alternative framing of/perspectives on the critical rethinking of the histories of South Asians in Hong Kong.

## **Institutional Histories**

This section recognizes the role of institutions in the lives of diasporic EMs. From their early settlement in the host societies, immigrants tend to rely on institutional communities for practical initiation into the foreign milieu, as well as cultural, social and political solidarity and networking with their own kind. Among South Asian businessmen, the formation of business organizations, which functioned both to foster business interests among similar ethnicities and to enhance visibility of the communities and bonds among compatriots, was common. Religious communities, as explained above, provided a religious and cultural stronghold for the diasporic South Asians, as they fostered and asserted their distinct identities in Hong Kong. As they established families in the territory, it became expedient to provide schools for those of South Asian descent who were born and raised in Hong Kong. It was not until much later that the Hong Kong government began to recognize the specific educational needs of non-Chinese children (as will be elucidated in Chapter Five). Instead, schools with missionary or Muslim backgrounds targeted South Asian children. In the following section it will become clear that several of these organizations and institutions provide alternative accounts of the history of South Asians in Hong Kong—told from their own perspectives.

### ***Ethnic and Religious Education: The Case of Islamic Kasim Tuet Memorial College***

A full treatment of South Asians' educational concerns will be provided in Chapter Five, which includes a specific case study of a particular school serving a large number of South Asian youths. Here, we would like to provide an initial discussion on the role of schools in constructing an important *institutional* milieu within which the South Asians' diverse cultural histories are situated. In particular, the religious nature of the case at hand warrants a separate treatment.

Providing education to South Asian youth has not been high on the agenda of the Hong Kong Education Bureau. It was only recently that the government

set up a number of “designated schools” that specifically cater to South Asian minorities. Two of those schools were established by Muslim organizations. Mr. Yusuf Yu,<sup>10</sup> the principal of Islamic Kasim Tuet Memorial College (hereafter IKTMC), is a living example of the lineage of Chinese Muslims in Hong Kong. The settlement of Chinese Muslims aggravated concerns over the educational needs of their descendants. The IKTMC was set up in 1970 by The Chinese Muslim Cultural and Fraternal Association. The Association itself was established in the 1920s to consolidate the increasing Muslim community by organizing classes in Islam and religious activities, and by setting up schools for the incumbents. The IKTMC, formerly known as the Islamic English School, started with the mission to “demonstrate how Islam is a complete way of life,” and “to provide and maintain a harmonious environment in which students from multicultural backgrounds can learn and work together in an enjoyable and successful way.” It also pledged to instill a sense of belonging to the school and society and to stimulate critical thinking.

In the 1970s, the Muslim population was truly a small minority in Hong Kong, with the majority originating from Indonesia (O’Connor, 2012). The IKTMC was set up partly to serve the second generation of Muslims who were born in Hong Kong. Because of the low student enrollment, however, the school was compelled to change from EMI (English Medium of Instruction) to CMI (Chinese Medium of Instruction) to attract more local Chinese students. Yet, in the 1990s, with the new influx of South Asians (especially Pakistanis) to Hong Kong, there was a steady increase of South Asian (Pakistani) students. At the same time, the school saw a gradual decrease in the Chinese student population. After the handover, yet another change occurred in the ethnic mix as more and more Mainlanders acquired the right of abode in Hong Kong, including those of Muslim descent (interview with Mr. Yu). The ethnic mix of the school has thus varied over the years. Today, besides the 60 percent of the students who are Chinese, the school has EM students of Pakistani, Filipino, Indonesian, Nepalese, Indian, Australian and Bruneian descent and origin.

The religious background of the school sets it off as not only a provider of secondary education to the Hong Kong public, but also as an institution that fosters the Islamic faith among believers. “We hold different levels of Quran classes for believers after school,” says Mr. Yu, who himself teaches in these classes, since he is particularly interested in the pursuit of Islamic knowledge. “To facilitate a better understanding of the Quran, we also organize Arabic, as well as Urdu classes.” In addition, the school assigns prayer rooms for Muslim students. “All we need

are rugs and a clear indication of which is the direction to pray (towards Mecca).” Mr. Yu stresses, “We must maintain, however, that we do not force non-believers into converting to Islam . . . Students are welcome to join our Jamats and worship, but we do not force them to attend any religious classes or activities.”

Although Mr. Yu enjoys educating others about the Islamic faith, he sees an uneasy coordination between religion and education:

In school you want the kids to focus on education as a way to pursue knowledge and actualize their life goals, but sometimes you do find yourself struggling with time management. For Muslim students, it becomes quite challenging for them to strike a balance between their religious education and formal education. For example, students take leave to observe religious festivities, or students attend prayer sessions or religious classes at the mosque every day and hence it becomes difficult for them to complete their homework. Parents, in most cases, cannot help their children to maintain a better time management. As a result, we have to resort to discussing [the problem] with their Imams, who, as the authority figure, can re-instill in them the importance of school studies in realizing their lives.

A common view often holds that the Muslim faith constrains women from actualizing their own aspirations, and subordinates their social roles to those of men. Mr. Yu is adamant towards affecting changes on that front:

Over the years I have had female students who were high achievers in their academics but due to their family traditions of early marriage, they had to quit their studies. These students could have ended up much better off by completing their education. There is a need for parental education on this aspect.

On the other hand, Mr. Yu argues against women’s oppression as central to, or associated with, Islam: “Nothing is stated in the Quran that women should not pursue their own goals and be economically independent.”

