

Meeting Place

Encounters across Cultures in Hong Kong, 1841–1984

Edited by

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Cover image: Children of Class Ten (First Grade) of Maryknoll Convent School playing during their physical training period, 1938. Courtesy of Maryknoll Mission Archives.

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Contents

Acknowledgments	vi
Note on Romanization	viii
Introduction	ix
<i>Elizabeth Sinn</i>	
1. Wang Tao in Hong Kong and the Chinese “Other”	1
<i>Elizabeth Sinn</i>	
2. From Dried Seafood to Instant Ramen: “Japanese” Industrial Food and Hong Kong Foodways	23
<i>Yoshiko Nakano</i>	
3. The Code of Silence across the Hong Kong Eurasian Community(ies)	41
<i>Vicky Lee</i>	
4. The Making of Accomplished Women: English Education for Girls in Colonial Hong Kong, 1890s–1940s	64
<i>Patricia P. K. Chiu</i>	
5. “No Day without a Deed to Crown It”: Childhood, Empire, and the Ministering Children’s League	87
<i>David M. Pomfret</i>	
6. Western Firms and Their Chinese Compradors: The Case of the Jebsen and Chau Families	106
<i>Bert Becker</i>	
7. The Parallel Worlds of Seafarers: Connections and Disconnections on the Hong Kong Waterfront (1841–1970)	131
<i>Stephen Davies</i>	
8. Carvalho Yeo and the 1928 Hong Kong Treasury Swindle	153
<i>Christopher Munn</i>	
Bibliography	175
List of Contributors	187
Index	189

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Introduction

Elizabeth Sinn

For over one and a half centuries Hong Kong has been a space of flow for people, goods, information, capital, objects, political ideas, social customs, religious beliefs, and much else, all shaping its evolution as a world city, long term and short term. Too often, however, this dynamic process has been simply described as “East-meets-West”—an expression which is as hackneyed as it is inaccurate, and which has prevented us from appreciating Hong Kong society as the multiethnic, multicultural, and globally situated place that it really was and still is. In rethinking the history of Hong Kong, how should we consider the plethora of elements at play? What were the sources of influence and how and at what levels and to what depth did they interact, and with what consequences? Who were the players in the long process of place-making, encountering, diffusing, engineering, adopting, resisting, and reconfiguring these components? How can we demonstrate the historically significant roles that individuals, families, groups, and institutions have played in creating diversity and in constantly shaping and reshaping Hong Kong?

Rather than make general statements about the “cosmopolitan” nature of Hong Kong, this volume explores on a more micro level some of the points of encounter—of people encountering people, and people encountering things—in business, consumption, social interaction, employment, and education. It examines disconnections as well as connections.

Interactions and cross-fertilizations of diverse cultural elements are of course not unique to Hong Kong. Cities, almost by definition, imply a coming together of different elements, as people bringing different individual experiences and different collective memories come face-to-face. Yet, every city, each occupying a different historical time and space, experiences these encounters differently. The variations are infinite.

Hong Kong, a free port situated on China’s doorstep and open to the ships and trade of all nations, was from the outset an extremely porous society. The flow of people and things—abstract as well as concrete—became more dense, more multi-directional, and more multiscalar with the expansion of trade, migration, and military and imperial activities. From the early 1840s men came to build and sustain

a governmental infrastructure that included the executive, legislative, and judicial branches; a civil service took care of revenue, public works, the postal service, medicine, law and order, and other basic aspects of administration. The sea and harbor necessitated the creation of the harbour master's office, which, among other duties, was in charge of regulating seamen of widely varying ethnic backgrounds. A large garrison was stationed to defend the new colony while the navy protected British trade in the surrounding waters. Lawyers, physicians, auctioneers, appraisers, chefs, pastry cooks—even piano tuners—and other professionals found their way to Hong Kong to cater to the growing population's various needs. A lively press developed as newspapers gathered and distributed commercial intelligence and society gossip and reprinted items from the newspapers brought by ships from all corners of the earth, making the open port a vibrant information hub. The English press prepared fertile ground for Hong Kong to evolve into a pioneering site for the first Chinese-language newspapers in China.

Trade took off after slow growth in the first few years. However, the presence of a number of large merchant houses such as Jardine, Matheson & Co., and Dent & Co. had a ripple effect that enabled others—including Europeans and Americans, Indians and Chinese—to draw on global financing and distribution to develop their businesses. These houses and later banks were intermediaries of capital that magnified Hong Kong's potential trading capacities. Commodities of the original Canton trade such as opium, silver, silk, and teas remained staples, but with the rapid expansion of the *nanbei* (south-north) trade and the Gold Mountain trade¹ in the 1850s, the variety of goods, the volume of trade, and the direction of trade movements grew quickly too. Rice, medicines, flour, quicksilver, prepared opium, refined sugar, and many other commodities became hot items being shipped and transhipped in its harbor. There was no embarrassment in declaring that Hong Kong was founded to make money as Chinese and foreign merchants—doing business with each other and among themselves—made (and lost) fortunes. The government could not ignore the interests and wishes of merchants, and for the Chinese, this was of particular significance. Here, in the absence of a scholar-gentry class, Chinese merchants were, for the first time in history, able to occupy the top rank in society as merchants. Mercantile wealth produced social and political power and a fundamental reordering of society that gave Hong Kong a special place in modern Chinese history.

Merchants and traders brought old forms of social organization with them. Europeans established chambers of commerce and Chinese formed native-place associations, guilds, and temple committees. They created new ones, too. The Tung

1. The south-north trade referred to the coastal trade between the north (North China and Japan) and the south (South China and Southeast Asia). The Gold Mountain trade was trade with California and other countries such as Australia and Canada where large amounts of gold were discovered and became magnets for Chinese migrants. By the 1850s, Hong Kong had become the major shipping hub for these two major trades, which greatly increased the volume and value of trade that flowed through it.

Wah Hospital, founded as a medical institution offering free Chinese medicine to the Chinese—partly in rejection of Western medicine—was formed by wealthy guilds, with moral support from the Chinese working classes who were the main beneficiaries. The Tung Wah, the first modern hospital to be organized by Chinese, became a model for similar institutions around the world. As a successful charitable institution, it was a manifestation of what Chinese merchants could do without the support or interference of either Chinese officials or Chinese scholars—although in Hong Kong, Chinese political influence was never far away.

With people of all colors and all nationalities arriving, the population became more diverse. Even those coming from China originated from different regions—indeed different parts of the Pearl River Delta—all bringing with them their own dialects and accents. They ate or craved different foods and cuisines and enjoyed a variety of music and art. Wandering along different streets, one would be presented with an unfamiliar mixture of sights, sounds, and smells. In addition to merchants big and small, there were soldiers and sailors and seamen of all flags and ranks. The main population was of course Chinese, who—besides merchants and compradors—included shopkeepers, bakers, butchers, chandlers, market operators, clerks, compositors for the presses, domestic servants, laborers, artisans and artists, and prostitutes. Hong Kong was also a haven for fugitives from the law and for refugees from war-torn, disaster-struck regions. Most of the men came singly without their families: for long periods, men in Hong Kong outnumbered women many times over. Brothels, on land and water, did a thriving business. Somehow, there were always enough women to serve the sexual needs of male residents and transients, one early consequence of which was the birth of children of mixed descent and the emergence of many Eurasian families, often headed by a Chinese matriarch.

And there were the missionaries from different parts of Europe and later America. In the process of spreading the gospel, they started schools, hospitals, and orphanages to serve their converts and to attract new ones. A number of their schools offered quality education, and parents sent their boys and girls eagerly for secular reasons, in spite of their religious affiliations. Their students, often educated in English and imbued with new information and values, became drivers of social and political change. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that all the schools were the same—cookie cutters that produced stereotypical students.

Despite the social and political segregation that often prevailed in colonies, Hong Kong was a place for meeting a wide array of the unfamiliar—hostile, terrifying, tantalizing, and delightful as the case might be. Every day and at every level of society, opportunities existed for meeting people who looked different, spoke funny languages and dialects, ate unthinkable food, worshipped strange gods, and harbored weird ideas of what was right and wrong, good and bad. Some encounters produced fear and anger, frustration and pain; others produced desires and pleasures and deep satisfaction. Sometimes the extraordinary ended up as ordinary, and the exotic as everyday. At other times, instead of resulting in syncretism, different

cultural ingredients simply ran parallel to each other, or went in opposing directions. In encountering the unfamiliar, there were people who adapted by assimilating; others adapted by switching codes, yet others by resistance and subversion, or by simply choosing not to see. Some elements could slip by each other, hardly touching, while others interpenetrated. The possible scenarios were endless and unpredictable. The one certainty was diversity and the constant reconfiguration of elements. There was never enough time for one mold to set.

This volume aims to show Hong Kong as the meeting place of many worlds from the 1860s to the 1980s. It starts with a chapter on Wang Tao, a member of the Chinese literati of Jiangnan, who arrived in Hong Kong in 1862 and found it a baffling place. He was mystified not only by the foreigners who inhabited it but also by the southern Chinese, who were—in his view—uncivilized, unable to speak his dialect, and possessing weird tastes in food. In Hong Kong, merchants who would have belonged to an inferior class in China flaunted their economic and social status with little restraint. Through the charitable work they funded and organized, they were able to claim political influence with the colonial government and to earn respect from officials in China and among Chinese overseas. Some of them, educated by missionaries, spoke fluent English and were able to do business with it and explore new technologies. They seized the opportunity to engage in different businesses including operating newspapers—a mode of communication that was new to the Chinese world. During his over twenty years of residence there, Wang Tao familiarized himself with Hong Kong and made history by founding the *Xunhuan ribao* in 1874—the first Chinese-language newspaper to be owned by Chinese. Eventually he came to terms with—even appreciated—the different versions of Chineseness that had at first bewildered and distressed him, and to some extent, molded new versions of Chineseness out of this jumbled assortment of Chinese identities.

Food is a constant theme in Wang Tao's writings, and his feelings toward Hong Kong as a place are discernible from his description of food. A century later, food remains a fundamental element in the city's place-making. Yoshiko Nakano's chapter on Japanese food shows how imported foods become integrated into Hong Kong life and assumed a central role. She shows that the foodways of a place do not happen by chance, but are discovered and molded, often through the careful work of cultural intermediaries. Equally significantly, she reminds us of the important role Japan plays in Hong Kong's place-making. The territory now imports more Japanese food items than does any other country or region in the world—having in 2007 surpassed the United States, with a population forty times greater than that of the territory—to become the biggest international market for Japanese produce. And yet, in spite of their tremendous influence, firsthand accounts from the pioneers who introduced Japanese food products into Hong Kong are scarce. In her chapter, she uses *Demae Iccho* instant noodles as an example of “Japanese” food products that made a real impact on the lives of Hong Kong people, and shows how a transnational Chinese merchant family in the port of Kobe contributed to

the process of its diffusion from 1969 onwards. Nakano further argues that Chinese transnational networks of dried seafood were an indispensable basis for *Demae Iccho*'s early distribution in Asia.

The story of the cross-cultural encounters in and around a bowl of instant noodles serves as a microcosm of the larger processes that take place, of the strange and alien becoming common and everyday—"local." Despite its seeming permanence, "local" is a shifting concept. This is particularly true when we speak of the "local population," for at any time that population consisted of different components, with migration and intermarriage being two major factors contributing to the dynamic situation. The port of Hong Kong opened its doors to opportunity seekers of all sorts—empire builders, merchants and traders, professionals, missionaries, seamen, pirates, petty thieves, and more—from Europe, the Americas, India, and other parts of the world, mostly single males planning only on staying short term. The cross-racial sexual encounters between some of them and Asian (mostly Chinese in our case) women produced mixed-heritage children, often called "Eurasian,"² at different social levels. Unlike other ethnic/cultural groups, such as the Parsee and the Portuguese, who shared a common religion or had other common cultural practices to foster a strong group identity, the sense of community cohesion among Eurasians up to the mid-twentieth century was somewhat nebulous and sporadic. Ironically, perhaps one common practice that members of this community seem to share was the conscious attempt to de-emphasize their membership in this ethnic group, a reflection of their reluctance to acknowledge their ethnic heritage both on an individual and collective level—"the code of silence," as Vicky Lee calls it. In Chapter 3, Lee deals with the dynamics of this group (from the 1860s to the 1960s) in terms of the members' perception of themselves and their attitudes toward their own European/Chinese heritage. In addition, she looks at the mutual perceptions and interactions with other ethnic groups, as each pondered the strangeness of the other. As people encountered people, the gaze was hardly one-sided. It was bilateral—even multilateral.

The bedroom, indisputably, is a major site for myriad encounters; so too is the classroom. Most works on the history of education in Hong Kong have focused on education policy or curricula, which is of course understandable, but other areas of the school experience are equally worth exploring, as Patricia P. K. Chiu shows us in Chapter 4. In various ways, the school represented a new frontier to the girl students, and the cultural exchanges that took place were multidimensional. Apart from contact with new knowledge through book learning about subjects such as geography, science, mathematics, and English, which was indeed a whole new language for Chinese girls attending English schools, girls gained access to other unfamiliar activities like choral singing and playing musical instruments, doing sports

2. Although the term "Eurasian" might strictly speaking denote mixed European and Asian parentage, it is used quite loosely. For instance, one well-known family in Hong Kong who had descended from Indian and Chinese parents is also referred to as Eurasians.

and girl guiding. They discovered new institutions such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and Ministering Children's League (MCL), each with its own ideals and practices as well as political, cultural, and social implications. As importantly, in some schools, girls encountered and mingled with others from very different ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds. When one English girl describes meeting other girls in school—Eurasians, Chinese, Portuguese—as an education in itself, she in fact expresses in a nutshell the vital significance of such a socializing experience, an aspect of schooling that deserves deeper study.

