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APPROACHING SOUTH ASIANS IN HONG KONG

SUNG HUNG MUI

MPHIL

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by
SUNG Hung Mui

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ABSTRACT

Approaching “South Asians” in Hong Kong

by

SUNG Hung Mui

Master of Philosophy

“South Asians” is usually an inclusive term to refer to ethnic minorities originating from countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Despite the apparent concern with “South Asians” in Hong Kong society in recent years, such as pushing for legislation against racial discrimination and initiating social and educational programmes to help these minorities to better integrate into Hong Kong society, attention to irreducible cultural differences constituting their heterogeneity is still largely lacking.

The thesis intends to take up the question of the South Asian minorities in the context of post-1997 Hong Kong. By looking at their everyday struggles in political, linguistic and cultural realms, the thesis tries to understand three key questions - first, how “South Asians” as a minority assert their political and democratic rights and practice their citizenship in the socio-political realm; second, how the cultural identities of ethnic minority children in their formative years are shaped by the tensions between the formal institutional schooling and language policies on the one hand, and traditions, religions, customs and bonding of neighborhood living in their communities on the other hand; third, how “South Asians” are portrayed as the other

in the mainstream representation such as cinema and newspapers, despite the rising awareness against discrimination.

The thesis seeks to challenge the ways mainstream Hong Kong Chinese represent these minorities and critique the deep cultural bias of racism and discrimination that prevent the fundamental opening up to the heterogeneity of the Other.

I declare that this is an original work based primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.

(Sung Hung Mui)

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL OF THESIS

APPROACHING SOUTH ASIANS IN HONG KONG

by

SUNG Hung Mui

Master of Philosophy

Panel of Examiners

_____ (Chairman)

Professor CHAN, Ching-kiu Stephen

_____ (External Member)

Dr. KU Hok-bun

_____ (Internal Member)

Dr. HUI Po-keung

_____ (Internal Member)

Dr. LAU Kin-chi

Supervisor:

Dr. LAU Kin-chi

Approved for the Senate:

Professor Mee-kau
NYAW
Chairman, Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee

Date

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Chapter One

Approaching “South Asians” in the Hong Kong Context

Introduction

This thesis aims to address a problem that seems to be increasingly evident but existing theories are insufficient to explain, let alone to provide any solutions. The problem is how to re-set and re-define a discussion frame for the issue of ‘ South Asian ethnic minorities in Hong Kong’ , particularly in the academic field, as there is an urgency to include this discussion within a cultural studies framework. Such reframing is important for the understanding of this subject because the subject matter, nowadays, requires an approach with political intervention rather than descriptive accounts or neutral comments. Therefore, an evaluation on the existing boundaries within which the issue has been traditionally captured and prefigured in other fields like history, ethnography or generally social science, is needed. Without doubt, the intellectual efforts and contributions that these approaches/traditions (especially social theory and ethnographic fieldwork, a concern with historical contextualization and the movement of larger-scale cultural formations) have enriched the understanding of the issue should not be denied, and thus, cultural studies, alongside these approaches to the study of culture in critical dialogues (an important part of its intellectual strategies of transdisciplinarity), provides greater vibrancy and energy. In this chapter, I attempt to explore the existing literature available on ‘ South Asians in Hong Kong’ , particularly three ‘ authoritative’ books written on this issue and use Cultural Studies as a method to recover the un-represented and the under-represented. I would also like to analyse how Cultural Studies can be used as a critical analytical tool to bridge the gap between established historical accounts on this subject and its becoming of a popular and highly spotlighted social issue in recent years.

Cultural Studies and the Study of South Asian Ethnic Minorities

Cultural Studies defines what is interesting about culture in a particular way. It is interested in culture as a source of power, difference and emancipation, closely connected with social movements and cultural critique (Johnson, et al., 2004: 9, 24). Therefore, when I intend to examine the issue of ‘South Asian ethnic minorities in Hong Kong’ by using Cultural studies approach, I want to liberate the South Asian subject from its ‘essential’ representations constructed in history or social science discourses. Moreover, this thesis attempts to (re)present / (re)write the extraordinary diversity of subject positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category of ‘South Asians’, that is, to recognize that ‘South Asians’ is essentially a politically and culturally constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no ‘natural’ guarantees.

Contesting the concept of the ‘South Asians’ is a crucial way to do cultural analysis more intelligently and critically as well as to open up more possibilities for this social category. Cultural Studies, which focuses on the concept of ‘representation’ – one of the key ideas of Cultural Studies in exploring cultural questions, offers me many insights to take up this intellectual exercise. Unlike the empiricist and epistemologically realist positions that assume and imply that they can *reflect* the true meaning of what has really happened (the truth), as though there were a single answer that existed outside the realm of cultural understanding (Johnson, et al., 2004: 141), Cultural Studies argues that we never have direct access to reality, it can only appear via cultural means – language, discourse, theories, frameworks of meaning – and these are all *part* of ‘the real’ (Johnson, et al., 2004: 140). Cultural Studies approaches ‘representation’ as the medium or channel (using representational systems – concepts and signs) through which meaning production and organization happen. It is called the constructionist or constructivist approach and it recognizes that objects, people, practices, and events are not the issuing source of meaning, they

do not have stable and true meanings; instead the meanings are produced by everyone that participates, however unequally, in the cultural process of making meanings and fixing and shifting identities. Therefore, Cultural Studies has tremendous interest in reading closely and critically the *means* of representation such as “the rules of which form, limit and shape each version” and “the *making* of meaning – with all its contradictions, emphases, absences, formal rules and codes” (Johnson, et al., 2004: 140-141), instead of taking ‘face value’ of the conception of the ‘real’ because we understand that ‘meaning’ does not exist until it has been represented.

‘Representation’ is a signifying practice in a wide array of social contexts and institutional sites. Meaning is always a potential site of conflict where the articulation of meaning – variable meaning(s) – can take place in the same text or practice or event; thus, culture is also a major site of ideological struggle, a terrain of ‘incorporation’ and ‘resistance’ (Storey, 1998: 4). Therefore, Cultural Studies also acknowledges the complex relationship between power/knowledge and representation. In a culture, meaning often depends on larger units of analysis – narratives, statements, groups of images, whole discourse which operates across a variety of texts, areas of knowledge about a subject. Therefore, representation is seen as a source for the production of social knowledge which is connected in more intimate ways with social practices and questions of power. Michael Foucault studies not language, but discourse as a system of representation. By ‘discourse’ he means “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment (cited in Hall, 1997: 44). The concept of discourse in this usage is not only about language/linguistic, but “since all social practices entail *meaning*, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect” (cited in Hall, 1997: 44).

It is also concerned with how knowledge is put to work through discursive practices in specific institutional settings to regulate the conduct of others. Foucault argues that power operates within institutional *apparatus* and its *technologies*

(techniques) such as a variety of diverse elements, linguistic and non-linguistic – “discourses, institutions, architectural arrangements, regulations, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophic propositions, morality, philanthropy, etc.” (cited in Hall, 1997: 47). The discursive approach argues that it is only *within* a definite discursive formation that the object can appear at all as a meaningful or intelligible construct. South Asians, for instance, is a specific kind of social subject that is produced, and can only make its appearance within the discourses, practices and institutional apparatuses.

In the light of Stuart Hall’s conception of the politics of representation, this thesis approaches representation critically as it is a realm where meanings, values, perspectives, beliefs, as well as power are constructed, sustained and contested. ‘Representation’ is particularly an important cultural politics with a continual struggle over meanings, whereby subordinate groups attempt to resist the imposition of meanings which bear the interests of dominant groups. Therefore, a discussion on the interrelationship between the notion of representation and South Asians ethnic minorities is a key for the thesis to further carry forward. In seeking to explore a space of representation that is open to transformative processes of negotiation between the Self and the Other, this thesis also borrows insights from Michel Foucault’s conception of heterotopia. In Foucault’s term, heterotopic sites are the sites “that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect.” (Foucault, 1986:24) “Heterotopia” is an important notion to write against and unsettle taken-for-granted assumptions that essentialist and homogeneous representations are often trapped in. Foucault understands this as “utopias” that “have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form ... but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces.” (Foucault, 1986: 24) By utopia, Foucault does not refer to its usual meaning of a perfect society on an imaginary island or any place or state of ideal perfection. Instead, utopia is a reduction and simplification of representation, which is detached from historical and social contexts, that is why it is “perfect” and unreal. My interpretation of Foucault’s emphasis on

heterotopias is to struggle for recognition of the South Asians as heterogeneous subjects. This research focuses on three heterotopic sites: a socio-political site which discloses the issues of racial discrimination and the struggles for citizenship; a linguistic and educational site which discloses the everyday practices that South Asian students have adopted in dealing with the problems they face; and a cultural site which discloses the formation of racial prejudices against the South Asian ethnic minorities. In other words, the politics of representation is to identify utopias and heterotopic sites, and through the readings, the thesis suggests that “South Asians” with their multiple subject positions negotiate their status and everyday lives with contested social and cultural meanings that go beyond a victim or an Other.

“South Asians” and Its References in Historical Discourses

‘South Asians’ as an inclusive term has two levels of meanings: first it is basically a convenient term for describing people from the South Asian region namely Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan; second the recent development connotes negative social meanings in the sociological spectrum. Of course the meanings of this term are always in contestation, as I want to include this later in my project. However, in the comparison of this issue in three texts contributed by academic scholars predominantly of Indian background, the definition is much more confined to the first level of geographical-based meaning. Due to the fact that writers of Indian origin and background are relatively active in the Hong Kong academia and given the strong social influence of Indian business community, the stories and perspectives in these three texts are basically from Indian points of view. Nevertheless, it is quite questionable to claim that they are about the ‘South Asians’ even in the earlier days. This community in the earlier days would not identify themselves as ‘South Asians’ because such a term had no reference in those days. However, in the contemporary situation people from Indian and Pakistani origin regard themselves more as ‘South Asians’. This has been a more recent shift because they are alert that such a heavily-loaded social term can create a general momentum that can potentially affect them.

If we analyse the three ‘authoritative’ texts, the ethnic term has been referred to as the ‘overseas Indian community’ (Vaid, 1972), ‘Hong Kong’s Indian communities’ (White, 1994), and the ‘Indians’ (Kwok and Narain, 2003). We can see that the subject matter concerned in three similar researches are categorized accordingly to political and ethnic boundaries of the term ‘Indian’ set by authors of these texts.

The term ‘Indian’ has both an ethnic and a political connotation. Ethnically, all people who originated from the Indian sub-continent – and their progeny – are called Indians irrespective of the country of their domicile. Politically, only citizens of India and those who live abroad but hold passports issued by the Government of India could be regarded as Indians (Vaid, 1972: 5).

In Hong Kong parlance, an Indian is a person or the descendant of a person from anywhere in the Indian subcontinent. Indians were established in Hong Kong for more than a hundred years before Partition in India in 1947 resulted in the separation of the new nations of East and West Pakistan from India” (White, 1994: 1).

[...] our study deals with political and ethin [sic] Indian communities, as in the 50 odd years since the partition of India, Indian identity has become distinct and different from Pakistan and Bangladesh, so India cannot be considered representative of a Greater Indian sub-continent. We have dealt only with Indians who still have Indian roots (Kwok and Narain, 2003: 7).

The key concepts ‘Indian’ and ‘community/ies’ here need be redefined over time: politically one crucial factor constituting negotiation over the term ‘Indian’ is the Partition in 1947 that divided the subcontinent into India and Pakistan (East and West), and then West Pakistan became an independent country of Bangladesh in 1971; and culturally in what way a community/communities is/are defined is also negotiable for the purpose of the author and the interest of the recorded community/ies.

Vaid uses the term ‘Overseas Indian’ to refer to the group “whose ethnic origin corresponds to a region now called India (in political definition)” and “who tend to constitute a community of their own wherever they live (in cultural

definition)”, so his research focuses on their cultures like traditional religion, forms of worship, food habits, social ceremonies, marriage rites and values with regard to social and family relations and of bringing up children – particularly girls, this community has generally retained (Vaid, 1972: 5).

White uses the term ‘Indian’ to include anyone from the Indian subcontinent rather than a specific nationality. We see stories of individuals especially the earlier immigrants whose identified origin could be traced back to the Greater India before the Partition but even though their places of origin are now under the sovereignty of the Pakistan government and the Bangladesh government, but are still recorded under the inclusive banner of ‘Indian’. White’s account on Gurkhas, Sri Lankans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are included in the section of regional groups that gives details on these ‘sub-communities’ (White, 1994: 1). By classifying these groups into ‘sub-communities’, she has tried to cover the diversity and heterogeneity of this community which a single ‘Indian Community’ could not cover. White’s text is the first comprehensive work dealing with this issue, nowadays referred to as ‘South Asians in Hong Kong’. Culturally, White defines ‘the Hong Kong Indian man’ as part of four communities: extended family, ethnic or religious group, the entire Indian community in Hong Kong, and by blood and emotion attachment, an Indian (White, 1994: 1). So, the Indian communities defined by White is multi-dimensional that relates to one’s life and identity.

Kwok and Narain define the term ‘Indian’ only as the ones who still have Indian roots. It is worth noticing that the Council of Hong Kong Indian Associations (CHIA) and the Indian Chamber of Commerce Hong Kong sponsored the research and its cause of production suggests obviously that ‘Indian’ would mean only Indian with Indian nationality or blood-tie. The first part of the book, besides dealing with the lengthy historical background tracing “Indian presence in, and relevance to, Hong Kong during its 160 years of existence” (Kwok and Narain, 2003: 85), also shows professional qualities of these two scholars as ‘comparative cultural historians’. The second part of the book is like a detailed business directory about some Indian tycoons and celebrities. The ‘Indians’ in Kwok and Narain’s text refer to different

scattered individuals, but ‘ fame and wealth’ are their distinctive features. ‘ Co-existence and co-prosperity’ that the book wants to highlight and the deployed tone synchronizing Hong Kong’ s image as Asia’ s world city are washing the unwanted dirt (the subaltern voices) in history and reality (Kwok and Narain, 2003: 2).

Refiguring the Subject Revealed in the Three Texts

These three texts are the prominent references about ‘ Indians’ or broadly speaking ‘ South Asians’ in Hong Kong. Generally they provide a historical basis for the understanding of the history of the Indians as a distinctive group in Hong Kong. As pointed out in different texts their presence and existence in Hong Kong are closely related to the ‘ expansion of the British Empire’ (Vaid, 1972: 1). The earliest tide of Indian immigration to Hong Kong is generally a result of ‘ the overall British operation in China and the Far East’ where they were seen as trustworthy ‘ third party’ to assist and support the imperialist project of the British (Vaid, 1972: 1). Trade and business took people of Indian origin to different Treaty Ports on the China coast and to Hong Kong. Thus particular business groups like Parsee and Ismailia got trade benefits from the British government because they were its supporting partners particularly in opium trade in China. The Colonial Government also required soldiers and policemen from India to enforce its authority, professionals to build infrastructure like railways, roads, houses, health-care, legal and education systems. We can see Indians in the early period of colonial Hong Kong were the backbone of imperialist governance and colonization. Even now some of those prestigious Indians are still enjoying economic and social supremacy and generally most Indians are trying out different possibilities in this land of domicile.

The authors of these texts intend to deal with an unwritten subject of minority. They pay tribute to Indians’ contribution to Hong Kong by writing about the marginalized voices and portraying under-represented figures into mainstream historic narration. As Indians acquire a very special position which complicates its ambiguity of ‘ both in and out’ (as part of Hong Kong community) role in a large part of the colonial history, and their ambiguous role has been seen to be more acute and problematic in the post-colonial era. These texts are produced in different times;

obviously they reveal the group in different political, socio-economic, and cultural circumstances in the 1970s, 1990s and 2000s; the last three decades signify important changes to Hong Kong and its living subjects. It started with entering into a golden age of economic boom that took off in the 1970s, political turmoil of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in the 1980s and sovereignty transition of the territory in the 1990s followed by economic downturn and social discontent recently. While importance has been given to different selected areas, issues, sectors of life by these authors, I believe a meaningful and careful comparison of these three texts could bring out a better understanding of the history of the ‘South Asians’ as well as help in explaining the present situation.

In this thesis, I am trying to develop understanding of these texts about the Indians/South Asians from a selected angle - race/class - which I believe are important angles to look at how ‘culture’ works within a community because they are the arenas where different kinds of cultural forms are merging, juxtaposing each other and finally formulating, shaping and reshaping different communities and individuals. Through revisiting the investigation and the findings that the authors have offered and through reading and interpreting what and how these matters are represented, we can hopefully unfold the dilemma and struggle of self-positioning in these writings.

Constructing “Race” and “Class” in Discussion of Ethnic Minority

‘Race’ and ‘class’ are presumably tricky in the discussion of ethnicity. Being and becoming a specific ‘race’ and ‘class’ is something as a consequence of interrelations with other races and other classes. There are debates on skin colour determining social class; that is why representing the upgraded social class, in these texts, is a practical means to offset the ignominy brought by given racial inferiority. All these texts have a common and clear approach of depiction and discussion about ‘class’ that is more or less siding with the higher-middle class values and cultural practices. They work to commemorate the contribution of Indians to Hong Kong in such a way that only big names and successful stories got recorded effusively.

However, this does not mean that they have no differences in representation and social implication.

Class distinction is not much about social differentiation; rather it is more a 'racial' issue in Vaid's representation. Indeed there is not much room for the poor (among the Indian groups) to be represented as all attention goes to the prominent Parsi and Sindhi merchants and traders. However, Vaid complains that no matter how wealthy and successful a businessman can be, social acceptance is still difficult to get. 'Race' is thought to be more important a factor than 'class' in the question of gaining social recognition. Vaid points out:

Racial origin always remained a barrier inhibiting social intercourse between different communities. The Englishman belonged to the master race and maintained his distance with other groups...Chinese who considered all other races as culturally inferior or barbarians were not keen to cultivate Indians. The Indians had to depend upon themselves for the small pleasures of life (Vaid, 1972: 29).

This kind of nationalist resentment and racism may be true in a broader structural sense especially when imperialist ideologies were so much customary in the early days, but Vaid is too hopeless to search for alternative interaction amongst the lower classes of different races. 'Class' in terms of social distinction exists in the text, but the poor and the socially disadvantaged are just something abated and unpicked in the lines showing how the 'newly-rich Indians' and the 'new elite amongst Indians' organize different strategies such as conspicuous display of wealth and adoption of new norms of public behaviour and social relationships to win their respectability (Vaid, 1972: 100). Vaid is much used to the kind of nostalgic nationalism and moralist-elitist discourses. He shows too little interest in the less well-off Indians because they are socially and financially incapable to become entrepreneurs whom he addresses to and banks on. However, more desperately it is likely a vain attempt for him to give sincere advice to rich Indians to change a general perception of 'racialization of class' and to restore the downfallen prestige of the Indian community because in the text it seems that they do not care any more about 'the goodwill of the majority community' (Vaid, 1972: 105).

‘Class’ as an issue is treated more closely to the social differentiation in White’s text. White points out that a single “Indian community” does not exist in Hong Kong, Indians have formed sub-communities (White, 1994: 3). The term “Indians” is seen as more diverse and heterogeneous at the social base. Hong Kong’s geographical limitations bind the Indian communities more closely to each other and almost everyone of the same sub-community knows each other, so in this sense they seem to be more “unified” than those in larger areas such as the UK and the US. However, thanks to this given “geographical enclosure”, social status and hierarchy differentiated by wealth and education are particularly “transparent” and more of a matter of discussion among the community. Therefore the kinds of “sore spots” like business rivalries or jealousies over success, condemned by Vaid, are more a problem among Indians in the 1990s. A quotation from White’s book shows how sophisticatedly the notion of “class” works in the community and individual life among Indians:

A Sikh woman living in Cleveland, Ohio commented that Hong Kong Sikhs seem more divided by education and money than do those in the United States. She sees Sikhs in Hong Kong as being on an obvious ladder, where everyone knows who is on top and who remains on the bottom rung; they are all very aware of how quickly currently well-heeled Sikhs can slip. Except for occasions on which Sikhs gather at the *Gurdhwara* (the home of the guru or Holy Book), there is little social connection between wealthy Sikhs and the typical turbaned watchman. In Cleveland, class distinctions among Sikhs are more graduated (White, 1994: 94-95).

A sharp social contradiction is pervasively cruel among Indians. For instance, in the depiction of a Parsi wedding in which the reader is told: “the bride wore a white georgette Western-style dress trimmed with silver” and “the entire cosmopolitan guest list was published in the newspaper” (White, 1994: 79); while scarcity of material comfort is everyday life for Sikh men living in a shared dormitory where one can find a “thin room furnished with a dozen narrow beds placed to allow basic leg room between them” (White, 1994: 100). Moreover, White is also more open to pinpoint the isolation of most Indians from the rest of Hong

Kong society and sometimes even highlights the tensions and discriminations that exist at various levels between the Indians and the larger Hong Kong community by citing concrete examples in this aspect. In spite of this, she controversially fails to get into more sophisticated investigation into the hidden parts of the two different cultures, but simply jumps to an assumption that racial problem is minimized because of “the relative scarcity of Indians in Hong Kong, combined with the high profile of prosperous members of the Indian community and the absence of an Indian ghetto...” (White, 1994: 226) Her observation could be easy to understand, but it helps little to explain discrimination, which seems to be trivial and subtle yet influential in race, gender and cultural differences. Indeed, she forgot that the most vulnerable victims of racial discrimination among the South Asian groups in Hong Kong are the ones who are neither “prosperous” nor “ghetto” in terms of social and class divisions.

“Class / race” in Kwok and Narain’s text seems to have reached a state of coherence and clearness in narration that was not easily accomplished in previous texts. It is because threads related to the “poor” and “racial tension” have been deliberately wiped away and hidden. The authors praise the British Empire and China as the two competitive sovereign holders for making Hong Kong into an amazingly dynamic and complex modern city with a strong international mix and conflict-free society with complete absence of any disturbing incidents of racial or ethnic conflicts (Kwok and Narain, 2003: 3-4). Kwok and Narain criticize White to be too frank to expose “the community tensions between particular Indian ‘communities’, as well as the strains between the Indians as a whole and the British and the Chinese” (Kwok and Narain, 2003: 6). They try hard to prove Hong Kong as a wonderful example of cross-cultural understanding and cooperation which have brought forth co-prosperity of two communities (Chinese and Indian) in Hong Kong. However, the evidence is only enough to show a “small-circle integration” of people like “Pang Yuet-moi and Lee Chi-wai, the badminton and tennis coaches of the India Club, who were among the Chinese invited to Hari Harilelas’ s birthday party” (Kwok and Narain, 2003: 250). Portraits of Indians, here, are presented according to occupational categorization which totally distracts individuals from the kind of

traditional organization based on cultural origins like Muslim, Parsi and Sikh as presented in previous texts. The specificity of this kind of categorization creates a problem of homogenization of class and subjects. The ones to be enlisted in different fields and sectors must have a successful story to tell; they must be successful and rich. So the selected portraiture of the Indians has the “businessman and managerial” figure in common, the drawbacks are these portraitures cannot have their own distinctive features to differ from others. I did not get much excitement and significant insights after reading these successful stories, which are presented in more or less the same way, and most importantly, nothing could I find from them regarding any attachment to communities at large and everyday life. For instance, “social culture” represented in DS Mohan’s videocassette can tell this text is extremely high-class-centric and elitist. “Social culture” is just high-class culture in which the people engaged are busy with endless house parties, ballroom dancing, party games, picnics and lavish religious ceremonies where all well-known Indian businessmen can be spotted; all kinds of mouth-watering cuisine can be served and ladies dressed impressively (Kwok and Narain, 2003: 73).

Contextualizing “South Asians”

Discussion or comparison on specific “class / race” is just like showing a small thread out of the whole piece of complex fabric – the subject “South Asians in Hong Kong” itself. However, through this small thread we see lots of interactions that this culture has been engaging with the mainstream society. We should note that these texts are located in different periods from the 1970s to the present time, their productions being a way to respond to what the situations required is pretty obvious as each one of them is so contemporarily contextualized. And writing in itself is a conscious act and often political means to participate in social progression and transformation. Thus, the juxtaposition of these texts is not intended to present a coherent picture. Though ‘history’ sometimes tends to provide a linear account about how things happened, I will not discuss this issue here. I want to anchor the issue with its contemporaneity / historicity in different times as represented here in different texts and find out the ruptures of such kind of representation in those texts.

Represented Indians' ambiguous historical position in Hong Kong has been well concealed before the 1997 problem, but the 1997 problem for the first time posed a historical difficulty to them that they would be totally and thoroughly "out of the place" as they could not get either Chinese or British citizenship. I would make an assertion that the significance of the 1997 problem to South Asians minorities is that it made the unnoticeable communities visible and drove the communities towards a common goal to gain right of abode in Hong Kong. The year 1997 can be seen as a turning point for the South Asian communities; its implication is far more than just political.

Pre-1997

The Sino-British Joint Declaration on the government of Hong Kong, as a Special Administrative Region after 1997, was moving forward with difficulty because of lots of differences between both the Beijing government and the British colonial government. This also seriously hurt the sentiments and feelings of the South Asians and made them believe that a time of irresistible catastrophe was going to befall. The whole issue related to ethnic minorities at the 80s was encapsulated in the mood of double blur - nowhere to go ahead and nowhere to slip away. This was a time of ambivalence and ambiguity of existence when everyone was confused with the change of the master of the territory, plus possibly the whole set of rules coded obviously in political identity and subtly in culture. Therefore, the intense political atmosphere in the early 1980s indeed informed the first two books with certain levels of differences. Vaid and White were responding to the disagreement between British and Chinese in early 80s and the search for better solution of the 1997 problem, which were of the same degree of significance to Indians in Hong Kong.

I think the "1997 Problem" was not much anticipated before the 1980s and it was not clear what would happen definitely, at least it was not perceived as a terrifying issue such as loss of nationality and identity for most of the Hong Kong people and its minorities. This was a historical problem that needed to be sorted out; however, most of the people were comfortable with their affirmed "Hong Kong identity". For Indians they felt happy with the prosperous environment for carrying

on business and to be a part of Hong Kong's international community. The 1960s and 1970s indicate the successful economic boom in the history of Hong Kong: "the overseas Indians in Hong Kong are amongst the economically better off Overseas Indian communities in different parts of the world..." (Vaid, 1972: 99). At the time Vaid made his account on this issue, he showed the complex dilemmas of subjects who were free from any sovereignty of nations and would probably become stateless (Vaid, 1972: 102), but there was no unnecessary fear about their politics because their interests were served best in the political status-quo of the Colony, and they wished the status-quo could be preserved as it might be equally desired by other communities as well.

However, Vaid pointed out the unfavourable political condition for Overseas Indians as he perceived Indians were slipping from positions of prestige and power in the community for two reasons: one, externally politics in India after the successful independence movement in 1947 marked "the loss of the British empire in India, Indians in the Colony became an out-group to the British in Hong Kong" (Vaid, 1972: 104); and the other:

[...] internally the changed political and social climate in and around the Colony, the British administration must cultivate the majority community. It can no longer hope to stay on without placating the Chinese nor remain in a peace which is enforced by a handful of persons brought in from outside (Vaid, 1972: 104).

More likely Vaid wanted to warn the Indians that their good days were no longer with them, they needed to be self-strengthened and self-reformed in order to prepare for new challenges. The self-strengthening project required that the Indian community should be seen as a united and dignified community and must be ready to merge with the larger Chinese community and make Hong Kong their home. Therefore, "at wider level, it should accept its social responsibilities toward the wider society in Hong Kong and use its talents and resources to enrich the quality of life in the Colony" (Vaid, 1972: 104). Regaining social approval and equal footing at the social basis were the prior steps to gain political recognition and rights. Vaid was very much confident of this because 1997 was still 20 years ahead of them, time would allow things to get recognized if a self-strengthening movement could

successfully change most of the Indians. The “1997 Problem” would not disadvantage them so badly if they could successfully get social recognition and political sympathy.