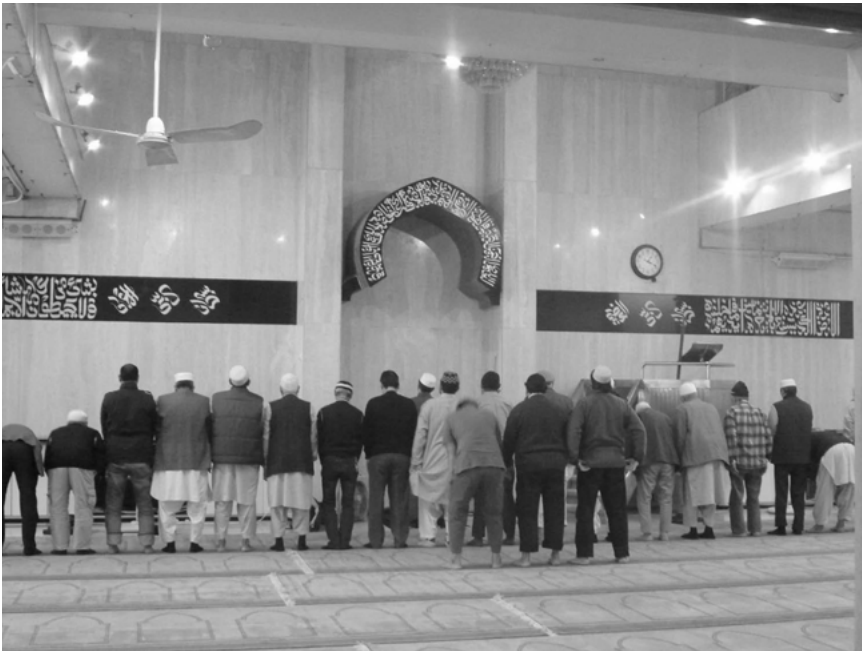
As an educational institution, the IKTMC is dedicated to nurturing South Asian students to be productive in Hong Kong society. Yet Mr. Yu feels caught at a crossroads:

We teach Muslim (and non-Muslim) students to feel proud of their own cultures, but on the other hand we want the Muslim students to learn to change some old habits and views, such as giving up trying with the excuse that they will not be accepted by the mainstream. In the end, we want to promote the idea of cultural harmony through recognizing cultural difference and hence understanding from both sides.

In this way, the school faces a potentially paradoxical mission of encouraging students to strive for recognition as Muslims in the mainstream society, while compelling them to acquiesce to the mainstream educational system. The school is also caught up with having to instill a sense of belonging in relation to the mainstream society and culture, by way of fostering a sense of cultural harmony through inter-ethnic understanding among students. Yet apart from educational institutions, such an “impossible mission,” so to speak, is also inherent in other kinds of institutions, such as religious organizations.

### *Ethnic and Religious Organizations: The Case of the Kowloon Mosque and Islamic Union of Hong Kong*

The Kowloon Mosque stands majestically in the heart of Tsim Sha Tsui. The building, as it stands now, is not the original mosque that was built in 1896. When the building of the MTR (Mass Transit Railway) caused structural damage to the original premises, the MTR corporation compensated by rebuilding the mosque on its original site in 1984. But the Kowloon Mosque continued to play a significant iconic and religious role in the Islamic community in Hong Kong, similar to the Shelley Street Mosque, which was the first in the territory.<sup>11</sup> According to the Chief Imam of the Kowloon Mosque, Mufti Muhammad Arshad, the first Indian Muslims in Hong Kong, who had joined the British Army, requested their commander to make a piece of land available for a mosque, as they were bound to pray five times a day. It soon became the center of religious, cultural and communal lives of Muslims in Hong Kong. From the teaching of the Quran to Muslims, to providing courses for those non-Muslims who want to know more about Islam, the Imam has been tasked to maintain the (Muslim) faith in Hong Kong: “For us Muslims, it is a life process to learn something more about religion, life and spirituality.” As mentioned earlier, several other mosques were built to facilitate the needs of the expanding Muslim community, including the Masjid Ammar and Osman Ramju Sadick Islamic Centre, which is located in Wan Chai. According to the Secretary of the Union, Mr. Ma Fung-wai, it has been asked to facilitate and provide support for different aspects of Muslim welfare—from medical services to burial facilities—areas long neglected by the government.<sup>12</sup> Many Indian and later Pakistani Muslims were brought in by the British but the local government did not provide any supporting facilities for them. “If you look closely there is one Muslim cemetery in Happy Valley, which also housed some older Catholic and Sikh cemeteries. Later the government had to take back some of that land to construct the Aberdeen Tunnel,” said Mr. Ma.



**Figure 2.1**

Masjid inside the Islamic Centre at Oi Kwan Road of the Islamic Union of Hong Kong. The Union was set up to respond to the daily and specific needs of the Muslims such as providing classes on the Quran, Urdu instruction, spiritual guidance and counseling to believers by the Imam and Assistant Imam.

Housed in the Islamic Centre on Oi Kwan Road in Wan Chai, the Islamic Union's roots can be traced back to 1905. The building, though only six stories high, offers many facilities to its members: a Masjid; a mosque of two levels, as well as washing areas for believers; classrooms, including a kindergarten on the ground floor; and a restaurant which provides Halal Chinese dim sum cuisine. The heart of the Union is on the sixth floor: two Council members' offices and a general office, as well as a clinic. The Islamic Union was set up to respond to the daily and specific needs of the Muslims in the territory. Like Islamic Kasim Tuet Memorial College, the Union as a Muslim organization also provides classes on Quran for its members. Besides responding to the lack of native language teaching in schools, the Union also answers to a general lack of educational services catering to Muslim children. The Union has therefore been keen on promoting the teaching of Quran to children from a very young age.