The diversity of experience for the girls partly arose from the wide range of schools in Hong Kong, especially since the early twentieth century: some were private, others were run by the government or received government grants; some were secular, others religious; among the religious, some were Catholic, others Protestant. The differentiation actually ran even deeper. Among the Catholic schools were the more conservative ones run by Italian and French nuns; the American Maryknoll sisters, who were latecomers and had many well-educated women among them, were more liberal in outlook. Even among the Anglican schools the differences were marked. St. Stephen's Girls' College, founded by the Church Missionary Society, had as its aim "to conserve and stimulate all that is noblest and best in the character of Chinese young ladies, and at the same time to provide for an excellent modern education under the direction of experienced English teachers." While receiving an English education, the girls were expected to maintain a strong Chinese identity and not become Anglicized colonial subjects. In contrast, the Diocesan Girls' School, established by the Diocese and founded originally for European and Eurasian girls, aimed at giving a liberal education according to the doctrines of the Church of England and inculcating in the girls the quality of industry, independence, a sense of vocation, and a British identity, a mission which continued even though it later accepted many Chinese girls.

There were commonalities and differences in the way the various girls' schools prepared their students to be trailblazers in a range of professions, higher education, and public service. These first-generation "accomplished women" contributed to the redefining of women's space in prewar Hong Kong. The turbulent years of the 1930s and 1940s also provided unprecedented opportunities for the women to exercise their language skills and experience in networking and organization of charity and relief work. Chiu argues that for those women who excelled in public service, it was not only the academic training but the all-round education in a multicultural setting that equipped them with discipline and determination, social skills and networks, and a vision to build international liaisons in their service for the common good.

In permeable Hong Kong it was inevitable that the lives of girls and boys were touched by developments in other parts of the world. Among the institutions that showed them a wider world and turned them into public-spirited individuals was the Ministering Children's League. Moreover, Hong Kong being a British colony, it would be no surprise that many influences came from the imperial metropolis.

David Pomfret's is the only chapter that deals frontally with British influence. The story of the MCL in Hong Kong, full of ironies, defies a clear-cut narrative of imperial influence or of East-meets-West and illustrates the unpredictability of such encounters.

The league was founded in Britain in 1885 by Lady Meath with the express intention of cultivating among the children of the rich an earnest desire to help those who suffered and to encourage them to feel empathy with the poor. It was created to redress specific social issues in Britain, yet it spread to different imperial outposts and permeated local societies. As more and more non-British people became involved, its original aims were inevitably modified, which led to unintended consequences. David Pomfret, examining the league's work in Hong Kong, argues that "Empire" was not a straightforward story of social division and ethnic segmentation, and that this picture of neat divisions and separate "worlds" in fact could not be easily found. The decision by Flora Shaw—the wife of Governor Lugard and a progressive activist in her own right—to change the earlier exclusionary policy to include Chinese girls as members broke down race-bound relations between "benevolents" and "beneficiaries." Subsequent activities such as the MCL Bazaars in Government House provided opportunities for adults and children of different ethnic backgrounds to work together and mingle socially. In the process, the formal lines dividing organizers and participants, European and Chinese, blurred. Certainly, barriers were many in a colonial society, but they were not everywhere as hard and fast, and mixing at different levels colored the multicultural landscape of Hong Kong. Shaw's decision to include Chinese members was partly made to realize the moral mission to save Chinese girls from depravity, but it was also a strategic move: a more integrative approach toward the Chinese elites could be a subtle way of improving governance. This inclusive impulse was paralleled by a growing willingness of educated Chinese at this juncture of China's national development to let their children, particularly daughters, have access to new ideas and engage in untried activities. Thus, under the aegis of empire-sponsored philanthropy, children in Hong Kong along with those in other parts of the empire assumed the spirit of public service while learning to see themselves as part of a multicultural, international fellowship of childhood.

Childhood in Hong Kong could be colorful with cross-cultural encounters taking place every day, often hidden from plain sight. Boys—English, Indian, Portuguese, Eurasian, and Chinese—played cricket and football on the same or opposing teams; together, they sang the *Te Deum* in Latin in school or church choirs. Non-Chinese girls got a taste of Chinese home cooking by sharing their lunches in school with Chinese classmates. Childhood could also be gray, as Eurasian children agonized over their patrimony and shied away from the often unfriendly gaze of others. Moreover, Pomfret's chapter makes a strong case for transnational history by revealing how histories of childhood and age relations intersected with movements across national and colonial boundaries.

Childhood was but one of a huge range of such sites; the business world was equally important. For most of its history Hong Kong served as a multicultural meeting point where merchants of different nationalities interacted in various ways. Given that the predominant position of business in Hong Kong history is well acknowledged, it is bewildering how little empirical research has been done on it. In addition, a particularly conspicuous omission is the relationships among different groups of business people when Hong Kong is so well known as an international business hub. These gaps are filled by Bert Becker's chapter on the remarkable multilevel and surprisingly intimate relations between a German family firm and a Chinese family firm.

In the late nineteenth century, Chau Kwang Cheong was the owner of the trading firms Yuen Cheong Lee & Co. in Hong Kong and Yuen Fat Lee in Hoihow (Haikou) and Pakhoi (Beihai). His firms were engaged in regularly shipping live-stock, vegetables, and various other products between these ports, chartering medium-sized freight steamers of the M. (Michael) Jebsen Shipping Company from Germany for this purpose. After the shipowner's son, Jacob Jebsen, and his partner Heinrich Jessen established their own firm in Hong Kong in 1895, acting as agency for the entire Jebsen steamer fleet, the son of Chau Kwang Cheong, Chau Yue Ting, was hired as comprador for Jebsen & Co., Hong Kong. As comprador Y. T. Chau was influential in introducing other Chinese merchants to Jebsen & Co., and also became important in opening up new markets for the German firm, which developed into a major import and export house before the First World War. Y. T. Chau continued to serve as comprador for Jebsen & Co. until the outbreak of the war and was highly praised by the owners for his reliable and trustworthy character.

In the study of foreign business in China, the role of the comprador as a bicultural middleman has been highlighted, though there are very few detailed studies of their activities. Yet, besides being compradors, the Jebsen-Chau associations demonstrate that Chinese individuals also engaged in business with foreigners in many other different capacities—as clients, customers, co-owners of businesses, employees and employers, creditors and debtors—and these have been almost completely overlooked. Becker's account of the close and complex business relationships between the Jebsens and the Chaus provides rare insights into Hong Kong's business development as well as social and cultural configurations across ethnic and national boundaries. It is particularly fascinating that Michael Jebsen and K. C. Chau never met and their relationship relied on correspondence across half the world, in English, a language that was the mother tongue of neither.

The chapter also serves to challenge the popular view that foreign steamship companies in Asia were “tools of Empire” or “spearheads” of Western penetration into Chinese markets during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, it argues that Chinese merchants were also a driving force, as merchant steamships were strategically employed tools of Chinese business circles to expand and consolidate their networks between ports in East Asia. From this perspective,

Western steamship companies were sometimes only acting as important service providers which contributed to the economic development of China and the neighboring region. The common purpose of making money among businessmen of different nationalities was easily understood in any language, but it did not preclude trust and friendship. The story of the business relationships and, indeed, friendships between the Jebsens and the Chaus is both amazing and touching. That the Chau family had placed Michael Jebsen's photograph in their family ancestral hall on Hainan Island illustrates that trust and respect were possible across ethnic and cultural divides; such acts of course did not often occur, but they do show how interethnic friendships could overcome barriers and endure in time.

In addition, the Jebsen-Chau story reminds us of the primary importance of shipping in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, we lack systematic studies of the social, political, economic, and cultural significance of this pillar of development. In particular, we know very little about the men who worked on the ships. While in histories of modern China, the political activities of Hong Kong's Chinese seamen in the 1920s have often been promoted as the vanguard of the Chinese labor movement and of anti-imperialism, their social and cultural lives remain an enigma. The same is equally true of the tens of thousands of non-Chinese seamen who worked on the ships calling at Hong Kong, particularly before the 1960s.

The seafarers' world in Hong Kong was multiethnic and polyglot, as Stephen Davies's chapter shows. In the godowns, the shipping offices, and the ticketing agencies for passengers, in the port office, the dockyards, and the chandleries, a medley of voices did business in a multiplicity of Chinese languages and dialects, in English, Farsi, Gujarati, China coast pidgin, German, French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and any number of other languages. The goods they handled, shipped in from all over the world, represented as many ways of seeing and being, eating and dressing, living and dying.

While the waterfront is generally the interface of interfaces, there were disconnections as well as connections during much of Hong Kong's history. Even as seamen of different ethnic backgrounds rubbed shoulders walking along gangplanks, shuffling along narrow lanes or waiting on the praya for a sampan to ferry them from shore to ship, clear boundaries existed. Davies's chapter describes how the colonial government set them apart by issuing different sets of regulations for Seamen's Boarding Houses, which provided accommodation and access to employment for the men: one set for boarding houses for lascars (Indians, Malays, and others from South and Southeast Asia), one for boarding houses for Chinese seamen, and another set for Westerners. Deepening the divides was the strong native-place- and dialect-basis principle in which the Chinese boarding houses were organized, which indicates a certain degree of segregation among the Chinese themselves. We see the separateness in pastoral work: the church-organized Missions to Seamen in reality served almost only white seamen. The Christian Mission to Chinese Seamen, set up

by a Hainanese, B. J. Tan, who arrived in Hong Kong after years in Singapore and Britain, further reflects the disconnectedness of the seamen's scene in Hong Kong.

At any time, at some level and in varying degrees, people in Hong Kong were faced with the strange and the new that they resisted or embraced, adapted or absorbed. The social and cultural mixing was in a constant state of flux. This kaleidoscopic character of Hong Kong life is highlighted by the trial of Carvalho Yeo, in which the courtroom was filled with people—judges, lawyers, defendants, jurors, witnesses, interpreters, spectators—from different ethnic, social, and cultural backgrounds. Yeo's deployment of different ethnic identities in his criminal pursuits added even more color and bafflement to the situation. At the same time, the case—as described by Christopher Munn in Chapter 8—provides a valuable opportunity to gain insights into intercultural relationships in the workplace.

In 1928 Carvalho Yeo was accused of stealing more than a quarter of a million dollars from the Government Treasury through an elaborate cheque fraud. After initially eluding the police, Yeo was eventually traced to Shanghai and brought back to Hong Kong, where, after a sensational trial in the Supreme Court, he was convicted of uttering cheques knowing them to be false. Carvalho Yeo was a man of “mysterious antecedents and doubtful nationality”—a criminal already wanted by police in other Asian cities. Possibly of “Sino-Siamese” origins, he presented himself variously as a Chinese, a Portuguese, and a British subject, and deployed various aliases, fictional partners, and fake companies to carry out his schemes. The cheque fraud, and the subsequent revelations of gross mismanagement in the Treasury, was an embarrassment to the government. But Yeo's story—and his appearances in court—fascinated the Hong Kong public. His trial— together with a further court action by the government to retrieve the missing money from the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank—revealed incompetence and racism at high levels. Equally, however, it showed a measure of trust and loyalty between the treasurer and his junior colleagues that resonates strongly with the relationship between Michael Jebsen and K. C. Chau. The chapter prompts us to beware the pitfalls of simplistically stereotyping race and interracial relationships. The confusion of identities through one person and the community's changing reactions to Carvalho Yeo every time he assumed a different guise undermines the rigidity of the concept of “race”—even, one might say, making a farce of it. Racial divides were real, but at the same time there was much mixing and matching. And individual choices sometimes challenged this rigidity.

What this book aims to do is remind us that there is room for more human-level studies of Hong Kong society and history. The big questions and big pictures are important, no doubt, but it is equally important to read deeper into archival and other documentary materials to recover the past in order to see the dots upon which the big pictures are based, and which will help us reshape the questions to ask.

Cities are recognized as hubs of multicultural interactions. Given its geographical, political, and economic circumstances, however, Hong Kong was extraordinarily

porous, resulting in immense diversity and the multidirectionality of such interactions. We see not just East meeting West, but also East meeting East, and South meeting North, and we find that “East” and “West” are too complex and dynamic to oversimplify. We see that intercultural encounters do not necessarily lead to syncretism or assimilation, and that the propensity to code-switch was perhaps one feature that enhanced the vibrancy and dynamism of the place. Above all, the volume shows that in the midst of the different interactions, Hong Kong was—and is—in a constant process of becoming. Understanding this moving target therefore calls for new mindsets and new methodologies.

Wang Tao in Hong Kong and the Chinese “Other”

Elizabeth Sinn

Introduction

It was a strange new world that Wang Tao 王韜 came upon when he landed in Hong Kong in October 1862. Everyone was so unlike himself. The Westerners were very different, naturally enough. But as a Jiangnan¹ *wenshi* 文士 (scholar) he found even the Chinese people there, mainly Cantonese, alien—in speech, social manners, learning, moral values, life goals, and the food they ate. As a place, Hong Kong was strange not only because it was ruled by the British colonial government, but also because it had a social order where scholars did not exist as a powerful class as they did in China, and where merchants instead were the leading players in society. Equally strange was seeing Chinese men who were educated differently from himself using the Chinese language for new purposes, and employing the newspaper—a totally new form of media—to spread information and express their views to influence the world. These different versions of Chineseness baffled and distressed him at first but, in time, he learned to appreciate and adapt to some of them, and even molded new versions of Chineseness out of this assortment of strange phenomena. His views shifted as a result partly of changes in the larger social, political, and cultural environment and partly of changes in his own circumstances. His experiences and observations—reflected publicly in books and newspaper articles and privately in diaries, letters, and poems—allow us to construct a more nuanced picture of cultural diversity in nineteenth-century Hong Kong.



Figure 1.1

Wang Tao (1828–1897). Source: Paul A. Cohen, *Wang Tao: Between Tradition and Modernity*.

1. “Jiangnan” literally means south of the Yangzi River (or Yangtze River) and refers to a region including southern Jiangsu and Anhui and northern Zhejiang. It has long been considered the most cultured and most beautiful region in China.