When White published her book in 1994, Hong Kong’s future was basically confirmed, the transitional engine was driving fast: preliminary structural changes in political and government areas had been carried out and more tangible changes such as issuing new banknotes and currencies and designing new symbols for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government departments were taking place. “1997” was just a hard fact for South Asians. The problem became acutely controversial in April 1990 when the British Parliament adopted the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill, “which allowed citizenship and right of abode in Britain to only 50,000 carefully selected heads of households and their families” (White, 1994: 227). This was a shocking decision for everyone who held the Hong Kong’s British Dependent Territories Citizens (BDTC) passport, South Asian minorities alike every Hongkonger threatened by the 1997 Panic started to believe that they were somehow betrayed by the British. The larger purpose of the book apparently was to highlight the dilemmas of the Indian community as it was very close to the momentous changes that lie ahead in 1997 when the British were about to leave Hong Kong and the island would revert to Chinese control. White tends to negotiate legal status for Indians as she says:

The year 1997, when Hong Kong reverts to Chinese rule, is a landmark for everyone in the territory. The changes raise special questions, however, for Hong Kong’s long-standing Indian population. The British have denied Hong Kong Indian holders of British Dependant Territory Citizen (BDTC) passports the right of abode in Great Britain, and China has not made them feel particularly welcome in Hong Kong after 1997. [...] Indians have contributed immensely to the wealth and well being of Hong Kong. Now their future is murky, and no one else seems particularly to care (White, 1994: 1).

The feeling of separation was particularly stressed, Indians did not share the same feelings as that of Hong Kong Chinese about the “1997 event”, rather they could feel being flung to a more peripheral and miserable position.

White thinks that Indians were discarded from the Chinese community particularly in the “1997 Problem”. Indians could only rely on themselves and it seemed that the “pragmatism” they absorbed from the Hong Kong culture was their only advantage for surviving another dramatic change in history. She writes: “Indians have survived dramatic changes throughout history. It is hoped that they will adapt to whatever Hong Kong’s future holds and continue to contribute to its welfare” (White, 1994: 231). At the time when White addressed the “South Asian” problem, perhaps social assimilation and integration were secondarily registered in the agenda. It was because “1997” had eclipsed other problems such as rivalries and it itself became a “common problem” of all the Indian communities, which helped to generate a kind of community identity when “everyone supported the admirable efforts of Kewalram Sital¹ to gain right of abode for Hong Kong Indians in Great Britain” (White, 1994: 222).

Kewalram Sital gave a speech in the Indian New Year celebrations at the Happy Valley Hindu Temple on March 21, 1996, when the granting of full British nationality / citizenship to the Indian ethnic communities in Hong Kong was still in wearisome debate. Sital sent his New Year message to enliven his Indian counterparts; he said:

In spite of 1997, don’ t panic. There’ s nothing to worry about. We’ re a business community; we’ re not a political group so any government will welcome us. So, keep doing what you’ re doing. And of course I wish everyone prosperity, happiness, better business, more profits and good health.²

These two books basically take a stand that Hong Kong’s South Asians should be allowed the right of abode in Britain as well as in Hong Kong. All these writings represent the long Indian heritage and their contribution towards Hong Kong’s history and its society and give ‘political legitimacy’ to these ‘empowered subjects’ .

¹ Sital was chairman of the Council of Hong Kong Indian Associations and a Justice of the Peace.

² “Passport Plea for Indian Loyalists”, *South China Morning Post*, 21 March 1996, p.2.

Post-1997

“The 1997 problem” brought no expected catastrophe. With the assurance of giving the right of abode in the United Kingdom announced by the House of Commons on February 4, 1997, years of campaigning paid off finally. “Through all this, we have kept our faith in the traditional British sense of fairness and I am glad to see our faith was not misplaced”, said Kewalram Sital.³ However, most of the Indian communities chose to stay behind in Hong Kong after 1997 even with possession of full British nationality. Consequently we see the status quo in terms of political rights enjoyed by South Asian minorities remain unchanged similar to those of Hong Kong people guaranteed under the Basic Law and the principle of “one country two systems”. Basic Law came to be an outcome of these negotiations, “Article 24, Clause 4 stated that ethnic minorities who had resided in Hong Kong continuously for at least seven years as their permanent residence, either before or after 1997, would be allowed to continue to reside in Hong Kong” (White, 1994: 227-228).

There is also no lack of the promised capitalist way of life if we count the interest of the privileged and the powerful like Indians who have been interviewed in Kwok and Narain’s study, “(they) have expressed their satisfaction at the conditions that have prevailed after 1997. They have in general reiterated their confidence in the Hong Kong system. And in general Indians feel they are more welcomed by local Chinese after 1997, probably due to the process of decolonization, the downturn of the Hong Kong economy, as well as more internationalization among younger generations of local Chinese (Kwok and Narain, 2003: 268). The Indian communities’ wits in political affairs and sound political knowledge teach them that their new master, the HKSAR government, should not be blamed, they know “whatever economic adversity has taken place is because of the general economic downturn that is worldwide phenomenon, rather than as a consequence of 1997” (Kwok and Narain, 2003: 77). In this sense it is proved that ethnic minorities can

³ “Indian Welcome Ruling but Have No Intention of Leaving”, *South China Morning Post*, 5 February 1997, p.3.

also enjoy the carnival mood of proverbial “continuation of horse-racing and ball-room dancing” in co-prosperity.

If things have been going quite well for Indians, then why do “ethnic minorities” pose another serious problem to the post-colonial Hong Kong? Are there any missing angles and visions in the studies demonstrated by Vaid, White, Kwok and Narain? What are the sensitive bits and pieces that have not been dealt with in these previous tasks? Perhaps there is something important which has been deliberately or accidentally undermined in the movement for political right? The new vital concern about “South Asians” as an issue is no longer a political problem; rather it is a mixed social, economic and cultural problem. Barry Sautman asserts that Hong Kong’s semi-ethnocracy (which is seen as more prevailing in Hong Kong’s post-colonial society) is related to the HKSAR’s anti-democratic features and globalization’s expansion of inequalities, which constitute a system of racial inferiorization and ethnic stratification, and in which “South Asians are a lower stratum” (Sautman and Kneehans, 2002: 116-117).

A Recent Case: 2001 Census on Ethnic Minorities

Thanks to the pressure from the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the HKSAR government started to show a rather cooperative attitude by carrying out the first ever census on ethnic groups and the report was released in January 2001. The Census, presenting the detailed profile of ethnic minorities - demographic characteristics, education, labour force, living arrangement and household characteristics, and geographical characteristics, tries to give details of the ethnic minority population in Hong Kong. The ‘South Asians’ have been given a clearer image. The 2001 Population Census shows that people from South Asian countries, namely Nepalese, Pakistanis, Indian, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankan, comprises about 13% of the total ethnic population in Hong Kong. The census has much more significance. It raises huge concern on evaluating quality of life of ethnic minority groups living in Hong Kong and implementing suitable social policies and laws to protect their rights and to include them in mainstream society. “South Asians” are the ones who get much social attention.

Details and Interpretations on the 2001 Census, particularly on “South Asians”

“South Asians” have largely taken precedence over other ethnic groups such as Filipina, Thai, Malaysian, Indonesian (as “South East Asians” generally named in a rather broad category by geographical convenience) who are now more in a state of fading importance. This is because they are more or less successfully incorporated in a comparatively accepted social category of “foreign domestic labourers” in both realms of physical labour sector in Hong Kong and Hong Kong people’s general perception about them as a fixed image. On the contrary, South Asians’ transplantation and insertion in Hong Kong’s life in terms of economic, political, socio-cultural participation take and constitute many more diverse possibilities of multilayer interfaces as we go through the different interpretations of the 2001 Census (*Government Press Release*, 2 Jan 2001).⁴ “South East Asians” constitute about 70 % of the total estimated minority population - Filipinas are the majority group (56.6%), the second is Indonesians (14.4%). They are also represented in more homogenized terms like aged from 27 to 38, mostly women (it has highly gendered characteristic as 82% are women among the minority population), work as domestic labourers with wages from HK\$2000 to \$6000 per month (77.2%), with education of middle-school level (54.8%) and certain level of language proficiency (60.4% speak fluent English and 11.2% speak Cantonese). In contrast, “South Asians”, who constitute a small percentage of the minority population, are represented in disputably diverse ways. One news report on this census highlights the point that there seems to be a career pattern for ethnic minorities in Hong Kong to engage with. Filipina, Indonesian and Thai basically engage in domestic labour work; Nepalese work in security positions and cleaning work; Pakistanis in transportation related work. The unemployment rate in “South Asian” minority groups is a striking problem often addressed in public discourses; about 5500 people out of the 9500 households surveyed are under employed, in which Indian, Nepalese and Pakistanis

⁴ “Government announced population census result on Hong Kong ethnic minorities,” Government Press Release, January 2, 2001, refer to webpage:
<http://www.info.gov.hk/censtatd/chinese/press/ops/0101/c020101.htm>

number 1000, 900 and 900 respectively.⁵ However, referring to the same aspect, another newspaper shows a very different picture. It says, besides Europeans and Americans whose median wage is about \$36,000 per month, Indians are the richest ethnic group having monthly median wage up to \$13,000; followed by Nepalese and Pakistanis getting \$10,000 and \$7,000 respectively.⁶ This means some “South Asians” are doing fairly well in Hong Kong and particularly Indians’ participation in Hong Kong’s economy shows more multilateral interfaces. Of course the great contradictions shown in these two newspaper reports do not mean that some of the information they quoted is not right, but here it shows the selection of different information can tell different stories, and shows different effects of different representations of “South Asians”. Regarding the issue of settlement in Hong Kong, 30% of the interviewees reveal that they may consider settling in Hong Kong, 40% say they would not because their families are not here. But it is seen as an “interesting” phenomenon that “no Nepalese reveal that they will surely leave Hong Kong, and about 95% of Pakistanis say they plan to settle in Hong Kong”.⁷ We can probably assume ‘the 30% who may consider settling and the 40% who would not’ are responses mostly from Filipinas and other domestic workers. Then we can see gender is a decisive factor for the transnational flow and settlement. However, why is it “interesting” that the newspaper highlight that economically inferior people have a plan of settlement in Hong Kong? Does it show the bias to poor migrants that they are not economically sound enough to be citizens in Hong Kong? Or it implies their settlement is a problem to us?

“South Asians” in Other Writings about South Asians

The above contextualization and interpretations of three particular texts demonstrate a selective ‘representational’ skill that I intend to use to make more easily comprehensible the complicated threads formulating the so-called history and development of the South Asian communities in Hong Kong. Apart from this

⁵ “Filipino account the greatest population among Hong Kong ethnic minorities; Indian face highest unemployment rate while Nepal the second high,” *Hong Kong Globe*, 3 January 2001, A02

⁶ “280000 Hong Kong ethnic minorities, 35% Pakistani are unemployed, of which 90% expect to stay in Hong Kong,” *Sing Pao*, 3 January 2001, A08.

⁷ “280000 Hong Kong ethnic minorities, 35% Pakistani are unemployed, of which 90% expect to stay in Hong Kong,” *Sing Pao*, 3 January 2001, A08.

conventional signifying practice that constructs meanings of South Asians in ‘history’, there are many ways to represent the same subject in the *making* of meanings and the production of knowledge through different articulations in different realms of cultural understanding in historically and culturally specific contexts.

Regarding the nationality issue after the 1997 handover, individual authors have shed light on the dilemmas and predicaments faced by the South Asian ethnic minority communities in Hong Kong, though their narratives are not as comprehensive as the three texts discussed above. They prefigure the predicament of the Hong Kong Indians in fighting for politically recognized statuses of nationality in Britain and Hong Kong in their quest for full British citizenship before the absolute deadline would come in 1997. Their representations normally attempt to reconstruct the sequence of this development chronologically (Das, 1990: 147-157). Besides the shared motion to call on the British government to give full British citizenship to members of the non-Chinese ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, some focus on the concerns and coping strategies, such as outright emigration and the acquisition of foreign passports, of the South Asian minority communities in Hong Kong in view of the impending transfer to Chinese rule and the special predicament of the ethnic minority BDTCs (British Dependent Territory Citizenship). This perspective gives importance to individuals, subjectivity, in response of negotiation to a big structural force (Menski and Gobel, 1995: 159-184).

Religion, as a major bonding among the South Asians communities, is an important cultural and ethnic identity. Social and cultural anthropologists are interested to discover the signification and effect of religion among the South Asian communities in Hong Kong. Caroline Piss and Joel Thoraval deploy a historical and ethnographical perspective in looking into the organization and activities of Trustees of the Hong Kong Muslim (Piss, 1999; Thoraval, 1991). They examine the history of inclusion and exclusion of different Muslim groups in their participation in their oldest and most encompassing organizational structure, the Trustees, at different periods of time. The paper emphasizes on the secular reasons such as concerns over membership fees, property rights and loss of power provoking

such hesitation, although religious and symbolic issues are equally important in determining the involvement of different Hong Kong Muslim groups in the Trustees. Transnational experience is common among South Asian migrants in Hong Kong; it brings interesting insights to know how incorporation and negotiation of two (native and foreign) cultures in a host society and in turn a new identity is re/shaped. Piss examines the ways in which Indians in Hong Kong have shaped their identities. It focuses on the relatively wide range of cultural knowledge and different social networks that Indians in Hong Kong selectively adopt as transnational strategies in engaging in the processes of globalizing their identities. The paper also discusses what referents Indians in Hong Kong used in order to present themselves in ways that they believed would give them a competitive edge over the other members of Hong Kong society. Whereas, Anita M. Weiss specially looks at the creation of a “Local Boy” identity that the newer generations of Indian migrants reposition themselves in negotiation with the mixed cultures they experience in Hong Kong (Weiss, 1991).

More recently, discussions about South Asians have been more focused on social policies to meet the needs of this generally termed ‘marginalized/socially disadvantaged community’. Questions are largely concerned about racial discrimination (Loper, 2004; Centre for Social Policy Studies, 2003), education for ethnic minorities (Loper, 2001; Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service, 1999-2000), and South Asians ethnic minority youth in Hong Kong (Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service, 2002). All of them attempt to seek optimal social, education and ethnic minority policies to deal with the ever-enlarging ethnic minority population as well as the problem of social stratification and inequality in contemporary Hong Kong society. Documentaries and series of special topic in TV and radio programmes have followed the traces of these social issues more closely and newspapers and magazines also feature these as hot social topics. The recent accounts on South Asian communities show a drastic shift in representation / discourse, they produce new social subject in contrast to the ‘unproblematic’ representation provided in the three authoritative texts. I will not note them in detail here as some of these ‘representations’ will be analysed and used in later chapters in the thesis.

“South Asians” through Hong Kong’s Perspective

The essentialist qualities of the collective “Indian” identity as shown in the three ‘authoritative’ texts are constructed in a system of binary oppositions “outside/ inside”, “margin/centre”, “minority/majority” that substitute all “differences” into the totalizing discourse of universal standards. This thesis is to put effort into an analysis of the formulation of identity in a process of identification at the performative level where everyday life and practices play an important role in cultural and social formation and transformation. The kind of basic differentiation between “South East Asians” and “South Asians” as shown above is not suggesting that we should/could put them into an absolute dichotomy. Here I want to emphasise that for so-called “differences”, mainly the experiences of being minority (culture) in Hong Kong, an umbrella sociological term of “ethnic minority issue” or simply a sociological perception is not enough for interpreting the complexities within the issue. It is also important to acknowledge the possibility that “South Asians” is an organizing social category constantly in the making and remaking of “subjectivity” that strives to represent its singularity and historical specificity, as well as a discursive formation in everyday practices and politics which are embodied and regulated in bigger nets of social relations, threads of power relations and trajectories of human interests and feelings with other social subjects. Perhaps, a new analytical approach needs to be taken up, and I would like to make a claim that the viability of one’s subjectivity in history and in actual reality is dependent on how other subjectivities are formed; therefore, I would like to extend this preliminary thought to an analytical project on the formation of Hong Kong South Asians in conversation with Hong Kong people’s identity formation. This is a project for us to learn to be sensitive to others’ differences and meanwhile also learn to be reflective of our own cultural limitations. This is a study about Hong Kong’s South Asians, at the same time this is also about Hong Kong Chinese, or this is more like a re-made story on Hong Kong’s South Asians from the perspective of Hong Kong Chinese.

An Outline of What Follows

By looking at those ruptures in representation through times, I hope to take good advantage of understanding the subject more and meanwhile to initiate dialogical relations with how the Cultural Studies is concerned with the similar kind of matter and see what differences and alternative perspectives Cultural Studies could bring to a discussion platform, which is primarily dominated by sociological and historical discourses so far. In the following chapters I would like to deal with three key questions:

1. Negotiation and praxis of citizenship: Incorporation of immigrants into the host society
2. Problems of education and language in relation to cultural identity and sense of belonging: South Asians' school children
3. *Heterotopologies*: South Asians in media and spatial representations

I believe that a sincere study on Hong Kong's South Asians should be about meanings of intellectual and political progressiveness and optimism, and possible alternatives. I hope my project can achieve this ideal.

Chapter Two

Negotiation and Praxis of Citizenship: Incorporation of Immigrants into the Host Society

Introduction

Hong Kong has waited far too long for laws against racial discrimination. Now, it looks as though this form of protection against prejudice is finally on its way after strong and persistent calls from ethnic minorities. A public consultation, which was launched last September, set out the government's plans, gathered more than 200 responses, which are now being considered by the Home Affairs Bureau. It is hoped that this time the government is committed to match its words with deeds. The consultation paper nails several myths and misperceptions that officials in the past have denied. The government admits that racial discrimination is a problem in Hong Kong, which has not always been recognized in the past. It also makes clear that legislation is required for Hong Kong to fulfill its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICEARD), to which Hong Kong is a signatory since 1969. This is an important recognition on the part of the government. However, most significant of all is, it is confirmation of a change in the government's position, that laws are needed in order to prevent and combat racial discrimination. The law would give protection, from direct and indirect discrimination, victimization, harassment and vilification on grounds of race, color, descent or national or ethnic origin, to individuals and their families (as set out in Article 1 of the ICEARD) and would include prohibition of racial discrimination and harassment in the areas of employment; education; goods, facilities, services and premises; advisory and statutory bodies; pupillage and tenancy in barristers' chambers; clubs and government. It is expected that the bill will provide victims of racism legal channel for redressal, something that will happen for the first time in Hong Kong.

Notwithstanding, the anti-race blueprint is rather conservative in its approach to the issue and still a lot of work has to be done as perceived by many human rights and ethnic minority concern groups.⁸ Still it marks a great significance to the long road to equality and is a triumph for the ethnic minorities living in Hong Kong who have been struggling for a long time for such a law to safeguard social justice. This chapter focuses mainly on the political site. It intends to provide a focused discussion on the specific constituency of “ethnicity” in Hong Kong especially its dilemma after the handover and its constituted spaces and limitations to the very existence of the South Asian communities in their negotiation and incorporation in the host society. This chapter also tries to understand the complicated issue of racial discrimination that impacts social relations among different ethnic communities in Hong Kong. It also tries to focus on their efforts in reshaping the concept of “civil society”/citizenship and the specific modes of praxis taken up by the South Asian ethnic minorities. It details their struggles dating back to their first launching of a political campaign to have the right of abode before 1997 and at present their new campaign to push the government to legislate anti-racism law. Further, their political engagement through forming and cultivating a political party called the Southern Democratic Alliance. The party was set up in February 2004, the first party that aims to put minority issues on the political agenda.

South Asians as a Specific Ethnic Group

Hong Kong is a largely homogenous society according to the 2001 Population Census that delineates the demographic feature in Hong Kong and finds that 95% of its population are Chinese (ethnically speaking, Han Chinese) and about 5% non-Chinese population and some 52% (180,000) are foreign domestic helpers who are not permanently settled in Hong Kong. However, the pressing need for such a protective law is largely echoed in a society where its devastating effect is to

⁸ Ravina Shamdasani, “Scope of race-bias law is revealed; Ethnic minorities and Chinese majority would enjoy protection for the first time,” *South China Morning Post*, 17 September 2004, p.3; “Anti-race blueprint does not go far enough, say activists; Language, religion, nationality and culture not included in consultation paper,” *South China Morning Post*, 18 September 2004, p.3; and “Welcome sign of serious approach to racial bias,” *South China Morning Post*, 20 September 2004, p.16.

substantially enlarge the population subjected to actions that are very like racial discrimination. The total number of people who are either ethnic minorities (particularly South Asians and South-east Asians) or new Mainland migrants probably exceeds one-eighth of the population and these people are vulnerable to various levels of bias or are regarded as “inferior” due to their given differences in culture and ethnicity. Unlike most of the South-east Asians and Mainland Chinese who are mostly new comers or short-term migrants, most South Asians are long-term residents; some of them are already the fourth-generation settlers, most of them born and brought up in Hong Kong and have the right to stay here permanently holding a permanent I.D. card. Nepalese are the particular group among the South Asians to be associated with ‘social burden’, ‘crime’ and ‘evil’ in public discourses because the age structure of this community is comparatively lower than others and they are comparatively new migrant group⁹, not like the Indians who have long settled here. Thus, the Nepalese migrants are facing more difficulties in their integration into Hong Kong society. Unlike their South Asian counterparts, being a new Mainland migrant in Hong Kong is a mutable characteristic that should disappear among the offspring of such migrants who are raised in the HKSAR (this is also an argument that officials try to use to back up their discriminatory decision to exclude new arrivals from the mainland from the scope of the legislation; it will be discussed in detail later in this chapter). However, ethnic minorities are permanent “visible minorities” and have to endure this probably forever. In addition, most of the South Asians who have migrated to Hong Kong in the past few decades have found themselves occupying a broadly similar structural position within Hong Kong society - as workers performing predominantly unskilled or semi-skilled jobs, occupying the lowest rungs of the economy. There are similarities in their encounters with racism

⁹ A report of CER also describes the Nepalese as ‘new community’. “(But) the major Nepalese presence traditionally comprised Gurkha soldiers and their families serving with the British garrison. Like the British units with which they served, they lived in military barracks in relative isolation from the community. And, by virtue of the tripartite agreement between Nepal, India and Britain, both soldiers and families were prepared – in terms of education and post-service training – for eventual return to, and resettlement in, Nepal. However, before 1 January 1983, persons born in Hong Kong, irrespective of their immigration status, had the right to land (now right of abode) in Hong Kong. Consequently, Nepalese children born here, before that date, to Gurkhas serving in the garrison automatically acquired first the right to land in Hong Kong and, later, the right of abode.” The number of Nepalese nationals living in Hong Kong increased significantly by the mid-1990s. See appendix 1.

in arenas such as workplace, education system, housing needs, health-care services, and access to information. These conditions of existence drive people in the various movements to search for a new cultural politics designed to challenge, resist and change the dominant regimes of practices. South Asians' participation in lobbying the government to enact legislation against racism and their formation of the Southern Democratic Alliance are good starting points to see how they are fighting for "full membership" of the Hong Kong community.

South Asian Communities and Racial Discrimination

More and more racism allegations cited by South Asian communities and individuals reveal that racial discrimination is seriously prevalent in Hong Kong. The complexity of the insidious form of prejudice and cultural bias is difficult to eliminate only through education. An Indian businesswoman recently told the press here that she was leaving the HKSAR and taking her international business elsewhere after receiving what she called unwelcome reception in Hong Kong because of her ethnicity.¹⁰ Ravi Gidumal of the Indian Resources Group said that he knew of one Indian businessman who had left for Singapore because he was sick of being treated as "inferior" here.¹¹ Repeated disclosure of similar incidents has alarmed that Hong Kong may lose its edge as Asia's World City if these issues are not appropriately addressed and dealt with.

CASE 1: Racial Discrimination against Individual Rights at Personal Level

These are a series of similar cases like ethnic Indian chief executive officers who were refused the tenancy of apartment on the Peak. One such story appeared in *South China Morning Post* on 17 June 2001¹². An Indian executive claimed that he had resorted to masquerading as an Italian to rent a luxury flat in Mid-Levels after

¹⁰ Ravina Shamdasani, "Indian trader disgusted with Asia's 'most unfriendly city'", *South China Morning Post*, 3 November 2002, p.2.

¹¹ Jo Pegg, "We're made to feel this is not our home because of the colour of our skin, our race; new group formed to combat racism," *South China Morning Post*, 20 January 1999, p.2.

¹² Mary Ann Benitez, "Indian masqueraded as Italian in frustrated quest to rent flat," *South China Morning Post*, 17 June 2001, p.1.

three landlords turned him down because of his nationality. Balani said that at the first flat he visited with his estate agent, the landlady refused to even open the gate. Balani says in the report, “she asked my broker, ‘ what nationality are these people?’ I said, ‘ I’ m Indian.’ The landlady said, ‘ I’ m sorry I will not rent the apartment to Indian.’” The other two landlords refused him also because they did not like to rent their houses to an Indian. Eventually he found a flat owned by a company and Balani did not think his race would be an issue. “But just to play it safe my realtor told them we were an Italian family – Balani sounds Italian,” he said.

A similar story appeared in *South China Morning Post* on 24 June 2001¹³ where an Indian couple told how they were forced to swap roles with their British real estate agent so they could rent a luxury flat because the landlord did not want a tenant from the subcontinent. Mr. Moorjani was born in Hong Kong, while his wife came to the HKSAR at the age of two. Both speak fluent English and Cantonese. The landlord was unaware of their identities throughout the time they lived there. Mrs. Moorjani said when they decided not to renew the lease as they had found a bigger flat, the landlord called her husband and asked if they would consider staying if he reduced the rent “because you really have been the best tenants I’ ve ever had”. The couple was shocked at the prejudice they had received. “One real estate agent told me to my face that a lot of landlords leave orders, ‘ no dogs and no Indians’ ,” she said.

A third such story appeared in *South China Morning Post* on 29 August 2001. An Indian investment banker from New York was barred from viewing a Mid-Levels flat because of his race. Amit, 25, was told that he could not see a Bonham Road flat because the landlord did not want an Indian tenant. His property agent told *South China Morning Post* that up to 90 % of landlords in Mid-Levels did not want to rent to South Asians, mostly because of smelly cooking and the turban worn by many Sikhs. The Estate Agents Authority is planning a racial sensitivity seminar to

¹³ Mary Ann Benitez, “Pair ‘ turned British’ to rent flat, Couple struggled to find an apartment as landlords ordered ‘ no pets, no dogs, no Indians,” *South China Morning Post*, 24 June 2001, p.2.

educate agents and landlords on eliminating racism following the reports of racial discrimination against South Asians.

A deep cultural bias penetrates everyday life, which seriously discriminates against a particular race or group. For most Chinese of the older generations who have experienced the early days of colonialism in Hong Kong, ‘no dogs and no Indians’ is synonymous with ‘no dogs and no Chinese’, a deeply humiliating phrase. Amit, the victim of racism, points out the problem is much wider than that of the lack of cultural acceptance in Hong Kong. However, Joseph Law, vice-chairman of the Hong Kong Employers of Overseas Domestic Helpers Association, comments on the cases of landlords refusing to rent flats to minorities as a matter of cultural and customs difference and not racism. He argues: “if some Chinese landlord does not like the taste or smell of curry, he may not be comfortable with Indian, especially if he is not comfortable communicating with him because of language differences”.¹⁴ However, this grounding of ethnicity in difference is deployed, in the discourse of racism, as a means of disavowing the realities of racism. We must not permit the term of ‘ethnicity’ to be permanently colonized in this sense.