Mr. Ma, who joined the Union eight years ago, after serving in the Chinese Muslim Organization, sees the importance of Quranic teaching in helping believers to cope with problems in daily life. The recent increase in the influx of Indonesian maids in Hong Kong, for instance, also saw a surge of counseling needs concerning these maids' conflicts with their employers.

Some maids feel hurt at being ordered to remove the burqa or veil, or to cook pork. We advise them to follow their bosses' orders even under coercion, but [assure them that] Allah would understand because those are the challenges in life that strengthen one's faith.

With the rise in employment of domestic helpers of Muslim faith in Hong Kong, religious centers such as the Union provide a spiritual stronghold as well as morality guide for diasporic (female) migrant laborers, not just to resident Muslims. In addition, the Union has been tasked to teach cultural traditions and values to Muslims and to perpetuate traditional gender values through the Quran. Mr. Ma notes, "This is how we pass on our beliefs to the next generation."



Figure 2.2

Foyer of the Islamic Centre. The Masjids around the world all share similar features: the Middle Eastern style facades and the Arabic inscribed plaques.

*Business Organizations—Indian Chamber of Commerce*

Apart from accommodating external trade, the Indian Chamber of Commerce represents the interests of small enterprises such as tailor shops and restaurants that have mushroomed into the Hong Kong economy. Setting up small businesses was considered essential to the economic survival of earlier settlers. The need to be financially independent and viable also inspired them to acquire property and land besides the piece of land where their shops or businesses were located. “Acquiring and investing in properties turned out to be important for the Indians to flourish in Hong Kong,” said Mr. Raj Sital. While focusing on the protection of the interests of the business community, the Chamber of Commerce also has close links with many Indian organizations that oversee the socio-cultural (and religious) life of the Indian community. The Hindu Association and the Indian Association, for example, look after the Hindu and Sikh temples in Happy Valley and in Tsim Sha Tsui, which provide the Hindus and Sikhs with a space for worship and for communal gatherings. “In the 1990s there was an influx of Hindus, not necessarily Indians, but also Indonesians for instance (from Java and Bali),” said Mr. Sital. The Hindu temples offer food and lunch on Sundays, and hold ceremonies for the many Indian festivals, providing social, cultural and spiritual grounding for Hindus in Hong Kong (Kwok and Narain, 2004, 302). Yet other associations were tasked to organize social and cultural events to enhance the cultural and ethnic bonding among the Indian communities.

To further coordinate the needs of the Indian communities, the various Indian organizations formed an umbrella group called the Council of Hong Kong Indian Associations in 1973. Its aim is to promote better understanding among members of the Indian community, to maintain the Indian identity, and to strengthen the community’s relationship with the Hong Kong government and society (Kwok and Narain, 2004, 72). Representatives from the ICCHK and other Indian organizations would meet once every six weeks to discuss ways to resolve problems that members faced. One of the (increasingly) teething problems stemmed from the change in Chinese language requirements for employment after the handover. Mr. Sital notes:

Especially in sectors popular with Indians (and South Asians), such as civil service and the different law enforcement sectors, when it became mandatory for civil service people to read and write Chinese, it almost drew a halt to us Indians (and South Asians in general) [entering these fields]. [Our position is] unless you work in the Education Bureau, you don’t need that high [a] level of written Chinese!

The Council lobbied for the government to recognize GCSE Chinese scores as employment criteria, so that EMs can (re)gain access to government jobs. Enhancing the economic (and social) opportunities of Indians in Hong Kong has also been one of the missions of the Chamber of Commerce, as it set up education trust funds for local Indian students to continue their studies overseas, or for students in India to study in Hong Kong. With the boom of the Chinese economy, the Chamber has a stronger mediating role to play in further enhancing the bilateral trade between Hong Kong Indian traders and China, which has been soaring in the last decade. “Hong Kong plays a major role here because . . . many Chinese manufacturers require a certain amount of deposit being paid [by Indian clients] . . . also because [there are] of a lot of connections between Hong Kong (the Chamber of Commerce) and Indian traders,” said Mr. Sital. Despite the need to constantly reposition its role in the changing global environment, Mr. Sital maintained that the Chamber will always have a “local” orientation. “With more than 50 percent of our members being full ordinary members, our role is more confined . . . to represent the needs and welfare of local ethnic Indians or Hong Kong permanent residents.” Being a Hong Kong-born second generation Indian, Mr. Sital personifies the institutional identity of the Chamber, itself rooted in Hong Kong.

The history of South Asians told from an institutional perspective articulates the constant reshaping of a diasporic community in a changing socio-political environment (in Hong Kong as well as in the location of ethnic origin). Moving away from an organizational approach, the remaining part of this chapter focuses on more personal accounts of settlement in Hong Kong, through stories told by South Asians themselves.

### **Some Life Stories of Indian, Pakistani and Nepalese Families**

In recent years, a small amount of literature that adopts a life story approach to the study of EMs in Hong Kong, has begun to emerge. They offer anthropological and individual accounts of the histories and lives of representative ethnicities in Hong Kong. These oral histories provide an alternative version of the “truth” as told in official accounts. Cloaked in a more intimate narrative style, they offer a more personalized account of South Asian settlement in Hong Kong (Ku, 2004, ix). They not only unravel the extent of cultural negotiation that South Asians have undertaken but also add proof of the significance of civilian histories in our holistic understanding of the making of the territory. In the following section



we assemble four different short vignettes of EM families who have settled in Hong Kong. Neither unique nor absolutely distinctive, these brief accounts nonetheless weave together a more “colorful” picture of Hong Kong society. Our interviews with them were conducted in 2011 and 2012.