Wang Tao's Background

Wang Tao is widely recognized as a leading reform thinker in late nineteenth-century China. As the country was seeking ways to meet the challenges of outside invaders and internal turmoil, and as “wealth and power” became increasingly a subject of fierce official debate, Wang made waves by putting forward innovative—and almost revolutionary—ideas on how to achieve them. Many of his ideas were disseminated through the newspaper, and his editorship of the Hong Kong-based *Xunhuan ribao* 循環日報—widely touted as the first Chinese-owned newspaper—made him a pioneer in Chinese journalism. His ideas both influenced policy-making at the time and exerted a long-term impact on China's intellectual history.

Born in Suzhou prefecture in 1828, Wang believed from an early age that he was destined for great things through a successful career as a scholar-official. Having won the most junior degree of the civil service examination with distinction at the age of seventeen in 1845, he tried for the second degree in the following year and failed. In 1849, he was invited by Walter Medhurst to work in Shanghai as Chinese editor at the London Missionary Society (LMS)'s press, where his main duty was to help translate the Bible into Chinese. In the spring of 1862, he became implicated with the Taiping insurgents and—to escape arrest and certain death at the hands of the Qing authorities—he took refuge in the British consulate in Shanghai. Then one day, several months later, the British consul spirited him away on a ship bound for Hong Kong, and his exile of twenty-three years began. Through a friend, he found a job helping James Legge of the LMS translate the Chinese classics. The job provided him with food and accommodation, initially in the Anglo-Chinese College (Ying Wah College)—organized by the LMS—on Hollywood Road. The two men were to develop a deep mutual respect. Legge found Wang's help so indispensable that when he retired to Scotland in 1867 he invited Wang to join him and they continued their work there. Wang left in December 1867 and returned to Hong Kong in March 1870.²

2. Wang Tao arrived in Hong Kong on October 11, 1862, left for Britain in December 1867, and returned to Hong Kong in early 1870. He visited Japan in 1879 with a side trip to Shanghai before returning to Hong Kong again. After that, he visited Shanghai and Suzhou several times before finally settling down in Shanghai sometime in late 1884. He died there in April 1897. For Wang's intellectual role in modern China, see Paul Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Wang Tao and Reform in Late Ch'ing China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Lo Hsiang-lin, *Hong Kong and the Cultural Interchange between China and the West* (Hong Kong: Zhongguo xuehui, 1961); Xin Ping 忻平, *Wang Tao pingzhuan* 王韜評傳 [Critical biography of Wang Tao] (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue, 1990); Zhang Hailin 張海林, *Wang Tao pingzhuan* 王韜評傳 [Critical biography of Wang Tao] (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 1993). Elizabeth Sinn deals more specifically with his twenty years' stay in Hong Kong, see “Fugitive in Paradise: Wang Tao and Cultural Transformation in Late Nineteenth-Century Hong Kong,” *Late Imperial China* 19, no. 1 (June 1998): 56–81. For Wang Tao and the history of Chinese journalism, see Fang Hanqi 方漢奇, ed., *Zhongguo xinwen shiye tongshi* 中國新聞事業通史 [History of Chinese journalism] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1992); Toh Lan Sang (Zhuo Nansheng) 卓南生, *Zhongguo jindai baoye fazhanshi 1815–1874* 中國近代報業發展史 1815–1874 [The development of modern Chinese journalism 1815–1874] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2002), 179–201.

Qitu 棄土: *Hong Kong as wasteland*

On his first arrival in 1862, Wang saw Hong Kong as the end of the earth. His misery was compounded by the way he had left Shanghai, smuggled out at short notice with hardly a penny to his name. He had none of his beloved books with him. He had left behind his wife and daughters and a mother who was seriously ill. Worse still, there was no telling when this exile would end.

Yet, while he might have arrived with hardly a change of clothes, he had plenty of baggage. In Shanghai, he shared the common hatred for Westerners as invaders but despised even more those Chinese who went to the treaty ports to become their hangers-on. With the characteristic contempt of the scholar for all things nonliterati, he saw merchants as mere hoarders and speculators, and definitely as social inferiors.³ His *zhongyuan* 中原 (center of China) mentality instinctively marginalized people living on the fringes of the Middle Kingdom as barbarians⁴—these treaty port Chinese were no less barbaric than foreigners.

Burdened with such preconceptions, it was no wonder Hong Kong made him sick for home and for Jiangnan. He knew hardly anyone. Those he met in the early days were mainly from the missionary circle—none a man of letters. His combined Jiangnan, literati, and *zhongyuan* biases led him to conclude that Hong Kong was a complete cultural wasteland. Before the British occupation, he wrote, the local residents of the small island had been mainly tenant farmers and fisherfolk, with little pretension to high culture. Not only was Hong Kong now under foreign rule, its social order was un-Chinese even though Chinese constituted the large majority of the population. Profit-making was the sole *raison d'être*, and wealth determined the new social order where young men—instead of aspiring to become scholars—learned English in order to work as clerks and translators in the government or trading firms. Indeed, as Wang Tao saw it, everyone was obsessed with money-making and had abandoned Confucian values and classical learning. Only the riff-raff, he concluded, would come to this cultural wasteland.⁵

The inability to replace the books he had left behind was painful for him. Even in Guangzhou, where there were many bookstores, he lamented, there was nothing special on sale. One can imagine how the paucity of bookshops in Hong Kong must

Some of Wang Tao's early essays were published in Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian* 弢園文錄外編 [Essays by Wang Tao] (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1994) (hereafter WLWB) and Wang Tao, *Taoyuan wenlu waibian* 弢園文錄外編 [Essays by Wang Tao] (Shanghai: Shiji chuban jituan and Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2002) (hereafter WLWB 1).

3. Wang Tao, “Yu Zhou Taofu Zheng Jun” [Letter to Zhou Taofu], in Wang Tao, *Taoyuan chidu* 弢園尺牘 [Letters of Wang Tao] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959) (hereafter *Chidu*), 25–32, especially 26. The letter fully displays his hostility toward foreigners and their Chinese collaborators, who served foreigners shamelessly. He blamed foreign influence for unrests such as the Taiping Rebellion and feared that as Chinese, including those who had failed in the Chinese civil service examination, became Westernized, Confucianism would be destroyed.
4. Wang Tao, “Letter to Wu Zideng,” in *Wang Tao riji* 王韜日記 [Diary of Wang Tao], ed. Fang Xing and Tang Zhijun (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987) (hereafter *Riji*), 204–6.
5. See note 2; *Riji*, November 10, 1862, 200.

have frustrated him.⁶ He missed his friends in Shanghai with whom he used to spend hours drinking, writing poetry, visiting brothels, and having stimulating conversations. For someone who had so much to say on everything—literature, history, philosophy, women, food, political policy, and military strategy among them—the language barrier in Hong Kong was painful. He only spoke his native Suzhou dialect and *guanbai* 官白 (“Mandarin”), a dialect bureaucrats were expected to speak throughout the empire, which was closer to the Jiangnan dialects. The Cantonese dialect was foreign to him, and though he could manage to understand some of it—he could comprehend Legge’s sermon given in Cantonese⁷—he could not converse in it, and definitely could not use it for any intellectual purpose. He was riled by street waifs laughing at his Suzhou babbling; in turn, he sneered at the locals for talking gibberish.⁸ He became very conscious of what dialects people spoke and noted this carefully in his diary every time he met someone new.⁹

Food was a problem, too. He loved food—today we would call him a foodie. In early letters to his Shanghai friends, he could not stop whining about the inedible food in Hong Kong. Hard and dry, the rice grains did not stick together and made him choke—meaning, it was not soft and glutinous like rice in the Jiangnan area. He was aghast that meat was so undercooked: to make a soup, he wrote, meat was just swirled briefly in hot water before eating. Vegetables too were so undercooked that one could actually see the “rawness.” Again, such ways of cooking differed greatly from Jiangnan cuisine, which emphasized stewing and braising. Then there was the fish, he protested, which was eaten with the scales still on, and the prickly parts scratched his tongue.¹⁰ How disgusting!

At times he found Hong Kong a totally worthless place. He even started calling himself “lazy old man at the southern end of the universe” and as having been “abandoned at the southern fringes of civilization.” Many scholars, taking these negative views at face value, have concluded that Wang detested Hong Kong. Yet this is only part of the story. There was much posturing in his writings, even in private writings to his friends. The traditional scholar was not above moaning and groaning and exaggerating his misery. Unfortunately, the complaints against Hong Kong are often quoted to represent his total experience, when, in fact, other things were happening and his impressions of Hong Kong became much more multifaceted in the course of time.¹¹

6. *Riji*, 204.

7. *Riji*, October 12, 1862, 198.

8. Wang Tao, poem, *Riji*, 211; Wang, “Letter to Yang Xingbu,” *Riji*, November 3, 1862, 199–200, 199.

9. For example, he noted in his diary entry for October 14, 1862: Wong Shing could speak *guanbai*; October 15, 1862: Legge could only speak Cantonese and Wang depended on Qu Yanshan 屈煙山 (who had resided in Shanghai) to interpret for them; October 20, 1862: Pei Xiaoyuan 裴小源, native of Jiangyang, could speak Cantonese; November 2, 1862: the Reverend Father Yang, a native of Songjiang, after being in Hong Kong for ten years, had forgotten his own native tongue.

10. Wang Tao, “Letter to Yang Xingbu,” *Riji*, November 3, 1862, 199. This is one of the most frequently quoted letters used to show his unhappiness in Hong Kong.

11. For example, Lawrence Wong Wang Chi is very emphatic about Wang Tao’s misery during his stay in Hong

Changing Views

Letu 樂土: Land of peace and contentment

Over time, his views changed—quickly on certain things, and more gradually on others. Quite early on, he came to recognize that the British had done a good job turning the wild island into a thriving port city. He could see a firm infrastructure. The first thing that struck him was the strong military defense,¹² a subject that captivated him, and soon—as he became an avid walker around the city and a keen observer of the cityscape—he admired the reclamation work undertaken to increase usable land along the harbor and the magnificent multistoried stone buildings in the city center.¹³ In time too, he appreciated the nonphysical infrastructure such as the administrative system, the laws and courts, and the liberal, noninterventionist policy that drove commercial growth.¹⁴ Above all, he cherished the peace and security of the place—such an enormous contrast from the war-torn Jiangnan region—that made it a *letu* for the many people who fled to escape the calamity. And he confessed it was the Westerners who had made that haven possible.¹⁵

Overcoming the language barrier

Despite the whining in his letters, he *did* find people to converse intelligently with. In this respect, one of the bright lights for him was Wong Shing 黃勝 (Huang Sheng), who managed the printing operation at the London Missionary Society. Wong—a native of Xiangshan 香山 (later, Zhongshan 中山) County, Guangdong—spoke *guanbai*, which he probably picked up in Shanghai; he had gone to Shanghai with the American envoy to China in 1853¹⁶ and stayed on afterwards. Wong also spoke and wrote fluent English, having studied at the Morrison Memorial Schools in Macao and Hong Kong. In addition, he had spent two years attending the Monson

Kong even after examining various aspects of his life there; Wang Hongzhi 王宏志 (Lawrence Wong), *Lishi de chenzhong: cong Xianggang kan Zhongguo dalu de Xianggang shi lunxu* 歷史的沉重：從香港看中國大陸的香港史論述 [The gravity of history: Mainland China's narrative of Hong Kong history from a Hong Kong perspective] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2000), 215–26.

12. *Riji*, 212.

13. *Riji*, October 21, 1862, 198, 217.

14. Wang Tao, “Xianggang lüelun” 香港略論 [A brief discussion of Hong Kong], *Xunhuan ribao* 循環日報, April 29, 1874; reprinted in WLWB, 260–65.

15. Wang used a range of terms to describe Hong Kong as a haven: Taoyuan or “paradise” (lit., land of peach blossoms) was used in a rather vague way in a poem soon after his arrival in Hong Kong, but it was at that time more as an emotional reaction of his own escape from troubles in China than an evaluation of 1862 Hong Kong as a place (*Riji*, 214). In *Riji* (212), he called it *ganjing tu* 乾淨土; *letu* 樂土 in “Xianggang jilüe” 香港記略 [An account of Hong Kong], in *Xunhuan Weekly Magazine* [XWM], February 7, 1874. He used *shiwai taoyuan* 世外桃源 in “Song zhengwusi Dan Na fan guo xu” 送政務司丹拿返國序 [Dedication to the Registrar General on his retirement to his country], WLWB 1, 180–81, 180.

16. *Riji*, October 14, 1862, 196.

Academy in Massachusetts. Since James Legge's office was at the LMS, Wang Tao and Wong Shing probably spent quite a lot of time together.¹⁷

Soon after Wang Tao arrived, Wong showed him the printing press. Wang noticed that the machine, though similar in structure to the one in the Shanghai mission where he had worked, was more efficient because of the copper punches.¹⁸ Wong Shing was probably the first Chinese person he had met who had a thorough knowledge of the English language; it was something he admired and possibly even envied. Wong's grasp of modern technology dazzled him: no doubt this was also a result of his English education. The two men later cowrote *Huoqi shuolüe* 火器說略 (Introductory treatise to firearms),¹⁹ which was submitted to Ding Richang 丁日昌 and through Ding to Li Hongzhang 李鴻章²⁰ (both were officials dedicated to strengthening China through learning from the West, especially through technology); Li was to become the most powerful official in China in the late nineteenth century. The co-authorship showed what combining Wang's Chinese literary skills with Wong's English reading abilities and technical understanding could achieve. Theirs was to be a constructive and enduring relationship which greatly affected their personal and professional lives. Indeed, Wong was to open his eyes to many things.