On the other hand, Deputy Director of Home Affairs Li Jinzhong claims: “Hong Kong people are not discriminating against (Chinese/South Asians) new migrants, only discriminating against poor people; now that Hong Kong is suffering from economic recession, therefore people may not be so discriminating.”¹⁵ However, people who are opposing racism here are from a higher rank of the social ladder with certain “class” superiority, if the kind of discrimination that exists in Hong Kong is only characterized as “the rich discriminating against the poor” then South Asians would not be vulnerable in this sense. Fermi Wong Wai-fun, the coordinator of Unison for Ethnic Equality which is an NGO focusing on this issue, is not surprised by the presence of racism in Hong Kong. She remarks: “people would not admit to it, but they have a class-oriented mentality that causes them to look down on people

¹⁴ Ravina Shamdasani, “More consultation on anti-racism law; Activists are frustrated at the government’s delay in enacting the legislation,” *South China Morning Post*, 14 April 2003, p.4.

¹⁵ “Young migrants as driving force of Hong Kong’s future, Seminar on social harmony, New migrants suffer discriminations”, *Wen Wei Po*, 29 October 2001.

who are from poor countries.”¹⁶ The point here is not to argue whether it is more acceptable to discriminate against a “poor” Indian than an “ethnic” Indian or vice versa. Rather, people from certain regions or particular countries would easily fall into a fixed “class” codification naturalized in Hong Kong people’s imagination. Here the racialization of class matters and affects is very much a class and social distinction. Racism is a complex issue as Stuart Hall points out:

Racism, of course, operates by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories, and its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalize the difference between belongingness and otherness (Hall, 1992: 255).

‘Indians’, ‘curry’, ‘turban’ and ‘darker color’ are arbitrarily put in negative equivalence with ‘dogs’, which symbolizes ‘the inferior class’ in terms of social value and ‘the inferior human being’ in terms of presumption of biological determination. Only by re-theorizing the concept of *difference* and contesting the term ‘ethnicity’ can we recuperate the term ‘South Asians’ from its place in a system of negative equivalences (Hall, 1992: 257).

CASE 2: Racial Discrimination against a Community’s Rights at Structural Level

Series of ‘racist’ policies led by the Immigration Department were revealed in the last couple of years and the incidents had caused widespread concern among the minority communities. The discriminatory immigration policies and measures are alleged to be institutionally and systematically racist against the South Asians in particular and the habit of questioning travelers from the subcontinent is based on racial stereotyping rather than any objective criteria. In January 1999 the government slashed visa-free privileges for South Asians from three months to two weeks, while Nepalese (and Pakistanis in 2001 after the 911 Attack in the United States) were totally removed from the convenience of visa-free access. The Immigration Department defended this decision with the excuse of “control

¹⁶ Linda Yeung, “The HKSAR’s invisible migrants,” *South China Morning Post*, 16 June 2000, p.15.

problems’, saying that nationals of these countries tend to abuse the system such as overstaying, seeking work illegally and using forged documents.¹⁷ However, in the same period, “statistics show that overstayers from the three countries fell from 590 in 1996 to 482 in 1997 and 354 up to November 1998”¹⁸ Of the nearly 180,000 arrivals from India in 2001, there were only 68 cases of overstaying detected. This figure has been falling in recent years.¹⁹ Within two months after the move to cut the duration of visa-free stays was imposed, another condemnation of ‘racist’ policy appeared on newspaper from a Nepalese man, Keshav Pandey, of his unfair treatment (and almost ordeal) from Customs officers who forced him to undergo body search on his last three flights into Hong Kong from Kathmandu. He was even sent to the toilet to provide a urine sample for drug testing, which he claimed was very humiliating to him and his country.²⁰ Customs Department spokesman denied allegations of racism but said that Nepalese were known to smuggle cannabis resin into the HKSAR. However, sources from Security Bureau and Hong Kong Tourist Association did reveal that “the high search rate shows South Asians – Nepalese, Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis – are 367 times more likely to be searched than travelers from Western countries, or 45 times more likely than those from East Asia.”²¹

The detention of Indian award-winning novelist Amit Chaudhuri and prominent singer Shubha Mudgal respectively reported in April and May 2002 were the latest in a series of cases to come to light, in which South Asian visitors were held up for further questioning upon arrival in the HKSAR. Both Chaudhuri and Mudgal were taken into a room for questioning without being given any explanation. Both experienced similar treatment, Chaudhuri recalled: “they took me into a room, took my passport and disappeared ... they didn’t say anything. Inside the room, 95 % of the people were South Asians. Everybody was too terrified to talk to each

¹⁷ Anne Stewart, “Anger grows over cut in visa-free privileges for South Asians,” *South China Morning Post*, 20 January 1999, p.2.

¹⁸ Anne Stewart, “Bias claim as South Asians’ visa perks cut,” *South China Morning Post*, 19 January 1999, p.5.

¹⁹ Shirley Lau, “Racial profiling fears after singer detained, Indian held for an hour on arrival at airport,” *South China Morning Post*, 12 May 2002, p.2.

²⁰ Glenn Schloss, “Torment of airport body searches,” *South China Morning Post*, 21 March 1999, p.4.

²¹ Ibid.

other.”²² Mudgal remembered: “I found myself in a room full of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi people. I must say the officials were polite to us. But we were a little taken aback and upset to see a room full of South Asian people.”²³ A Security Bureau spokeswoman explained: “in line with international practice, the Immigration Department conducts checks on visitors which are necessary to ensure they come to Hong Kong for legitimate purposes.”²⁴ The Indian Chamber of Commerce and The Indian Association had highlighted their concerns on these incidents and numbers of similar complaints from businessmen about being held up at the airport or Lowu train station for further questioning.²⁵

In light of these incidents, it is very hard to argue with officials when they cite security reason. However, the key question remains why people from certain areas, with particular religious background and skin-color are stereotyped and subjected to discriminatory investigation that deprives them of their right to privacy and right to be free from arbitrary detention. It is not difficult to make people believe that it is racial profiling that the law enforcement agents often unfairly use race as factor in criminal investigations.²⁶

What campaigners for racial equality can do is to call for more transparency of the procedures in which travelers are held up for further questioning. However, such stringent immigration control targeted on South Asians specially reveals a fact that Hong Kong has been ‘in line with international practice’ - a worldwide xenophobia directly and indirectly against dark-skinned people and people from particular regions such as Middle East and Indian subcontinent. This phenomenon has been more intense since the widespread paranoia of terrorism after 911. Internally, the unjust immigration policy on the Nepalese is believed to be a stringent control over the mushrooming Nepalese community in Hong Kong. Nepalese are

²² Shirley Lau, “Novelist claims detention was racist,” *South China Morning Post*, 19 April 2002, p.3.

²³ Shirley Lau, “Racial profiling fears after singer detained,” *South China Morning Post*, 12 May 2002, p.2.

²⁴ Shirley Lau, “One system, ‘two treatments’”, *South China Morning Post*, 6 May 2002, p.2.

²⁵ Shirley Lau, “Racial profiling fears after singer detained,” *South China Morning Post*, 12 May 2002, p.2.

²⁶ “Backgrounder on Enacting a Racial Discrimination Legislation for Hong Kong,” Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor & Oxfam Hong Kong, August 2004, p.11.

now the 10th largest ethnic group in the HKSAR, ranked after Japanese and Australians. The Immigration Department puts the number of Nepalese nationals at 17,700, but the true size of the community is believed to be much larger. Mr Ekraj Rai, the son of an ex-Gurkha who was born in Hong Kong, estimates the number could be as high as 50,000, given the large number of spouses and children who have arrived since the mid-1990s, when an influx of migrants from Nepal began as word spread of their legal right to claim permanent residency. Many more could be on their way. “Ninety-five per cent of the children of Nepalese born in Hong Kong before 1983 have yet to come,” he notes. Of the new arrivals here, 60 % are in their 20s or 30s.²⁷

Contesting “Ethnicity” and “Imagined Chinese-ness”

The struggle of the South Asian movement now is to fight against simplification and stereotypical characterization of the “South Asians” as coded by social convention which is predominantly important to shape “a relationship of domination and subordination between the colonizer and colonized” (Brah, 1992:127) both in discursive formation and regime of practices. A renewed contestation over the meaning of the term ‘ethnicity’ itself may help us to rethink our approach to change and rebuild society.

Ethnicity as a vital marker of and constituent factor for subjectivity and identity is a distinctive factor in forming social relations and social reality. Its special form has become more “problematic” in colonial and post-colonial social landscapes in Hong Kong. To understand the particular constituency and changes of the notion of ethnicity we must unlearn the habitual concepts of a very consistently “homogenous” and “hegemonic” conception of Chinese-centric ethnicity / Chinese-ethnocentrism represented in an impressively overwhelming majority of 95% of the Han Chinese who are in the sense of being a member of a particular linguistic, ethnic, religious, or cultural group contrary to a disrespected minority of 5% belonging to other ethnicities. By deploying Barry Sautman’s careful sketch of the changes of ethnic composition in Hong Kong since 1980s onwards, I would like to argue that

²⁷ Linda Ye ung, “The HKSAR’s invisible migrants,” *South China Morning Post*, 16 June 2000, p.15.

Hong Kong's vast majority has been establishing different communal relationship with the ethnic minorities. Perhaps we can approach the '95% majority and 5% minority' as a complicated set of social relations that are always in a process of negotiation and compromise brought together by historical and social contingency instead of ahistorical fixed categories. With a considerable growing economy and expanding new middle class local population in mid-1980s more Filipina domestic workers were imported;²⁸ the 'localization' policy change in government administration results in retreating of the European and South Asians administrative expatriates in mid-1990s. Since 1995, there has been a sizable growth in the Mainland migrant community, alongside the closer political and economic connection with Mainland China, and at present with the government ambition and determination to brand Hong Kong as an Asia's World City and a knowledge-based economy, talents of all nationalities are welcome to the territory. Chinese ethnic identity itself is also very much in the process of emergence and constantly negotiating with other forces. Discrimination, predominantly racial discrimination, suffuses throughout a wide spectrum of social relations in Hong Kong. The professed ending of the colonial rule, rather than bringing about an end to this discrimination, only makes it worse for the ethnic majority are now misled to believe that they have their own fate in their hand, and are in a position to protect their interests against encroachment by 'outsiders'.

Racism has historically been defined as a belief that race is the primary determinant of human capacities, that a certain race is inherently superior or inferior to others, and/or that individuals should be treated differently according to their racial designation including skin color, cultural heritage, and religion. Sometimes racism also means beliefs, practices, and institutions that discriminate against people based on their perceived or ascribed race. Here in Hong Kong racism appears in a form of "double-absurdity" that I assume very much in connection to a traumatic reaction to a colonial heritage and a post-colonial social reality. Dr. Chan Ming, Professor of History at the University of Hong Kong, whose research denounces Britain for its

²⁸ The segment of Foreign Domestic Workers (FDWs) population itself has undergone changes in terms of ethnic composition over time, for instance, since mid-1990s Indonesian FDWs are gradually increasing because of their docility and compromise.

“obnoxious” record of discrimination in colonial Hong Kong that he compares to “mini-South Africa”, said insidious racism thrived in the civil service, private sector and the courts. His insight in comparative history also makes him notice another common racial prejudice (apart from Western/Chinese) against Filipino at present. He cited the case of wealthy residents of Tregunter Tower trying to ban Filipino maids from the main lifts, an incident that was exposed by a local newspaper ten years ago.²⁹ However, I think he fails to question the culture/paradox of transmitted racial prejudice the oppressors had imparted to the oppressed: in the earlier days, whites definitely discriminated against Chinese, who in turn looked down on those whose skin was darker. Open and blatantly discriminatory behavior subsided in time, although it still existed in subtle forms. All along, dark-skinned minorities suffered most. Plus, the kind of egotism of being new masters of the land is largely promoted to local ethnic-Chinese at the moment when everyone in Hong Kong seems to catch up in handover euphoria. The new government learns that engineering ideological “ethnicity” is an essential tool for governance to secure a new political regime. Quoting from the inaugural speech of former Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa who swore in on July 1, 1997 as Hong Kong’s new leader, we see how the Chinese ethnicity at the first time gets orthodox proclamation. Tung stated:

This is a momentous and historic day: July 1, 1997. After one hundred and fifty-six years of separation, Hong Kong and China are whole again. This is a solemn, stately, and proud moment. We are here today to announce to the world, in our language, that Hong Kong has entered a new era. In recent history, China, as a nation, and *we, as a people*, have been through days of glory and times of despair. We have lived through days of hope, prosperity and glory. We have lived through days of despair, humiliation and hopelessness. The lesson is clear: the most precious possession of any nation or any people is the ability to chart one's own future, to be master of one's own destiny.

The phrase “we, as a people”, that has been repeatedly emphasized in his speech, renders an implied bias that only “ethnic Chinese” are qualified to be subjects of Hong Kong, and belonging to the nation of China; I do not know if a South Asian or non-Chinese listening to the speech thought that he/she is a part of the

²⁹ Christine Retschlag, “Outrage at lift ban; Anger as maids banned from lift,” *South China Morning Post*, 25 November 1993, p.1.

so called and narrowly defined “we”. However, this knowingly encouraged cultural chauvinism of rebuilding national imagination through reinvention / promulgation of “Chinese-ness” indeed causes harmful effects of social exclusion and stratification to other ethnicities that are excluded in the very boundaries drawn between “we” and “other”. Moreover, stressing the essential unity of the “Hong Kong Chinese” nation goes along with identifying the other (ethnic minority, immigrant, asylum seeker, or Chinese new immigrants, et cetera) as the source of social disorder. There has been a general change in social and cultural landscapes in the post-handover Hong Kong. This was reflected in a survey conducted by the Society for Community Organization (SoCO). The survey was conducted among 8 different ethnic groups and out of 83 respondents more than 50% thought that racial discrimination has become worse since 1997. Ho Hei-wah, director of SoCO pointed out: “this is a subjective feeling, the Hong Kong government has become more and more ‘Chinese’ after 1997, (as a result) ethnic minorities feel they are more marginalized and excluded.”³⁰

Even though Tung Chi-hwa portrays the Chinese community as the ubiquitously hegemonic Chinese ethnicity, yet there seems to be no easy way for Hong Kong Chinese to be truly proud of belonging to “Chinese”. On the contrary, the “Chinese-ness”, supposedly embedded in nature, has been undergoing serious traumas and self-doubts. Hong Kong was a British colony for such a long time that Chinese now have an inferiority complex and still believe in the supremacy of Caucasians. Chinese people themselves may not be aware of this kind of complicated dilemma of mixed inferiority complex and self-identity conflict, but from an outsider’s point of view this is particularly clear and awkward. An Indian frequent flier, who has laconically learnt to accept strip-search, rude behavior, and singling out by over-zealous security immigration staff at airports around the world, notes in his letter to editor that Hong Kong’s security officials and other staff at the immigration and security control points seem to have a problem with good behavior towards Asians of all sorts, including Chinese. He himself saw a well-dressed and obviously well-behaved Chinese boy who approached an immigration counter and was brusquely told to take his cap off whereas a scruffy and unkempt man whom he

³⁰ “Ethnic minorities: discrimination increases”, *Ming Pao*, 1 July 2001, A12.

took to be British was waved through with great deference.³¹ This is just one case among many; *South China Morning Post* in June 1998 reported that in a survey of six clubs, four allowed white customers to get in free, but charged Chinese men about \$150 and Indians \$300. Club managers explained that the charges were imposed to prevent Chinese, Indians, Nepalese and Filipinos entering bars because they caused “trouble” and this was purely a commercial consideration, not racism.³² A Chinese woman who had stayed and studied overseas for many years and spoke native-level English and possessed children education qualification was called for a teaching job in a school. However, she was employed on a condition that she accepted less pay because of being Chinese.³³ Ideologically, is it too difficult for Hong Kong to accept that it is no longer a British outpost or is it impossible for people to reject the passivity of being second class citizens in western cultural hegemony?

At a time when we are allowed to proudly identify ourselves as “Chinese” it turns out to be quite embarrassing and difficult for us to accept in our deep ambivalence of identification and desire. When we pass through the ironic twist of the 1997 that touches on the central dilemma facing Hong Kong - how the city redefines itself being a part of China – this psychological rupture is not easy to be healed/resolved. This is ethnicity in trouble when it is contested in culture rather than in nature. Especially we, as Hong Kong Chinese, react with irritation and resistance to dominant political and cultural discourses. For example, a video promoting patriotism entitled *Bonding with My Home and My Country* 《心繫家國》, and shown every night on TV before evening news by the government, is heavily criticized for brainwashing citizens. Instead of bringing expected loyalty from Hong Kong Chinese audience, its hollowness in substance (signified superficially with depiction of identification of a few successful icons of People’s Liberation Army, Great Wall, Olympic game and space technology) shows incongruity of two cultures. Yet officially promote Chinese heritage and highlight

³¹ “Contrasting views on racist behavior,” *South China Morning Post*, 19 May 2002, p.10.

³² Susan Schwartz, “Absence of laws ‘legitimizes practice’,” *South China Morning Post*, 30 August 2001, p.3.

³³ “Afflicted by face values”, *South China Morning Post*, 27 August 2003, p.14.

Chinese consciousness that serves to stabilize the transitional sovereignty and all kinds of non-coercive mechanisms that have been deployed in promoting civic education and assisting the project of Chinese-identity building. The move from the colonial to Chinese rule has proved to be a twisted experience; how far the attempts to promote Nationalism could work in the post-colonial Hong Kong awaits its encountering clashes and negotiations with the remnant culture from the old colonial régime. However, one thing for sure is that the other ethnic groups who are marginalized, dispossessed, displaced and forgotten in the irony of hysteria of inferiority complex and the pseudo-superiority of enforced Chinese-ness have to face tremendously unexpected challenges that require them to reposition in different cultural strategies than their predecessors who themselves fought their battle a decade ago.

“Popular Conservatism”

With the awareness of the dangers of ‘ethnicity’ as a concept, in the form of a culturally constructed sense of Chinese-ness and a particularly closed, exclusive and regressive form of Chinese national identity - one of the core characteristics of Hong Kong’s racism today, I find that the hegemonic conception of “Chinese ethnicity” under the HKSAR government stabilizes much of its dominant political and cultural discourses.

Indeed, underneath a veneer of racial harmony and acceptance encouraged by the government, there is a politics to mask the kind of ignorance combined with denial that the government has been responding to racism. It has been argued that education is a sufficient means of dealing with the problem. Former Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa stated publicly that he doubted anti-racism laws offered the best solution:

I think all places, all cosmopolitan cities have racial discrimination. Hong Kong also has this problem. But is legislating the best

option? ... I think the US and UK have worse racial-discrimination problems than we do, even though they have a lot of such legislation. I think the most important thing is to educate people to know that discrimination is wrong.³⁴

Tung's response shows irrelevance and irresponsibility to the request of those communities who have lived for decades with subtle but institutionalized discrimination permeating their existence. Anna Wu Hung-yuk, former EOC (Equal Opportunities Commission) chairwoman has warned that "it is impossible for the victims to continue to suffer while waiting their whole lives for cultural education to come into effect. You can't say we don't need to legislate to protect them just because we don't yet have the culture here."³⁵ Of course we cannot agree more to Tung's intuitiveness that public education is the ultimate remedy to racism, however, legislation and education may not be necessarily a contradictory dichotomy but sometimes in some cases they work with each other and make the result better.

Generally at the social level understanding the issue of racism tends to be hypocritical pretence if not complete denial. A column critic entitled "Anti-racism legislation is unnecessary" shows widespread equivocations on the subject of legislating against racial discrimination. The columnist of this popular Hong Kong newspaper *Hong Kong Daily News* gives acrimonious comments on the issue of bringing racial discrimination into justice and provocative castigation to the supporters of the law whom he thinks as "troublemakers" engaging in a conspiracy of disturbing a peaceful social order. He writes:

Those Indian, Filipino, and Indonesian businessmen who make big money in Hong Kong receive no resentment from Hong Kong people, nobody damages their cars, burns their shops; ethnic minorities have money they can make their own school with their mother tongue as medium of instruction, publish newspapers in their languages; for those poverty-stricken ethnic minorities with the possession of residency/citizenship they can still apply for social welfare allowance,

³⁴ Ambrose Leung, "Tung rejects anti-racism law idea; Chief Executive opts for education over legislation to get rid of discrimination despite UN criticism," *South China Morning Post*, 15 June 2001, p.6.

³⁵ Michelle Chak, "Laws the only way to stamp out racism, says Anna Wu," *South China Morning Post*, 17 June 2001, p.1.

public housing, they are not discriminated against ... there is never any overt racial conflicts in Hong Kong, but just because some people subjectively say that “racial discrimination is serious” (indeed as insignificant as chicken feather and garlic skin) and [ethnic minorities] need to be “protected” by law ... if these ethnic minorities cannot rent a house they can accuse this on racial discrimination, if they are not employed because of incapability of speaking Cantonese they can accuse this on racial discrimination, then ethnic minorities would become “.....super powerful/arrogant”, they can at any time make use of legal assistance to have litigation against commercial organizations and their boss. Hong Kong people have to bear the cost of their litigation, this would only arouse people’s discontent towards ethnic minorities, and more conflicts will occur.³⁶

This critic’s implication is more than an expression of disagreement on the legislation; it is a common misconception about how to see another race in Hong Kong. It is a view of xenophobia which encourages a sense of hostility to “others” by saying that the chances and the living environment we offer to them is already a privilege; and asking for a law to protect their basic human rights is “unnecessary” - they are asking for too much. Furthermore, it also tries to instigate a kind of misunderstanding among the public that the law is a burden to Hong Kong. ‘No overt racial conflict’ does not mean that we have done enough to make room for every race to live happily in this place. This has been expressed by a reader that “perceived tranquility in a city where different races co-exist does not translate into racial harmony.”³⁷ Hong Kong government should address racial discrimination issues in a greater scale.

Negotiating Citizenship in Hong Kong

The term ‘South Asians’ is something more than just a simple demographic definition as suggested in the 2001 Population Census. Its social being and social significance lies in its being a term of ethnicity which “acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity” (Hall,

³⁶ “Anti-racial legislation is unnecessary,” *Hong Kong Daily News*, 29 October 2001, A03.

³⁷ “City full of bigotry and discrimination,” *South China Morning Post*, 16 December 2000, p.17

1992: 257). By looking at their everyday life and struggles for citizenship³⁸, we can generally understand the particular social existence constituting the ‘South Asians’ as a constructed social category in Hong Kong and at the same time also see how “South Asians” may come to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance.

Struggle for Racial Equality, Legislation of Anti-racism Law

The controversial law has gone through an awful long history of debate (see appendix 2) in the past ten years. Former legislator Christine Loh Kung-wai supported a bid to establish a human- rights commission before the handover. The proposal was controversially blocked by the British administration in October 1994 amid concerns about the costs involved and the fear of opposition from Beijing.³⁹ Loh drafted a bill in 1999 to ban racial discrimination. It was again rejected by the government and she was told by officials that her proposed bill was not in line with the Basic Law.⁴⁰ Very recently the issue was again included in the agenda in the Legislative Council, when independent legislator Audrey Eu Yuet-mee asked whether Tung felt that Hong Kong had a problem with racial discrimination and whether the government would legislate to ban it. At the same time, pressure from international human rights agencies as well as from local ethnic minorities’ organizations and social activists pushed the government to take up certain “obligation” gradually and forced it to admit that there is racial discrimination in Hong Kong. It also shows the government’s dithering attitude as a routine practice towards framing the law was no longer applicable in a new situation where more and more racially discriminated people who have been deprived of basic human rights have stronger consciousness to fight for their rights. The Equal Opportunities Commission received 157 complaints about racial discrimination in 2000 and 68 up

³⁸ Citizenship can be defined as “the status of having the right to participate in and to be represented in politics.” See the website of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): www.unesco.org/most/migration/glossary_citizenship.htm).

³⁹ Cliff Buddle, “Human rights coming into view”, *South China Morning Post*, 11 May 2001, p.18.

⁴⁰ Lydia Ho, “Anti-race bias law needed now, says Citizens Party”, *South China Morning Post*, 9 December 1999, p.4; and “Bias setback”, *South China Morning Post*, 11 December 1999, p.6.

to May 2001⁴¹, a great increase in numbers compared to a total of 64 complaints received from 1997 to 1999.⁴² More victims are willing to come forward. We see the government is slowly moving away from its original position and its excuses and rhetoric seem to be more groundless and contradictory. In October 2000 the government said racism was not a problem in Hong Kong and it did not plan to formulate anti-racism laws in a report submitted to the UN under the ICEARD; however, in May 2002 a Race Relations Unit, part of the Home Affairs Bureau, was set up to handle complaints about racial discrimination and educate the public. The unit has received 69 enquiries and handled 11 complaints from the period of 1 April 2004 to 31 May 2005.⁴³

Debates on legislation started at a broader social level and drew concerns from different social sectors including supporting views from business communities and political parties. The government's consultation exercise on whether to bring in laws against racial discrimination found that 16 of the 25 business organizations that responded stated that they were broadly in favor of the legislation. Of those 16, nine were from overseas chambers of commerce.⁴⁴ In March 2003, legislators voted overwhelmingly in favor of a motion by independent legislator Audrey Eu Yuet-mee for a law banning racial discrimination.⁴⁵ They criticized the government for proceeding at snail's pace, arguing that an anti-discrimination law would help to establish Hong Kong's image as an international business center that attracts talents from overseas. Positioning in rhetoric is a new strategy as no one can stand the slur on Hong Kong's reputation. Yet the most typical conservative and neo-liberal voice such as pro-business Liberal Party chairman James Tien Pei-chun who also represents the Federation of Hong Kong industries in the Legislative Council proposed, "this will give Hong Kong a good international image and silence the

⁴¹ Mary Ann Benitez, "Racism petition falls 997,000 short; Only 3,000 join call for discrimination law – despite appeal for a million signatures," *South China Morning Post*, 9 August 2001, p.7.

⁴² Gleen Schloss, "Laws needed to fight racism," *South China Morning Post*, 30 January 2000, p.4.

⁴³ See Home Affairs Bureau website:

http://www.hab.gov.hk/en/policy_responsibilities/the_rights_of_the_individuals/resultser.htm

⁴⁴ Cliff Buddle, "Firm grounds lacking for race law delay," *South China Morning Post*, 9 August 2002, p.16.

⁴⁵ Ravina Shamdasani, "Lawmakers unite to seek anti-racism bill," *South China Morning Post*, 13 March 2003, p.5.

critics at the United Nations in Geneva” though the party stood by its view that racism was not a big problem in Hong Kong.⁴⁶

Denial is never a sensible response towards a barrage of criticism, as demonstrated by the government over its handling of racism. The government at last had to accept that its original position was insufficient to combat racism. However, the semi-finished product, the proposed “Race Discrimination Bill”⁴⁷, receives much bombardment during its course for public consultation before being passed. Areas that have prompted strong reactions are: protection to new arrivals from the mainland is not included in the proposed law; foreign domestic workers’ general interest is also not protected by granting exception for small companies and employers (who have less than six employees); the three-year exemption suggested for small and medium-sized enterprises is too long; it defines indirect discrimination too narrowly for instance the unnecessarily stringent language requirements for jobs is one of the most prevalent forms of racial discrimination in Hong Kong that will not be eliminated in this law; the Coalition for Racial Equality, the Society for Community Organization and several ethnic minority groups note that language, religion, nationality, citizenship and culture have been left out as warranting protection under the law.⁴⁸

An Anti-racial Discrimination Bill, Revealed Mindset Discrepancy

After passing every hurdle in such a long road to equality we are about to reach the final point which however may disappoint many people especially those continuously fighting for their rights for so many years. What is wrong here? I would like to say that the understanding about the whole issue of racism/racial

⁴⁶ Ravina Shamdasani, “Backers hail the prospect of a law, but want more,” *South China Morning Post*, 10 June 2003, p.3.

⁴⁷ It is proposed that the Bill should be called the “Race Discrimination Bill”. It should be modeled on the structure and format of the three existing anti-discrimination Ordinances, namely the Sex Discrimination Ordinance, the Disability Discrimination Ordinance and the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance. (Refer to *Legislating Against Racial Discrimination – A Consultation Paper*, September 2004, p.8)

⁴⁸ Ravina Shamdasani, “Anti-race blueprint does not go far enough,” *South China Morning Post*, 18 September 2004, p.3.

discrimination is rather too superficial, perhaps that is attributed to the ingrained form of prejudice that subtly expands in every stratum of social life and masks the truth for oppressed ones who are troubled by the crime of racism. We must understand that racism is not only a question of legislation but also a cultural problem – a social attitude we have for the “other”.