### *A Pakistani Life: Coping with Military/Regimented Life on Chinese Soil*

Ghulam Habib (aka Habib Shah) (rank and file no.: SPC3093) was recruited in 1952 directly from his hometown of Raupendi (now Islamabad). After the Partition, the British had gone directly to Pakistan in a bid to recruit the nationals, as the Sikhs and other Indians had become too expensive to hire. The British had harbored increasing distrust of Indian servicemen during the Japanese occupation. Recruitment was also fueled by the increasing disturbance at the Sino-Hong Kong border, as growing numbers of Mainland Chinese tried to flee from the Nationalist-Communist War and the later Communist rule.

Habib Shah saw from the advertisements in the Pakistani newspapers that the British wanted to hire around five hundred men from Pakistan. They had traveled around the country recruiting men. Many of Habib’s friends registered for enlistment. Without any previous relevant qualifications, Habib applied and was immediately enlisted.<sup>13</sup> He spent three months on a ship bound for Hong Kong, and many of his fellow countrymen either did not live through the journey or gave up upon arrival in Hong Kong. After six months’ training, Habib started working as a border patrol guard. At the time, his salary was HK\$150, plus \$30 sea allowance, with a 4–5 percent increase every year.

Aided by his son Tahir’s translation, Habib Shah related how the first batch was put along the border to combat illegal entry. “There were many guard posts at the border, and we were supposed to hold our rifles to check for illegal immigrants. We even had to collect the corpses in bushes. We were also dispatched to the city, at a time when crime was considered rampant in the 1950s.” Habib added, “The Chinese police were afraid to work in the city because of the crime; that’s why they put the Pakistanis in the city. You know the Pakistanis look tall and big, so the British gave people the impression that Pakistanis would kill you any time.” According to Habib, they were also called “Morochas” at that time by the locals from Shatin to Fanling, which were all patrolled by the Pakistanis. No one dared take people back to Shatin because the crime rate was so high. “The thieves were also scared of ‘Morochas.’” But law and order got out of hand when the 1967

riots broke out. “They were throwing stones at us, and planting bombs. When two Pakistani policemen died during a fight on July 7, 1967, some decided to return to Pakistan.”

Rank and file foreign policemen were given a three-month home leave after three years of service. “Every time we left for Pakistan, we packed everything in a wooden box to be shipped to Pakistan, and left everything there. We never knew if we would come back to Hong Kong or not.” After Fanling, Habib Shah was posted to Sham Shui Po, until his retirement in 1985. His salary before retirement was about HK\$6,800. Apart from his pension, he was given an apartment in a public housing estate for his family. “The government treated us well. They gave us accommodation and facilities; they even helped us send our kids to England.”



**Figure 2.3**

Habib Shah (left), his son Tahir (top), and family. Habib came to Hong Kong in 1952 from Pakistan to work as a border patrol guard to control the immigrant mainlanders fleeing to Hong Kong.

### *More Pakistani Lives: The “Fanling Boys”*

Sitting in his Tsim Sha Tsui office where he has been running his phone network and communications business for twenty years, Mr. Zahir Abdul spoke in fluent Cantonese about his childhood years growing up in the Fanling Police Quarters. “I was born in the Sheung Shui Jockey Club clinic in 1963.” His father was one of the first recruits directly from Pakistan by the British government in the 1950s. The British government, in an effort at ethnic zoning, arranged for Muslim Indians to settle in the Fanling Quarters, which were set up with facilities that catered for their religion. This included a mosque and schools that taught Urdu and observed Islam (Ho and Chu, 2012, 38). The Fanling unit’s specific mission was also to patrol the areas bordering Shenzhen, at a time when illegal entry began to soar. Pakistani recruits were also deployed in various other districts for specific



Figure 2.4

Artilleries Unit at the Fanling Quarters where Pakistanis recruited by the British government served in the 1950s. The government had arranged for Muslim Indians to settle there, aiming to make ethnic zones for them. Their main duties were patrolling the areas bordering Shenzhen to prevent illegal entry.

activities, including anti-smuggling on Hong Kong island and working with the Shandong group in the Kowloon Unit. This played a significant role in the quelling of riots in the “October 10th Riot” in 1956 and the “Lam Chuen gun fight” in 1964 (Ho and Chu, 2012, 39).<sup>14</sup>

The Fanling Quarters became the mainstay of Mr. Abdul’s childhood. A day at the quarters went as follows: From 7 to 8 a.m., he and other Muslim kids would read the Quran. After that he would be off to the Pakistani Police Primary School located within the police compound, where he would have classes in Pakistani history, religion, geography and English. He would also study Chinese but only after Primary Five. School was easy for him and he would spend the after-school hours playing with anything he and his playmates could lay hands on. Mr. Abdul told us: “There were about ninety families living together in the neighborhood. They had grouped us Pakistanis and Muslims together in this household. We did not have a lot of toys and definitely no video games like kids nowadays do, so we did not stay at home a lot. We spent a lot of time outdoors with our friends, climbing trees and



Figure 2.5

Mr. Abdul stands next to a painting about the Fanling Quarters. There was a bakery, a school, the Fanling Club, the Fanling Mosque, and a swimming pool. This illustrates the daily and social life of Mr. Abdul, his family and his friends during the old times at Fanling Quarters.

playing hide-and-seek and football on large fields.” As much as he and his mates were active, they seldom ventured outside the Fanling compound. “Sometimes my father would take us outside, but only to local stores and playgrounds. Fanling in the late 1960s was very rural (compared to now) and there wasn’t much happening in the vicinity.” His father would seldom share stories with him about his work as policeman. “My father is just like any typical old-style fathers in those days: quiet and strict with his kids.” Hence Mr. Abdul would hang around with his Fanling Quarters mates. But like many Hong Kong children during the early 1970s, Mr. Abdul and his friends would spend hours watching television too. “I can remember my favorite show was a Japanese superman cartoon . . . but definitely those martial arts TV dramas as well.” It was from the TV dramas that he and others learnt spoken Cantonese. “We would buy the photo cards of superman and Hong Kong martial arts actors.”