Another *guanbai* speaker Wang met in Hong Kong was Li Jingzhou 李鏡洲, who—being well-built, handsome, and carrying a dignified air—was considered by Wang one of the finest specimens of a Cantonese he ever came across. Li might have been a degree holder, having served under Ye Mingchen 葉名琛, the governor general of Guangdong and Guangxi (1852–1858).²¹ There was also Lo Sam-Yuen 羅深源 (Luo Shenyuan) whom Wang had befriended ten years earlier in Shanghai. A preacher in the LMS, Lo must have learned various dialects for evangelical purposes.²²

Indeed, the cultural scene in Hong Kong was more diverse than Wang gave it credit for, and was shifting more rapidly just around the time of his arrival. For one thing, more people from the Jiangnan region were arriving.²³ Some were fleeing from places ravaged by the Taiping rebels and the Qing armies in the lower Yangzi valley. Among them was Bao Xingzhou 包荇洲 from Wuxing, Zhejiang; Wang was

17. Edward J. M. Rhoads, "Wong Shing," in *Dictionary of Hong Kong Biography*, ed. May Holdsworth and Christopher Munn (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 462–63; "Huang Jun Pingfu shilüe" 黃君平甫事略 [Brief account of Wong Shing], *Huazi ribao*, August 7, 1902, 4.

18. *Riji*, October 14, 1862, 198.

19. Wang Tao, "Huoqi shuolüe qianxu" 火器說略前序 [Preface to *Introductory treatise to firearms*], WLWB, 326–28.

20. For Ding Richang, see Arthur W. Hummel, Sr., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644–1912)* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1944), volume 2, 721–23; for Li Hongzhang, see Hummel, volume 1, 464–71.

21. *Riji*, November 8, 1862, 200.

22. *Riji*, November 8, 1862, 200. For Lo Sam-Yuen, see Gillian Bickley, *The Golden Needle: The Biography of Frederick Stewart (1836–1889)* (Hong Kong: David C. Lam Institute for East-West Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University, 1997), 80.

23. *Riji*, 210, 212; Wang, "Xianggang lüelun," WLWB, 260–65, 264.

thrilled to run into him one day in the business district of Hong Kong.²⁴ Another was Cai Eryuan 蔡二源—a first degree holder from a powerful family in Deqing, Zhejiang—who, knowing English, had come to work as an accountant in a trading firm.²⁵ Like Wang, Cai had given up pursuing an official career and was ready to sell his skills in the new marketplace. As upward mobility within the Chinese official hierarchy became more restricted during the second half of the nineteenth century, the newly commercialized economy of Hong Kong and the treaty ports were offering unprecedented alternatives to the old narrow path that many young literati were forced to take in the past.²⁶

Port city and commercial culture in new light

In his letters and poems, Wang often gave the impression that all he did was to stay home studying the classics because Hong Kong was so distasteful. In fact, he was constantly out and about, and—wandering around and studying the cityscape—witnessing Hong Kong’s evolution into a robust port city, he began to recognize that this was no wasteland.²⁷ As he watched Hong Kong thrive during the 1860s as a regional and global hub for cargo and passenger shipping, he realized that the key to its success was freedom of trade and freedom from vexatious tariffs.²⁸ It was the transit point not just for merchants and migrants traveling to and from different parts of the world, but also for those traveling to and from different parts of China. Besides those fleeing the chaos of civil war, a growing number of the literati class, including candidates on their way to different levels of the civil service examinations and Qing officials—later including Chinese diplomats—traveling to new posts, made Hong Kong’s cultural scene more diversified. With more of his compatriots and fellow scholars appearing, Wang found comfort in the fact that even “in a remote and strange place, I do not have to worry about having no company.”²⁹

Hedonistic pleasures played their part in warming him to Hong Kong: Southern Chinese food could be quite exciting after all, he found. Though he detested raw food generally, he quickly discovered the delight of raw fish (*yusheng* 魚生).³⁰ He discovered lychee, a tropical fruit which had for centuries captivated the palate of royal consorts and poets, scholars and high officials from the north, and he waxed

24. *Riji*, November 10, 1862, 200.

25. *Riji*, 210.

26. Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, 81.

27. Wang, “Xianggang lüelun,” WLWB, 260–65, 264. Also see Wang Tao, “Zheng she Xianghai cangshulou xu” 徵設香海藏書樓序 [On the fund-raising for the Xianghai Library], WLWB, 319–22, 321.

28. Wang Tao, “Xianggang lüelun,” WLWB, 260–65, 264.

29. *Riji*, 200–201.

30. *Riji*, October 16, 19, 1862, 197. *Yusheng* (literally, raw fish) was a popular dish in Hong Kong up to about the 1990s, after which, now, for most people, *yusheng* means Japanese *sashimi* and *sushi*. Cantonese *yusheng* consists of pieces of sliced raw carp served with green onions and cilantro; just before eating, it is mixed with soy sauce or other seasoning. Today (2016) it is served mainly in congee shops and is put into the hot congee just before eating so that it will not overcook.

lyrical about its taste, texture, and appearance.³¹ Other tropical and subtropical fruits such as bananas and oranges also enraptured him. As he started dining at more lavish restaurants and experienced fine Cantonese cuisine, and not just snacking in teashops, he discovered all kinds of wonderful and exquisite delicacies—including finely prepared scallops and fish.³²

Rather than lamenting the lack of a literary culture, gradually he began to appreciate the commercial culture that flourished in Hong Kong, and, more and more, realized that Chinese merchants were contributing greatly to its success. His attitude toward them was transformed, especially after his return from Scotland in 1870.

Hong Kong after Scotland

Social elevation

Wang returned to Hong Kong in 1870 after spending twenty-eight months abroad. Scholars have rightly emphasized the significance of his travels in Europe. As the first Chinese man of letters to have observed and written seriously on how European nations and societies worked, he had the intellectual, if not social, authority to recommend ideas of reform to China.

His position in society took a great leap; his return to Hong Kong was nothing less than triumphant. He was now heralded as a great master of Western learning for his comprehensive understanding of the geography, history, politics, and society of the West, no longer a fugitive or an obscure translator in the employ of missionaries. In 1871, when his history of the Franco-Prussian War was published, the *China Mail* described him as “second to none . . . in Chinese literary attainments” in Hong Kong and referred deferentially to his personal experience of the West, particularly Scotland and Paris. It called him the “learned doctor” as he held “a Chinese literary degree equivalent to an L.L.D.” The article described another work of his, a history of France, as an “exhaustive” history of the subject, and reported on his recent project—compiling a biography of “Eminent Men of America” as given in the Portrait Gallery [National Gallery]. It ended by saying that “Dr Wong Tau [*sic*] is one of the most enlightened Chinamen we have yet met with, and he only lacks a more thorough knowledge of the English language and a foreign habit, to make him almost a complete Englishman.”³³ One may assume that even if Wang had not wanted to become a “complete Englishman,” he probably would have agreed that not knowing English was a handicap.

With the publication of his books in the 1870s and his editorship of the *Xunhuan ribao* from 1874, his social status continued to rise. In addition to being

31. *Riji* (210–12) describes lychee and other delicious foods in the south, including oranges and bananas.

32. “Xianggang lüelun,” 260–65, 264.

33. *China Mail*, October 13, 1871.

Carvalho Yeo and the 1928 Hong Kong Treasury Swindle

Christopher Munn

In January 1928, officials at the Treasury in Hong Kong discovered that over a quarter of a million dollars had gone missing from the government's account with the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation ("Hongkong Bank"). Investigations revealed that the money had been deposited into bank accounts of three bogus companies through forged or otherwise fraudulent cheques. After first suspecting two of the Chinese treasury clerks, the police traced the crime to Carvalho Yeo, a former clerk, who had fled to Shanghai. He was brought back to Hong Kong, where his trial in the Supreme Court became a *cause célèbre*. A man of "mysterious antecedents and doubtful nationality," Yeo fascinated the Hong Kong public as much as he embarrassed the government. Possibly of "Sino-Siamese" origins, he presented himself by turns as a Chinese, a Portuguese, and a British subject, deploying various aliases and fictional partners to carry out his schemes. The scandal prematurely ended the career of the Colonial Treasurer and triggered an unprecedented court action by the Hong Kong government against the Hongkong Bank to recover the missing money. The Carvalho Yeo episode, said one newspaper, was "one of the most remarkable cases in the history of the colony."¹

Forgeries, frauds, embezzlements, and other forms of misappropriation were common enough occurrences in colonial Hong Kong. The record of "defalcations" by civil servants in particular was "appalling," said officials in London. A series of scandals stretched back to the colony's earliest days. Among the more prominent was the escape to Macao in 1878 of Frederick Huffam, the deputy registrar of the Supreme Court, after he had embezzled some \$50,000 from monies entrusted to him as official assignee. Huffam was brought back to Hong Kong and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. In 1893 A. F. Alves, a Portuguese clerk in the Post Office, fled Hong Kong after losing on property speculations \$60,000 he had stolen from the government. Alves shaved off his moustaches, donned a false queue, and, disguised as a coolie, hid out in the hills beyond British Kowloon before being

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1. *Hongkong Telegraph*, October 4, 1928.

captured, tearful and thoroughly miserable after twenty-four days of wandering. His punishment was six years' imprisonment. A variant of the Alves case, involving as it did a form of transethnic disguise, Carvalho Yeo's crime was by far the most daring. It was said to be the largest cheque swindle so far perpetrated in the Far East. In contrast to the usual casual fiddling or desperate maneuvers by staff whose lifestyles had outgrown their means, this was a minutely planned sting carried out by a self-assured international criminal who was already wanted by police in several other Asian cities.

The legal proceedings in Carvalho Yeo's case involved committal hearings before a magistrate, a trial in the Supreme Court before a special jury, and a brief appeal on a legal question. It was one of ninety-one criminal cases tried by the Supreme Court in 1928. Whereas most of the work of the courts consisted of British magistrates summarily handing out punishments to thousands of Chinese working-class men for minor thefts, assaults, and breaches of regulations, the smaller number of trials by jury in the Supreme Court drew in people of more varied backgrounds. Some were microcosms of multicultural life revealing relationships across communities that complicate conventional ideas of a city segregated by ethnicity. In the "Aberdeen Street Murder" case of 1877, for example, two Italian sailors were charged with the murder of a Chilean sailor during a street fight fueled by liquor in a mixed neighborhood. The case involved a victim, defendants, witnesses, policemen, jurors, and court officials of eleven nationalities giving evidence in six languages, a great test for the court interpreter, the multilingual Portuguese, R. A. Rozario. This was one of the early Hong Kong cases establishing the right to state-funded legal aid for a person accused of murder.² Another landmark case, in 1909, confirmed the right of a defendant to have the evidence against him translated: in this case the defendants were Hoklo and the witnesses Cantonese, a reflection of cultural and linguistic divisions *within* Chinese society.³

The trial of Carvalho Yeo was a different matter altogether. Here, the multicultural differences were concentrated in a single individual in a case that captivated the Hong Kong public. The "Quarter Million Dollars Forgery Trial" supplied ample copy for the colony's newspapers during an otherwise uneventful year. Along with official reports, the newspapers provide extensive material on Carvalho Yeo's disruptive encounter with colonial Hong Kong, and the different interests coming together and colliding during his trial. This mass of material offers possibilities for

2. The jury found the two men guilty of manslaughter. The eleven nationalities or ethnicities were Chilean, Italian, Irish, Portuguese, Baghdadi Jewish, German, English, Chinese, Muslim Indian, "colored" (possibly West Indian or American), and a native of the French colony of Réunion. The languages were Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Hindustani, Chinese, and English. *Hongkong Daily Press*, August 1, 2, and 3, 1877; *China Mail*, August 4, 1877.

3. *R v Kwok Leung and others* (1909) 4 HKLR 161. Before that, it had been the custom not to translate evidence when the accused was represented by counsel.

exploring relationships between communities in late 1920s Hong Kong in both the courtroom and the workplace.⁴

Carvalho Yeo

The name “Carvalho Yeo” was one of a dozen aliases collected over the years by someone whose original name may have been Yeung Tsui Tsim, or Ngai Tsim, or possibly Wong Pih Chun.⁵ His origins were the subject of conjecture. He declared on his first appearance in court that he was a native of Amoy (Xiamen) in Fujian Province: “Yeo” is a Fujian pronunciation of “Yang” (or “Yeung” in Cantonese). He claimed to have been born on April 9, 1901, in the city of Trang in Siam. His mother was Siamese or possibly Malay. His father, a businessman from Fujian or perhaps Guangdong, sent Yeo to the St. Xavier School in Penang, a place notable for the diverse origins of its students, where he learned English and Western ways. He acquired Siamese, Malay, and several Chinese dialects, including some Cantonese. After school he took on clerical jobs and moved to Bangkok to work for Douglas & Grant, a firm of Scottish architects. In 1922, working with an accomplice known as “F. Katz,” Yeo allegedly swindled the elderly head of the firm out of his retirement fund of some \$40,000. When the Bangkok police announced a reward of \$6,500 for information leading to his arrest, Yeo fled to Hong Kong. Staying in the YMCA on Bridges Street, he gambled away the proceeds of the swindle in *fan tan* saloons in Macao. He then left Hong Kong and spent time in Canton and other port cities, allegedly perpetrating other swindles. At some point he married a well-connected Cantonese woman whose family name was Yuen. They had two children together. Despite Yeo’s interest in other women, they were said to be a devoted couple.

By the time he returned to Hong Kong in the mid-1920s, Yeo was wanted by police in Bangkok, Singapore, Canton, and Tianjin. None of this was picked up by the Hong Kong police. He obtained a job as a clerk with Jardine Matheson & Co., where he was a steady worker. It is not clear when he started using the name “Carvalho.” Some suggested it came from one of the Catholic fathers in Penang. Others said he adopted it in Hong Kong. If so, it was an inspired choice. Members of this Portuguese family had served the Hong Kong government for more than seventy years—although conveniently for Yeo they were no longer in public service by the late 1920s.⁶ Descended from colonists who had married local women in

4. Except where otherwise indicated, the sources for this chapter are *South China Morning Post*, *China Mail*, *Hongkong Daily Press*, and *Hongkong Telegraph* for the months of January 1928, September 1928–January 1929, and April–May 1929; and the Colonial Office files CO 129/510/14 (1928) and CO 129/515/6 (1929). Much of the biographical material is drawn from the account in the *China Mail*, January 14, 1929.