When Secretary for Home Affairs Patrick Ho Chi-ping was asked if a law protecting against racial discrimination is a right, rather than a privilege, he answered “(again) this is a very complicated issue, very complex in this consideration; we have to study the implication from all sides.”⁴⁹ It shows that at the conceptual level the concerned government officials in charge of the legislation seem to have inadequate understanding of the problem of racism. At a meeting, Stephen Fisher, Deputy Secretary for Home affairs, tied himself in knots when he described racial discrimination as someone discriminating against a person of a different race, just as he said, sexual discrimination by a person of one gender against someone of a different gender. This aroused bombardment from the NGO representatives immediately.⁵⁰ Another laughable piece is the API (Announcement in the Public Interest) that was commissioned by the Home Affairs Department and also shown on television recently. The “we’ re all just one big happy family” of the API showing different Chinese faces, each speaking his/her own vernacular to show Hong Kong is a harmonious society. However, the “one family” does not include South Asians, South-east Asians and Caucasians who are also part of the Hong Kong community. It indeed sends an exclusionary message to some people. In a written reply the department said that the TV piece clip is aimed only at promoting the acceptance of “the continuing large numbers of arrivals coming from the mainland every year.” Some ethnic groups criticize that it actually promotes segregation instead of integration.⁵¹

⁴⁹ *Equal, or Not*, Pearl Report, 14 November 2002.

⁵⁰ Frank Ching, “Slow to act,” *South China Morning Post*, 14 October 2003, p.14.

⁵¹ “One Family (as long as you’ re Chinese),” *The Pulse*, Radio Television Hong Kong, 18 February 2005.

The mindset behind those confusing and extraneous answers is indeed pretty clear; the government is incapable of dealing with racial discrimination and it is still too reluctant to take up decisive measures to make a harmonious society that can embrace cultural diversity. This is not surprising that the government adopts the same tactic of rhetoric to defer protection to new mainland immigrants. Patrick Ho Chi-ping explains the government's decision to exclude new mainland immigrants: "Mainland migrants being discriminated by Hong Kong Chinese is discrimination, but not racial discrimination."⁵² In response to criticism that the government has ignored its previous inclusion of mainland immigrants in its codes of employment practice, Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs Stephen Fisher admitted the policy has changed.⁵³ Fisher also says most of them come from the "same ethnic stock" as local Chinese people. In other words, they cannot be distinguished from Hong Kong people. They elaborate:

All of us at some time were new arrivals, some get assimilated sooner than others – someone from Guangzhou, university educated, can be assimilated much more easily than someone from a rural area – they are not ethnic minorities, they constitute a social category.⁵⁴

This decision is backed by Democratic Alliance for Betterment (DAB) of Hong Kong legislator Yeung Yiu-chung who amends the motion to delete "new arrivals from the mainland" from the law. Ho Hei-wah of the Society for Community Organization (SoCO) says the DAB's amendment demonstrated the party's ignorance with regard to racial discrimination in Hong Kong. "Most mainland Chinese in Hong Kong face discrimination – that is a fact," Ho says.⁵⁵ The Law Society has formally expressed its opposition against the excision of mainland immigrants from the law. It argues that some of the submissions made during the consultation suggest that the "national origin" category could be defined in a way that covers mainlanders. Or, as in Australia, discrimination against immigrants

⁵² "No more discrimination," *Hong Kong Connections*, Radio Television Hong Kong, 7 February 2005

⁵³ Klaudia Lee and Quinton Chan, "Legco to vote on anti-race legislation; the law will cover ethnic minorities but not newly arrived mainland immigrants," *South China Morning Post*, 20 June 2003, p.1.

⁵⁴ Ravina Shamdasani, "Anti-racism law will not exclude mainland arrivals; But those seeking redress must ask courts if they fall under new ruling," *South China Morning Post*, 1 July 2003, p.1.

⁵⁵ Ravina Shamdasani, "Conflict as race bias motion is amended," *South China Morning Post*, 13 March 2003, p.5.

generally could be outlawed.⁵⁶ The Law Society rightly points to other international conventions that expressly prohibit discrimination on the grounds of “social origin”. The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights – applied to Hong Kong through the Basic Law – is one of them. The Law Society’s submission says, “the administration should, however, be aware of the provisions in Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which prohibit discrimination on the grounds of “national or social origin” or “birth or other status”.⁵⁷

Another disadvantaged group is the Foreign Domestic Workers. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination reiterated concerns over the situation of foreign domestic helpers, saying the so-called “two-week rule” that requires domestic helpers to leave within 14 days of their contracts expiring might be discriminatory, when the committee first urged the government to have a thorough review on what it described as an “unsatisfactory” situation in the HKSAR in 2001.⁵⁸ However, the government intends to exempt immigration protocols from the legislation, though human rights organizations criticize the retention of this measure as preventing helpers from attaining a continuous seven-year residence in Hong Kong. Worse, under the general exceptions from anti-discriminatory provisions this group of people is subjected to “licensed” discrimination by their employers. Eman Villanueva, Secretary General of United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFL-HK), an alliance of Filipino migrant organizations in Hong Kong founded in 1985, complains, “we found that the government’s paper is actually excluding foreign domestic workers’ general interest, particularly those which are under the immigration clause...so we are actually in the process of legislation of the anti-racial discrimination bill, we feel that we are already being discriminated against.”⁵⁹ It is because such an exception is granted to an employer who has less than six employees

⁵⁶ “Mainlanders should be protected by racism law,” *South China Morning Post*, 1 March 2005, p.12.

⁵⁷ Ravina Shamdasani and Carrie Chan, “Racism law should cover mainland migrants, say lawyers”, *South China Morning Post*, 28 February 2005, p.2.

⁵⁸ Jimmy Cheung, “Top UN body rejects stand on race law,” *South China Morning Post*, 11 August 2001, p.4.

⁵⁹ “One Family (as long as you’re Chinese),” *The Pulse*, Radio Television Hong Kong, 18 February 2005.

and the exception would expire only three years after the Bill is enacted into law. In other words, foreign domestic helpers are not protected in the law because their employers mostly employ one worker. Reacting to the question if there will still be a clause allowing employers to discriminate on the basis of race in selecting domestic helpers, Stephen Fisher says, “Employers will not be allowed to discriminate against domestic helpers. However, we take into account the fact that under this situation, the employer is employing someone to work within the family, to live with the household. And therefore, what we are now proposing is that the employer should be allowed to choose the person to work within the household. But once employed, there should be no discrimination.”⁶⁰ In general he explains why exemption is needed, “Hong Kong is an international city with people of every race doing business, living and visiting. We understand that new legislation often raises concerns in the community, but hope that this law, like the existing three anti-discrimination laws, will be implemented smoothly.”⁶¹

While the government is opening some room for legal protection for victims of racism, it is at the same time limiting the law’s function. It shows that the government is at a loss in handling this issue. Perhaps, that could be partly explained with its previous record of long-standing position of hesitation, inconsistency and conservatism. Such a dysfunctional law also means minimum changes to the status quo, which sustains the kind of dominant discriminatory regime in social and welfare policies as well as social intolerance towards minority.

Representation in Politics, HARD and the Southern Democratic Alliance

Of course by being ethnic and cultural minorities in an alien society, they have many experiences in common such as racism, marginalization in society,

⁶⁰ “One Family (as long as you’re Chinese),” *The Pulse*, Radio Television Hong Kong, 18 February 2005.

⁶¹ Ravina Shamdasani, “Draft anti-racism laws may have exemptions,” *South China Morning Post*, 31 October 2003, p.2.

livelihood difficulties and linguistic and cultural differences. This also means there are also many common frontiers and battlefields that the minorities could and can fight together, for or against. Let us look at some of the major fights, particularly in the political realm where the movement petitioners are trying to bring the question of “other” ethnicities into our perspective. We have to be aware that if the subtleness lies mostly in ‘ethnicity’ then how come ‘ethnicity’ matters so much in mediation and transformation of the relations *between* the ‘South Asians’ / the South Asians’ Movements *and* the mainstream society? And how is ‘ethnicity’ as a specific subject matter constructed and deconstructed in the struggles that the ‘South Asians’ stage and what kind of effect has ‘ethnicity’ brought to a conceivable level?

The strategies that they have learnt and re-innovated through their long-term struggle have led their movement to enter into a new stage of being more proactive and self-representing. They struggle for self-representation by turning the public discourses from their personal plights to encouraging awareness on the issue of racial discrimination, a larger social problem. They also take up the strategy of building a broader supporting network among themselves and the ones who are concerned about the problem and are involved in minority rights movements. They also see the needs in theorization of the concept “ethnicity” and its specific contestation in Hong Kong at the conceptual level as well as in reformation of the social and cultural relationship between minorities and the mainstream in everyday life.

HARD

The first political action waged by the ethnic minorities was the formation of an anti-racism alliance, Hong Kong against Racial Discrimination (HARD), which was formed in 1999 to fight against what activists depict as “a rising tide of discrimination in the situation where there is no law to protect victims of racism”. It is a coalition of 14 non-governmental organizations ranging from groups representing domestic helpers and defenders of human rights to a collection of young ethnic Indian professionals. Citizens’ Party chairwoman Christine Loh Kung-wai, who has been devoted to draft a bill that would outlaw racial discrimination, is one of the founding members. The spokesperson, barrister Vandana Rajwani, claims that

long-term Hong Kong residents who are not ethnic Chinese are “neither accepted nor made to feel that this is our home, primarily, we believe, because of the color of our skin, our nationality, our race.”⁶² They have reached a unanimous motion/consensus to fight for racial equality by promoting legislative protection and multiculturalism through public education. The group started its work by compiling cases of racial discrimination that were ample and ubiquitous such as the crackdown on Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi visitors in 1999 to cut their visa-free access from three months to two weeks; female Thai tourists stopped by Immigration officers and asked whether they were involved in prostitution; Nepalese targeted by Customs officers for body searches at the airport; Indian and Chinese customers charged admission fee while Westerners admitted for free in some Wan Chai bars, et cetera. The anti-racism coalition also investigates the ways in which the children of ethnic minorities are disadvantaged by having to attend schools where teaching is conducted in Chinese, not their mother tongue. All of this suggests that there is no reason to ignore the problem despite that fact that racism in Hong Kong tends not to be overtly violent. In response to the government’s reiterated denials that racism is not a “significant problem” in Hong Kong, Rajwani determinately states: “the name in itself was symbolic. We wanted to take a hard stance.”⁶³

Before anti-racism legislation became HARD’s political agenda and in the wake of the handover, the Indian Resources Group, now a core member of HARD, had launched a successful campaign to lobby the British Government to grant citizenship to ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. Rajwani admitted that their new challenge was very different from the campaign to win British citizenship for ethnic minorities. The earlier campaign had a deadline – July 1, 1997 – and had attracted a large amount of interest from the international and British media, which helped to increase the pressure on decision-makers in London. She believes the HKSAR has a long way to go before reaching an environment of racial equality. With the Racial Discrimination Ordinance is expected to become law next year (2006), HARD empathizes with the struggle ahead for Hong Kong’s gay and lesbian groups, in what

⁶² Jo Pegg, “New group formed to combat racism”, *South China Morning Post*, 20 January 1999, p.2.

⁶³ Glenn Schloss, “HKSAR’s long, Hard race row,” *South China Morning Post*, 29 December 2000, p.13.

will almost be an acrimonious debate on a discrimination ordinance covering sexual orientation. As Rajwani remarks: “this is not about being gay. Don’t make that issue. This is not about morality”. Rajwani has her perception on how to win in the court of public opinion, she articulates: “it’s about human rights. Remember that, and you stand a fighting chance.”⁶⁴ HARD has gone through the stage of confusion with different but unfocused agendas at its initial formative stage according to Rajwani, however, with its background of an extended NGOs coalition it could extend its outreach deep to the socially marginalized and change conditions for them with its legal knowledge.

Southern Democratic Alliance

Another political action taken up by ethnic groups recently shows not only a continuity of the previous campaign against racism and for racial equality but it also has a significant turn in identification and usage of political tactics. However, its forming structure reflects a great discontinuity. This is the Southern Democratic Alliance, with membership of 600 people including some 400 Nepalese, and about 100 from other nationalities like Indian, Sri Lankan, Indonesian, Pakistani as well as about 100 local Chinese members. It was formed in February 2004 and aims to put minority issues on the political agenda. To judge its identification as so-called “social movement” lies not on its up-front position as a political party but also on its vibrancy in creating new cultural politics with which ethnic minorities can negotiate with the dominants and reshape their identity and everyday life.

In April 2004, the *U-Beat Magazine*⁶⁵ briefly introduces the formation of the Southern Democratic Alliance. In October 2004, a group of South Asians, who had enthusiastic interest in politics, thought that most South Asians fellows in Hong Kong face different living hardships so that they decided to form a political party that could express their demands directly to the government. Limbu Genu, Director of Women Issues section of the Southern Democratic Alliance, is the key founding

⁶⁴ Tim Cribb, “Fighting for acceptance is hard work”, *South China Morning Post*, 27 July 2004, p.14.

⁶⁵ “Alien place, no way to express grievance, South Asians form their own party,” the *U-Beat Magazine*, issue 62, April 2004.

person in the party. She used to be the Secretary of the Prime Minister of Nepal before she came to Hong Kong eight years ago. She is keen on politics and has much knowledge about it. She realizes quite a lot of South Asians in Hong Kong are suffering from unequal treatment through her observation and experiences of her fellow countrymen. These reasons drove her to think of forming a political party of the South Asians. Members of the South Asian communities have also realized from their unsuccessful performance in the district council elections in the year 2003 that they need co-operation with local Chinese to gain local support. Genu and her fellow members invited James Lung Wai-man, a community worker with the Hong Kong Community Development Network and director of the Yau Tsim Mong Mutual Development Center, to be the chairman of the new alliance early this year. April 5th Action Group activists Koo Sze-yiu and Lui Yuk-lin are also among the Chinese members and are expected to help amplify the voices of the minorities.

Seeking more understanding about this political party I interviewed its chairman James Lung on 3 January 2004. According to Lung, there are about 240,000 South Asians living and working in Hong Kong and the ones whom his party approached and documented in records amount to 20,000 to 25,000 mainly from regions of Wan Chai, Kwai Chung, Yuen Long and Yau/Tsim/Mong. The party charges each member HK \$200 for annual membership fee, the amount is meant to make a different signification to its members that they are joining a party, not a community centre which may charge them about \$20 per member. Lung believes that the amount is sensible to convey the message that the party is professional enough and generate a sense of belonging to the party. Lung adds the services and the assistance that the party offers will cover and extend to the family members of the party members; that means a family can enjoy all the benefits even if only one member from the family joins the party. Here we see its representation and popularity among the South Asian communities is through this particular membership system. Lung reveals that Nepalese are easier to approach because of their nature of openness towards strangers. The Alliance's effort in mobilizing Nepalese communities is actually noteworthy as compared to the Human Rights Monitor's survey on minorities' views on racial discrimination in 1998; the Nepalese

community was the least active group among the ethnic minorities. About 800 survey forms, in English and Chinese, were distributed in Statue Square, Tsim Sha Tsui, near Immigration Tower and other areas where minorities gather. Nearly 70 per cent of respondents described themselves as Filipino but one of the largest ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, the Nepali community estimated by their consulate as 50,000-strong, did not return any form.⁶⁶

Responding to the question of whether or not the Southern Democratic Alliance is leading to a “social movement”, Lung replied that “absolutely” because this party, probably the only party, is hyperbolically intervening in every aspect of livelihood of the South Asians, and it is the only party that has the political awareness about the problems that the South Asians are encountering in Hong Kong and are germane to the failure of the whole system. Other parties or organizations that are concerned about South Asian ethnic minorities just put each case in separate position; they have never thought that there are inter-relations and causal relations among these cases and consistently they become a social phenomenon or a social problem. If the root of the problem is in the social system, Lung thinks we must change the system at any cost. It is worthy if it is good to the South Asians.

Believing political participation/representation is an effective way to solve these problems, the South Democratic Alliance has taken a rather important political move to assert visibility in the 2004 Legco Election since its formation in February 2004. Though it did not directly join the 2004 Legco Election, as it planned in April 2004 by forming a joint-candidacy combining candidates of multi-ethnic backgrounds, it put its efforts in mobilizing ethnic electors to support Leung Yiu Chung of Neighborhood & Workers Service Centre to win in the New Territories (West) constituency. Moreover, Char Shik Ngor Stephan, an independent candidate standing from the New Territories (West) and committed to bring the voices of ethnic minorities into the Legislative Council, also got support from the Southern Democratic Alliance. Though, Char failed to get enough votes to be elected, the result was clear - to show that the support from ethnic minorities is really important. It is because Char received the largest number of votes (totaling more than 6000

⁶⁶ Gren Manuel, “How we suffer bias – by minorities,” *South China Morning Post*, 30 July 1998, p.3.

votes of which more than 400 were votes by the South Asians) that a retired senior civil servant has ever accomplished as compared to about 4000 votes another senior government official managed to get in the year 2000. The need to have a representative for ethnic minorities in Legco is also widely shared by ethnic minorities. Muhammad, who faces job discrimination as other minorities, expressed they need someone who actually understand their issues.⁶⁷ The real impact brought by the South Asians ethnic minorities may not be reflected in the “center” Legco setting as far as we observe, but it is fermenting at the “sub-center” political level. Lung said within two weeks of the establishment of the Southern Democratic Alliance in February, the Democratic Party, the Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong and Civil Human Right Front have set up ethnic minority concern groups. During the election, a Democratic Party candidate also sensed that the South Asians as a potential vote bank could not be neglected, he started printing his political agenda also in South Asian languages, following Char’s practice. Within a bigger political spectrum, ethnic minority issues more and more seem to be an unavoidable agenda.

The South Asians’ movements, especially this political type, seem to be taking good advantage of the concurrent political phenomena. Lung analyses the situation of “an ample space opened by complex social issues, advanced communication technology and broader public sphere” and at the level of praxis they are expressing their will through quite active political participation. However, some views doubt that the movement is doomed to be an inevitable failure for not being accepted by the mainstream, others think its proclamation of “ethnicity” is just a superficial political gesture to make it look different in the Legco elections. Lung believes that skepticism will get its answer later as time will show the results of efforts that the Southern Democratic Alliance has made. Southern Democratic Alliance also faces criticism from Ivan Choy Chi-keung, senior instructor of the Government and Public Administration from the Chinese University, on its outspoken political agenda “supporting the universal suffrage for the Chief Executive

⁶⁷ Ravina Shamdasani, “Pakistanis complain of job discrimination,” *South China Morning Post*, 9 June 2003, p.A2

and ministries in 2007 ... and long-term Hong Kong residents who were not ethnic Chinese should also be eligible to compete in election for Chief Executive and ministries” as something “high ambition but limited ability, and impracticality”. Lung is very much eager to oppose this criticism. He retorts that the ambitions they have are of course “high” because they are committed to it, but whether or not their capability is viewed as “limited” awaits time to prove; but having equal opportunity is the most fundamental concept of “equality” which is definitely not “impracticality” as Choy said.

We see the South Asians’ movements in the political arena has been leading towards a direction which is more and more politicized both within itself and influenced by other parties. It seems that the movement has entered another phase of politicizing South Asians. From this kind of political alliances between ethnic minorities and local Chinese, we see a new tactic in political articulation that South Asians have developed in recent years. Lung said minority communities needed the co-operation of local Chinese before they could get the kind of power needed to make significant improvements to their welfare. We see now that the Southern Democratic Alliance is expressing the political will of a group of people, or perhaps a sector of the people. It is now far too early to make any judgment on the South Democratic Alliance because it is continuously fermenting and maneuvering in its specific social context. However it is crucial for a movement to have the new cultural politics, which engages and embraces “difference” of other ethnic and political groups, and other social movements.

Other Political / Cultural Representations

In the political arena, the struggle for representation has many dimensions. South Asian communities voice a sense that they are not represented by the government, so that they have to learn how to represent their complex identities *politically* in their own ways.

South Asians are keen on taking part in many public affairs no matter if they concern directly their pressing needs and the betterment of their livelihood or generally the

interest of the larger public; some of the motivation is out of their religious belief, citizens' right and responsibility or goodwill for world peace. All their participation and commitment reflect that they want to be a part of the Hong Kong community and global citizenship both in political and ideological representations.

The consultation paper on racial discrimination legislation should be of particular interest to Hong Kong ethnic minorities, but it may not be easy for all of them to read it because the full version is only available in two languages, Chinese and English; while the Hindi, Urdu, Bahasa Indonesia or Tagalog versions are only printed in summaries in small leaflets, which may not fully convey every important detail. However, the Nepali groups do have their own way to find out more about things that concern them. Seminars, workshops, focus groups, public forums, and exhibitions are being organized in order to make members of ethnic minorities more aware of the possible value of such legislation. In an open forum organized by the Asian Students' Association on this issue, reporters from a local Nepalese website were already there to collect news. The website HKNepal.com is a bilingual English and Nepali website, set up earlier this year and brings latest news about their community, home country as well as overseas to the local Nepali community by clipping news from local English newspapers, TV news and news websites and translate them into their language. Chura Thapa, Executive Editor, says their reporters work on voluntary basis so their website focuses more on issues that affect their community. Bhim Bahadur Gurung is the organizer of another Nepalese group, Jhataro Hong Kong, making feature-film length videos for the community. Members of the group have raised \$200,000 for the first production "Post No.6" which is about domestic problems of Nepalese in Hong Kong, some caused by the pressure of being strangers in a strange land, that face many local Nepalese. Now they are making another video about the younger generation and drug abuse, as it is a serious problem that the community is facing, especially younger generation. The underlying belief of the group is to bring a simple message to their community: it is important to keep your own house in order. Gurung elaborates: "in Hong Kong, the Nepalese society is very big, in Nepalese society, there are many bad things. So we want to throw out the defects from our society. But we don't have any media, so this is a very big

problem for us.”⁶⁸ Besides, there are a variety of media serving Hong Kong’s Nepalese community although they are operating on a small scale. Having access to information is one of the common problems faced by many ethnic minorities in a language environment which is alien to them. Now this kind of minority-established media can help them a lot in this aspect, a crucial step to increase awareness.

The controversial Article-23 about national security ordinance caused great public disquiet and opposition in Hong Kong. It was taken back by the Beijing government because of a demonstration of unity by Hong Kong citizens formed against this unacceptable law. However, we might have not noticed the ethnic minorities who also were part of the coalition. In a march to the government central office, in December 2003, (much earlier than the July 1 Rally) more than twenty Nepalis who are permanent residents holding their self-made posters marched along with their local Chinese counterparts to express their disappointment and concerns towards the ordinance. They demand the government to explain the proposed Article 23 in the Basic Law to ethnic minorities living in Hong Kong. They revealed that they were afraid of all possible limitations on human rights, freedom of press and freedom of assembly the law might bring if it were passed, so they asked the government to extend the consultation period and in the form of white-bill public consultation.⁶⁹

The United Muslim Association of Hong Kong (UMAH), which is a recognized charitable organization, has been applying for a site in Sheung Shui since early 1997 for building the first mosque in the New Territories. However, the proposal is strongly rejected and protested against by local non-Muslim residents in Tsui Lai Garden and the land grant application is still under the government’s consideration and the decision will be made in due course after considering all relevant factors, including the views of local residents. The rationale of building a

⁶⁸ “Hong Kong’s Nepali Media,” *Media Watch*, Radio Television Hong Kong, 16 December 2004

⁶⁹ For the details, see “Hong Kong government received more than 200,000 consultation papers on the legislation of Article 23,” *Dajiyuan*, 23 December 2002; “Nepalese residents also ask for White consultation bill,” *Ming Pao*, 24 December 2002, A10; and “More than 200,000 consultation papers passed to the government,” *The Sun News*, 24 December 2002, A06.

new Mosque in New Territories is that the recent government project of urban renewal forces many Muslims to move from Hong Kong Island, Kowloon to the new satellite towns in the New Territories (Tuen Mun and Yuen Long) and most of them are economically less well off. The project is a welfare-oriented mosque, which will not only provide a site for Muslims to pray and gather for religious purposes, but will also provide an English medium secondary school for ethnic minorities and residential care and attention home for the elderly. Reasons cited by Tsui Lai Garden residents are their anxiety about the noise of five daily prayers, the traffic congestion, community security and the declining real estate value of housing which might be adversely affected after the building of the mosque. However, its real reason may more be misconception and hostility to alien culture especially Muslim which may be related to global fear of Islamic terrorism after 9-11.

UMAH Chairman Mohamed Alli Din takes chances to deliver clear understanding on Peace that is revealed in the Holy Quran. In his speech delivered at Breakthrough Campsite in Sha Tin upon the invitation of the Breakthrough organization Hong Kong, Din says,

GOD ALMIGHTY made the human society, built on interconnected interest, benefits and made to promote mutual understanding and cooperation, if peaceful co-existence is to be achieved as given in the Holy Quran Chapter 49 Verse 13 which is as follows – Mankind! We have created you from (a single pair of) male and female and made you into tribes and nations that you may know one another (not that you despise one another), verily, the most honored of you in the sight of GOD is (he who) most righteous, verily, GOD is all knowing”.⁷⁰

In practice, UMAH claims to be a peace-loving religious group and it fights hard for social justice and equality as well as works hard for community bonding through religious and cultural participation. Apart from managing the Haji Omar Ramju Sadick Care and Attention Home and the UMAH International Primary School, the Association also organizes Islamic Activities for the Muslim community. The Old Age Home Prayer Hall and the School are used for every Eid Festivals to

⁷⁰ The website of Mohamed Alli Din’s Speech on PEACE:
<http://www.geocities.com/umahweb/acts.html#speech>

cater the Muslim community in the New Territories. Every Eid, there are around 800-900 Muslims gathering in the school and around 160-200 Muslims gathering for Taravee Payer in the Old Age Home Prayer Hall during Ramadhan and Eid Festivals. The Association conducts Quran and Arabic classes for children and two Alims were recruited from Pakistan both for the purpose of teaching Arabic lessons and Quran reading and to lead prayers including Jumma (Friday) prayers and Islamic functions in its premises at Yau Oi Estate, Tuen Mun and the school. Recently, the Association helped and supported a group of Indonesian and Filipino migrant workers to form an organization, the Asian Muslim Women's Association. The purpose of this organization is to give them courage to speak up and have a voice to the problems they are presently encountering. Quarters for terminated migrant Muslim workers located in Long Ping Estate, Yuen Long, are provided by the UMAH. The Association is also concerned about world affairs; UMAH joins in promoting world peace for example joining a candle vigil commemorating September 11 victims in USA after the tragedy, a Prayer Rally for World Peace in Charter Garden in December 2001, donating in goods and cash for Afghan refugees, war victims and orphans through EDHI Foundation Lahore, Pakistan.

Conclusion: Naming the Movements of the South Asians in Question

In this concluding section I would like to abstract the experience of social and political struggles that South Asian ethnic minorities have been engaging since 1990s to the present in a theoretical level of discussion by drawing useful insights from Stuart Hall's analysis on the politics of representation in the British black movement.

Stuart Hall's focus is on the real heterogeneity of identities and interests of the 'black' subjects in a singular and unifying framework of a so-called "black movement". The black movement in Britain is framed by the same historical conjuncture and rooted in the politics of anti-racism and the post-war black experience in Britain. The movement later is able to transgress the frame of binary oppositions. The struggle over political representation is disposed to inscribe their

selves in response to the problematization of the cultural representations of the black self by the insistent presence of irreducible differences. Hall names the second phase – a politics of representation of the black movement. A phase comprising the two moments at once, a moment of struggling for recognition and respect in the society as well as by state institutions; and a moment of working for new forms of solidarity through the cultivation of strength by opening the self to the play of multiplicities, rather than suffocating differences by the legislative power of the posing of a single racial identity. The movement started to critically question the kind of unified collective political identity – the ‘essentialized’ black identity and the suppression of cultural diversities and interests in the movement - and recognized the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category ‘black’; so that the term ‘black’ develops into an inclusive term and opens to ‘differences’ and provides the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, amongst (minority) groups and communities with very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities. The black movement was formed in a self-transformative process.