The secluded but closely bonded kinship with his fellow Fanling mates went through a drastic change when they entered secondary school. Since there were no secondary schools in the compound especially for Pakistani police families, he and his friends were compelled to apply to local secondary schools in the city. “We had to find our own secondary schools, and in those days few schools would admit us Pakistani children. So in the end we got accepted only at private middle-schools in the city—those that were nicknamed ‘kwaai jai hok hau’ [schools for ill-disciplined boys].”

Most of his friends had by this point entered different schools, but it was then that they discovered hockey, which brought them together and gave them their first brush with a sporting culture closer to their Pakistani roots. “We would go to the King’s Park hockey ground every Sunday to play hockey. There would be some twenty to thirty of us and we would hang out there the whole day.” As teenagers, Mr. Abdul and his friends were allowed to go out on their own, and they would travel a long way on the train from Fanling to Tsim Sha Tsui. That was the start of his “Fanling boy” years. “We would always go out together, sometimes up to forty in the group, and we would talk noisily on the train during that hour-long journey.” It was also in those days that the “Fanling boy” nickname began to circulate among the hockey community. The lives of the “Fanling boys” further drifted apart as they had to join the workforce. “A few of us went into different kinds of business. A few others went to the UK; some went to Pakistan. Only one stayed on to become a policeman, like his father.” Mr. Khan, or affectionately called “Khan Sir,” told us: “In the 1980s the Hong Kong government announced a change in the enrollment requirements for the police force, requiring a higher



Figure 2.6

The area of Fanling Police Quarters where the “Fanling boys” grew up, and where Muslim Indians were settled by the British government. The picture shows Mr. Khan or “Khan Sir”, one of the “Fanling boys,” standing at the Quarters reminiscing about the good old days.

Chinese proficiency for the new recruits.” The number of Pakistani boys who could qualify for the Chinese requirement dropped drastically, even though they were born and raised in Hong Kong.<sup>15</sup> Many of the second generation settlers from Pakistan went into business and set up their company offices close to Mr. Abdul’s in Tsim Sha Tsui, so sometimes they meet for coffee or lunch. When they meet, they most often end up reminiscing about the “Fanling days”: the teacher they made fun of at school, how their fathers would beat them up, how they would score against opposing teams during their hockey playing days, and so on.

The contact that Mr. Abdul maintained with these fellow “Fanling boys” enhanced his desire to rekindle their bonds. So, in 2005, he created *Fanlink*—a website that helps the “Fanling boys” scattered far and wide to reconnect. “We just changed the “g” to a “k” to denote our Fanling heritage.” *Fanlink* provides a history of Pakistani policemen in Hong Kong and how they came to take up residence in the Fanling Quarters after having been assigned to the duties of



border control in the 1960s. But the most important function of the website was to provide a platform where “Fanling boys” could send greetings, share news, upload photos, and generate discussions with one another. The website provided vivid evidence of Mr. Abdul’s claim that the “Fanling boys” still display a strong “sense of unity” despite years of living apart. “We always get together, every time fifty or sixty people. We live in our own world. For us it’s a great life; we really enjoyed life in Fanling/Fanlink.”

### *A Nepalese Life: The “Trans-local” Gurkha*

Mr. Durga Gurung was recruited in Pokhara in 1981 and immediately assigned to the Second Rifles; he was stationed in Shek Kong after internment. After a brief training he was deployed to Brunei for two years. “When the company moved, everyone moved,” Gurung remembered. But he returned to Hong Kong after two years to patrol the borders when the British colonial government was dealing with an influx of Mainland Chinese immigrants. “We covered the whole border of Hong Kong. We were a team of four; one could take a full day off, while another had to take twenty-four-hour guard. The other two would patrol the area for twelve hours a day.” They were stationed in Sai Kung, Fanling, Tuen Mun, and other border areas. The regiments would rotate duties, e.g. border control and manning the camp. At the camp, Gurung received training in shooting and acting as a bodyguard.

At that time, the British already realized that Hong Kong had to be handed over in 1997. Suddenly they were concerned about “IS” (internal security): how to control crowds, handle terrorists, even bombers who could attack from a passing car. We were wondering why they got us to be trained in all this, when Hong Kong seemed so safe then . . . When the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group reached agreement about the future of Hong Kong in 1986, they realized the need to decide on what to do with the Gurkhas. Luckily, there was the Falklands War.

Mr. Gurung was dispatched for six months to support the British in the Falklands. After the war, the Gurkhas were still stationed on the islands, but Gurung returned to Hong Kong in 1987 and then moved to the UK, where he served his “public duty” at the Tower of London and Buckingham Palace.