5. The *Kung Sheung Yat Po* refers to him throughout the trial by the transliteration “嘉華路姚,” though it lists his various Chinese aliases.

6. J. A. Carvalho, chief cashier, had been proposed by Governor Hennessy in 1880 as Colonial Treasurer, but was denied the position because he did not have British nationality. His son, E. A. Carvalho, also became chief cashier and retired to glowing tributes in 1924 after forty-two years of government service.

Macao and other settlements, the Portuguese in Hong Kong numbered about 3,000 in the 1920s. Some, born or naturalized in Hong Kong, claimed British nationality. Apart from the small group of self-declared Eurasians, they were the only group with rough parity between the sexes. The “local Portuguese” had traditionally supplied the government and businesses with clerks and managers. Later, many of them entered the professions and held senior positions in business. Thoroughly at home in the colony, they formed a distinct community with its own traditions, a dialect that absorbed Chinese, Japanese, Malay, and Hindustani words, and an attachment to the Roman Catholic Church.

Officials had concluded that the local Portuguese were sufficiently well defined as a community to make a distinction between them and other Europeans “advisable and interesting” for the purpose of census and general policy.⁷ The establishment of the Portuguese Republic in 1910 had revived national feeling and fostered a strong sense of ethnic identity. Yet few of Hong Kong’s Portuguese community were born in Portugal and many had adopted English as their main language. They were, some officials acknowledged, “colonists” in the true sense—“a European community settled in the Tropics, thoroughly acclimatized, and apparently not recruited to any extent from Europe.” Plans had been put forward for an exclusive Portuguese residential area at Wong Nai Chung along the lines of the segregated district for Europeans on the Peak. The project failed, and instead Portuguese moved in large numbers to Homantin “Garden City” and other parts of Kowloon, where in 1928 they opened a magnificent new building for their Club de Recreio. In 1929 one of their leaders, the journalist J. P. Braga, became the first Portuguese representative to be appointed to the Legislative Council.

Distinct though they were as a community, Portuguese in Hong Kong could seem to British observers—who cared deeply about physical appearance—to be either European or Asian, or a mixture of the two.⁸ With his “Sino-Siamese” parentage and Catholic education, Carvalho Yeo no doubt found it easy to give the vague impression of being Portuguese. Although he formally retained the surname “Yeo,” he was often simply known as “Carvalho,” and was variously described as “Portuguese,” “Eurasian,” and “Filipino.” Having left Jardine’s with excellent references, he joined the Government Treasury in September 1926 as a clerk in the “special class” of trusted non-Chinese “Asiatics”—Indians, Eurasians, and Portuguese. He became friendly with the European staff in the department. His starting salary, at \$1,000 per annum, was higher than that of mostly Chinese junior clerks in the “ordinary class.” He set about supplementing it through a fraud on the water accounts, which were his main responsibility. This scheme, involving skimming cash payments and

7. A. W. Brewin, Report on the 1897 Census, June 20, 1897, *Hong Kong Sessional Papers*, 26/97.

8. G. H. Gompertz, the son of a Hong Kong judge and an employee of Jardine, Matheson & Co. in the 1920s, describes three Portuguese staff in his office, who were closely related to each other. The uncle “could, in appropriate dress, have passed any day as an Indian.” One nephew looked Chinese. The other nephew “could well have passed as of a rather heavily built Mediterranean type, or indeed as a pure Portuguese.” G. H. Gompertz, *China in Turmoil: Eye-Witness, 1924–1948* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1967).

falsifying receipts, began in December 1926 and netted some \$15,300. Flush with money, Yeo took up dancing and became something of a “lounge lizard.” He frequented tea dances, usually in the company of two or three women, one of whom was a Westerner. Held in places such as the Lee Gardens or the roof gardens of the larger hotels, tea dances were the rage in jazz-age Hong Kong. They were events where well-heeled people from different communities observed each other and mingled.

The Swindle

Carvalho Yeo used some of the money from his water accounts fraud to sow the seeds of a larger swindle on the Hong Kong government. In September 1927 he leased an office on the sixth floor of the China Building, on the corner of Pedder Street and Queen’s Road, only steps away from the treasury offices. He engaged an office boy. He opened accounts in three different banks in the names of bogus companies, all of them with addresses in the China Building and described variously as building contractors, coal merchants, and government contractors. Confident to the point of cockiness, and dressed throughout in European clothes, he posed as a different “managing partner” for each of them, shifting his identity and mannerisms from Chinese to Portuguese, then back to Chinese.

In late August, as “Mr Chan Man Wai” 陳文偉 of the Min Tak 綿德 Company, a building contractor, Yeo applied to open an account at the Instone Banking Company, dealing with its president, Noel Instone Brewer, and Poon Ping Kan, the assistant comprador.⁹ When asked to produce a letter of authorization he returned a few days later with one signed by the “partners” of the company—“Young Ah Yao,” “Yeung Pak Chuen,” and “Chan Man Wai”—authorizing him to sign cheques. On September 14, as “Mr J. K. D’Almada” of Katz & Co.,¹⁰ coal merchants and contractors, Yeo opened an account with the Netherlands Trading Society, assisted by H. Holtkamp, cashier of the bank. The D’Almadas were a long-established Portuguese family of civil servants and lawyers. Better prepared this time, he immediately produced a letter signed by “Mr R. M. Waller” and “Mr Fischer Katz” authorizing him to sign cheques. Yeo returned several times to conduct transactions. His adopted Portuguese persona raised no suspicions even with the bank’s Portuguese clerk, F. X. M. da Silva. Another Portuguese, the comprador Charles Choa, managed Yeo’s account in the third bank, for which Yeo adopted a Chinese disguise. In October, posing as “Mr Yeung Tak Lee” 楊德利 of the Man Lee 文利 Company, Yeo opened

9. Instone was a minor Hong Kong bank, soon to run into problems when, in 1930, Brewer was convicted of perjury in connection with the winding up of the bank in 1929. When evidence of a miscarriage of justice emerged, he was subsequently pardoned, but only after serving a four-month sentence. The government awarded him £1,000 compensation for this.

10. Yeo did not realize this was a risky choice. Katz & Co. had once been a Hong Kong company but, as a German company, had been placed on the blacklist for trading with the enemy during the Great War.

an account with the Equitable Eastern Banking Corporation, giving the name of Katz & Co. as a reference.

Over the next few months Yeo gave these accounts a semblance of activity by moving small amounts around, using a total capital of about \$3,500. Then, in early January 1928, he deposited three cheques, one into each account, totaling \$260,408. The cheques, all dated December 30, 1927, were drawn on the Treasury's account with the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. They bore the signatures—or forged signatures—of the Colonial Treasurer, Charles McIlvaine Messer, and the treasury accountant, Thomas Black. When cashiers queried the large amounts, Yeo explained they were for government contracts and said he would soon need to draw out cash to pay his subcontractors. In one of these transactions he made a near-fatal error. For some reason, the original cheque for the Equitable Eastern Banking Corporation was made out to the “Sang Cheung Co.,” rather than to the Man Lee Company he had registered with the bank. The cheque was returned the next day with a query. When told of this, Yeo took it away, then brazenly returned later in the day with a cheque for an even larger amount made out to the correct payee. This one went through without challenge.

As soon as the three cheques had been duly cleared by the Hongkong Bank, Yeo withdrew nearly all the money from the three accounts in wads of banknotes. Again, a glitch occurred at the Equitable Eastern when the comprador, Charles Choa, asked him why he needed to withdraw such a large sum as \$79,930. Yeo's response was to pull out of his pockets some \$80,000 in notes he had already withdrawn from one of the other banks, saying that he required the money to pay his subcontractors. Money talked. “A man who had \$80,000 on him was one who would have satisfied anybody,” Choa later told the court. While in the process of drawing down the three accounts, Yeo deftly disengaged himself from government service. He was “impertinent” towards one of his European colleagues in the Treasury, and when advised to apologize said he would rather resign. On January 6 he did exactly that, paying a month's salary in lieu of notice. The next day, having completed his cash withdrawals, he boarded a ferry to Macao with the \$260,000.

Arrests, Investigations, and Enquiries

On January 18, 1928, Tsang On Wing,¹¹ a clerk in the Treasury, found discrepancies in the passbook received from the Hongkong Bank to the amount of more than \$260,000—equal to one-sixth of the government's balance with the bank, and enough for the annual budget of an entire government department. Anxious discussions took place between treasury officials and the management of the bank. Cheques were examined, and when it was confirmed this was not an error the police

11. Tsang was thirty-five years old. He was educated at Queen's College and taught English at the Whampoa Naval School for two and a half years before joining the Hong Kong government in 1914.

were brought in. The CID raided the offices of the three bogus companies in the China Building and took away books and papers. A Chinese newspaper started to mention names. Rumors circulated about a plot involving several people: the assumption at this stage was that the cheques were not forgeries but a fraudulent trick. Tsang On Wing and his assistant Cheung Man Kun were arrested and charged with conspiracy to defraud. The cheques had been drawn on genuine treasury forms. They all bore Tsang's handwriting—or at least handwriting resembling his. The police thought it impossible that Tsang and his staff could not have known about the fraud. For the next three weeks, over the Chinese New Year holiday, Tsang and Cheung were repeatedly brought before a magistrate and remanded in Victoria Gaol, bail being refused, even though none of the staff from the banks could pick them out in identification parades, and despite vigorous representations by Tsang's solicitor, the Eurasian M. K. Lo. Tsang and Cheung were finally released and reinstated on February 8. Suspicions nevertheless persisted that Tsang had taken part in the crime. They were to become the focal point of Yeo's trial.

The water account defalcations were not discovered until February—more than a year after they had taken place. Criticized for their “woeful lack of sense of direction,” the police took several more weeks to establish a link between the missing \$260,000 and the missing Carvalho Yeo. An offer of a reward of \$5,000 for information in mid-February made no mention of him. In March the Governor, Sir Cecil Clementi, concerned by the abysmal state of financial management, appointed a committee to enquire into irregularities not only in the Treasury but also in several other departments. The committee, chaired by the Chief Justice, Sir Henry Gollan, received evidence from fifty-six witnesses. Its report described a state almost of chaos in the Treasury: receipts entered on loose-leaf pages in an erasable “indelible” pencil; cash and cheque books kept in drawers and safes left open all day, including tiffin hour; cheque books sent in unsealed envelopes for overprinting in the Victoria Gaol print shop; and wholly inadequate precautions—in short, ample opportunities for solitary or collusive abuse. The committee's report was particularly critical of the senior treasury officials, Messer and Black.

In April, Carvalho Yeo, “a Eurasian of many aliases” claiming to be Portuguese, was identified as the ringleader in what was still seen as a conspiracy to defraud the government. At this time he was believed to be in Manila, but the track there ran cold.¹² He was rumored to have gone to Canton, from where word reached Hong Kong (but not the police) of his extravagant nightlife, and then to Amoy, where he apparently attempted to settle down. He was finally noticed in Shanghai, where he had set himself up in a sumptuous flat on Peking Road with various relatives, a dancing instructor, and some of his lady friends from Hong Kong. He was now making himself conspicuous through his lavish lifestyle, gambling on greyhound races, and speculation in foreign currencies. Then somebody remembered “the

12. *Hongkong Daily Press*, April 3, 1928.

Hong Kong Treasury cheques sensation.” The Shanghai police started to take an interest. After watching Yeo for eight days, they arrested him in early August. In an ill-considered attempt to protect himself (since it would have been easy to transfer him to Hong Kong), Yeo claimed to be a British subject but could not produce evidence. His attempt to claim Portuguese citizenship was rejected by the Portuguese consul-general. Finally, he claimed to be a Chinese citizen and was taken before the Provisional Court. Hong Kong officials rushed to Shanghai to seek his extradition. Yeo’s wife mobilized lawyers. A struggle ensued to prevent his return to Hong Kong, going all the way to officials in the capital at Nanking (Nanjing). The government at Canton then applied for him for crimes committed in Canton. Washing its hands of an affair that was “all down South,” the court in Shanghai decided that Carvalho Yeo, “*alias* Yung Tseu-tsen, *alias* Yung Fuh, *alias* Wong Pih-chun, 38 years of age, and a native of Canton,” was not a bona fide resident of Shanghai. It granted the Canton government’s application and Yeo was put on a ship for Canton. On September 21, following secret negotiations, he was spirited out of Canton to Hong Kong by CID officers.¹³

“Thrown to the Wolves”: The Trial of Carvalho Yeo

After hearings before a magistrate in late September and October, Carvalho Yeo was committed for trial on charges relating to both the cheque swindle and the frauds on the water account. His legal advisor was C. A. S. Russ, a somewhat unscrupulous solicitor active in cases of this kind.¹⁴ The trial before the Supreme Court of Hong Kong took place from November 20 to December 6—unusually long for criminal trials at this time. Yeo was charged on six counts: three of forgery of the cheques, and three of uttering them knowing them to be forged. Hong Kong’s Forgery Ordinance, enacted in 1922, was almost identical to the English act of 1913, with maximum penalties for the offences in question of fourteen years’ imprisonment. Procedures and arrangements in Hong Kong’s Supreme Court also followed those in England, with a judge and jury. There were, however, certain departures from English practices. In the first place interpretation was usually necessary to overcome the language barriers between the mainly Western judges, jurors, and lawyers on the one hand and the mostly Chinese defendants and witnesses on the other. Yeo requested Cantonese interpretation, but when it became apparent that he was more comfortable with English the interpretation was abandoned, except for the Chinese witnesses, and for Yeo’s former colleague, Moosa Azim, who, after

13. *North China Herald*, August 11, September 1, 1927.