A key question pointed out by Stuart Hall, which is particularly crucial to every social movement, is:

[...] how a politics can be constructed which works with and through difference, which is able to build those forms of solidarity and identification which make common struggle and resistance possible but without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities, and which can effectively draw the political boundary lines without which political contestation is impossible, without fixing those boundaries for eternity (Hall, 1992: 255).

In Hong Kong I find that “South Asians”, a term consisting of multiple identities, are formed under external historical pressures rather than an organic linkage to everyday life and practices. The case studies included under this topic, such as the campaigns for right of abode and legislation against racial discrimination as well as the establishment of a political party, may tell more about the political assertion and representation, if not ‘social movement’, of the South Asians. Their

‘collective’ identity is based more on the kind of common interests produced in the political arenas, a field more or less out of their hands. Besides, the term ‘South Asians’ expressed and used in Chinese does not imply its pluralistic and diverse character as if ‘South Asians’ refers to a ‘single’ ethnicity or a ‘single’ identity of people coming from ‘poor’ and ‘backward’ countries like India, Pakistan or Nepal (sometimes the term also includes the Philippines which does not really belong to South Asian region in a strict geographical sense). Some groups whom we (in Hong Kong Chinese’s usage) categorize as ‘South Asians’ may not even identify with such a ‘simplified’ term, that totally conceals their cultural diversities and divides in histories, languages, religions and political interests. The most obvious example is the difference between Indian and Pakistani whose political identities and religious beliefs are acutely different, sometimes hostile, because of different political positions and interests despite their largely shared cultural roots. Therefore, this cultural representation has to be further discussed in relation to its construction of a collective identity as ‘South Asians’, particularly the exchanges and interactions in everyday life and social practices.

However, I am aware that the South Asians share more or less the same diasporic experience and the consequences which this carries for the process of unsettling, recombination, hybridization and ‘cut-and-mix’ – in short, the process of cultural diaspora-ization, colonial history, shared and collective experience – encounter with cultural difference and subjection to social stratification and difficult social conditions that have long placed the South Asian communities in a marginalized and invisible social position. These conditions make them join at conjunctural points in history as this chapter reveals. The question of minority always implicates the question of marginalization and subjugation for it is, first of all, a position defined from the statist position of the ruling elite, i.e., whatever is at variance with the state sanctioned standards is relegated to the minority position. As plans, decisions, policies are made on the basis of these standards, the minorities are facing an uphill battle with their struggles for recognition. The more or less similar social and political conditions serving as an external cause to bring the minorities together are often seen as human right issue directing against the state without

necessarily challenging the standards set by it. However, Hall's understanding of the politics of representation allows us to go beyond reducing the minority movement to a state-centered human rights struggle and to recognize its potential of reflecting on the self that questions fundamentally the totalizing binary thinking that makes possible the majority/minority divide and the setting of the majority standards in the first place.

My arguments are: first of all, with the case of Hong Kong, there is still not such a single and already-formed movement called "South Asians' Movement" though in reference to recent history quite a lot of South Asians have been making great efforts in fostering social changes that fit best the communities' interests and general well-being of the communities. Besides, most of the time the "movements" are still very tiny and hardly noticeable; that is why I prefer to use the word "tracing" to follow the course of their specific forms of social existence, and they as a significant group in social participation have enriched more dimensions to its ambivalence as a term of "South Asians".

As revealed in HARD's sympathy and coalition with sexual minorities and sexual dissidents, UMAH with migrant domestic workers from Islamic countries, and Southern Democratic Alliance with people of racially and culturally diverse groups, I find some positive signs that can be further developed to an 'inclusive' social movement / identity that Hall has evocated. Besides, South Asians treat themselves as an emergent social identity in the movements, and I hope to see that the South Asians as vertical point of identification in the 'politics of representation' will allow the emerging of the minorities suppressed by the dominant structures, of a common struggle that challenges the fundamental values of the majority standards. Thus, it is quite clear that the so-called South Asians Movement is in the making, bearing signs of the possible formation of new forms of solidarity that draw their strength from diversity and openness rather than the coercive politics of rallying around a self-same identity.

Appendix 1:

The following table, which is extracted from the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) report published on 19 April 2001, demonstrates how the numbers of Nepalese nationals living in Hong Kong increase significantly after mid-1990s.⁷¹ However, these figures – which relate to Nepalese nationals – do not account for all the ethnic Nepalese living in Hong Kong. An unknown number of Nepalese residents have acquired various forms of British (and possibly other) nationality and are therefore among the United Kingdom nationals in Hong Kong.

Nepalese Nationals Living in Hong Kong

As at end of the year	Permanent Resident	Temporary Resident*	Total
1990	162	178	340
1991	92	221	313
1992	68	353	421
1993	182	727	909
1994	806	1125	1931
1995	3259	2220	5479
1996	5518	4490	10008
1997	7589	6692	14281
1998	8434	8917	17351
1999	8420	9261	17681

⁷¹ International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), CERD/C/357/Add.4 (Part II), 19 April 2001. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Reports submitted by States Parties under Article 9 of the Convention, Ninth period reports of States Parties due in 1999.

* Here, 'temporary residents' are mostly persons who have entered for settlement but have not yet completed the seven years of continuous residence necessarily to qualify for permanent resident status.

Appendix 2:

The following is a chronology of “the long road to equality” extracted from *South China Morning Post* dated 9 June 2003, which provides a brief historical trace-back of the controversial legislation.

1969: The United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) becomes applicable to Hong Kong

1996: the Committee on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) calls on Hong Kong to enact a law banning racism

July 1998: Acting Secretary for Home Affairs Peter Lo Yat-fai says Hong Kong does not have the “historical background” for laws against racial discrimination

1999: The UN Human Rights Committee directly asks the administration why no legal remedies are available to victims of racial discrimination

October 2000: In a report submitted to the UN under the ICERD, the government says racism is not a problem in Hong Kong and it did not plan to formulate anti-racism laws

April 2001: The ICESCR asks the government about its continuing failure to legislate against racial discrimination in the private sector. Officials said they would hold a consultation and respond by early 2002.

May 2002: A Race Relations Unit is set up to handle complaints about racial discrimination and educate the public

August 2002: A Home Affairs Bureau consultation finds strong support for the laws among business groups and non-governmental organizations

November 2002: Diplomats from several consulates of Commonwealth countries raise the issue of racism against their nationals with Secretary for Home Affairs Patrick Ho Chi-ping

January 2003: The parliamentary under-secretary of Britain’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Bill Rammell, calls on Hong Kong to enact the laws after talks with Chief Secretary Donald Tsang Yam-kuen

March 2003: Legco unanimously supports a motion backing anti-racism laws

April 2003: The Home Affairs Bureau conducts another round of consultations among business groups

Chapter Three

Problems of Education and Language in Relation to Cultural Identity and Sense of Belonging: South Asian School Children

Introduction

The unequal treatment of ethnic minority students in the Hong Kong education system and their problems with special educational needs and social adaptation saliently form a crucial part in the discussion of South Asian ethnic minorities. In 2001, an inaugural study on ethnic minorities by the Census and Statistics Department reported that there were 38,200 children with Filipino, Indonesian, Indian or Nepali roots aged 24 or below, however, the real size of the student body is expected to be far more than this figure.⁷² Changing demographics attributed to young immigrants from the region, and new educational policies that have adversely and disproportionately affected many of these ethnic minority groups, are clearly noted as factors leading to the worsening of their problems. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), front-line social workers, media workers and academics have worked hard to bring the pressing problems that the South Asians face to public recognition and concern; some also take proactive initiatives to urge for policy changes and facilitate policy making by giving ideas through their

1 Social Worker Wong Wai-fun Fermi believes that the department's sampling method does not reveal the full picture. Her research estimates the number as closer to 70,000 Nepalese, the fastest-growing community among the South Asians, are now the 10th largest ethnic group in the SAR, ranked after Japanese and Australians. The Immigration Department puts the number of Nepalese nationals at 17,700, but the true size of the community is believed to be much larger. Ekraj Rai, a community leader and principal of the Poinsettia Kindergarten and Primary School (one of the private schools catering for ethnic minority students), estimates the number could be as high as 50,000, given the large number of spouses and children of former Gurkha soldiers who have arrived since an influx of migrants from Nepal began in the mid-1990s, as words spread of their legal right to claim permanent residency (which is approved by the Immigration Ordinance). "Ninety-five per cent of the children of Nepalese born in Hong Kong before 1983 have yet to come," he notes. Many more could be on their way. Of the new arrivals here, 60 per cent are in their 20s or 30s. He also estimated as many as 10,000 Nepalese children need schooling in Hong Kong. The educational facilities the government provided is far from enough to fulfill their educational needs. For the details, see *South China Morning Post*, 19 October 2002; *South China Morning Post*, 16 June 2000, p.15; and *South China Morning Post*, 29 December 2000, p.9.

research⁷³. However, the suggestions they provide to help these ethnic minority students to mitigate learning difficulties fail to challenge the knowledge formation as what Gayatri Spivak explains of “the conditions of institutions and the effects of institutions” (cited in Giroux, 1991: 52) that reproduce inequalities, power, and human suffering and cannot liberate these students from a limited structure and pedagogical practices which affirm cultural uniformity and closure instead of celebrating cultural diversity. By challenging the knowledge formation, more specifically in the Hong Kong context, one has to question the established canon at various levels of schooling that produces and legitimates Eurocentric, patriarchal, racist, and class specific interests; the legitimatization of ideological state apparatuses to safeguard the government’s interests in economic maximization and nation building; within this education system that emphasizes personal success, competition and hierarchy through different mechanisms, for instance, banding system and language supremacy, even the majority are also being ‘marginalized’; the ones who are already at the margin are further marginalized. The substantial introduction of the series of education and language policies put forward by the SAR government right after the change of sovereignty in 1997 is one of the crucial factors. Perhaps these are the core issues that require a prior understanding before we can better handle the predicaments that the South Asian communities face in education. Thus, the discussion must be placed in a historical framework and with concerns for power, politics and ideology.

By taking a perspective of the ethnic minority children, this chapter also attempts to understand a key question: how the cultural identities of ethnic minority children in their formative years are shaped by the tensions between the formal

⁷³ Related researches are as follows:

- Centre for Comparative and Public Law (HKU) & Unison Hong Kong – for Ethnic Equality, February 2004, *Race and Equality: A Study of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong’s Education System* (Occasional Paper No. 12).
- Centre for Social Policy Studies (Poly U) & S.K. H. Lady MacLehose Centre, April 2003, *A Research Report on the Life Experiences of Pakistanis in Hong Kong (Research Report Series No.7)*.
- Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service, June 2002, *a Study on Outlets of the South Asian Ethnic Minority Youth in Hong Kong*.
- Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service, July 2000, *Educational Needs and Social Adaptation of South Asian Youth in Hong Kong*.

institutional schooling and linguistic policies on the one hand, and traditions, religions, customs and bonding of neighbourhood living in their communities on the other hand. It is hoped that by looking into these heterotopic linguistic and educational sites intensively we can bring positive and fruitful discussion in border pedagogy which envisions a new possibility for children in crossing these distinctive, sometimes contradictory, borders of institutional education and community fostering. Only by starting a debate over the politics of cultural difference in existing formal educational structure can one engage with the broader issue of how learning “is truly attentive to the problems and histories that construct the actual experiences students face in their everyday lives” (Giroux, 1992: 17). The analysis will be supported with literature reviews drawn from government policies, policy amendments, documentations, readings and press information related to the issues of South Asian school children in Hong Kong.

Problematizing Discourses: Economic Restructuring, Knowledge-based Economy and Population Quality

The HKSAR government claims to put the greatest importance on education and its workforce is regarded as its greatest asset and perfectible building of its competitiveness. The government says, to maintain and advance its economic development in the transition to a “knowledge-based economy” and “economic restructuring” and to revitalize its competitiveness under new challenges of globalization, education is the key to the future of Hong Kong. Substantial investment in education and raising the competitiveness of labor force have been repeatedly emphasized in Tung Chee-hwa’s Policy Addresses. Education is the single largest item of government expenditure, in the 2004-2005 financial year, it takes 25% of the government budget, compared to 19% in the 1999-2000 financial year; the increase is astonishing⁷⁴. Tung also on many occasions said that every cent spent on education is an investment, not an expense. How well does Tung make sense with such an equivalence of education to investment theory is arguable. However, the

⁷⁴ Another reference: funding has surged from \$37.9 billion in 1996-1997 to \$55.3 billion in 2001-2002, a 46% increase over five years. (2001 Policy Address)

overall objective of Hong Kong education policy, as envisioned by Tung at the Ceremony to Celebrate the Establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China on July 1, 1997, is problematic. He stated:

Our education system must cater for Hong Kong's needs, contribute to the country, and adopt an international outlook. It should encourage diversification and combine the strengths of the east and the west. We shall draw up a comprehensive plan to improve the quality of education, and inject sufficient resources to achieve this goal.

The presumption of the target audience and the implication towards the target students of the speech are explicit. It is clear that the local Chinese students are inserted inspiration and optimism to contribute to the country – the reunited motherland of the People's Republic of China. A master narrative like this is inherently dangerous to substitute humanity concern in education to utilitarianism and patriotism which in turn work to mould our children according to those formulas. In terms of cultural positioning, transculturation is far less persuasively encouraged than cultural obstruction because the proclaimed 'international outlook' is no more than prolonging the legacy of colonialism which the White-centric values epitomize the only paradigm. In addition, emphasizing the "strengths of the east and the west" can only do more exclusion to other cultures instead of encouraging "diversification". This kind of totalizing discourse and invented monolithic pedagogical model indeed further strengthen a mindset commonly rooted in the educational sector, which cannot open itself to and cannot collaborate with the notion of cultural difference. In contrast to the newly arrived students from mainland China, South Asian students' needs are not addressed anywhere in any Policy Addresses (See Appendix 1). In fact, many parents of ethnic minority children feel desperate, as Ali Asshar, 56-year-old, a Pakistani, believes that the ethnic minorities are different from Mainland new-arrivals because Hong Kong is a home for them, therefore, the government gives more resources to them. Relatively, it is reluctant to care about the needs of other ethnic minorities. Ali's 19-year-old son has to apply for visa to study in Hong Kong,

he helplessly says that when he faces problems, he seeks help from his friends rather than the government because he can't wait too long.⁷⁵

In turn, South Asian minority students are the ones who characterize the most evident marginalization and exclusion in such a homogenized institutional structure. Fermi Wong Wai-fun, a social worker and founder of Unison Hong Kong for Ethnic Equality, which champions for the rights of ethnic minorities, complains, "The Education Department (ED) neglects them and treats them as invisible – this is the worst discrimination."⁷⁶ She also says, "The government is not discriminating them, but completely ignoring them, the government has no idea how many South Asian ethnic school children are studying, it is a disregard of their existence."⁷⁷ Secretary for Education and Manpower, Arthur K C Li defends, "since a student's racial origin/nationality does not affect his/her eligibility to study, the Education Department does not keep separate statistics on the number of Indian/Pakistani/Nepalese children who are aged below 15 and are now studying in public sector or private/international schools."⁷⁸ The problem perhaps comes from the kind of benevolence of not discriminating/differentiating the ethnic minority students from the vast majority as Li wants to convey to us. However, this refusal of making a distinction between ethnic minority and Chinese students is based on the rhetoric of equality. It is definitely a false equality which deals with equality in a hypocritical and superficial fashion that subsequently leads to a conclusion that the needs of ethnic minority students cannot be addressed. Fermi Wong's challenge on the government's incompetence to 'see/envisage' this group of children is something that needs to be taken into account, especially to understand such an unintended consequence of 'discrimination/disregard'. What is their limitation of seeing?

⁷⁵ "Journey of love, Hong Kong people visit ethnic minorities," *The Sun News*, 10 November 2001, D03

⁷⁶ "Learning the hard way," *South China Morning Post*, 10 October 2001, p.5.

⁷⁷ "Places for South Asian students are insufficient to fulfill their needs," *Oriental Daily*, 4 June 2001, A13

⁷⁸ Written replies to questions in Legco meeting (Legco Question No. 13), 15 November 2000, Cheung Man-kwong asked, SEM answered. Available at: <http://www.emb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=136&langno=1&UID=101003>

To better understand this problem there must be a link to its references of social relations, political changes and power/knowledge embedded in historical contexts. Then we have to ask why and how these groups of children have been positioned in a peripheral status in relation to dominant social practices that allow specific forms of privilege to remain unacknowledged by legacy of colonialism as well as ideology of “education as capital” in the so-called development of “knowledge-based economy” which supposedly is advantageous to nurture more ‘local talent’ as addressed by Tung Chee- hwa. Perhaps, juxtapositions of two educational institutions, taking different path-breaking processes to be an integral part of the HKSAR educational community and of what government’ s involvement in smoothening processes of their establishment can help to illustrate the issues raised above.

The Australian International School (AISHK) was established with the Hong Kong government’ s assistance and favorable policies in contrast to another similar case of the UMAH International Primary School (UMAH) that faced and still faces many obstacles when asking for Land Grant Treaty from the government. However, the government’ s different attitudes towards them are noticeably tendentious and not justifiable according to the principle of equal opportunity in handling the issues of educational needs of ethnic minorities. Australian International School Hong Kong (AISHK) was opened in 1995 to meet the growing demand for a high quality Australian educational institution in Hong Kong, thanks to the increasingly prominent economic role of Australia in the Asia Pacific region⁷⁹. The UMAH International Primary School (UMAH) was opened officially in October 1996 to set up a first international school in the service of less well off ethnic minorities, whose demand for formal schooling is unheeded in the Chinese-based schooling because of their inability to adapt to the language environment and because normal international

⁷⁹ Refer to homepage of Australian International School Hong Kong (AISHK) for details. Supporting data: “East Asia now accounts for 53 per cent of Australia's exports and 45 per cent of our imports” quoted from Peter Costello MP(Treasurer), Address to Australian Business in Europe (ABIE), "Economic Perspectives 2003: Australia and the Asia Pacific Region" Access from: <http://www.treasurer.gov.au/tsr/content/speeches/2003/006.asp>

schools are not a choice for them as they are mostly financially poor (Ho, 2001: 70). Tracing back to the history of development, detailed in both schools' websites, gratitude has been expressed by AISHK to the government's help and generosity in many ways whereas UMAH expresses its hard feeling and sometimes grievance against the government. One line from AISHK's webpage strikes me especially, i.e., "in July of 1995, through the generosity of the Hong Kong Government, the school moved to the Gun Club School, Tsim Sha Tsui, at a minimal rent of \$1 per year. This had been a school for the dependants of military personnel and had closed in July."⁸⁰ It strikes me because this kind of "generosity" is only a possible as a result of the government's unequal distribution of resources and deprivation of the poor. Chairman of United Muslim Association of Hong Kong (UMAH) and supervisor of UMAH International Primary School, Mohamed Alli Din reveals that the socio-political impact of the 1997 hand-over and its implicit changes of status of ethnic minority are reflected obviously in school policy. He elaborates:

[...] before 1997, when the British were here, they started to shut down schools in 1995, before that there were schools for the police children, all right. There were schools for the army children, okay. Because these types of soldiers and policemen, most of them are Pakistani, Nepalese ... so there are facilities for them provided by the police, by the army. But now, they are gone and they (the government) removed all these kinds of things, completely wiped out, so where do you expect the children to go? (Ho, 2001: 72).

Apart from an economically specific context, the education problem of the South Asian ethnic minority children is also encapsulated in a distinctive political context which is characterized by an emptiness and displacement of a colonial past in a new political regime. Following the traces that Din has noted that there were special schools for ethnic minority students in the old colonial days, I find a short clip⁸¹ about such schools in Fanling Police Station, established to provide Pakistani-language education to descendants of military personnel who followed the British to

⁸⁰ Refer to AISHK's homepage: <http://www.aishk.edu.hk/>

⁸¹ "Alien/Diaspora", *Hong Kong Connection* (Chinese), Radio Television Hong Kong, 24 February 1980.

the territory in the late 19th century. The school also stressed Chinese language education to equip students to better adjust to local Chinese society. Fanling Police Station also accommodated expatriate military staff and their family members in police hostels and there was an Islamic mosque for them to practice their religious faiths. However, after 1997 this relatively autonomous and isolated learning environment is no longer a privilege to ethnic minority students who have been exposed to cultural disparity in which their cultural identity is mostly experienced in rupture. Problems of ethnic minority school children have become a critical issue in the post-colonial era; however, we also have to see that “within a context that also opens them up to a plurality of contexts and possibilities” (Giroux, 1991: 57).

Here, I want to argue that the government, as the biggest institution, has certain preferences and biases in treating different ethnic communities unequally based on its validation of who is worth investing into and who is more capable of bringing profitable returns to Hong Kong's economy. White-supremacist logic, a popular myth inherited from colonialism, easily acclimatizes this arbitrary validation practice. Kevin Sinclair⁸² remarks that the privilege that the government generously granted to the schools for expatriate kids is a clever investment which forms a strong magnet to attract highly educated and well-skilled management expatriates to work in Hong Kong if their major concern of quality schooling for their children is well satisfied. Now about 35,000 Australian passport holders, who are among more than half of the total estimated 60,000 local Hong Kong-Chinese migrated to Australia between 1987 and 1997, are returned “Hong Kongers”, there is a great demand for so-called high quality international schools in Hong Kong as many of the students who study in the AISHK are ethnic Chinese. Having high quality international schools in Hong Kong is definitely an advantage to sustain Hong Kong's status of international business centre. Attracting international talents will be of significant value to our economic restructuring and future development and it is also a progressive approach to materialize Tung Chee-hwa's vision of Hong Kong as a world-class city in which vibrant cosmopolitan community is necessarily important.

⁸² Kevin Sinclair, “Schools for expatriate kids score an A-plus for the economy”, *South China Morning Post*, 17 July 2000, p.17.

Therefore, based on values of market exchange and economic rationality, money and resources have been channelled to support a comparatively wealthy ethnic group while the socially disadvantaged is completely forgotten. During the process of negotiation, Din had met Legislative Councillors and other governmental officials on the possibility of setting up a school catering especially to non-Chinese speaking children in the New Territories. After five months of negotiations, the Lands Department finally offered a piece of land of about 1,730 square meters in Yuen Long. The derelict village type school there originally was converted to a new school at a cost of HK\$1.5 million contributed by the United Muslim Association of Hong Kong (UMAH). The government granted the school campus at a HK\$1.00 rent per annum to the Association after justifying the need of a school for ethnic minority children, but refused to subsidize the school. According to Din, “it (the government) simply puts our school under the category of international schools, indeed most of the minority families are living on meager incomes and can hardly afford the school fees ... it is ridiculous.”⁸³ On the contrary, AISHK seems to be a prestigious “beloved” client. The government granted a valuable 5,800-square-foot site at 3 Norfolk Road, Kowloon Tong, a precious site that would have fetched millions if it were on the open market, to AISHK for building its permanent school premise in December 1998. Before the construction was completed in September 2001, the government again supported the school, through the Education Department, by providing it with a temporary premise in a disused secondary school at Cheung Sha Wan. At the same time the construction work also got overwhelming support from the Hong Kong Jockey Club and the Department of Education and Manpower Branch which granted and lent the AISHK HK\$60m and HK\$77m respectively. With the active move by the government AISHK has become the most outstanding and expensive international school in Hong Kong, which spent a total of \$200 million to build a nine-storey, 33-classroom school with facilities of a cricket pitch and a swimming pool on the roof.⁸⁴ Well, UMAH International Primary School with

⁸³ May Chan, “Legislators claim education system neglects minorities,” *South China Morning Post*, 5 February 2003, p. 4.

⁸⁴ Kevin Sinclair, “Schools for expat kids score an A-plus for the economy”, *South China Morning Post*, 17 July 2000, p.17.

7 classrooms and basic facilities like library, computer room can in no way compare to that standard of such luxury.

To have a grasp of the logic that capital is central to the analysis of this complicated issue of ethnic minority education, especially when education in Hong Kong is now repositioned in multifaceted concerns for a national world city (this positioning is more obvious after 1997), to grow as Tung Chee-hwa strongly stressed in his 2004 Policy Address, “Hong Kong has entered an age of globalization which brings not only opportunities but also severe challenges”. As a result, education itself is more a question of governance and development instead. Education is practiced in an exclusively calculative manner as if it were a government project of ‘business investment’ and a promise for high economic growth through the outstanding population composition carefully engineered through population planning/selection schemes such as the Admission of Mainland Professionals Scheme in 2001⁸⁵ (ISD 2000: 418-419) and the investment-for-residency scheme for people with assets of \$6.5 million in 2003.⁸⁶ Therefore, education has become discourse of modern management through articulation of clichés of ‘human resources management’ and ‘add to the value of self’ and application of justifiable discriminatory policies such as the immigration policies. When talking about education of the South Asian children we must be able to see these points, as they are mega obstacles against ethnic minorities’ interests. One possible crucial impact it has is the further limitation and elimination of the socially and economically less qualified population. South Asian communities will probably be the first victims as their arrival is not welcomed by the discriminatory immigration policies (we have talked about this in Chapter Two) and the young generation of this group is always being categorized as “lower-quality” population and is deprived of economic and social mobility (we will discuss this part later in this chapter). Nevertheless, it requires tremendous effort to demystify the well-packaged rational term of “high-quality population” because it is widely accepted as legitimacy for necessary

⁸⁵ “Government announced the Admission of Mainland Professionals Scheme and the Investment-for-Residency Scheme, mainland expatriates can apply in July,” *Hong Kong Commercial Daily*, 12 March 2003, A01.

⁸⁶ “Hong Kong’s new population policy,” *Newsline*, Asia Television, 2 March 2003.

assurance of vibrant economy. By deconstructing the colonialist and imperialist ideologies that structure our knowledge, social practices and conditions that have disabled others, I hope these critics could help them assume authority and the conditions for human agency in opening up a space for politics of difference in education, which is predominantly important for ethnic minority students.

Space for Ethnic Minority Students in Existing Educational Structure and Social Participation

Hong Kong's education is acclaimed quite a well-developed system and many international human rights obligations are also applicable to Hong Kong to ensure the right to education, equal opportunity and non-discrimination in education⁸⁷. However, the opportunity that the system opens to ethnic minority children is minimal and far less satisfactory in reality⁸⁸. This section briefly reviews the structure of the Hong Kong education system, and policies that have particular impact on ethnic minority children's equal opportunity in the education system as well as Hong Kong society.

The government provides 9 years of free and universal basic education for children who are at the age of 6 to 15 at government and government-aided primary

⁸⁷ They include:

- The 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which has been largely incorporated into Hong Kong Law by virtue of the 1991 Bill of Rights Ordinance (BRO) and Article 39 of the Hong Kong Basic Law;
- ICESCR articles 13 and 14, and articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) applied to Hong Kong, guarantee a right to education including, at the minimum, free and compulsory primary education for all and secondary education available and accessible to every child and imply a government obligation to ensure that these rights are fulfilled;
- The Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) clarifies that education must be accessible to all, especially the most vulnerable groups, in law and fact, without discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds.
- The 1966 International convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which has applied to Hong Kong since 1969, obligates States parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination notably in the enjoyment of political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights including the right to education and training (article 5.v.e.).