He returned to Hong Kong in 1988 again, and in 1991, he went back to Brunei after a brief break in Nepal, bringing his wife and children with him. But the uncertain prospects of the Gurkhas still haunted Mr. Gurung. “As early as 1986,

the British already knew that Hong Kong had to be returned to China, so they had decided how to deal with the 12,000 strong Gurkhas after 1997.” Not encouraged by the prospects of returning to Nepal, Mr. Gurung took the opportunity to apply for redundancy in 1995, and for residency in Hong Kong. His wife had a Hong Kong ID card because she was born in Hong Kong. Mr. Gurung’s father-in-law had also been stationed in Hong Kong as a Gurkha. But like the younger Gurung, neither was eligible for Hong Kong residency. “Even though we had lived in Hong Kong for more than seven years [altogether], we could not apply for the HKID card, because by law, we had to have lived in Hong Kong continuously for seven years, but we kept being posted elsewhere.”

To support the family, Mr. Gurung found a job as bouncer for a club in Tsim Sha Tsui. “If there are fights in the club, the security guards would be the polite ones; we were supposed to take them out and deal with them.” After a month, however, he decided to quit the job, because having been a soldier for many years, he could not cope with the “unhealthy” lifestyle of smoke and alcohol. He then worked for Motorola and various other technology companies where heavier security was required, until he was persuaded by his friends to work in a security company. The job change also advanced his salary to \$23,000 a month. By then he and his wife had saved enough money so that his wife could open a hairdressing salon in Jordan. He himself, however, never desired to own a company. “I do not have a business mind. I am never comfortable with having to trick and deceive people in business.” With the \$25,000 a month pension from the Gurkha army, he also felt secure, without needing to venture into business.

Mr. Gurung is reluctant to be resettled in the UK because he considers Hong Kong his second home. To his first home, Nepal, he contributed by rendering service to the Non-Resident Nepalese Federation. “The Association” collects donations from diasporic Nepalese all over the world to support development projects in Nepal. In cooperation with the local Nepalese community, the Federation holds seminars for local Nepalese residents to raise their civic and public awareness in the host society. Gurung also believes that the civic mindedness of the Nepalese originates from their Gurkha history of having protected the borders of this adopted home.

### *An Indian Life: Growing up in Chungking Mansions*

The Tetjnanis—Sudhir, Rakhee, and Raji—greeted us warmly in their family flat situated in a middle-class estate in Tai Po. The third generation Indian siblings marked the differences from when their grandfather first came in 1947 after the



Partition. Back then, the older Tetjnani (now deceased) was invited to come to Hong Kong by a friend who already owned a retail garment shop there. "My grandfather came alone. During those days many Indian males would come alone and work and send money back home. They lived a bachelor's life. My grandfather said they used to live together, eat together, talk together . . . spent a lot of time with each other." To save costs, they would live in the shop, so when the family came along, they started their life in Chungking Mansions. Sudhir's father came in the 1970s, working for the same shop, but he opened his own business in the late 1970s. When he became more settled with his job, he brought Sudhir (who was six) and his mother along to Hong Kong. Raji and Rakhee were both born in Hong Kong.

The fondest memories for the Tetjnanis were running around the garden. "All the Indians would stay together in Chungking Mansions. We used to call it the 'Sindhi garden.' Now most Indians want to move further away from Tsim Sha Tsui to estates that have club houses . . . but now huge parks are not there, so people resort to having clubhouses near where they live." The siblings harbored fond memories of the Chinese shops in Chungking Mansions. Raji said, "You remember there used to be a Chinese lady running a medicine shop who used to help out with our Chinese homework!" Sudhir replied, "There is this Chinese shop which sells Hindi VCDs, the shop owner got quite close to Indians and knows Hindi." Things started getting complicated when the guesthouses started mushrooming in Chungking Mansions. "There were all these Pakistanis . . . they used to ring our bells at night, and my mother had to take care of three kids while father and grandfather were away on trips. So we had to move out." It took them a long time to get used to the ambience in their new neighborhood of Whampoa. Like other South Asian students, the kids went through an array of schools: "Western Pacific Kindergarten, then I went to Wellington [School], Mansfield [School], and ended up in Delia Memorial School." In the school, "we kept on being bullied but we bullied them back." Rakhee said, "English was not very popular. We were not mingling with Chinese students at all. The assemblies were all held in Chinese . . . very segregated." Raji added, "We could not take up science subjects because they were all taught in Chinese. Nobody actually took A-Level because we just did not have enough Chinese." Raji got a job when he was fifteen, working as a clerk in a firm dealing with watches. Raji told us, "In those days getting a job was easy because Hong Kong was having a lot of business with China and Korea."

The Tetjnani siblings all noted the changing attitude of the local Chinese. "In those days, the Chinese people we met used to be friendly; nowadays, like

whenever I go on the bus or enter an office, the Chinese people there open the windows.” Rakhee, on the other hand, felt more socially constrained being a woman than did her sibling. “It’s better for Sudhir, as a boy, to socialize with others; for me, I was more confined to the household and I did not have too much chance to go out and explore, not to mention to mix with the locals.” For Raji, however, her experience with local Chinese differed from that of her sister. “I have always been in different social groups, mainly because I went to the university and am working with Chinese and Western colleagues. I always had a group of Chinese friends with me.” She was, however, conscious of the cultural hierarchy between the Chinese and Indian communities.

From early on I had it hammered into my head that we are different. The Chinese students always made decisions for us: where to go for picnics . . . all the discussion was of course conducted in Chinese so we wouldn’t understand a word. But a teacher always supported us and encouraged us to insist



**Figure 2.7**

The Tetnjani family. They settled in Hong Kong when their grandfather came in 1947. They have experienced changing attitudes from the Chinese and have a different perspective on integrating into the local community.

on where *we* wanted to go. So we stood up and said, “No, we want to go to Ocean Park.” But the Chinese students overruled us because they were in the majority. So in the end we decided not to go, and the school had to endorse the fact that two classes would not join the picnic.