14. Russ was suspended from practice for twelve months by the Supreme Court in 1936 for “disgraceful and dishonourable conduct” in going into partnership with an unqualified Chinese associate, K. K. Wong, in return for a guaranteed income. He had been admitted to practice in Hong Kong in 1912, and had returned to England for a period in the early 1930s, apparently the worse for drink: the agreement with Wong included a promise that he would remain teetotal. *China Mail*, July 30, 1936.

a stressful cross-examination in English, decided he would be better off giving his evidence in Cantonese. From an old Hong Kong Indian family, Moosa was chief clerk in the Treasury. Called as a surprise prosecution witness late in the trial, he gave evidence of having seen Yeo suspiciously going through cheque books and account books at Tsang On Wing's desk during tiffin hour. The interpreter for the trial was the Supreme Court's chief interpreter, John Valentine Dodd, the Hong Kong-born son of an English tea trader.¹⁵

Another set of differences related to the jury. Juries in Hong Kong consisted of seven men instead of the usual twelve in England. Whereas English juries were required to be unanimous in their verdicts, majority verdicts were allowed in Hong Kong except in capital cases.¹⁶ As in England, the jury list, approved annually by the Legislative Council, contained an elite category of "special jurors" comprising senior members of the mercantile, banking, and professional classes. In Hong Kong, juries composed entirely of special jurors were occasionally used for the more difficult or controversial criminal trials. This was the arrangement adopted for the Carvalho Yeo trial. Officials claimed that the special jury list was more ethnically diverse than the longer list of common jurors, who were mostly Europeans. Although this was doubtful, once a handful of Hongkong Bank employees had been exempted, the jury finally empaneled in this case was an interesting mix: it consisted of three Portuguese (J. M. da Rocha, J. M. Alves, J. P. Braga), three Europeans (A. H. Ferguson, J. Arnold, and W. G. Goggin), and the former comprador, Ho Kom-tong, brother of the eminent Eurasian businessman and philanthropist Sir Robert Ho Tung.¹⁷

In contrast to the practice today, juries tended to participate actively in trials. In the Carvalho Yeo trial the jury played a particularly prominent role. Jurors directly questioned witnesses. They gave views on which prosecution witnesses should be called. They raised questions about procedure. At one point, they were even consulted by the judge about the admissibility of evidence. On the eighth day, the jury, "in a critical frame of mind," objected to the recalling of the clerk Tsang On Wing, a witness for the prosecution, to go over again the question of how he formed the letter "A" when writing cheques. The foreman, Ferguson, said that enough time had been wasted already. "They were all businessmen and their time was valuable to them." One reason for the jury's forthrightness was the judge, Philip Jacks. Only recently called to the Bar and with barely any court experience, Jacks was the government's Land Officer. He had been recently filling in as Puisne Judge when other

15. Within a year Dodd was himself before the Supreme Court as a bankrupt, having lost money on speculations and become indebted to Sikh moneylenders at punitive rates of interest.

16. A majority guilty verdict had to include at least five members of the jury.

17. In the Jurors List for that year, Alves and da Rocha are listed as merchants, Braga as Reuter's agent, Arnold and Goggin as shipping company managers, and Ferguson and Ho Kom-tong as bankers. Goggin had a long Hong Kong connection: his father, S. W. Goggin (d. 1900), came to Hong Kong in the late 1860s and served as a captain in Kwok A-Cheong's Hong Kong and Macao Steamship Co.

judges were away.¹⁸ The Chief Justice, Sir Henry Gollan, was in Shanghai hearing an appeal at the British Supreme Court there. The permanent Puisne Judge, J. R. Wood, was on leave.

The prosecution was led by the senior barrister Eldon Potter K. C., in the absence of the Attorney General, who was also on leave. For Yeo to be convicted, Potter had to convince the jury that the cheques were forged, if not by Yeo then by someone else. If they were not forged, then not only would Yeo be acquitted of the forgery charges, but the charges of uttering would also fall away. Potter called a dozen witnesses, including Messer, Black, Tsang On Wing, Cheung Man Kun, and Moosa Azim from the Treasury, the Director of Criminal Intelligence T. H. King, and various bank staff. His case fell into three parts. First, he argued, the controlled circumstances in which treasury cheques were signed made it impossible that the cheques were not forged. Secondly, Messer and Black, both honorable men, denied the signatures were theirs, and Tsang, a clerk with an unblemished record, denied the handwriting was his. Thirdly, he would prove that, though Yeo himself might not have forged the cheques, he was a “skilful little villain,” “a man of iron nerves” well provided with the means to make the frauds possible.

In his statement to the police (signed “Y. T. Tsim”), Yeo had denied all the charges and had told the magistrate he would explain everything in court: “Anything I can do for the Government I will do in Court.” In fact, he said nothing until the very end of the trial. His counsel, F. C. Jenkin, a veteran criminal barrister, decided early on not to put Yeo in the witness box. Confounding public expectations of a dramatic examination, Jenkin described this as springing “another sensation” and stressed that he himself took full “moral responsibility” for this decision. The right to silence was, of course, an essential feature of the common law. But as Jenkin’s case proceeded it became clear that his eyes were on another trial looming on the horizon. Over the summer the Hong Kong government had decided to sue the Hongkong Bank to get back the missing \$260,000. In anticipation of a civil trial, the bank had already retained Jenkin. The main issue in such an action would be whether the cheques were forged. Under the law at the time, if they were forged, the bank would be liable for having failed to exercise due care regardless of any general negligence by the Treasury. If they were not forged, the bank would not be liable for the missing money. From Jenkin’s point of view, therefore, the question of forgery was key to both the Carvalho Yeo trial and the impending civil suit against the bank.

Gossip had spread that the Carvalho Yeo trial, far from being a criminal trial, was nothing less than a “trial of strength” between two powerful institutions—the government and the bank—so much so that Potter was at pains in his opening address to draw a distinction. The trial of Yeo, he insisted, was an entirely different matter from any civil action by the government to recover the missing

18. Philip Jacks (1877–1941) qualified as a solicitor in England in about 1900 and came to Hong Kong in 1905 to join the Land Office. He was called to the Bar by the Inner Temple in 1922 but appears never to have practised in the courts.

money: different rules of evidence applied and different questions would be asked. Jenkin echoed these sentiments, but then proceeded *precisely* to conduct his case as a preparation for his larger civil trial. His defense of Yeo was directed towards showing that the cheques were not forgeries. A successful defense along these lines would instantly clear Yeo of the charges. But it was not part of Jenkin's plan to get his client out of trouble. His argument was that, taking advantage of the "shocking manner" in which the Treasury was run, several conspirators, led by Carvalho Yeo, had somehow "tricked" Messer and Black into signing the cheques. Yeo's partner in the fraud, Jenkin claimed, was another insider, the clerk Tsang On Wing, whom Yeo had double-crossed by escaping with the booty.

Jenkin's attempts to portray Tsang as a criminal required detailed probing of Black and Messer about their degree of trust in Tsang and an aggressive cross-examination of Tsang himself. Tsang had "kept his mouth shut" on discovering that new cheque books received shortly before the swindle were missing sixty cheques, Jenkin argued. The only defense witness was the expert witness J. L. Shellshear, professor of anatomy at the University of Hong Kong, an authority on the "aboriginal brain" and the colony's sole handwriting expert. Like Jenkin, Shellshear had been retained by the bank.¹⁹ His evidence, occupying several days, was intended to show that the cheques could not possibly have been forged. Wrapping up, Jenkin attacked the credibility of the "two trusted custodians," Tsang and Moosa, and the "gross slackness" in the Treasury. "In a department like that, one might expect anything," he said. He conceded that his client was "guilty of criminality." "He would even go so far as to say that accused had had the cheques with which he obtained the money. But that had nothing to do with the question at issue. The question was whether or not these cheques were forged. That was the one and only issue."

In a closing address that consisted of "sensation following sensation," Potter rounded on Jenkin. "Have you ever heard of a counsel putting up such a defence before?" he asked the jury. "Do you believe Carvalho Yeo instructed his counsel and solicitors to fight the case for thirteen days merely because whereas he is guilty of fraud, he should not also be convicted of forgery?" Potter claimed that the Hongkong Bank had "overshadowed the defence from the beginning to the end." Carvalho Yeo had been "thrown to the wolves so that the defence could fight what they thought was the first round in the fight between them and the Government." Everything, he said, was in favor of the bank because the prosecution in a criminal case was circumscribed in so many ways. Jenkin's "nebulous suggestion" that the cheques had been signed by a trick was an insult to the jury's intelligence. He had never once suggested what the trick was, or put a single question to Tsang about his alleged part in it. In all of his experience, "and in all the books of Law which were

19. The evidence of a second witness, R. A. Green of the Hongkong Bank, was withdrawn after confused exchanges between counsel, judge, and jury about whether it was admissible. Jenkin had called Green to show that, during his early discussions at the bank about the cheques, at no time had Black suggested that his signature on the cheques was forged.

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Index

- advertising and promotional campaigns, 17, 21, 27, 31, 34–35, 39
- Alford, Bishop Charles, 64
- Americans in Hong Kong, 42, 45, 47, 50, 131
- Amoy. *See* Xiamen
- Anderson, Catherine Joyce. *See* Symons, Catherine Joyce
- Anderson, Charles, 42, 46, 50, 59, 62
- Anderson, Donald, 44
- Anderson, Henry Graham. *See* Hung Kam Ning
- Ando, Momofuku, 24, 33, 36
- Anglican education in Hong Kong, xiv, 18, 64–65, 73–74, 81, 84. *See also* DGS; SSGC
- Anglo-Chinese College. *See* Ying Wah College
- Apénrade (Aabenraa), 106, 108–9, 113, 117, 119, 125
- Asiatic Articles, 132
- Badische Anilin- & Soda-Fabrik (BASF), 119, 122–24
- bao ernai*, 57
- baogong zhi*, 142, 148. *See also* “crimping”
- Barker, Major-General George Digby, 89
- beachcombers, 137
- Beau, Paul, 114
- Beihai (Pakhoi), xvi, 113
- Belilios, E. R., 70
- Belilios Public School (BPS), 66–72, 69 fig. 4.1, 77–79, 81–84, 99, 101
- Berlin Foundling House, 92
- Black, Thomas, xviii, 158–59, 162–64, 167–68, 170, 173
- boarding houses (for seafarers), xvii; Boarding House Ordinance (1917), 141; admission, eligibility and segregation, 134–35, 137, 139, 151–52; charitable establishments, *see* missions to seafarers in Hong Kong; decline of, 135; deregulation of, 140; “European Seamen’s Boarding Houses,” 134–35; exclusion of Chinese, 134–35, 137; fees, 140, 150; governance, 141; “Licensed shippers of Manila Seamen,” 134; legislation, 139; licensing and licensees, 135, 139, 141; number and capacity of, 135; operators and owners, 134–35; recruitment, 148; regulations, 139, 141; role, 140; types and classification, 140–41; Seamen’s Boarding Houses, 135. *See also* *ghaut serang*; *hang shun kun*
- Bosman, Charles Henri Maurice (Charles Bosman), 52, 54–56, 59
- Bosman, Walter. *See* Ho Kai Kai
- boycott, 110, 115, 142, 172
- Boy Scouts, 90
- Brabozon, Reginald (twelfth Earl of Meath), 87. *See also* Meath, Lady
- Braga, J. P., 170
- brothels, xi, 4, 53–54, 65
- Brown, Cyril, 146, 148

- Butterfield & Swire (China Navigation Co.), 110, 129, 146, 151
- Canton Medical School, 84
- Carvalho Yeo case: prosecution, 162, witnesses, 162; judge, 161–62; jury, 161, 167; verdict and sentence, 164; reporting, 164–66; stereotyping, 173; racial profiling, 173; racial stereotyping, 172–73; ethnic diversity, 173; testimony, 165; legal proceedings, 153; multiethnicity, 159, 160; census and demographics of Hong Kong, 3, 42, 44–47, 65, 69, 74; ethnic categorization, 45–46; Eurasians in, 45, 46 table 3.1
- Central British School, 79
- Central School. *See* Queen's College
- Central School for Girls. *See* Belilios Public School
- Chan Ayin (Chen Aiting), 9, 11, 18–22
- Chan, Bruce S. K., 45, 49–50
- Chan Kai Ming (George Tyson), 42, 50–51, 55
- charity and philanthropy in Hong Kong, xii, xiv, 12, 72, 96–97, 132. *See also* Po Leung Kok; Tung Wah Hospital
- Chau Kwang Cheong (KC Chau), xvi–xvii, 106–7, 112 fig. 6.3, 111–21, 123, 126, 129–30
- Chan Sui Nam, 13–14
- Chau Yue Teng (YT Chau), xvi, 107, 116–17, 120 fig. 6.4, 120 fig. 6.5, 120–26, 129–30
- Chen Aiting. *See* Chan Ayin
- Cheng, Irene, 44, 52
- Cheong Lee & Co., 124
- chewing gum, 28, 30, 34–35, 40; Kanebo, 28, 29 fig. 2.1, 30–31, 34–35; Akihiro Mori and Haris, 28; Wrigley, 28, 30
- China Chamber of Commerce, 14
- China Mail*, 8, 15, 17, 19, 47, 165–66
- Chinese General Chamber of Commerce, 125, 128
- Chinese identity, 1, 3
- Chinese Mail. *See* *Huazi ribao*
- Chinese Printing and Publishing Company, 21
- Chinese Women's Club, 85
- Chiu Yuen Cemetery, 51 fig. 3.3, 51–52, 62
- Churchill, Sir Winston, 169
- Church Missionary Society (CMS), xiv, 72, 81, 92, 95; Baxter Mission Schools, 92
- Clementi, Sir Cecil, 159, 167–68, 172
- Club de Recreio, 156
- Cohong System, 118
- compradors, xi, xvi, 40, 89, 107, 115–18, 121, 127–29, 157; decline, 129–30; Eurasian, 89; guarantee system, 122–23; Hong Kong Compradors Association, 128; Hongkong Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC), 129; need for, 118; relation with foreign firms, 126. *See also* cultural intermediaries; trust and loyalty; Wong Sik Kay concubinage, 54, 68
- Confucianism 3, 3n3, 10, 13
- coolies, 12, 109, 109n7, 153
- “crimping,” 133, 142
- cultural intermediaries, xii, 39–40. *See also* compradors
- customer-relations, 109–12
- dai uk*, 54
- Daily Press*, 15n57, 17, 165
- Daimaru department store and supermarket, 30–31
- Demae Iccho*, xii, 24, 26, 37; advertising and advertisement, 32, 34, 35 fig. 2.2; Chingchai (mascot), 39; distribution, xiii, 33, 38; branding and packaging, 24, 34–35; vs. *Doll*, 34, 39; “delivery, single order” and naming, 34; in the US, 37
- Deng Xiaoping, 38
- Dent & Co., x, 54
- Ding Richang, 6, 10, 18
- Diocesan Boys' School (DBS), 43–44, 47, 120, 126
- Diocesan Girls' School (DGS), 44, 47, 66, 74, 76–80, 88, 92; admission of Chinese girls, xiv, 75, 78; Diocesan