For more detail, see Kelly Loper, *Race and Equality: A Study of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong's Education System*, Occasional Paper No.12, February 2004, pp. 20-27

⁸⁸ Education facilities for non-Chinese speaking children, see refer to the following webpage:

http://www.emb.org.hk/EDNEWHP/school/education_services/Chinese/download/NCS2002.doc

and secondary schools. Students who wish to continue their studies and qualify after the age of 15 (forms 4-7) may attend government and aided schools for a relatively small fee. With this system about 95% of the children receive highly subsidized upper-secondary education or equivalent technical education, the rest are given other education enabling them for employment.⁸⁹ However, a survey conducted by the Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service found that half the respondents (ethnic minorities who are permanent residents) did not know about educational subsidies in Hong Kong, a quarter had no idea about the policy on nine-year compulsory education.⁹⁰ When students enter their first years of primary and secondary school, they may apply for school places using two possible methods.⁹¹ However, the information and procedures on these methods of school place allocation are not satisfactorily conveyed to parents and teachers. Though South Asian children who attend local kindergartens are eligible for Primary One places through central allocation, they often end up in a situation of missing a school place due to lack of information and other reasons. Fermi Wong was shocked to find that a few kindergartens catering for minorities missed the central application deadline. She complained, “The teachers did not understand how the new allocation exercise worked. Many of the parents – who spoke neither Chinese nor English – did not know their children would have a higher chance of gaining admissions to the primary school his or her siblings were studying at.”⁹² The survey (conducted by the Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service) also found 39 % of the ethnic minorities had difficulties in finding a suitable government-subsidized school, with many having to wait from six months to a year for a school place. Regarding the case studies documented in a joint research project by the Centre for Comparative and Public Law

⁸⁹ “Education in Hong Kong”, Education & Manpower Bureau Hong Kong, 1999.

⁹⁰ Linda Yeung, “Schools fail South Asians,” *South China Morning Post*, 22 August 2000, p.13; and Martin Wong, “Minorities face school woes,” *South China Morning Post*, 16 August 2000, p.4.

⁹¹ There are two possible methods of school places allocation. First, students can apply directly to the school of their choice during a “discretionary places admission” phase. This system allows schools to reserve a certain number of places that may be filled at the school discretion, usually according to a point system that gives preference to students whose parents or siblings studied at the school. Second, students can also apply through the central allocation system, which assigns school places according to a complicated, mostly random, process taking a number of criteria into account including the proximity of schools to students’ homes (Quoted from Loper, 2004: 3-4).

For more complete information on the school places allocation system, see the Hong Kong Education and Manpower Bureau website: <http://www.emb.gov.hk>

⁹² Polly Hui, “South Asian pupils who go without,” *South China Morning Post*, 19 October 2002, p.5

and Unison, half of the informants state that school choices and places are extremely limited for ethnic minority students (Loper, 2004: 13-14) despite reiteration of the Education Department's commitment that "our regional education offices stand ready to provide placement services for all non-Chinese speaking children seeking school places" and its insistence of fulfilling so.⁹³ A research officer with Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor, Nancy Stafford, also says there is a lack of legislation on children's rights to receive schooling. She says the government's ignorance of the problem indeed violates Hong Kong's nine-year free education policy and Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Culture Rights.⁹⁴ Yet a presumably "open" system remains "closed" if the needy cannot get what they need and enjoy their rights.

Private schools may be a viable alternative to some parents and students if they cannot find any place in public schools, however, most private schools catering for South Asian students face the problems of substandard resources⁹⁵ and poor quality education.⁹⁶ Students claim they have to endure inadequate education or have none. Bushra Khan, 19, a Pakistani girl who came to Hong Kong three years ago, says she does not feel welcomed by Hong Kong's education system whether public or private. She took a secretarial course in 1999 after finishing her secondary education. She was the only non-Chinese in the secretarial school, which promotes itself as an English-teaching institution. She remarked about the medium of instruction "The teachers there did not express their ideas in English and when the

⁹³ The Education Department's performance pledge of finding a school place for a child within 21 working days as stated in written replies to questions in Legco meeting (Legco Question No. 13), 15 November 2000, Cheung Man-kwong asked, SEM answered. Available at: <http://www.emb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=136&langno=1&UID=101003>; and "Support pledged for non-Chinese students," *South China Morning Post*, 22 October 2001, p.15.

⁹⁴ Polly Hui, "Ethnic groups studies after school facilities criticized," *South China Morning Post*, 13 October 2001, p.6.

⁹⁵ "Learning the hard way," *South China Morning Post*, 10 October 2001, p.5; Polly Hui, "Equality the loser in race for places," *South China Morning Post*, 20 October 2001, p.5; Polly Hui and Linda Yeung, "Sidelined minorities battle to learn," *South China Morning Post*, 20 October 2001, p.5.; Polly Hui & Steve Cray, "ED denies need for ethnic school," *South China Morning Post*, 29 October 2002, p.4.

⁹⁶ With regard to complaints like this, a spokesman for the Education Department says it conducts periodic inspections in all registered private schools and give due advice to the school authorities. Courses provided by the schools are also approved by the Director of Education before being offered to students. *South China Morning Post*, 20 October 2001, p.5.

students were asked to split into groups, I was left sitting alone. The teachers asked me to do self-study instead. They said they needed to teach in Chinese, as the students had to sit for an exam. But I had to sit for an exam too. I don't understand why that happened."⁹⁷ Fermi Wong notes problems with teaching and learning in private schools catering to South Asian children. "The schools are not provided with adequate support to deal with individual differences, which are strong because students in these schools are of many different cultural and educational backgrounds...The situation is the consequence of a system that is not sensitive enough to the special needs of non-Chinese speaking South Asian children, and public ignorance of the difficulties the group has to face," she said.⁹⁸ Under this situation students have low incentives to learn because their learning difficulties are not solved.

The tertiary institutional structure comparatively seems to be more tolerant to "difference" but it is still immensely difficult for ethnic minority students to get access to. Referring to general admission requirement on language proficiency,⁹⁹ and requirement of each tertiary institution indicated on the JUPAS¹⁰⁰ website, most universities (except Lingnan University and the Hong Kong Institute of Education) have made some accommodation for non-Chinese speakers as most programmes accept applicants who offer an alternative second language such as French or German or who have obtained outstanding results in other subjects; they may, at the discretion of individual Faculties, be exempted from this language requirement and be admitted to the programme concerned after passing a language test arranged by the university.¹⁰¹ However, realistically university education is not mostly accessible to South Asians students because only 1 percent of the students (South Asians) can

⁹⁷ Linda Yeung, "Schools fail South Asians," *South China Morning Post*, 22 August 2000, p.13.

⁹⁸ Polly Hui & Steve Cray, "ED denies need for ethnic school," *South China Morning Post*, 19 October 2002, p.4.

⁹⁹ Most tertiary institutions require Advanced Supplementary Level (ASL) pass in Use of English and Advanced Supplementary Level (ASL) pass in Chinese Language and Culture.

¹⁰⁰ The Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS) in Hong Kong is a unified system for applying to the eight universities for undergraduate admission. The system was introduced in 1990. The system evaluates students' Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) qualifications for application to the eight universities.

¹⁰¹ See the JUPAS website at: <http://www.jupas.edu.hk/jupas/index.htm>; and see the CUHK website at: http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/adm/application/njrequ_e.html.

successfully complete the secondary education and only a few out of those (1 percent) can enter university, as estimated by some social workers. Those who are left with no chance of further education can only work as security guards or bar waiters. School choices are even more limited after Form 5, when the number of available places decreases further. Two secondary schools specially catering for South Asians eliminate quite a huge number of students at Form 3 and Form 5 levels.¹⁰² Mahesh, a 21-year-old Nepalese boy, followed his father to Hong Kong five years ago for studying. Owing to different education systems in two places he had to start from Form 3, lowering by two levels. Getting only one point in the HKCEE¹⁰³ did not give him any hope for promoting to Form 6. Compared to his friends in his village who are now studying at university, Mahesh, worried about his future, is particularly repentant that he came to Hong Kong.¹⁰⁴

Project Yi Jin¹⁰⁵, Associate Degree programmes and programmes offered by Professional Education Institute are possible choices for ethnic minority students like Mahesh; however, realistically Chinese as teaching language poses a problem to many South Asians students. Fermi Wong also says that they often have strong verbal skills and the tourism and catering industries can be promising areas for them. However, a plan to help them qualify for work in the tourism industry may have been blocked by the government's refusal to provide funding. The Education and Manpower Bureau explains: "There are already similar courses offered by the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE) under government subvention, which are taught in English and open to all eligible Hong Kong residents, including ethnic minorities; we find it difficult to separately fund courses that are already offered by

¹⁰² "Places for South Asian students are insufficient to fulfill their needs," *Oriental Daily*, 4 June 2001, A13

¹⁰³ HKCEE is Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination which is a public examination for students to take before entering to senior secondary levels (Form 6 and Form 7). Students must achieve 14 points (minimal) in the exam so as to promote to Form 6.

¹⁰⁴ "Ethnic minority students find no hope in getting school places, social workers condemn the government for its serious discrimination," *Ming Pao*, 10 August 2001, A06

¹⁰⁵ The Project Yi Jin is a new initiative launched by the Government to promote "lifelong learning". It is targeted at Form 5 school leavers and adult learners aged 21 or above who wish to pursue continuing education. It is aimed at providing more opportunities for people with secondary education to receive continuing education; providing training in biliteracy and trilingualism and IT applications; helping the trainees build up a foundation in employment and continuing education; enhancing the quality of Hong Kong working population and strengthen their competitiveness.

another government-subsidized institution.” Actually the minority children whose scores are low in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examinations will hardly get into IVE courses because as IVE principal education officer Annie Ho Siu-wah says that the programmes on hotel management and business are often competitive and those who secure places have to do well in the HKCEE.¹⁰⁶

Primary and secondary schooling prepare the most essential foundation for students to higher quality education and ensures upward social mobility, however, the existing education model in many ways brings South Asians minority children traumatism and sense of failure; and it fosters undesirable social exclusion and fuels concerns of a social crisis. Benyameen Khan, 17, an enthusiastic teenager, has been frequently in media to present the plights of his people. In a press conference on employment difficulties faced by ethnic minorities, he says, “For us, we have vision, we have knowledge but we at last still have to do work of our parent generation like security job and cleaning; we don’t want our employment prospect to be limited to only few choices, I come from a low-income family, I see Hong Kong as my home, please give us and our next generation a chance for life.”¹⁰⁷ It seems an uncertain and gloomy future outlook overwhelms most South Asian youth,¹⁰⁸ because the possible future that they can imagine is inevitably determined by their existing social status of a different race and lower social class. So schooling as a basic means for upward social mobility, for job advancement and for self-fulfilment and desires in this sense is not a promised for many ethnic minority students.

Unemployment is a common problem among most of the ethnic minority youth, although no reference of ethnicity/race is taken as one of the demographic

¹⁰⁶ Polly Hui, “Government won’t fund course for minority students,” *South China Morning Post*, 18 July 2004, p.4.

¹⁰⁷ “Give me a chance,” *Mingpaoweekly.com*. <http://as2.mingpao.com/mpweekly/htm/1806/bb01.htm>

¹⁰⁸ According to a study on outlets of the South Asian Ethnic Minority Youth in Hong Kong (June 2002) conducted by Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service which based on a sampling of 359 people, of which the ages of interviewees are mainly between 15 and 16, accounting for 34.5% and 24.2% respectively (p.13), the attitudes of South Asian teenagers towards their future are mixed with optimism and pessimism. 9.6% of them indicate that they are very optimistic towards the future, while 27.4% are optimistic. However, 11.3% are very worried, with 24.3% being worried. (p.15).

characteristics into analysis of such group of “non-engaged youth”¹⁰⁹ that constitutes a difficult knot in problem of unemployment rate in Hong Kong.¹¹⁰ However, it seems that the kind of employment and unemployment patterns have been affecting repeatedly the South Asian ethnic communities who are at low social status and poverty level. In a research on “*the Life Experience of Pakistanis in Hong Kong*” carried out by the Centre for Social Policy Studies of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, it was found that a majority 75.2% of the 121 respondents, employed full-time, is engaged in elementary occupation, including 69 construction workers, 16 security guards, 5 factory workers and one delivery worker. Others are working as clerks (6.6%) and plant and machine operators and assemblers (5.8%). Of the 160 respondents, 43.8% have been unemployed in the past two years. Of the 200 respondents, 17.5% (35 cases) are recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). Some agencies, concerned with the social welfare policies, worry that this unfavourable future prospect, generally for the children of low-income families, may further worsen the situation of wealth disparity and inter-generational poverty in Hong Kong.¹¹¹ Christine Fang Meng-sang, Chief Executive

¹⁰⁹ The term used to describe “young people who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies” include the following two categories of young people aged between 15 to 24:

- Unemployed young persons in the economically active population (including those who do not seek work because they believe work is not readily available).
- Young persons in the economically inactive population who are not studying (excluding those who are full-time home-makers or who cannot work due to chronic illness).

Source from: Chapter II. Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of Non-engaged Youth.

Available at: <http://www.info.gov.hk/coy/eng/report/doc/continuing/chap2.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, The finding of the Census and Statistics Department’s General Household Survey shows severity of the problem. Youth unemployment rates for the first and second quarters of 2002 (12.9% and 14.7%, respectively) were considerably higher than those of the total labour force (6.9% and 7.6%). If the latest figures of June-August 2002 are used as a basis, the number of unemployed persons aged 15 to 24 was 73,600, while the number of economically inactive young persons who are not pursuing any studies was 20,500, making a total of 94,100. There is still an upward trend; Compare to: the latest unemployment rate is now 6.4 per cent. Under-unemployment remains at 3.1 per cent. (Government Press Release on 21 February 2005)

¹¹¹ In September 2004, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) published a report “*Growing Seriousness in Poverty and Income Disparity*”. The research results revealed a significant upward trend in poverty rate of Hong Kong, which rose from 11.2% in 1991 to 18.0% in 2002, representing an increase of over 50%, the number of poor population reached about 1.25 million. Similar trends could also be found in poverty rates of children. In 2002, 255 out of every 1000 children in Hong Kong were living in poor families. The study warns of a poverty cycle that traps people from generation to generation.

See information note, the situation of poverty in Hong Kong, from Legislative Council Secretariat IN22/04-05, available at: <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr04-05/english/sec/library/0405in22e.pdf>

of Hong Kong Council of Social Service, addressed this issue at *Newsline* of Asia Television (24 October 2004).¹¹² She elaborates:

[...] we do see poverty as an issue of multiple desperations, especially for children living in low income families. That's why we are concerned about intergenerational poverty, can they have the chance to leave this poverty cycle¹¹³. It is more critical the sadness about poverty in Hong Kong is the issue of social mobility, and we see children in low-income families living in conditions and prospects which do not offer them any hope of leaving this cycle.

She also urges for setting up of a government body to deal with the issue of poverty cycle. Reacting to this pressing poverty problem, the Commission on Poverty headed by the Financial Secretary Henry Tang was formed on 27 January 2005 to alleviate poverty. It is for the first time the issue has been acknowledged in the Policy Address, under the theme of helping the poor and alleviating poverty, delivered by the former Chief Executive on 12 January 2005. But there is no mention of ethnic minority children though it was said that poverty among children of low-income families should be given more attention.

Fermi Wong warns that the government would pay a high cost if it keeps neglecting the problems faced by minority students, some of whom resort to drugs and crime after failing in school and being unable to find work. There is rising concern about them being recruited by criminal gangs among communities. United Muslim Association of Hong Kong chairman Mohamed Alli Din says that more young people from ethnic minorities are getting involved in gangs because they are not getting proper education in schools. He warns of a "time bomb" following the murder of a 22-year-old Pakistani man in a gang feud recently¹¹⁴. Two suspects have been arrested over the knife attack. Gang activities engaged by Nepalese youths also

¹¹² "What to do about poverty in Hong Kong," *Newsline*, Asia Television, 24 October 2004.

¹¹³ Ibid,41. It means children from low-income or Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) households have relatively crippled family backgrounds. As the parents cannot get out of poverty, the children are the hope for the family. However, under the existing system, the education and welfare support to those children is grossly inadequate, which has deprived their right to develop. In fact, they are in grave danger of being trapped in the poverty cycle.

¹¹⁴ Patsy Moy, "Pakistani's death prompts a warning over frustration among ethnic youths," *South China Morning Post*, 4 February 2003, p.3 gives full detail to the killing case.

alarms their community leader Ekraj Rai. He admits Nepali youth's involvement in drug selling and prostitution because they face financial difficulties and find no hope in life. The local gang culture is very powerful in organization and networking, once Nepalese youngsters get involved in drugs and local gangs, they vulnerably become preys.¹¹⁵ Chiu Tak Choi, convener of outreach team, Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service Yau Tsim Mong Integrated Centre for Youth Development, also reveals that South Asian minority youth cannot find jobs easily, they have more chances to wander on the streets, parks or basketball courts where they can mingle with local marginal youths, and some also have close relations.¹¹⁶ Drug abuse among Nepali adolescents has become a disturbing problem according to figures released by Narcotics Division, Security Bureau. The total reported cases of seeking for help from Nepali youth was 27 in 2002, in which 80 per cent (that means 22 persons) took heroin; this percentage is 8.5 times higher than that of the local youths of which heroin users count generally 8.6%. It is because ethnic minorities lack information and correct knowledge about drugs, and it is estimated that there are about a hundred Nepali youngsters still taking heroin. Legislator Lo Wing-lok feels worried about this situation; he urges that the government should put more social workers to follow up the cases and lead ethnic minority youths to quite drugs. But the Social Welfare Department yet cannot decide how many outreach social workers will be assigned to help ethnic minorities.¹¹⁷

“Integration Education Policy” and Its Difficult Encounter with Homogenous Language Policy and Conformist Mindset

The Hong Kong government has attempted to respond to and rectify some of these problems in recent years through policies designed to meet the needs of ethnic minority communities, which include physical financial assistance for ethnic minority pupils and something generally termed “integration education policy”¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁵ “Government should draft ethnic minority policy,” *Sing Pao*, 3 June 2001, A03.

¹¹⁶ “South Asian youth may form new criminal forces,” *Sing Pao*, 3 June 2001, A03.

¹¹⁷ “Hundreds of Nepalis youngsters take drugs,” *Ming Pao*, 25 February 2004.

¹¹⁸ “Integration education” was first deployed as an important pedagogical concept and practice in Hong Kong in 1986. Since then measures have been taken to cater for the needs of students with

Thus, a heavily-loaded administrative approach such as central regulation is put into practice in an attempt to provide most effective remedies to the problems. However, it is rather an awkward policy to deal with the popular demand to meet the students' special education needs, whereas language policy, a homogenizing force suppressing and colonizing cultural diversities, has failed to get any serious revision and reformation. This section will first provide a brief illustration on how the heavily centralized language policy imposed intensively on the Hong Kong's education system after 1997 affects the "integration education policy" is applied to South Asian school children recently. It is followed by discussion about the problems of integration education as well as the mindset dilemma that the whole education system is inhabited with. It is to argue that only by reflecting and opening up the mentality/mindset of closure and the diseased/ill education policies, the imagination and praxis of an optimal/alternative education policy to South Asian communities shall be possible.

Language Policy

The Hong Kong's education system has been largely criticized as "abnormality / malformation" which is also very difficult for local students to deal with, in which language policy that forms the core of discussion in recent years is wrought with contradictions and problems, particularly in a post-colonial context. Under these situations we see the problems that ethnic minority children face in present education system are more serious. The proposed education reforms in Tung Chee-hwa's Policy Addresses (1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2004) make no direct reference to the needs of ethnic minority students. Owing to the students' absence or being made "absent", their education needs are never taken into account

special educational needs (SEN), including those with visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical disability or emotional and behavioural problem, as well as the needs of gifted students, in the regular classroom and special schools, these involve dealing with the wide range of individual differences, addressing behavioural problems, and resolving learning problems. Recently, while the consultation document on reforming the academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education is in a phase of gathering public opinion, special education as an integral subject in the consultation on the academic structure reform is also in process to collect opinion on establishing a new system through a differentiated curriculum to better meet the needs of SEN students. The Board of Education Sub-committee on Special Education set up in 1996 also provides substantial researches on how integration might best be achieved to cater for the educational needs of these children. "Integration education" in this field is said to be entering a mature phase.

for planning and thus improperly catered. Worse still, many policies which are supposedly “favourable” to local majority, however, have indeed disproportionately or adversely impacted these ethnic minority children in Hong Kong.

The implementation of the mother-tongue teaching policy in schools that started in beginning of 1998 drastically reduced the number of secondary schools that these (ethnic minorities) children could realistically attend and further limited their school choices. This policy emphasizes that the “greater use of mother tongue teaching will help raise the standard of teaching in non-language subjects. It also allows more time to be given to specialized teaching of English and Chinese so that all language standards may be raised” (1997 Policy Address, 84-88). The government then required 307 government and aided secondary schools in Hong Kong to switch from the English medium of instruction (EMI) to the Chinese medium of instruction (CMI) in 1998, while a remaining 114 secondary schools were allowed to continue teaching in English after establishing their ability to do so effectively (Loper, 2004: 4). The Education and Manpower Bureau also regulates schools categorized as CMI to teach all academic subjects in Chinese. The adoption of mother-tongue teaching policy could possibly bring educational benefits to Chinese-speaking students, however, it poses serious problem of adaptation and learning difficulties to most ethnic minority students who are unable to function in Chinese, or, if they can speak Cantonese, cannot read or write well enough in Chinese to attend CMI schools. The government is also aware of their insufficient Chinese language skills (ICESCR Second Report¹¹⁹, paragraph 13: 24), but it is just too reluctant to tailor-make a flexible language policy to these children. Although 114 schools continue to teach in English after 1998, schools really available to South Asian students are very few. These include some highly competitive Band 1 schools which require high academic achievement for admission. Some leading DSS (Direct Subsidy Scheme) schools say they will not take in international students who cannot work in Chinese, even though English is their medium of instruction. Paul Yau Yat-heem, principal of the Logos Academy, a DSS school in Tsueng Kwan O that plans

¹¹⁹ Second Report of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China in the Light of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR Second Report), June 2003, p.171, paragraph. 13.24.

to offer the IB (International Baccalaureate curriculum)¹²⁰, said that his school aimed to achieve a Chinese standard comparable with the Mainland and Taiwan, although English was of paramount importance. “DSS schools are primarily set up for local students. We cannot adjust our teaching to cater for a few students who do not speak Chinese because local parents would not accept sending their children to a school where the teaching of their mother tongue was minimal,”¹²¹ he said. Therefore, these students are mostly relegated to the schools that have traditionally large intakes of South Asian students and those considered as Band 3 schools. For instance, one school with a majority of ethnic minority students is Sir Ellis Kadoorie(s) Secondary School, a Band 3 school, with a student body (as of 30 October 2004) that consisted of 28.2% Pakistani, 18.5% Filipino, 15% Nepalese, 12.8% Indian, 1.3% Thai, 21.1% Chinese and 3.1% others.¹²²

The language policy of “bi-literacy and tri-lingualism” as official language and learning media in Hong Kong brings lots of difficult questions to most ethnic minorities. A study released by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University’s center for social policy studies and Sheng Kung Hui Lady MacLehose Centre found that Hong Kong’s 11,000 Pakistanis felt marginalized by language difficulties and experienced discrimination when they tried to find jobs, homes or schools.¹²³ Unlike their Chinese counterparts who may be classified to be suitable to learn in English or Chinese language environments in the new system of learning language assessment (such a simplistic deviation of best language learning medium is already complained

¹²⁰ The International Baccalaureate (IB) Program is an internationally recognized, pre-university curriculum that offers 11th and 12th grade students an opportunity to earn a diploma based on an integrated curriculum and international standards. There are 1174 secondary schools in over 115 countries authorized to offer the IB Diploma Program. The curriculum is traditional and broad: students take six subjects over two years in the major academic areas (native language, second language, social studies, experimental sciences, mathematics and the arts), which are then held together by three core components called Theory of Knowledge (ToK), Creativity, Action and Service (CAS) and the Extended Essay. This advanced, comprehensive program of study offers an integrated approach to learning across the disciplines with an emphasis on meeting the challenges of living and working in an increasingly interdependent, technological society.

¹²¹ Polly Hui, “Local schools no alternative to ESF; International students must have a high standard of Chinese to be awarded places,” *South China Morning Post*, 11 January 2003, p.1

¹²² See Sir Ellis Kadoorie(s) Secondary School website: <http://www.seksswk.edu.hk/main.htm>.

¹²³ Patsy Moy, “Pakistani’s death prompts a warning over frustration among ethnic youths,” *South China Morning Post*, 4 February 2003, p.3.

by many local parents), it is particularly discomfoting for ethnic minority children whose mother tongues are neither Chinese nor English. We often have a misunderstanding that these children cannot adapt to Chinese-language learning environment; English-language must fit their needs. It is indeed not the case. Peter Chung Wai-por, principal of Delia Memorial School in Kwun Tong, says his teachers face difficulties communicating with students who speak neither Chinese nor English. “We can only use body language or the help of their classmates to communicate with them,” he says.¹²⁴ It is because many of the students do not have a high English proficiency. “Teaching in English thus poses a huge obstacle to their learning. We have no choice but to adopt English as the medium of instruction because there are so many mother tongues spoken in the school,” he says.¹²⁵ If the mother-tongue teaching policy is equally applicable to each student in Hong Kong, and if it is also meant to bring fruitful result instead of a destructive one, could a system allow their own mother tongues to be deployed to benefit learning activities to this minority group? Or, should the question be whether we need a medium of instruction policy that goes beyond the verbal and written language, but one that explores the possible language of the body and culture, a metalanguage of arts, pictures and dance from the critical pedagogy perspective. However, in a learning and living world where language has become an important politics to maintain cultural hegemony and power relations, it is an uphill battle for the minorities to reverse such an oppressing force. A survey, conducted by the Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service, found that of the 593 students from Primary Five to Secondary Five polled, 40 per cent said that they had experienced learning difficulties, mainly in communicating with their Chinese classmates.¹²⁶

Incoherent language policy towards ethnic minority students in the school system is accused of bringing confusion and unhelpfulness to their education and employment prospects. Christopher Wardlaw, Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower, who is also the supervisor of Sir Ellis Kadoorie Primary & Secondary

¹²⁴ Polly Hui, “South Asian pupils who go without,” *South China Morning Post*, 19 October 2002, p.5.

¹²⁵ Polly Hui, “Equality the loser in race for places,” *South China Morning Post*, 20 October 2001, p.5.

¹²⁶ Linda Yeung, “Schools fail South Asians,” *South China Morning Post*, 22 August 2000, p.13; Martin Wong, “Minorities face school woes,” *South China Morning Post*, 16 August 2000, p. 4.

Schools, agrees on acquisition of one language in a natural way. He says, “If ... the teaching is good teaching, a student is engaged and interested, they will learn Chinese. And of course they are merged in a Chinese culture, they should pick up Chinese.”¹²⁷ That is exactly what Marjolin Ballevar did. She studied the local language since she was a child, but only to see it stopped in her teens. Born to Filipino and French parents, Marjolin Ballevar graduated from a Chinese primary school, she can write and read Chinese that she had studied for 8 years, and speak Cantonese fluently and has even won the second place in a Chinese Poetry Writing contest. She wanted to be allocated into a Chinese secondary school to further her Chinese language studies. But she ended up in Sir Ellis Kadoorie(s) Secondary School, an English medium school where she is a Form 4 student now. Her school includes Chinese subject in its curriculum, however, the tailored/school-based Chinese language curriculum is insufficient to meet the needs of most students. Marjolin says, “...that is just basic Cantonese which is basically useless for some people who really learn ... or ... what they teach you is how to say “apple”, you can’t brush up my writing and reading any more.”¹²⁸ Many ethnic minority students also complain that they are disadvantaged by a curriculum which forces them to learn another language such as French which is not useful in Hong Kong instead of giving them adequate opportunities to learn Chinese.¹²⁹ Many students believe that a low level of Chinese teaching limits their choice of primary and secondary schools options for further education and weakens their job prospects and job-related training opportunities (Loper, 2004: 15-16). So we have individual differences, needs and aspirations in this heterogeneous group of South Asian minority students. Then comes the question of how an education system can cater for the diverse needs.