Rakhee agreed that sometimes some people’s bad attitudes could be likened to discrimination, but thinks that the situation has been alleviated over time. “Chinese attitudes towards us have softened. Hong Kong is becoming more and more cosmopolitan and people come from more diverse backgrounds.” Sudhir thought this attitude change reflected the improved socio-economic situation of Indians in Hong Kong: “Many Indians have made a lot of money. The younger Chinese generation is more open, children are studying together, so I would think they will be more receptive of ethnic mixing.”

## Conclusion

This chapter does not claim to have filled all the gaps left uncharted in previous historical works; rather, it has drawn from them. Nor is it a comprehensive and exhaustive historical account of the lives of South Asians in Hong Kong. It hopes, however, to have added to the mosaic of the histories of South Asian settlement in Hong Kong, by articulating the role of various institutions, as well as individual histories, in reshaping the lives of South Asians in Hong Kong.

At the outset, the institutional and oral histories elucidated above could constitute to the notion of “cultural histories.” Jacob Burckhardt, one of the primary proponents of “cultural history,” defines it as:

Cultural history . . . possesses a primary degree of certainty; it consists for the most part of material conveyed in an unintentional, disinterested or even involuntary way by sources and monuments; they betray their secrets unconsciously . . . [T]his kind of history aims at the inner core of bygone humanity, and at describing what manner of people these were, what they wished for, thought, perceived and were capable of. (cited in Green, 2008, 14)

The Marxist critique of “history” has challenged the “cultural hegemony” that represents the interests of ruling and dominant classes. The idea of history as “cultural” comes from a critical approach that acknowledges the growing importance of “culture” in the rethinking of ways to record human activities. Asserting “culture” as “whole way of life,” Raymond Williams insists that culture (and history) needs to be reconstructed from bottom-up, i.e. documenting the ordinary

as authentically historical. This notion of rethinking history has been criticized as “culturalist,” or placing undue emphasis on experiences and ideas rather than on hard economic, social and political realities. It became clear that in the classic intellectual wars between “culturalism” and “economism” (see Burke, 2009, 24), the word “culture” is, after all, subversive, adhering to the Gramscian notion of “hegemony” that states that the ruling class extends its power through a “lived process” that also includes acceptance by the “subordinate class”. The “culturalist” school has gained momentum with the rise of feminism and cultural studies, both of which stress a “new historicism” which articulates a lateral as well as vertical centrifuge of “History” into “social histories,” “cultural histories” (later “new cultural history”), “post-colonial histories,” and other histories that have previously been made invisible or marginalized. In terms of methods, the writing of a cultural history often combines the approaches of anthropology and history to look at popular cultural traditions and cultural interpretations of historical experience. The use of “memory” or “remembering,” which denotes “the expression and representation of the remembered past by living individuals and collectivities,” has been emphasized as “central to our sense of self as human beings” (Green, 2008, 83). Passerini, an oral historian, is especially noted for her insistence on memories as a form of agency to uncover the “subaltern” in society, with specific goals of advocacy and empowerment (see Green, 2008, 91).

As such, cultural histories are especially relevant, if not pivotal, in divulging the genealogies of South Asians in Hong Kong in a number of ways. They remedy the (lack of) history on South Asians with non-institutional records. They play an integral part in providing accounts of migratory diasporic lives. They serve to subvert the minoritized position of South Asian minorities by “visibilizing” their role in contributing to a comprehensive understanding of Hong Kong. The tapping of the socio-cultural lives of South Asians across generations not only reveals inherent problems in Hong Kong as seen from their eyes, but it also celebrates the “cultural” making of Hong Kong from a bottom-up approach.

The institutional and personal oral histories included in this chapter expose how different institutions have been fighting for the status of South Asians, and negotiating over the unfair distribution of resources as a result of the general negligence of EMs by the Hong Kong government. The institutional histories reveal the dynamics and challenges of organizations of and for EMs in Hong Kong: how they perform multifaceted and often paradoxical roles as gatekeepers to the ethnic and religious identities of South Asians, and as enforcers of cultural identity. On the other hand, the oral histories of the families reveal how diasporic minority

communities struggled to assert their unique ethnic, cultural and religious identities, as they negotiated with assimilationist government policies in a culturally homogenous Hong Kong. More importantly, they epitomize the cultural creativity and integrity of communities amongst us in their efforts to contest, manage and sustain a hybrid and trans-local belonging in a changing political and economic context. These histories “talk back” at the mainstream as they reveal the contributions of minority groups in the making of Hong Kong, something that the powers-to-be gloss over. The fact that these stories have been told by the younger generations (rather than the first settlers) was not an intended aspect of our project. Throughout the research process, the urgency of capturing the stories of earlier generations of South Asian settlers, who had a special contribution to the making of Hong Kong, became apparent. Efforts are still underway to trace earlier immigrants who are still alive and residing in Hong Kong. The upside of some of these stories being retold by their descendants, arguably, is that they can demonstrate how life has been negotiated across generations. By relating these life histories, this chapter hopes to reveal their diversity, not just across ethnicities (laterally), but also across generations (vertically). As they are told by the younger generations, these histories are narrativized as “histories in the making” as they merge with the present.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think there is a lack of official and historical literature on South Asians in Hong Kong? Why is it important to understand the lives of South Asians in Hong Kong?
2. What differences do you see in the histories of South Asians as found in government records, institutional accounts, and personal interviews? Based on these differences, how do you define the term “cultural history”?
3. In the Chapter, a number of cultural historians have been quoted, such as Raymond Williams, Jacob Burckhardt, and Luisa Passerini. In what sense do these quotations strengthen the authors’ argument that cultural histories are relevant in the genealogy of South Asians in Hong Kong and important to “visibilize” South Asians’ roles in our understanding of Hong Kong?
4. Some question the reliability of the oral history approach in which unofficial accounts may be “overly subjective, over-determined, tentative, or even distorted.” Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