- Girls' School and Orphanage, 74;
Diocesan Native Female Training
School, 64, 68, 74; and Eurasians, 44,
47; English education for Chinese,
74–77; multiculturalism, 78–79
- dried foods xiii, 27, 30, 32, 33, 40. *See also*
instant noodle
- education in Hong Kong, xi; admission, 74;
and the arts, 79; boarding schools, 80;
Chinese, 64, 66, 71, 75, 81; for Chinese
girls, xiii–xiv, 80; comparison between
boys and girls, 71–72; curriculum, 66,
72, 77–78; English (Western) educa-
tion, xii, xiv, 3, 17–18, 64–66, 70–77;
for girls, xiv, 64, 66, 71–74, 92, 97;
grant-in-aid schools, 66, 68–69, 74, 76;
home education, 97; and modernity,
68, 71, 97; multiculturalism, 44, 73,
75–76, 79; non-conformist mission
schools, 66; petition for establish-
ment of English schools 1901, 71–72;
physical education for girls, 78–79; and
religion, xiv, 65–66, 73–75; segrega-
tion, 72; and social hierarchy, 67–68,
71–72; and women, 70, 97; vision,
73–74
- Eitel, Dr. E. J., 66, 68–69, 71
- Empire Day, 90, 92
- ethnic and religious groups in Hong Kong,
xi, 51, 143
- Eurasians, xi, xiii, xv, 61, 62, 65, 68, 79,
88–89, 156; “alho e cobra,” 61; asso-
ciations with other Eurasians, 60–61;
attitude toward, perception, and
stigmatization, 42–44, 46, 52, 60, 62;
blending into European communities,
48; burial, 51–52, 62; in census, 45, 46
table 3.2; challenges, 42; childhood, xv;
Chinese practices, 43, 49, 51–52; early
Eurasians, 42–43; education, 73; ethnic
distinction, 61; ethnic preference, xiii,
xviii, 41, 43, 45, 47–53, 57, 60, 62, 75,
89, 171; “Eurasian isolationism,” 49;
Eurasianness and identity, 45, 48, 51,
53, 59; “Eurasian we group,” 59; during
Japanese Occupation in Hong Kong,
50, 60; legitimacy, 47, 49, 52, 54, 62;
marriages, 44, 48, 52, 60, 62; origins
of Chinese surnames, 50–51; prewar
Eurasians, 44–45; relations with other
ethnic groups, 59–61, 65; in Shanghai,
46, 48–49; usage of, xiiin2. *See also*
Eurasian Welfare League
- Eurasian Welfare League, 42, 50, 59, 62, 172
- Europeans in Hong Kong, 42, 50, 79, 131
- Fairlea Girls' School, 99
- Filipino, 79, 132, 135, 156
- food in Hong Kong: xii, 4, 7, 23; *cha chaan
teng*, 39; Japanese, 23–24, 30–31, 35,
39–40; OpenRice.com, 23
- foot-binding, 95
- fraud cases in Hong Kong, A. F. Alves,
153–54; Hong Kong Forgery ordinance
(1922), 160; Frederick Huffam, 153.
See also Carvalho Yeo case
- French Convent School. *See* St. Paul's
Convent School
- French Indochina, 114, 124, 172
- Friend of China and Hong Kong Gazette*
(*Friend of China*), 15nn57–58
- Fung Mingshan, 13–14, 21
- Fung Wa Chuen, 97
- gambling, 119, 159, 166–67
- ghaut serang*, 135; abolition of, 135n20;
definition and origin, 133; licensing,
134; scope, 134; owners/operators and
locations, 134; 138, 142. *See also* *Ghaut
Serang and Lascar(s) Ordinance*
Ghaut Serang and Lascar(s) Ordinance
(successive), 133–34, 135n21
- Girl Guides, xiv, 81–84, 90
- Gittins, Henry, 43
- Gittins, Jean, 57, 61nn111–12, 82
- Gollan, Sir Henry, 159, 162, 166–70
- Gordon, General Charles, 9
- Gosano, Eddie, 60–61
- Government House, xv, 9, 87, 88 fig. 5.1, 98
fig. 5.2, 101, 103
- Great Depression, 100

- guanbai*, 4
 Guangzhou (Canton), x, 3, 55, 122–24, 126–27, 155, 160
- Hahn, Emily (journalist), 61
 Haikou (Hoihow), xvi, 113–16, 129, 144
 Hainan, 124, 144
 Haiphong, 113–14
 Hakka sailors, 138
 Hall, Peter, 41, 43, 45, 50, 53, 57–58
 Hall, Stephen. *See* Sin Tak Fan
*ham seui jai*e (salt water boy), 55
hang shun kun, 138–42, 146, 151;
 Anlanxuan, 139; *sai ma sha kun*, 142, 148; *Taoyige*, 138; *Yihetang*, 138. *See* also *baogong zhi*; *ghaut serang*
 Hao, Yen-P'ing, 128–30
 Harbour Master's Office, x, 132, 134, 134n2, 136, 139–41, 142n41
 Hazlerigg, T. M., 165n21, 167, 172
 Helena May Institute, 102
 Hennessy, Sir John Pope, 9, 14, 18, 100, 155
 Henry, Patrick, 20
 Hildesheim Mission, 92, 94
 Hill District Reservation Ordinance, 91
 Ho Chi Minh, 171–72, 172n37
 Ho, Eric Peter (Eric Ho), 41, 45, 50, 52–60
 Ho Fook, 42, 54, 79
 Hoihow. *See* Haikou
 Ho Kai, 65, 71, 97
 Ho Kai Kai (Walter Bosman), 47, 53
 Ho Kom Tong, 58, 161, 161n17
 Holmes, Johnathan, 59
Hong Kong Almanack & Directory for 1848, 134
 “Hong Kong cot,” 101–2
 Hong Kong Hainan Commercial Association, 125
 Hongkong Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC), 129; and Carvalho Yeo 153, 158, 162–63, 167–68, 170
 Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children, 172
 Hong Kong Women's Guild, 100
 Ho Tung, Robbie (Robert Ho Shai Lai), 44
- Ho Tung, Sir Robert, 42, 43, 43 fig. 3.2, 44, 47, 52, 55, 57, 65, 79, 171
 Huang Sheng. *See* Wong Shing
Huazi ribao (Chinese Mail), 21
 Hung Kam Ning (Henry Graham Anderson), 43
hung mo kiu, 55–56
- Indians in Hong Kong, 56, 67, 71, 76, 127, 154n2
 Indo-China Steam Navigation Company. *See* Jardine Matheson & Company
 instant noodle, xii, 25–26, 35–36, 39–40; *Chicken Ramen*, 24, 37; Doll Instant Noodle (*gung chai min*), 24, 32, 34, 39; Japan's exports in 1970, 36 table 2.2; Maruchan, 32; Top Ramen, 36; World Instant Noodles Association, 25; Winner Food Products, 34
 institutional discrimination, 170–71
 International Labour Organization, 148–49; seafarers and welfare, 148; conference (1953), 149–50
 International Transport Workers Federation, 148
 Italian Convent School. *See* St. Mary's Canossian College
- Japan–Hong Kong relation, xii; anti-Japan sentiment, 31; desire for and appeal of Japanese products, 33, 35; Hongkong Japanese Club, 30; Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 33
 Japanese food in Hong Kong, xii, 35–36; adaptation into local cuisine, 27, 39; Ajinomoto, 23, 36; *Demae Icho*, 39; monosodium glutamate (MSG), 23, 27
 Japanese occupation, Hong Kong during, 50, 60–61, 97, 104, 128, 143, 171
 Jardine Matheson & Company, x, 50, 58, 146, 151, 155–56
 Jepsen & Company (Jie Cheng), xvi, 106–9, 114–15, 117–19, 121–26, 124 fig. 6.6, 128, 130; role in foreign trade of China and HK, 106; origin, 106; structure, 107

- Jebson, Jacob, xvi–xvii, 106, 108, 115–17, 119–21, 120 fig. 6.5, 123, 128–30
 Jebson, Michael, xvii–xviii, 106, 107 fig. 6.1, 108–10, 112–13, 129
 Jebson and Jessen Historical Archives (JJHA), 108
 Jenkin, F. C., 162–64, 166n23, 168, 170, 172n37, 173
 Jessen, Heinrich, xvi, 106–8, 116–17, 119–24, 130
 “junk trade.” See *nanbei* route

 Kao, Reverend Peter, 147
 Kejia (Hakka) sailors, 138
 Kemp, Sir Joseph, 167
 kept women. See protected women
 King Yuen Cheong, 124
kit fat, 43
 Knollys, Henry, 118
 Kobe, xii, 25–28, 31–33, 40, 99
 Kotewall, Bobbie, 78 fig. 4.5, 84
 Kotewall, Sir Robert, 170–72
kow see tow, 53–55
kun. See *hang shun kun*
 Kwok Hing Yin, 54

 Lamson, Herbert (sociologist), 48
 Lang, Hazel, 61
 Lang, John, 61
 languages in Hong Kong, xiv, 1, 4, 22, 131; Chinese dialects, xii, 1, 3–4, 6, 8, 131, 154; English, xii, 3, 7–8, 22, 131 (see also pidgin English); Portuguese, 120. See also multilingualism
 La Salle College, 74
 lascars, xvii, 132n3, 133–35, 135nn21–22, 150. See also *ghaut serang*; *Ghaut Serang and Lascar(s) Ordinance*
 “Lascar Act.” See Merchant Shipping Act or 1823
 “Lascar Boarding Houses.” See *ghaut serang*
 legal and justice system of Hong Kong, xiii, xviii, 154, 161, 172. See also Carvalho Yeo case
 Legge, James, 2, 4, 6
 Legislative Council of Hong Kong, 14, 65–66, 71, 84, 139, 151, 156, 161, 170–71
 Lethbridge, J. H., 44
 Lethbridge, Henry, 172
 Leung Hok Chau (Leung On), 13–14
 Li, Ellen, 81, 84–85
 Li Hongzhang, 6, 9–10, 12, 12n47
 Li Jungzhou, 6
 Li Tse Fong, 145
 Li Wan San, 54
Lianbang mingren lu (Famous people in America), 20
 “Licensed shippers of Manila Seamen,” 134
 Liuhe zongtan, 20n68
 Lo Cheung Shiu, 53, 60
 Lockhart, Sir James Stewart, 139
 Lui Tai-lok, 29, 31
 Lugard, Sir Frederick, 95

 Mackenzie, Bruce (Bruce S. K. Chan), 45, 49–50
 Maclean, Margaret (Margaret Mak), 52
 Maitland, Mary Jane. See Meath, Lady Mak, Margaret. See Maclean, Margaret
 Marine Department (Hong Kong), 152
 maritime regulations, 135n21; Desertion of Seamen Ordinance (1850), 135n21; Distressed British Seamen Ordinance, 137; Distressed British Seamen Merchant Shipping Consolidation Ordinance of 1891, 139; Merchant Shipping Ordinance (1844), 137. See also Merchant Shipping Act of 1823
 Marty, Auguste Raphael, 112–14
 Maryknoll Convent School (MCS), 74–76, 80 fig. 46, 81
 May, Helena, 89–95, 101–2
 May, Sir Francis Henry, 81, 87, 89–90
 McClymont, Edith. See Sze Lin-Yut
 McClymont, Julius, 47
 Meath, Lady (Mary Jane Maitland), 87, 89–93, 102
 media, sensationalism in, xviii, 166
 Medhurst, Walter Henry, 2