Integration Education Policy

The government becomes more mindful that some non-Chinese speaking (NCS) children may not be able to adapt to the local education system initially,

¹²⁷ “Quality education”, *Inside Story*, Asia Television, 26 August 2003.

¹²⁸ “Quality education”, *Inside Story*, Asia Television, 26 August 2003.

¹²⁹ Sir Ellis Kadoorie Secondary School and Delia Memorial School (Hip Wo) offer French as elective second language besides Hindi, Urdu and Chinese.

therefore, starting from the school term in September 2000, the Education Department has been providing these children who are aged between 6 and 15 and have not yet completed junior secondary education with support services similar to those received by newly arrived children from the Mainland. The School-based Support Scheme provides block grants¹³⁰ (\$2,750 and \$4,080 per student for primary and secondary levels respectively) to schools for each NCS student in attendance. Subventions are also provided to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for running induction programmes to help NCS children adapt to the local school environment and half-year full-time “initiation programme” for these children also takes place. However, Law Pak-tuen, principal of Yaumati Kaifong Associate School, says he cannot get the grant for most of his South Asian children because it is limited to those who have never studied in Hong Kong.¹³¹ Restrictions of this kind should be removed if the government is sincere in its commitment.

Furthermore, the introduction of a new policy under the government’s central allocation system is the most radical move of all, at the same time it is also most controversial. The new policy came into effect in June 2004. Under the new allocation system ethnic minority students can apply to any primary and secondary school under the government’s central allocation system, as their Chinese counterparts do. They are entitled to choose from schools within their own ‘net’, or school district, and three more schools which traditionally have a high intake of ethnic minority students.¹³² It hoped to change the situation of limited numbers of schools available to them¹³³ and place them on more equal footing with local students.

¹³⁰ The schools are expected to use the money to organize tutorial classes, develop special teaching materials and conduct orientation and guidance programmes, see *South China Morning Post*, 17 August 2000. p.4. To ensure proper use of the grant, schools are required to apply to ED for the grant and propose how to use the grant in their applications. ED, through its regular school visits, also renders advice to schools on how to run these programmes. To measure the effectiveness of the grant, ED will require schools receiving the grant to conduct self-evaluation by the end of the school year on how their school-based support programmes have helped NCS children. (Source: Legco Question No. 19 (Written Reply) Asked by Emily Lau, replied by SEM, Date of Meeting: 5 December 2001)

¹³¹ “Equality the loser in race for places,” *South China Morning Post*, 20 October 2001, p.5.

¹³² May Chan, “We’re too busy for minority students’ ; Emily Lau reports mainstream schools” complaints over non-Chinese allocation, *South China Morning Post*, 26 June 2004, p.3; Kristine Kwok, “More help is needed for ethnic minorities,” *South China Morning Post*, 13 March 2004, p.3.

¹³³ It is estimated that about 20,000 South Asian youngsters are studying in Hong Kong. However, most of the students have to seek places in private schools because three government-aided secondary

According to the EMB, about 37 per cent of non-Chinese speaking Primary Six students have chosen mainstream schools, and about half of these selected Chinese medium schools in 2004.¹³⁴ However, how well does this figure reflect the effectiveness of the new policy? The findings of Oxfam - Ethnic Minority Concern Group, which was established in February 2004, shows another side of the story. Of the 582 interviewees of persons with ethnic minority background 80% expressed that they did not want their children to be allocated to CMI schools. Views of parents from three central allocation centers were also collected, 60% of the 47 interviewed said they felt disappointed with the result that their children were sent to CMI schools; most of them did not know what CMI schools meant, they just thought half of the subjects would be taught in English, half in Chinese.¹³⁵ From the surface, there is no doubt that the government is taking measures to help secure a school place for ethnic minority children who are always discriminated against in the old and unregulated system, yet how successfully this executive oriented measure is going to meet their actual educational needs requires our close examination. First, with such a system it only helps to temporarily direct/redirect the source of the problems to other tributaries/feeder streams which may not be prepared or capable to handle such an overwhelming demand. Emily Lau Wai-hing, leader of the Frontier, told the Legislative Council education panel that mainstream schools already were complaining, "Schools say they have already got enough on their plate and just don't have the energy to make extra effort to accommodate non-Chinese speaking students."¹³⁶ Fermi Wong Wai-fun also warns, "The teachers might not be well equipped to teach ethnic minority students, and those children may find it hard to

schools and four primary schools offer only 2,080 subsidized places for ethnic minorities. (SCMP. 7/8/2000, SCMP. 16/8/2000, SCMP. 22/08/2000, Focus 13) Many ethnic minority students who are seeking for school places are in fact being put on a long waiting list. Delia Memorial School (Kwun Tong) has a waiting list of 50 for Form 1 to Form 4 classes. Gurung, Nepalese, who looks for a school for his eight-year-old son, says: "I have heard from other Nepalese saying they have to wait for dropouts in a school to get a place for their child." (SCMP. 22/08/2000. Focus 13).

¹³⁴ May Chan, "We're too busy for minority students"; Emily Lau reports mainstream schools' complaints over non-Chinese allocation, *South China Morning Post*, 26 June 2004, p.3.

¹³⁵ "Studying in mainstream schools is integration into society? Ethnic minorities oppose the new allocation policy," Oxfam (HK), June 2004, p.24-25.

¹³⁶ May Chan, "We're too busy for minority students"; Emily Lau reports mainstream schools' complaints over non-Chinese allocation, *South China Morning Post*, 26 June 2004, p.3

adjust in a Cantonese-speaking environment.”¹³⁷ Under this situation ethnic minority children are forced to learn in a potentially unsuitable learning and cultural environment by another authoritarian policy of homogeneity which produces conscious exclusion of “otherness”, despite the fact that their right to learn is recognized. Such a clear-cut operation can hardly offer any better resolutions to the existing problems like social, cultural and language differences interweaving all difficult knots.

Second, can a new policy entrenched with too many problems and contradictions in itself really change the disappointing system? Ethnic minority children lose the advantage of being allocated to Non-Chinese Speaking schools (NCS) in the first round of placement allocation, which they enjoyed in the old system.¹³⁸ In the name of “integration education” the EMB has set forth to cancel about 5 classes for ethnic minority children in seven NCS direct-subsidized primary schools.¹³⁹ It is not hard to believe that this is more like a “budget-cut” instead of an “encouraging measure” to integrate them into mainstream schools. With not many alternatives some parents who felt disappointed with the new system and sent their children to CMI schools, consider giving their children home study, sending them to private primary schools or waiting for another application next year. In order to secure a place in NCS schools some parents choose to prioritize the three schools¹⁴⁰ traditionally catering for ethnic minority students, though not really happy with them.¹⁴¹ Cherry Tse Ling Kit-ching, Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower, claims that the three secondary schools on the list can cater for all non-Chinese speaking students who wish to study in other languages. She says, “If non-Chinese speaking students put these three schools as the top three choices, they will definitely

¹³⁷ Kristine Kwok, “More help is needed for ethnic minorities,” *South China Morning Post*, 13 March 2004, p.3.

¹³⁸ Under the old system, ethnic minority students only need to tick “Non-Chinese Speaking Schools” from the “School Selection Form” then they are assured to be allocated to a NCS primary or secondary school. All NCS schools can take in 50% of students in the first phase by this method. (Source: Oxfam (HK), June 2004, p.25.)

¹³⁹ “Studying in mainstream schools is integration into society? Ethnic minorities oppose the new allocation policy,” Oxfam (HK), June 2004, p.24-25.

¹⁴⁰ Sir Ellis Kadoorie School and Delia Memorial Schools at Mei Foo and Kwun Tong

¹⁴¹ “Studying in mainstream schools is integration into society? Ethnic minorities oppose the new allocation policy,” Oxfam (HK), June 2004, p.24-25.

be admitted. As such, ethnic minority students are choosing mainstream schools not because of lack of options but personal choice.”¹⁴² The space and flexibility opened by this new policy is not more than just a “limited” choice between mainstream schools and NCS schools where the claims of social and cultural difference are not better accommodated. Although, it is not fair to accuse the government of sustaining and justifying unfair situations by a new mechanism, nonetheless the closure and contradiction of the system must be challenged. For the sake of the children and critical pedagogy, educators must be conceptually free from a kind of extremely conflicting dichotomy of “integration” and “segregation” which arbitrarily and uncritically looks at the problems that most ethnic minority children face.

Mindset of Strong Conventionality

The concept of “integration education” is not merely a form of institutional integration. In terms of policy it fails to account to a core complicated problem of cultural identity. It should be about opening up of a cultural space in schools that can embrace and celebrate cultural difference and diversity. In other words, it requires opening up of mindset and a change of ideology. When “integration education” is applied to the case of ethnic minority students, there is, it seems to me, an omission of their “special” educational needs, though their educational needs are generally recognized. Their languages, cultures, religions, traditions and customs that structure their specialties are largely disregarded. Raymond Chan Mow-chiu, Hong Kong Baptist University senior instructor of education studies and project leader on research on integration of young new arrivals from the mainland, strongly recommends the integration of South Asian children into mainstream schools. He says, “We should not isolate these children in schools specifically set up for them, because it will only lead to the emergence of sub-cultures and more discrimination against the group.”¹⁴³ The most serious concern for educators reflected here is the fear of “difference” wherein “sub-cultures” symbolizes the most expressive power of self-identity and group identity, as the ethnic minority youths face suppression

¹⁴² May Chan, “We’re too busy for minority students’ ; Emily Lau reports mainstream schools” complaints over non-Chinese allocation, *South China Morning Post*, 26 June 2004, p.3.

¹⁴³ Polly Hui, “Equality the loser in race for places,” *South China Morning Post*, 20 October 2001, p.5.

instead of affirmation in the school system. This “liberal managerial democracy” administering education policy sometimes reproduces oppression as the cost of inclusion: admission to the “common culture” may come at the cost of abandoning those differences of perspective, value, or interest that threaten the status quo (Jay: 1994, 17). However, “difference” exists in reality and is embodied in ethnic minority cultures; it should be given enough cultural sensitivity and recognition instead of evasion and disapproval or institutional control. Yeung Sum, Democratic Party legislator, criticizes the government for over-simplifying the issue: “Non-Chinese speaking students will integrate into mainstream schools successfully only if they have strong motivation, which is a very complex matter. It also takes a very open school culture to support their integration. Placing them among unprepared teachers and students will only lead to learning and behavioural problems.”¹⁴⁴ Many people who have deep understanding on the issue of ethnic minority school children express their hesitation on such a move towards integration and call for a comprehensive ethnic minority policy.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ May Chan, “We’re too busy for minority students’ ; Emily Lau reports mainstream schools’ complaints over non-Chinese allocation, *South China Morning Post*, 26 June 2004, p.3.

¹⁴⁵ For instance:

1. Cheung Man-kwong, democratic legislator, also the president of Professional Teachers’ Union, expresses sufficient time should be given to test out its effectiveness of integration education. He says, “This will leave us time to prepare non-Chinese speakers in primary schools to enter mainstream secondary schools.” (SCMP. 26/06/2004. p.3)
2. Rai, Principal of the Poinsettia Kindergarten, lobbies for a coherent ethnic minority policy. He says, “ It is not about the discrimination from the legal and policy level, the Hong Kong government must understand in practical operational level something is not possible because of background, language and cultural differences, the biggest problem is we cannot speak.” He also thinks the Legco should fix an agenda to set up and implement a coherent ethnic minority policy, see *Hong Kong Daily News*, 3 June 2001, A03. #62).
3. Chan Kui-pui, principal of Delia Memorial School in Mei Foo, says, “Placing pupils who cannot speak Cantonese in a mainstream school may, optimistically, force them to learn better Chinese. But it is also very likely they will become withdrawn because they cannot communicate, and may eventually hate going to school.” He calls on the government to come up with a tailor-made curriculum for non-Chinese speakers in schools like his so they could learn Chinese at their own pace, see *South China Morning Post*, 26 June 2004, p.3.
4. Fermi Wong Wai-fun, “The main problem of integration is the lack of a holistic curriculum for ethnic minority students to develop their skills in Chinese language and academic subjects. I hope that the EMB would commit its curriculum support to schools for at least five years, or else it would just be another knee-jerk reaction to the problem”, see *South China Morning Post*, 26 June 2004, p.3.
5. Ganesh Ijam, Supervisor of Poinsettia School says, “How can the department justify what it is saying? Integration in Chinese-medium schools is impossible because ethnic minority children cannot communicate with their classmates and teachers. Many of them have been rejected from mainstream schools because they don’t speak Cantonese”, *South China Morning Post*, 19 October 2002, p.5.

What does a comprehensive ethnic minority policy mean in relation to the undertaken “integration education policy”? In what follows, I hope to take a look at subtle areas like “(ethnic) background, language and cultural differences”¹⁴⁶ by drawing lived experience of students in other learning institutions such as family, religion and communities, in shaping and fostering the kind of subjectivity that generally formal schooling has not taken care of; as well as a school case in creating a borderland where “multiple subjectivities and identities exist as part of a pedagogical practice that provides the potential to expend the politics of democratic community and solidarity” (Giroux. 1991: 63).

Pedagogy of Difference and Construction of a Democratic Society

By using the cases, I do not mean that these children and teachers are free to determine their identities through acts of critical pedagogical practices. But I do insist on the importance of maintaining a theoretical understanding of the space between dominant discourses of education and critical pedagogy/alternative pedagogical practices in different locations, in which they try to rebel against what people perceive as universalistic/monolithic claims of modern education system and restrictive education norms. Through dialogues with their existence and struggles we can see how the existing education system impacts them and through their experience of alternative practices we will learn reflectiveness and reform by attending to their cultural diversity in the mainstream system.

Pedagogy of difference points to pedagogical practices that offer students the knowledge, skills, and values that they will need to negotiate critically and transform the world in which they find themselves. It is both ethical and political imperative to

¹⁴⁶Students have requested for a welcoming and open atmosphere in schools where their culture and religion should be respected, for instance, their requirement for halal food (meaning it accords with Islamic dietary principles) and understanding on the kind of uneasiness that some girls coming from a Muslim culture (where boys and girls rarely learn together) may have in a co-educational school, see *South China Morning Post*, 22 August 2000, p.13.

necessitate a radical democracy and public life by challenging the prevailing social order, authority and discourses of those practices wedded to the legacy of a colonialism and networks of hierarchy, systemic injustice, and economic exploitation while simultaneously providing the basis for students to deepen the intellectual, civic, and moral understanding of their role as agents of public formation (Giroux, 1992:16-18).

I' m Pakistani

“I' m Pakistani”¹⁴⁷ documents a group of Pakistani children of hybrid social and cultural backgrounds in Hong Kong. The significance of this programme is it attempts to take a cultural account to understand the relations of the children' s special cultural upbringings and the construction of their subjectivity in a specific Hong Kong context. This kind of analytical angle is largely lacking in general narrations. Their particular subject-position is clearly defined by boundaries of ethnicity, race and culture, which they make particular ideological and affective investments and in turn (re)produce a sense of meaning, purpose, and delight. The questions that I want to draw from this documentary are: how can Pakistanis as a specific ethnic and cultural construction intervene in and challenge the homogenization action generally taken in formal schooling system? How can their special cultural capital (resources) be an empowering force and corresponding reaction to the mainstream education policies? How do other cultural and social institutions work to shape these children' s subjectivities and what kinds of insights they bring to the whole discussion of ethnic minority students especially in the education arena?

The story is formulated from the children' s perspectives and voices to engage in various cultural texts (food, fashion, living style), religious practices and social relations, broadly speaking the same “cultural codes”. By drawing upon their personal experiences in the process of cultural translation where their distinctive and irreducible cultures engage and negotiate with a growth environment in which

¹⁴⁷ A documentary made by Radio Television Hong Kong, some footage is taken from the Pakistan children' s self-representation with a video-camera.

cultural differences and mixtures are strong, the children have to make the construction of their growth environment problematic and become more attentive to racial and cultural pluralism. We see how they understand their growth to be like in Hong Kong. Shehzaad (Lee Siu Ming), Usman (Mo Yuet Man), Neveed and Shazia are the few central characters in the documentary. All aged about 10 or 11 years old, Shehzaad and Shazia are brother and sister; Usman has a younger brother and a sister; Neveed also has a younger brother; they all know each other and sometimes hang out and play together. They form a small community and bonding of junior generation among Pakistanis and this type of socialization is distinguished through their special shared culture. Hong Kong is a place for them to grow up in; however, they have quiet dissimilar growing-up experiences to the vast majority of local Chinese children. Their different cultural codes, experiences, languages and religious beliefs as part of the social and historical constructions presuppose particular cultural identities and subject-positions for them. Intellectually and affectively they always have to face a problem of how to “read” themselves and their culture of difference.

Clothing as the most explicit cultural sign functions to form their cultural and religious identity; however it sometimes also shows their experience of marginality as well as a toll of repression within a culture. Children from Muslim families learn how to dress as Muslim in young age. Shehzaad tells most Muslims are traditionally dressed and they also wear caps to attend the prayer at mosque at 1 pm on every Friday, which is regarded as the most important time for Pakistanis and the most important thing for them to do on that day is to clean themselves and worship. This special dress code is an important part of religious practice and within their community it carries meanings of respect and goodness. However, it is paradoxical / problematic because it belongs to a culture of marginality which is disregarded in a place where mainstream culture is prevalently dominant. Usman feels uneasy when contacting with people’s strange gaze when he dresses in traditional Pakistani clothes. While Usman is unwilling to be gazed at, it is difficult for him to express so. His feeling of being “special” in appearance for an outsider is indeed something all his friends find “ordinary”. They prefer their traditional clothes because they are “pretty” and a way of reflecting their own cultural identity. This is a very normal and natural

choice; however, it may bring embarrassment for those who are afraid of being looked down at. For girls who reach a certain age, clothing is more associated with control over body including the level of exposure and proper behavior which touches on issues of morality and cultural conformity rather than freedom of choice. Shazia suffers from dwarfism and underwent corrective surgery. She does not like Pakistani clothing but she has to wear it because when girls reach puberty they must properly cover their bodies. However, for Shazia it is particularly inconvenient to wear traditional clothing as it is easy for her to trip over the stairs with the lengthy trousers. Shazia likes Chinese/Hong Kong clothes better because they are “special” to her and can enable her to move her limbs more easily. Gaining self-control over her physical body also means some kind of “freedom” for her. However that is limited by her “limited” body shape; in many cases for girls “freedom” is limited for the fact of being born as a girl in Muslim culture. A girl named Asma, aged also about 10, wishes she would never grow up because “grown-ups get married. I don’t want to. So I don’t want to grow up. As a child, I have friends.” A little girl can already sense something “uncompromising” especially about marriage freedom in her culture. All these “heterogeneities” that individuals have in terms of their different perspectives, values, aspirations, desires and anxieties are not articulated in the general school system. A critical pedagogy should address these differences and give them confidence, knowledge and values to deal with the contradictions between cultural identities and marginalities.

Sometimes dealing with an alien cultural environment and social relations in everyday life requires an art of negotiation with cultural clashes and schools may not be able to provide supporting cultural resources to students, but other institutions like playing fields do. It is because both settings formulate different forms of cultural practices which then enable different possibilities. Usman’s Chinese name - Mo Yuet Man – is given by his teacher. He can write his Chinese name in a very clear and correct way but he is shy and unconfident to tell others that he has a Chinese name. Whereas, Shehzaad seems to be very happy with his Chinese name “Li Siu Ming” given by one of his Chinese friends. He is also delighted to tell a happy story about his given name. He imitates the tone that his friend teases him with his given

name which means “you understand little” because when they play, Shehzaad seems to have little understanding of what is going on. The Chinese naming of Usman and Shehzaad take place in different contexts and both have different effects. For Usman the effect is school homogenization serving to integrate ethnic minority students into school culture by giving them Chinese names; for Shehzaad the effect is a little ‘play trick’ necessary for making more fun among playing groups, therefore, the children make sense with their given names very differently. Usman does not know what the name means (or he knows but the video does not show us); Shehzaad can clearly identify with his name. Does this little contrast between two cases give any hint to integration education policy taking place in some mainstream schools, accepting ethnic minority students? What I want to argue is that children’s active participation and good feelings are important to make the new system work. Besides, a new cultural space can be successfully opened up only by a participatory democracy in which children actively find their places. Shehzaad is a popular guy among his Chinese friends and they all feel excited to address Shehzaad “Mr. Li Siu Ming” and those who do not know his Chinese name may address him by his nickname “Pakistan” which is also given by his Chinese playmates. In this sense children have stronger power of openness to master the oppressive boundaries of racial difference and cope with it very well by tactics of “playfulness”. A community centre provides suitable pedagogical conditions where children of different backgrounds learn to respect and celebrate “difference”.

Perhaps, the kind of pedagogical practice that community centre is experimenting can bring stimulation to reform the formal schooling system. It then touches on a core issue that language as a monolithic paradigm of pedagogical tool has to be challenged. Moreover, it also has to recognize other “knowledge systems” and “skills” which are child-centered and attentive to everyday living practices. In a small community centre children learn through their bodies, senses, emotions, dialogues, visions, compassion, games or even little playful tricks; there are alternative languages critically attentive to the liberating social and racial relations. Indeed, a critical pedagogy should also pay attention to other cultural resources in popular culture and recognize their importance to youths. Shehzaad demonstrates

how to use three little fingers to roll beef curry into a Rotti, but he names his food “sushi”; it is not surprising to find Shehraad and his sisters so attracted to watch Chinese drama portraying an ancient Chinese context in which dialogues and characters’ customs are “ancient Chinese”, but it is not too alien for them to “understand”. Cultural assimilation is happening in everyday situations and in assistance with other forms of “languages”. What is the way out to language education in general in Hong Kong? Can we go for pedagogy for alternative languages, languages of the body, arts, dance and drama and then open up space for collective projects of racial integration and democratic public life?

Muslim as a paramount pedagogical institution and life practice in many ways shapes the children’s subjectivity. The cultural significations and practices such as religious worship, food, clothes and learning Koran in the mosque can be shared only among their group; people of other cultural domains know little about them. Muslim is a practice of soul and body. For the children of small age Muslim does exercise a strong disciplinary control over them besides an epistemological and moral training. After the first worship¹⁴⁸ of the day at 5 a.m., then comes breakfast. After that, they take the MTR to Tsim Sha Tsui Mosque and attend Koran class from 9 to 11 a.m. By 1 p.m. when their school starts, they have already started their day a lot earlier than many of the local Chinese students. Then after school, they also have to attend religious class or Urdu language class held in Mosque. Shehzaad candidly tells his feeling of this tight schedule whose biggest disadvantage is it takes away his time to play with friends. He says, “After school, I’m not happy. I’ve got no friends to keep me company on the way home. I need to go to the mosque in Tsim Sha Tsui. No one keeps me company on the way home. Sometimes I just sit quietly doing nothing. That’s boring, I wish I could get to my friends ... take the MTR and play.”

For Pakistani children in a day they have to travel between two different cultural borders where different knowledge systems, the school and the mosque, and cultural civilizations have taught them ideas about the world and themselves. How

¹⁴⁸ Muslims have to worship 5 times in a day: 1st at 4am, 2nd at 1pm, 3rd at 5pm, 4th at 7:30pm and 5th at 8:30pm.

do they cope with the different systems and what do they really learn? Usman feels unhappy at school because the teacher hit him and he seems to be more worried about adolescence and adulthood. He says, “Grown-ups have many problems ... troubles”. Maybe he has experienced something unpleasant at school but he feels shy and reluctant to talk more. Whenever he feels unhappy he likes to hear Chinese songs, and “This Time Next Year” is his favorite song. However, he and other children are quite happy with the way of learning and the learning atmosphere in their community. Religion, which defines and mediates in complex ways, indeed strengthens children’s mind and vision towards life. It also forms a complementing partner of general formal education to carry out pedagogical exercise by empowering moral and ethical discourses. Shehzaad may seem a bit silly to believe if he makes the same wish everyday, it will come true one day. However, such persistence and positive outlook for long will bring positive impact to their growing up and life. According to some recent findings from a self-esteem studies, South Asian students in Hong Kong have a higher level of self-esteem in non-academic aspects and in general performance than local Chinese students. Although these children may be weaker in academic achievements and may have lower motivation, most of them are optimistic, confident, active, helpful and willing to express themselves (Oxfam, 2005: 6). This comes as a delightful surprise in spite of the problems resulting from the education system in HK mentioned earlier in this chapter. I guess a comprehensive ethnic minority policy in education should initiate a critical dialogue with the children’s own cultures and lives.

Yaumati Kaifong Association School

Yaumati Kaifong Associate School has more than 30 years of history in Yaumati and now is known as the first “secular international school” in Hong Kong. It used to be a normal subsidized primary school, but it was closed down for a year in 1997 because of serious drop in the number of students. The school reopened and started having its first intake of students from South and Southeast Asia origins to meet new social demands. School director Po Wai-ching said officials of Education Department had referred students to the school and told them to start classes in

February 1999.¹⁴⁹ However, even before a complicated process to get the written approval from the Education Department for opening English-language classes, some 70 pupils of minority backgrounds had been left in limbo. This happened because of the disagreement that the school could admit 17 and 10 students for Primary One and Primary Six respectively, such figures were far too low than the required class size of 37 (32 for the activity-approach class) for Primary One and 35 (30 for the activity-approach class) for Primary Two to Six, the school had to further struggle for bargaining for ED's approval for the classes. Then the U-turn came suddenly after the *South China Morning Post* reported the plight of the school and the students. The success also tells that a joint effort of different concerned parties can bring material realization. The school had written a letter signed by the teaching and administrative staff to the Director of Education, Fanny Law Fan Chiu-faun, seeking help; Legislator Christine Loh Kung-wai also wrote to the department, demanding a meeting with officers on education for non-Chinese students.¹⁵⁰ The school now practices the bilingual system; it runs classes from Primary One to Six, altogether six "Chinese-language-classes" and six "English-language-classes" for Chinese-speaking children and non-Chinese speaking children respectively. 80 per cent of students in the Chinese-language-classes are newly arrived Chinese immigrants; English-language-classes for students of Nepali, Filipino Indian and Pakistani origin, who cannot speak Cantonese and their parents cannot afford international school's fees. This school is still confronting a serious problem of resource shortage. If the story of this school is a mirror reflecting the kind of social conditions that the Chinese new immigrants and ethnic minority children face generally in a larger social context, it exactly reveals the structures of domination that function to disable the subordinate groups, an unrecognized and unspoken racial category.

However, educators interested in developing a just and empowering society for new generations have been exploring new epistemologies for contesting and reconstructing the relationship between the margin and the center in order to extend

¹⁴⁹ Shirley Kwok, "Pupils left in limbo amid language plea," *South China Morning Post*, 5 January 1999, p.1.