5. To what extent do the institutional histories told in this chapter fit Kwai-cheung Lo's concern in his book, *Colors of Hong Kong*, that the local Chinese "maintain a rare and deeply psychological neglect of racial minorities in their society"?
6. The Tetjani siblings mention the changing attitudes of the local Chinese towards EMs. In what ways do you think this attitude change is related to the changing social position of Hong Kong Chinese after the 1997 handover?
7. Is there any difference between your own knowledge of the histories of South Asians in Hong Kong and the histories told here by them? How would you characterize the similarities and/or differences between these two types of life histories?

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## Notes

1. The Parsees, Punjabis and Sindhis were some of the Indian ethnicities who came to Hong Kong as traders. See White (1994, 72).
2. Sikh soldiers defended the New Territories against the Japanese during the Second World War. While many lost their lives fighting for the British, some later collaborated with the Japanese, hoping they would assist the Indians in the struggle for independence (against the British) (Pluss, 2004, 164). Many Indian soldiers did return to India after the Indian independence in 1947, while the remaining members were recruited to assist civilian causes after the War.
3. See "Nepalis in Hong Kong", available on Wikipedia, accessed on May 14, 2013. The first Gurkhas [26th Gurkha Brigade (1948–1950)] moved into the Shek Kong Barracks in Yuen Long; while the first Gurkhas were believed to have moved into the Gun Club Hill Barracks [in Jordan] around the 1960s. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gun\\_Club\\_Hill\\_Barracks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gun_Club_Hill_Barracks); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalis\\_in\\_Hong\\_Kong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalis_in_Hong_Kong))

4. Hong Kong Blue Book, 1855, 1885, and 1915. Figures show the lowest pay within the rank (cited in Ho and Chu, 2012, 46).
5. Hong Kong Government (1928). "Report of the Captain Superintendent of Police" in Appendix K, Hong Kong Administrative Report 193=27, *Annual Report on Hong Kong Police Force 1946/47* (Hong Kong: Government Printer); C. Jones and J. Vagg (2007). *Criminal Justice in Hong Kong* (London: Routledge-Cavendish). Cited in Ho and Chu, 2012, 12.
6. The Harilelas are affectionately known from the forty-bedroom mansion they own in the heart of Kowloon Tong, which houses the entire family. [http://www.dharilela.com/family/family\\_main.html](http://www.dharilela.com/family/family_main.html), accessed on July 13, 2013
7. To date, it is still unclear in what year Chungking Mansions was built. In his book, anthropologist Gordon Mathews mentions some reasons why it gained its reputation for seediness: i) it became a hangout for Western hippies and backpackers in the 1970s as hostels and guesthouses mushroomed in the building; ii) it was somehow linked with the Kowloon Walled City by the police as "Hong Kong's others." See Mathews (2011, 14–19) for a history of the Mansions.
8. A "local boy" wrote, "The Muslim seamen held their first Jamat (gathering) in an open street at Lower Lascar Row, and continued to do so for a time. In those areas the non-Muslims never dared to pass through that street after marketing for fear of hurting the Muslims' feelings when they held pork and walked along while the Muslims were having their salat (prayers)" (Weiss, 1991, 81).
9. Crisswell and Watson (1990) depict the situation as follows: "A lack of (archival) material makes it difficult to describe the life of the Chinese and Indian members of the force in the first decades of the colony's existence . . . [but] The Indians found themselves even more isolated than the Europeans. Some of them patronized drinking dens and brothels but none of them intermarried with local Chinese in the way that some Europeans managed to do" (78).
10. Dr. Yu's surname is actually not "Yu." His ancestors were Uighurs in northwestern China. After they moved south, they sinicized their surname from "Yusuf" to "Yu." In fact, surnames like "Ha" or "La" are all derivatives from Uighur surnames.
11. The architecture of these mosques is rich with South Asian Islamic themes, and is reminiscent of Islamic geometric architecture from different regions. The Kowloon Mosque, for example, is modeled after Mughal forms with cool marble floors, grills and slabs to withstand the heat and humidity. The Stanley Mosque, built within the prison complex, is reminiscent of a village mosque in Punjab.
12. Interview with Mr. Ma Fung-wai, June 12, 2010.
13. The British had left for their vacation once the number exceeded 500. When they returned, they were shocked that the registered number had dropped drastically because many Pakistanis thought they had cancelled the project. In desperation, the British started grabbing people on the streets to try to refill the quota. In the end, the British sent half of the candidates by plane and half by air. (Interview with Habib Shah, May 7, 2012)



14. It has to be noted that in the 1950s the British government recruited for the police force from several other ethnicities. Besides Indians and Pakistanis, there were policemen from Shandong in northern China and from Russia. There were of course also policemen from England and other European countries. An “ethnic differentiation” practice was evident in those days: whereas the European policemen could go as high as Superintendent, South Asians could only be promoted to Sergeant; the same was true for their Chinese counterparts (see Ho and Chu, 2012, 44–47).
15. In the 1980s, candidates were required to hold an OL [O Level] in Chinese language.

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