- merchants and mercantile organizations, x, xi, 1, 31; and charity, 11–12; China Chamber of Commerce, 14; Chinese General Chamber of Commerce, 125, 128; in Hong Kong, 108; merchant houses, *see* shipping and trading companies; social perception and hierarchy, 8–11; Society of King Chau Ngai Merchants in Hong Kong, 125
- Merchant Shipping Act of 1823 (“Lascar Act”), 132n3, 135, 137
- Messer, Charles McIlvaine, xviii, 158–59, 162, 164, 167–70, 173
- migration, ix, xiii, 12, 15n58, 44, 46, 48, 68n16, 109n7
- Ministering Children’s League (MCL), branches and chapters: Belilios, 99, 101; DGS, 95, 99; SSGC, 95, 99; in Singapore, 93, 97, 99;
- Ministering Children’s League (MCL), xiv, 90–94, 97, 100; activities, 87; admission policy, xv, 95, 97–99; aim, 90; anti-British sentiments and British image, 100; appeal and draw, 101; in Asia, 93–94, 99, 101; bazaar, xv, 88 fig. 5.1, 98 fig. 5.2, 100, 103; branches, 99, 101; in Britain, 87; and charity, 88, 92, 94; and Chinese girls, 101; Christian roots, 87; comparisons with Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, 90; conference, 98–99; ethos, 97, 102, 104; “Fun ‘o’ the Fair,” 103; global network, 104; in Hong Kong, xv, 88, 91–93, 99–100, 104; London, 100; magazine, 95, 97, 99–100; membership, 90, 94–95, 97–100, 103; multiethnicity, xiv–xv, 88–89, 93, 95, 97, 100–105; “No day without a deed to crown it,” 87; origin, 87; philanthropy, 99–100, 102–4; and postwar Hong Kong, 105; rules, 87; Shanghai, 81, 93, 99–100, 104; Lady Verulam, 103; wartime, 99, 103. *See also* Hong Kong Women’s Guild; Meath, Lady
- Ministering Children’s League (MCL) Hong Kong, presidents: Lady Lugard (Flora Shaw), xv, 95, 97; Helena May, 89–95, 101–2 (*see also* Helena May Institute); Lady Stubbs, 99–100
- missionaries and work in Hong Kong: xi–xii, xiv, 3, 65–67, 75, 78, 80–81, 83, 92, 94–95, 97, 144; Canossian Sisters, xiv, 66, 74–75; *The Chinese Recorder*, 145; Maryknoll sisters, xiv, 75; Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres, 66
- missions to seafarers: Casual Ward, 137, 137n29; chaplains, 147–48, 150; Chinese Mission House (London), 144; Chinese Seamen’s Mission (Christian Mission to Chinese Seamen), xvii–xviii, 143–47, 150; London Chinese Evangelical Mission, 144; London City Mission, 143–44; London Missionary Society, 2, 5–6, 20n68, 92, 144n52; Sailors’ Home and Missions to Seamen, xvii, 136 fig. 7.1; 136–37, 142, 145–48, 148 fig. 7.4, 149 fig. 7.5, 150; Sailors’ Shelter, 137; Seamen’s Institute, 143, 147
- M. Jebsen Shipping Company (Partenreederei M. Jebsen), xvi, 106–11, 111 fig. 6.2, 113–14, 117, 119, 129
- Mong, William Man-wai, 26, 31
- modernity and modernization, xiv, 6, 15, 28–32, 35, 38–40, 65, 68, 71–72, 74, 77, 82, 98, 103
- muitsai* (female domestic slaves), 13–14
- multiethnicity and multiculturalism, ix, xi, xiv–xix, 1, 40, 51, 79, 84, 120, 131, 154, 172. *See also* education: multiculturalism; MCL: multiethnicity; multilingualism
- multilingualism, xvii, 4–5, 40, 56, 120, 131, 154
- Muslims, 51, 56, 134, 154n2
- Nagasaki, 25–26
- nanbei* route, x, 132
- nanyang*, 132n4. *See also* Southeast Asia nationalism, 49, 96

- newspapers, x, 1, 8, 15, 17–18, 19, 99; and business, 17, 22; Chinese newspapers, x, 19; in the Carvalho Yeo case, 154, 164–66; and education, 19–20; and politics, 19–20; and Self-Strengthening Movement, 19
- Nissin Foods, 24, 32, 34–36; advertising, 34, 39; expansion into China, 38; in Hong Kong vs. the US, 38–39; in the US, 36
- North German Lloyd (Norddeutscher Lloyd), 125
- Olson, Sean, 47–48
- On Yip Indigo Syndicate, 122–23
- opium, x, 136, 140
- orphanages, xi, 74, 82–83, 92, 94–95
- Osaka, 24, 26, 28, 31–33, 37
- Ottershaw, 92, 99, 101–2
- Oxford Local Examinations, 77–78
- Pakhoi. *See* Beihai
- Parsees (Zoroastrian), xiii, 51, 79
- Passfield, Lord, 168
- patriarchy and patrilineage, 13, 49, 51–52, 60, 62, 98
- Peking Catholic Convent School (Hong Kong), 49
- pidgin English (China coast pidgin), xvii, 55, 120, 131
- “pig route.” *See* Schweinefahrt
- Po Leung Kuk, 14, 71, 85, 96
- Portuguese in Hong Kong, xiii, 56, 60–62, 66, 74–76, 79–80, 82, 118, 131, 153–57, 160–61, 172–73
- Potter, Eldon, K. C., 162–64, 166–67, 172
- prostitution, xi, 12, 14, 54, 56, 65
- protected women, 53–58, 63, 65; Lam Tsai-tai (and Gustav Overbeck), 54; Li Wan San (and Charles Roberts), 54; Shi Sze (and C. H. M. Bosman), 54–56
- Pui Ching School, 66
- Qing dynasty: anti-Qing movement, 141; civil service examination, 2, 7; Ding Richang, 6, 10, 18; Emperor Guangxu, 12, 12n47; *Huoqi shuolie*, 6; Li Hongzhang, 6, 10, 12; Self-Strengthening Movement, 19; Taiping Rebellion, 2, 3n3, 6; Treaty of Nanjing, 118
- Qiongzhou. *See* Haikou
- Qiribao*, 18–21
- Queen’s College: alumni, 44, 47, 65, 126; and elite Chinese families, 68, 72; and English education in Hong Kong, 65–66; and Eurasians in Hong Kong 43–44, 65; names and name changes, 43, 65–66, 70–72; principle and educational vision, 66, 70; and Wang Tao, 9. *See also* Ho Tung, Sir Robert; Wong Sik Kay
- Randers, 113n19
- Red Cross, 85, 147
- Register*, 15n57
- Report of the Commission to Enquire into the Working of “The Contagious Diseases Ordinance, 1867”* (1879), 54–55, 57
- rice cooker, 31, 33, 35, 38
- Robinson, Sir William, 139
- Rothwell, Thomas. *See* Lo Cheung Shiu
- Rules for the Government of Licensed Boarding Houses for Chinese Seamen*, 139
- Russ, C. A. S., 160, 160n4
- Schweinefahrt, 113
- Schuld, Jochen, 109–10
- seafarers and seamen in Hong Kong, xi, xiii, 132, 135, 138; alcohol consumption of, 131, 136–37, 140, 154; Asiatic Articles, 132, 132n3; brokerage, 140, 142, 147; charities, 142; Chinese, 132, 135, 137–38; comparisons between Chinese and non-Chinese, 139–40, 143, 150; Crew/Seamen’s Articles of Agreement, 132n3; and crime, 131, 154; decline of in Hong Kong, 152; demand for, 135; ethnic composition and classification, 131–37; ethnic tension, 135, 138, 143, 150–51; Hakka (Kejia), 138; hierarchy among, 132, 132n3; and

- illegal immigration, 131; involvement in smuggling and piracy, 148; labour relations, 148; Malay, 132, 140; Manila men, 132, 140; marginalization, 131; opium use among, 140; places of origin, 138; and sex, 131, 136; strike of 1922 and general strike and boycott of 1925–1926, 142; recruitment, 147, 150, 152; Ship's Articles (Shipping Articles), 132n3; supply, 140; transience, 131; union, 142, 149; welfare of, 132, 136, 151–52; of Western origin, 131, from Xiangshan (Zhongshan), 138 fig. 7.2, 139. *See also* boarding houses; Harbour Master's Office; lascars; maritime regulations; missions to seafarers
- Sephardi Jews, 48, 51
- serang*. *See ghaut serang*
- Severn, Sir Claud, 100
- shang* (commerce), 10, 115
- Shanghai: Andersen, Meyer & Co., 127, 127n65; and Carvalho Yeo, xviii, 159–60, 162, 166; Chan Ayin, 18; The Chinese Girls' School (*Zhongguo nüxuetang*), 67; Chinese Women's Club, 85; Eurasians in, 46, 48–49; and Jebson & Co., 128; MCL, 81, 93, 99–100, 104; and Tso Sin Wan, 71; *Xunhuan ribao* distribution, 21n70; Wang Tao, 2n2, 2–6, 9, 20n68; Wong Sik Kay, 127
- Shantou (Swatow), 21n70, 122, 124, 127
- Shaw, Flora, (Lady Lugard), xv, 95, 97
- She Po Sham (Paul Samuel Shea), 55
- Shea, Reverend Guy, 41, 45, 50, 55, 57, 60, 62
- Shea, Paul Samuel. *See* She Po Sham
- Shellshear, J. L., 163–64, 168
- shipping, 106; chartering, 108–11, 113–14, 129; deepsea and shortsea shipping, 132, 132n5; steam power, 108–9, 135
- shipping and trading in Hong Kong, x, xiii, xvii, 5, 7, 70, 112–15, 131, 151–52. *See also* Harbour Master's Office
- Shortrede, Andrew, 17
- Singapore: and Carvalho Yeo, 155, 171; and Y. T. Chau, 126; Chinese Women Club, 85; Eurasians in, 45; girls' education, 67; Japan ramen export, 36 table 2.2; MCL in, 93, 97, 99; Nissin, 38; seafaring, 149; and Rev. B. J. Tan, xviii, 144; and Tong Pak-wing, 32; and Wong Sik Kay, 127; *Xunhuan ribao* distribution, 21n70
- Sing Tao*, 27, 31 Sino-Japanese War, 97, 114
- Sin Tak Fan (Stephen Hall), 42–43, 43 fig. 3.2, 53, 58
- Smith, Carl, 18, 53, 59, 129
- social and racial hierarchy, x–xi, 1, 10, 60–61
- Society of King Chau Ngai Merchants in Hong Kong, 125
- Song, Sachiko, 27, 32, 34, 39
- South China Morning Post*, 30, 164
- Southeast Asia, xin1, xvii, 10, 27, 32, 91, 93, 132n4, 133, 171; French-Indochina, 113–14, 121, 124–25, 172; Malaysia (Malaya), 36 table 2.2, 67, 80; *nanyang*, 132n4; Thailand (Siam), 10, 80, 155; Gulf of Tonkin 113–15, 119, 129; Vietnam (Annam), 10, 32–34, 36 table 2.2, 80. *See also* Singapore
- Southorn, W. T. (colonial secretary) and Mrs. Southorn, 82, 103, 125
- Stewart, Frederick, 64, 66
- St. Joseph's Branch School (La Salle College), 74
- St. Joseph's College, 61
- St. Mary's Canossian College (Italian Convent School), xiv, 61, 66, 74–75, 80, 84, 92
- stores (small all-purpose grocery stores in Hong Kong), 28, 33–34, 38–39
- St. Paul's Co-educational College, 84
- St. Paul's College, 18
- St. Paul's Convent School (French Convent School), xiv, 77, 79–80, 84, 92
- St. Paul's Girls' College, 99
- strikes, 44, 142, 147, 172
- St. Stephen's College, 71
- St. Stephen's Girls' College (SSGC), xiv, 66, 71, 74, 77, 77 fig. 4.3, 79–81, 88; Carden, Winifred (first principal), 73;

- and English education for girls, 72–74, 77–85; MCL chapter, 88, 95
- Stubbs, Reginald, 99, 169, 172
- Sun Yat-Sen, 77
- supermarket culture, 24, 26, 28, 30, 36, 38–40
- Swatow. *See* Shantou
- Symons, Catherine Joyce, 41, 43, 45–46, 48–50, 53, 58, 76, 76 fig. 4.2, 78, 78 fig. 4.4
- Sze Lin-Yut (Edith McClymont), 47
- Tai Ping Shan district. *See* Victoria city
- takuwan bōeki* (Japanese pickle trade), 37
- Tan, Reverend Bock Jock (Rev. B. J. Tan), xviii, 143 fig. 7.3, 143–44, 146–47
- Tanka, 55–56
- Tasp Yet Company, 114–15
- Teng, Emma, 48, 51
- Toda, Seiji, 37–38
- Tong Pak-wing, 26–27, 31, 33–34, 37, 39
- Tong, Sachiko. *See* Song, Sachiko
- Tonkin Shipping Company (Compagnie de Navigation Tonkinoise), 114–15
- trade routes. *See* shipping and trading ports and routes
- translation and translators, 2–3, 18–20, 55, 154, 165, 167n26
- Treasury of Hong Kong, xviii, 153, 156–63, 165, 167–70, 173
- Tsang On Wing, 158n11, 162–63, 165, 168–70, 172–73
- Tso Shuk Ki, 73
- Tso Sin Wan, 71, 73
- Tung Wah Hospital, xi, 9, 11–14, 21, 35, 68, 71, 96, 125–26, 128
- Tyson, George. *See* Chan Kai Ming
- University of Hong Kong, 58 fig. 3.4, 61, 66, 73, 75, 76 fig. 4.2, 77, 78 fig. 4.4, 4.5, 82, 84, 125, 163
- Victoria city, 56, 74, 91, 136
- Victoria Diocesan Association, 73, 75
- Victoria Home and Orphanage, 92, 94
- Vietnam (Annam), 32, 38
- volunteering, 86–88, 93, 95–96
- “Vote for Your Favourite Brand,” 24, 25 table 2.1
- Wahl Shipping Company, 114
- Wang Tao, 1 fig. 1.1; accustomization to Hong Kong, xii; alienation and culture shock in Hong Kong, xii, 1, 3; background, 1–2; and James Legge, 2; and journalism and newspaper, 2; and Andrew Shortrede, 17; and *Xunhuan ribao*, xii, 2; and Ying Wah College (Anglo-Chinese College), 2; *zhongyuan* bias, 3
- Wing Hing & Co., 26–27, 33–35
- Wei Yuk, 71, 97
- Wellcome (supermarket), 24, 25 table 2.1
- Wells, Rev. H. R., 144, 144n51
- Wong, Frances, 79–80, 86
- Wong Shing, 5–6, 9, 11, 17–18, 21
- Wong Sik Kay, 107, 126–28, 130
- Wu Tingfang, 9, 11, 13–14, 18
- Xiangshan. *See* Zhongshan
- Xiamen (Amoy), 21n70, 127, 155, 159, 165
- Xunhuan ribao*, xii, 16 fig. 1.2, 2, 8, 15, 18, 21
- yee gwoon chong* (gown-and-hat graves), 52
- Ye Mingchen, 6
- Yeo, Carvalho, xviii, 153–57, 171–73; background, 155; portrayal in media, 165–66. *See also* Carvalho Yeo case
- Ying Wah College (Anglo-Chinese College), 2, 15n58, 144n51
- Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), 155, 172
- Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), xiv, 81, 83–85
- Yuen Cheong Lee & Co., xvi, 106, 109–11, 113–17, 121, 129–30
- Yuen Fat Hong, 109
- Yuen Fat Lee & Co., 113

Zeng Guoquan, 12
Zhongshan, 138 fig. 7.2, 139
Zimmern, Adolph, 43
Zimmern, Kristeen, 41