¹⁵⁰ Shirley Kwok, "School wins right to teach in English," *South China Morning Post*, 7 January 1999, p.2.

the possibility for creating enabling conditions for human agency. Teachers work to insert the idea of “difference” into the pedagogical platform as part of an attempt to rearticulate ideas of justice and equality. The situation in the school is extremely difficult but teachers and students have tried hard to negotiate with the limitations which they associate with a big cage, a structural border, limiting their possibilities. Outdoor playground, basketball stand, volley ball court, or volley ball stand are very common facilities that most schools have for physical education activities, however, students in this school have to “invent” in their own ways, most of the time with creativity they can also make the playtime a lot of fun. Teachers also put a lot of effort to make them more “equal” to other students in other schools. Chau, their Physical Education teacher, says that he finds ways to let them play, other students have opportunity to join competition; our students should also have the same chance to gain more experiences. Primary 5 and 6 students from both Chinese and English streams are organized to form a volley ball team for the Hong Kong and Kowloon Primary Volley Ball Competition. Their unfamiliarity to a standard volley ball court is more or less a reason for their defeat in the game, however, their performance is satisfactory in a sense that they do not just wait for the good to come, instead they try their best to fight for something they want even if it is in a difficult situation. For those students who have generally been either marginalized or silenced by the dominant ideologies and practices of public education, this is an opportunity to raise questions about how the categories of race, class, and gender are shaped within the margins and center of power. In Chau's words, they are located in a marginal position, where a step forward would mean a little betterment, and a step backward - loss of everything. The position in between also means they are existing, just in between the gap/limited space, they can still live, study and play.¹⁵¹

The analogy of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ is a productive spatial metaphor to point out the kind of social injustice and the “struggle over representation emerges as an historical event and as an opportunity for development of more just representation in culture, politics, and knowledge.” (Ray, 1994: 12) However, we should not reduce

¹⁵¹ “This school; This Classroom”, *Hong Kong Connection* (Chinese), Radio Television Hong Kong, 23 July 2000.

the struggle of representation to the dichotomy; rather we need to develop new pedagogy for the ultimate purpose of new social solidarity. Thus, in a new and critical way the demand from the margin has been that the centre should speak about itself. To do this is to activate – or respond to – the kinds of dialogue across difference that we have discussed before (Johnson, et al., 2004: 111). The signification of the notion of new forms of solidarity lies on the new cultural politics that celebrates and engages with cultural diversities, instead of a coercive totalising identity, and the opening up of cultural identity can also bring productive effect to the existing debates on migration and social movement which are more encapsulated by the frame of binary oppositions of a self-same identity and essentializing-other politics.

The heterotopic sites of language and education in this case offer the opportunity for students as well as teachers to acknowledge the shifting borders that both undermine and reterritorialize different configurations of culture, power, and knowledge (Giroux, 1992: 23). School as the most paramount institute produces the whole body of knowledge/power; it is often far too reluctant to prefigure cultural criticism to itself. However, the opportunity opens up recently with the massive change in the student body. That body is increasingly made up of people of colour and different cultural histories, and persons from underprivileged social and economic backgrounds. Their representation in the student body has forced us to question many of the traditional concepts and practices of our education. Students in this school learn to learn and play with students of other cultures and languages. Some students express that they are happy to meet friends from different parts of the world; some mischievous boys say they are happy to learn together with “gweilos”¹⁵², but another boy suddenly correct his arrogant tone by replacing a more neutral term “dear foreign friends” to refer to their schoolmates with ethnic minority backgrounds. Law Pak-tsuen, principal of Yaumati Kaifong Associate School, states that education should accommodate students’ needs and educators should listen to and understand

¹⁵² In Chinese, “gweilos” literally means “male ghost” which is a derogatory term to call the foreigners, usually the whites.

students; so that education system is not a conforming system, which requires students to obey it, and the school should be a place to offer education to children.¹⁵³

In a liberating learning environment teachers and children of different backgrounds develop anti-racist pedagogy and commitment to fight against racism in a wider society and barriers and oppressive boundaries of racism that undermine and subvert the construction of a democratic society.

¹⁵³ “This school; This Classroom”, *Hong Kong Connection* (Chinese), Radio Television Hong Kong, 23 July 2000.

Appendix 1:

Extracted from 1999 Policy Address, this is for the first time a social category is specially singled out for giving more attention in the policy address.

C. Our Society and Culture

159. A bright future for Hong Kong encompasses not only economic progress, but also the building of a caring, decent society with a rich cultural life.

Helping the New Arrivals

160. We cherish family reunion. Many people in Hong Kong have relatives on the Mainland. Through an orderly arrival arrangement, 54 000 family members of Hong Kong people are allowed to come from the Mainland and settle here each year. This is no small figure. The new arrivals are also members of our society and they will contribute to our future development. To help the new arrivals integrate into society more easily, the Government has introduced a wide range of measures, such as providing them with various kinds of information and tailor-made courses, as well as offering financial assistance for the education of their children.

161. I understand that housing is the major problem facing families newly arrived from the Mainland. According to the existing policy of the Housing Authority, families applying for public rental housing should have a majority of their members satisfying the seven years' residence rule before they are allocated housing. Furthermore, the Housing Authority treats non-adult children born in the Mainland to parents who are Hong Kong permanent residents differently from those born in Hong Kong. I have asked the Housing Authority to consider reviewing these criteria so that a family will be eligible for allocation of public rental housing if at least half of its members meet the residence rule; and non-adult children born in the Mainland to parents who are Hong Kong permanent residents will be treated the same as those born in Hong Kong. This will ensure a fairer and more rational approach to the allocation of public housing. I want to emphasise that although more people will be added to the waiting list, the Government is committed to building more public housing flats at a faster rate, thus the waiting time for public housing will still be reduced, not lengthened.

162. To help newly arrived children integrate into the local school system, we are looking into the possibility of cross-boundary co-operation. We will follow the example of some voluntary bodies and provide these children with induction services before they arrive in Hong Kong. Such services will range from providing English readers to conducting preparatory courses.

163. The unemployment rate of the newly arrived is slightly higher than the average rate in Hong Kong. The Labour Department has set up employment and guidance centres to provide employment services for new arrivals. The ERB has also extended its service to new arrivals and will handle applications from those aged below 30 flexibly. In general, all new arrivals who are jobless should be able to join the training courses offered by the ERB.

Chapter Four

Heterotologies: South Asians in Media and Spatial Representations

Introduction

Hong Kong, not limited by its physical constriction, is acknowledged as one of the world's metropolitan cities and enjoys splendid importance in the global economy. Its being of a modern international financial centre has drawn tremendous capital flows and has also brought along a huge population influx into this place. Such development, that we usually term as “globalization”, is significant in two aspects:

First, it opens up a process of changing urban landscape characterized most precisely by the increasing diversified and hybridized ethnicization of metropolis. This was briefly outlined in an article entitled “Signs of the Times” in *Sunday Magazine of South China Morning Post* in 1996¹⁵⁴, depicting the changes in the cultural life in intervals of every 10 years since 1965. In the article, the figures of American expatriates and Filipino expatriates were 3,932 and 751 respectively in 1965, and the figures changed into 6,679 and 3,070 in 1975; 15,200 and 32,300 in 1985; 32,100 and 137,000 in 1995; showing that the white-dominated ethicized urban landscape has been undergoing dramatic push-back by the increasing numbers of nationals from South-east region particularly the Philippines. The figures of population from the Indian sub-continent has also risen up to 0.7% to the same level as the White foreigners, among the total 5.1% non-Chinese population shown in the 2001 Population Census.

¹⁵⁴ “Signs of the Times”, *South China Morning Post*, 7 January 1996, p.10.

Second, it manifests the most dreadful effect of the rich-poor polarization in an ever conspicuous manner and yet surprisingly it leads to a situation of general ethnicization / racialization of the extremely rich and extremely poor as shown in 2001 Population Census' Thematic Report – Ethnic Minorities. If analyzed by ethnic group, there are significant variations in monthly income from main employment among different ethnic groups. For males, the median monthly income from main employment is about \$55,000 to \$65,000 for European; \$70,000 for American/Canadian and \$75,000 for Australian/New Zealander while those for Asian (other than Chinese) is \$13,000 in which Filipino get the least, only \$7,500, and Pakistanis, who get \$9,250, are second lowest in the rank. Similarly, the median monthly income from main employment for female European is \$26,000; \$30,000 for American/Canadian; \$35,000 for Australian/New Zealander while those for Asian (other than Chinese) is \$3,670 – a figure like this is attributed to the domestic helper occupation taken up by most Filipinos, Indonesians and Thais; while Indian, Nepalese and Pakistani earn roughly \$6,000 to \$9,000 (Table 6.5. pp.68-69).¹⁵⁵

However, reviewing the recent campaign of the Hong Kong government marketing Hong Kong as “Asia’ s World City”¹⁵⁶ through the video *Hong Kong – Asia’ s World City* which was commissioned in 2004 by the Information Services Department as part of ongoing efforts to promote Hong Kong internationally, Hong Kong has just pictured its ever changing ethnicized city skyline with problematic discourses of available binaries like the difference between “East” and “West”, “tradition” and “modernity”. The series of promotional clips show not only a simplistically constructed “self”/ “east” and imagined “others”/ “west”, but also deliberately obliterating an unrecognized or unrecognizable “others out of the binary opposition of east and west”, namely the marginality which is never a concern in the master discourses of the centre. Pointing to some of the narratives and images from

¹⁵⁵ Here European, American/Canadian, Australian/New Zealander refer to the “White” only (2001 Population Census Thematic Report – Ethnic Minorities.

¹⁵⁶ Brand Hong Kong video also won a prestigious award at the 2004 Columbus Film and Video in the United States. The video received the award in the ‘ Business and Industry’ category and it was the only video in the category to achieve a Chris Award which is highly respected by film and video makers around the world. Access Hong Kong – Asia’ s World City video and script in the following website: http://www.brandhk.gov.hk/brandhk/vidmus_e.htm.

the 3-minute clip, we will see how a consensus of Hong Kong as Asia's World City is made. Here presumably a preferred audience group is only limited to major categories of east and west because Hong Kong, as a giant dragon, has been positioning itself to command a view of Asia and preparedly make rapid strides to the world economy and the world culture. The advertisement opens with a view of Victoria Harbour, which is worldly recognizable, then it focuses on the landmarks of Hong Kong like the Convention and Exhibition Centre and the Star Ferry, the lines read, "gaze into the heart of a great city. Look closer and you'll see what really makes a city great ...". "Its people" are regarded as essence of all its successes and virtues. It is followed by close-up shots that reveal people who make this city great – including individuals (close-up on a father and a daughter) and the activities the people are engaged in (holding business meeting, staging fashion show and teaching and learning inside classroom). These people have "ideas, vision, dream outrageous dreams and make them come true", however, besides Chinese faces, the corresponding faces that are collaborating in the business and education activities are "White" foreigners only, if one sees closely those in the meeting room and the classroom. People and things that are out of the conventional Chinese-Western binary are not mentioned anywhere and are not counted as something related to Hong Kong's success. Furthermore, a modest and sensible way for Hong Kong's development suggested is ability to combine strength from both new / modern and old / tradition. The advertisement praises people who "embrace the new and respect tradition", the images bring series of juxtapositions of tall and modern buildings vis-à-vis Chinese opera and Chinese Fung Shui, signified by a Chinese compass; Chinese culture vis-à-vis western contemporary art. The way that the advertisement approaches "Chinese" culture in equivalence with the "tradition" of Hong Kong people itself requires more explanation and differentiation. However, it seems to suggest that only by making full use of the vitality of biculturalism can we excel on the world's stage. Jackie Chan, a super world icon, showing Hong Kong Kungfu on the world's stage; then a shot of collaborative kite-building that means Hong Kong people have determination to make supreme goals and these goals will fly high as the kite, designated as 'Hong Kong' and that flies up in the sky of a progressive, stable and free society in the end.

Donald Tsang, the former Chief Secretary for Administration, at the prize presentation ceremony of the “World City – My City” essay and photo competition jointly organized by the Information Services Department and *South China Morning Post*, praised the creative talent of writers and photographers who took part in the competition. He said:

It is heartening, and heart warming, to see that these values are considered to be part of what makes us tick; that people identify freedom, plurality, tolerance and tenacity as part of the essence that makes Hong Kong our home, as well as a world city.”¹⁵⁷

The “plurality and tolerance” as shared values of Hong Kong people do not seem quite convincing as shown in the advertisements that are a mouthpiece of government and society’s position in general. In the core values (composite) version, people take the first-person position to say how they perceive Hong Kong as Asia’s World City. The people who appear in the advertisements are supposedly the representatives of different sectors in society, however, we see only middle class perspective: ballet teacher who sees smiling faces in a society; Donald Tsang who sees an accountable government; female director who sees creative ideas; Stephen Chau¹⁵⁸ who sees massive opportunity and businessmen who see Hong Kong as one of the most progressive places in the world and a living example of the pursuit of excellence. The different faces, whose efforts and participation are supposed to make Hong Kong tick, are conspicuously that of the Chinese, while other communities or ethnic minorities living and working here such as Filipinos or Indians have no parts to play. Thus if this promotional piece is meant to be a praise of the vital elements – plurality and tolerance working together to produce a vibrant, dynamic and yet harmonious Hong Kong society – it fails for the “difference” suggested by the phrase “plurality and tolerance” are reduced to the different social spaces that a Hong Kong person who is none other than a Chinese can occupy. Of course the director of these advertisements did not simply make a stupid mistake. It

¹⁵⁷ Press Release: Chief Secretary for Administration praises creative talent of “World City” winners: <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/brandhk/290105e1.htm>.

¹⁵⁸ Stephen Chau is a famous comedian star in Hong Kong.

rather reveals a lot before us about the common sense of those subscribed to the myth of Hong Kong's success. Behind the praise of success we see the fear of failure lurking, i.e., the common sense that allows them to feel proud is deeply affected by the superiority / inferiority complex framed by the representation of the tension between China and the West. The domination of the West – the white race – constitutes also the seduction for identification with white superiority. Hence, the paradoxical coining of the term “Asia's World City” which in claiming an identity that is “non-west” at the same time subverts itself by appealing for the legitimacy of its identity to the “world”, a fantasized “West” modelled after the imaginations of western advanced capitalist cities. Thus it is all natural that the promotional piece summons the words of white foreigners in conjuring up grandiose image of Hong Kong. Thus, a foreigner standing at a busy crossroad at Lan Kwai Fang is amazed and appraises: “I see a city that never sleeps” and another one posing at the Tsing Ma Bridge claims: “I see a place a hundred times bigger than it is on the map”. It is obvious that other versions also adopt the similar pattern of representation of Hong Kong as Asia's World City; white foreigners have overwhelmingly representational power over other races. It is a deliberate calculation of omitting something which is unfit (such as poor class and poor races/ethnic groups) to represent Hong Kong. Within this agenda, cultures are conceived/constructed as shared, homogeneous and tightly bound. Cultures in their internal relations are seen as conflict-free zones. Irreducible differences of race and class are contained and reduced to a difference of degree measured by the majority standards laid down in discourses of economic growth and prosperity and those which remain uncontrollable become signs of social pathology and have to be completely wiped out.

It is crucial to note the problematic nature of these advertisements because they work with and legitimate discourses of identity (of a metropolitan city) and allow the dominant culture to enforce its own authority and racist practices through an unquestioned appeal to the virtues of Western civilization. The representation of these advertisements is merely the predictable mingling of western images of Hong Kong under the colonizing gaze. Its underlying assumption of a monotonous representation of Hong Kong's international image is synonymous with whiteness;

and whiteness is synonymous with internationalism or multiculturalism, however, they are just a utopia “with no real place”, as Foucault terms it. (Foucault, 1986: 24) Therefore, these types of colonialist and imperialist ideologies need to be challenged so that difference, heterogeneity and multiplicity can engage in representation and open up new political possibilities.

This chapter aims at looking into representational arenas as well as heterotopias (real places) where non-White, or more precisely South Asians - as my research targets, are produced and given different images and social meanings, for instance, displaced diasporas, globally mobilized cheap labour force, city outlaws or positively national heroes and heroines sending foreign capital back home. Generally I would name them “city actors” building the kind of dialectic relationship with their situated realities. It will analyze some significant cultural narrations including popular media representation like feature films that capture the images or even unimportant glimpses of South Asians with which their social meanings are widely circulated, mediated and reproduced in popular culture. The chapter will also engage with the Chungking Mansions as an Other space and its marginalization in the dominant regime of representation as well as the effects of media representation of “South Asians” in the shaping of the popular imagination. These three areas overlap each other in the production of the knowledge of “South Asians” as an ethnic and cultural minority in ‘the process of a “complex structure in dominance”, sustained through the articulation of connected practices, each of which, however, retains its distinctiveness and has its own specific modality, its own forms and conditions of existence’ (Hall in During, 1993: 508). It is a knowledge that is rarely made explicit and yet it operates in the form of ‘taken for granted’ assumptions about the world and social relations that are discursively and spatially placed. This project is to make such knowledge explicit by bringing their particularities in focus and critically engaging their processes of making.

Media Representation: South Asians as Contested ‘Others’

In the system of cultural writings about ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, South Asians' images are frequently portrayed in cinema. Due to their given minor roles, those representations are not meant to speak for them in any political sense, but they are serving as the delimiting difference in the inscribing of the "others" within conventional imagination boundaries where the self-other differentiation can be well maintained. As figure of radical difference, their images also constitute a kind of "object" inviting the projection of our desires, fantasies and anxieties about the others and ourselves. We will look at a series of cultural portraits of South Asians in the mainstream media especially cinema visualization. We will question the regime of representation as part of the technologies of marginalization and the assumed innocence of those privileged with the accessibility to this dominant regime of representation.

So Weird! So Smelly! So Funny!

Motion pictures, *Girls Without Tomorrow* (1992) and *It's a Mad, Mad World Part II* (1988), deploy a most discriminatory tone in portraying South Asians' images. The films show glimpses of Indian-like people for just a few minutes, but the effect can be to negate their dignity and integrity as being ethnic minorities. The reason I choose these films to talk about is because of their popularity among local audience and the popular "myth / stigma" about South Asians that these films have created. *Girls Without Tomorrow* is a polyphonious and surprisingly complex portrayal about the lives of Hong Kong prostitutes, told through the eyes of five women of varying classes and social standings whose lives are affected directly and indirectly by the world's oldest profession. This film aroused much concern and interest from the public at the time it was shown. It rightly caught the timing of the exposure of the disgraceful rumour and scandalous stories in tabloid newspapers about "silver-screen" prostitution and its social popularity promised quick return from the box-office as its previous episode *1988 Girls Without Tomorrow* had proved. *It's a Mad Mad World* is a series of typical Lunar New Year comedies that was brought to the screen from 1987 to 1989 with a fair amount of popular success in Hong Kong. The audience found these films appealing because they, humorously, spoke on a number

of issues such as Vietnamese Boat Refugees and the 1997 Handover that troubled them at the time. Despite the excuse that the discriminatory depiction of “South Asians” means not more than ‘a light-hearted joke’, it is nonetheless a calculative move to bring about amusement through the debasing and ridiculing of the Other, hence the choice of the “object” of debasement and ridicule betrays the director’s belief that the “truth” depicted of the “Other” / “them” is a shared common sense of the “us”.

One scene from *Girls Without Tomorrow* showing Eva (starred by Pauline Chan), a nightclub sex worker, is taken to meet a customer who is a rich Middle-east Asian merchant at a hotel room. A South Asian looking guy, whose ethnicity is clearly signified by his costume – long pyjamas, also accompanies the Middle-east merchant as they wait for Eva. In the toilet Eva is getting herself ready to serve the merchant, but then she finds that her menstrual period is not over yet. However, because she is suffering from predicament and needs money urgently, she cannot afford not doing it. She comes back to the room and helps the rich man remove his shoes, while the South Asian guy goes into the toilet and checks whether she is clean. Soon the South Asian guy shouts: “she is dirty!” after he finds her napkin. Then the rich man becomes recklessly violent and pulls Eva back to the toilet by tearing her hair, and he shouts: “what? Dirty woman, want to harm me? Come in, dirty woman, your front part is dirty, I’ll take the back.” This is a violent representation of the Islamic tradition on the sexual taboo that women’s menstrual blood is regarded sinful and dirty. The juxtaposition of an aspect of Islamic culture and barbaric male chauvinism is an invitation to the habitual totalizing tendency of common sense to take that particular violent appropriation of Islamic culture as representation of Islamic culture as a whole. Part of the attraction of the extremely negative representation is certainly hinged upon the vengeful violation of a woman by a man from a different culture. And it is a projection of patriarchal desires in which men can exercise absolute power over women. Of course, sex workers in media representation as well as in reality are usually regarded as mere objects for satisfaction of all forms of sexual desires. However, the portrayal of a villain of the other race in complete control of a Chinese woman somehow signifies a fear of the

barbaric intrusion that ambivalently entertains a disavowed pleasure in the violating penetration that partly explains the attraction of the film. In this sense, these kind of stereotyping representations of the others (both the sex worker and the clients) are invoked by a set of complicated emotions of the male unconsciousness exemplified in this patriarchal fantasy by a male director.

Similarly, a quick look of South Asian-like man also appears in *It's a Mad, Mad World Part II* for just seconds but it helps somehow to spread the myth that South Asians have the unpleasant body odour and stink. The scene is set on the plane, where the second daughter of Bill Tung (starred by Loletta Lee) who emigrates to Canada with her family is sitting on her own seat, while another passenger, an Indian man wearing a turban, asks her for excusing him to get to the seat. Lee immediately covers her nose with her hands and uncomfortably sits next to him. This overreacted gesture is a way to protect herself from threat, including alien culture, it also suggests that Indian's uncivil-ness and primitive nature as represented by bodily stink, is not much covered or hidden even though the man is wearing a western suit. His Indian's inferiority is not eliminated even though he is a business executive as his turban and skin colour have fixed him into a social position of "stink". Racism is often associated with essentialist thinking, through the reduction of cultures, societies, or people to a central core or feature and some essential characteristics like 'body stink'. The most awkwardly racist comments about the South Asians whom some Hong Kong Chinese remarks are: "Indians are *either criminals or rapists*"¹⁵⁹ and "Pakistanis are *Ba Gay Lan Tan*"¹⁶⁰. Worse, the media provoke this kind of thinking at a socially penetrating level.

The media almost always seem to involve a certain manner to deal with "alien" culture. Another scene from the movie *It's a Mad, Mad World Part II* perhaps helps to explain more specifically the complication/complexity when Hong Kong people face the alien culture and in which we know our prejudice on "others"

¹⁵⁹ I got this comment from one of my sister's colleague working in a western kitchen where he has many experiences working with ethnic minorities from the South Asian countries like Nepal and India.

¹⁶⁰ It is a most disparaging term for Pakistani; its vocal equivalent to 巴基 "爛坦" in Cantonese, which is associated to a very colloquial foul language.

is nurtured in a special socio-cultural context. It happens inside the MTR and the camera focuses on a couple (starred by Bill Tung and Lydia Shum) and through them we see how we as people of Hong Kong see “others”. Inside the train compartment a strongly ethnicized space is created first with a Taiwanese tour group hurrying in boarding. The couple shows annoyance to a big crowd of Taiwanese tourists and the noise they make. Then there enter three Filipinos who are behaving boisterously; and the husband, out of the couple, makes a comment on them that “she is like a pig” and his wife agrees by replying “a group of Filipino maids”; then the camera shows a group of Vietnamese fighting inside the train, the husband grieves and says, “Hong Kong will soon be occupied by foreign nationals. When can we recover the territory?” Soon afterwards there is an announcement about the train stop, “the next station is Wong Tai Sin”, a Chinese man (Mainlander) is so thankful to the announcement and answers back to the “loud speaker” (which is indeed a holding handrail) that “Thank you, Comrade; I’ll get off at the next station. Thank you, comrade.” The wife cannot help laughing at this silly man and sneers: “How boorish!” because of his ignorance and the way he says “Comrade” – as if speaking in an old-fashioned Communist context. After the funny Chinese guy gets off the train another Chinese man and Chinese woman (also Mainlanders) get on. The husband immediately describes the Chinese man as “Uncle/? ? ”, a disdainful term for someone coming from China - a country that seems too backward and old-fashioned under the communist rule. This is how a modern capitalist Hong Kong looks at China and shows a marked disinclination towards 1997. The film particularly depicts the conversation between the Chinese man and the Chinese woman about their different viewpoints about Hong Kong and Hong Kong people. Meanwhile, the couple reveal their anxiety of facing the 1997 turnover. The husband predicts: “now she (the Chinese woman) looks down on us Hong Kongers, we’ll suffer when we’re under their rule. No wonder so many people are emigrating.” Finally the scene ends with a common impression about the Chinese people who spit everywhere: the Chinese man complains that the only bad thing about Hong Kong is “there is no spittoon hue” and then he spitted unthinkingly. Humorously his spit rests on the wife’s shoes.

Recently, there is rising concern about stereotyped images of South Asians, which are appropriated to add melodramatic fun to commercial cinema, though those images may not be necessarily out of discriminatory intention. However, images of South Asians largely represented in media are either as a viewer spectacle of multiculturalism or as servicing the needs and desires of the business classes in ethnic restaurants. *Golden Chicken I* (2002) portrays Indians as watchmen in golden turbans and uniforms patronizing the doorway of a nightclub showing fabulous exotic look. In a particular funny scene, Ah Kum (starred by Sandra Ng) is taught to serve any customers with wholeheartedness and quality by her super idol Andy Lau, then Ah Kum learns to be hospitable and smiling even to ‘Indian’ customers. In the movie, *Needing You* (2000) Indians are featured in a customary site, an ordinary Indian restaurant, they are mostly usual staff members and customers; however, such a place is depicted as a shady and mysterious place to the Hong Kong audience. The camera also exercises its very exploitative power to approach weird objects, for instance, Indians respond with dubious and suspicious glances at Chinese entering their place as well as disturbing and sickening reaction of Chinese when seeing Indians using their hands to eat. Even a more positive image in *The Masked Prosecutor* (1999) about a retired Indian policeman who adopts a Chinese orphan to be his son, is vulnerably taken as “someone out of the ordinary/cult”.

Then, there’s *Himalaya Singh* (2005), written and directed by maverick filmmaker Wai Ka Fai, a farcical, pseudo-Bollywood comedy shown during the Chinese New Year that pushes intolerance to new lows. Director Wai Ka Fai just sings his own praise that, “Shooting in India can capture a kind of fantastic exoticism, I think putting all those elements into a comedy will bring a bustling and happy atmosphere.” In his previous movie *Running on Karma* (2003) he portrays an elusive Indian contortionist who is wanted for murder; he said *Himalaya Singh* is another inspiration from Indians.¹⁶¹ The film tells the story of Singh (starred by Ronald Cheng), a young yoga master from the Himalayas. However, *Himalaya Sigh* does not quite achieve the beautiful and lofty heights of the Himalayas in its title. The film’s Chinese title, “Himalaya Star”, could be taken the wrong way: “star”- sing in

¹⁶¹ “Wai Ka Fai: Indian Complex”, *Oriental Daily*, 19 February 2005, E07.

Cantonese - is the vocal equivalent to the common Sikh surname, but is also the disparaging term used to describe South Asians in turbans. The film's attempt at humor through caricatures of effeminate "Indians" in ridiculously large turbans and comic accents is an unenlightened view on mocking of other culture and race and putting them in vulgar fun. The profound message about life the film intends to tell, for instance, Brahma creationism philosophy (according to Hindi mythology we are all the stuff of Brahma's dream and the world will vanish when the God of Creation awakens) would look out of place in a film full of commercialized crap. It barely qualifies to be a film, more likely a bad 'compilations' of incomprehensible jokes strung together. However, the bad thing is that sometimes the comedy cinema can be a very xenophobic cinema in terms that people feel free to represent. This film is the typical example of the so-called "freedom of artistic expression" which however trades on ignorance of South Asian minorities. The way it appropriates Indian culture is extremely terrible, for instance, Indian yoga is seen as insanity; the King of yoga and the India Beauty are classical fantasies; snake dance, Indian magic ointment and Indian hypnosis are typical exotic signs.

However, to theorize the action of viewing film as a social practice as Graeme Turner (1999) emphasizes, this movie reveals an interesting dialectic between the processes of production and the activities of consumption. In the film an Indian man says, "I sold curry in Chungking Mansions, killed people in Mongkok, I was also imprisoned in Stanley". I think this is particularly an awful scene as it calumniates that all Indians are criminals. These few lines give laughable fun to local Hong Kong audience and fix Indians with a stereotyped image of social outlaws. Meanwhile, Indian audiences also find that Chinese in this movie are depicted equally stupid and ignorant because one scene shows Chinese eating snake, a common misconception/misrepresentation, which Indians think about Chinese. In terms of cultural representation of different ethnic groups, both Indians and Chinese are essentialized and homogenized; this film represents a symbolically simple but remarkably discriminatory conceptualization of Hong Kong/Indian relationship and

beliefs. To add insult to injury, *Himalaya Singh* is currently 2005's highest-grossing Hong Kong film (HK\$15 million as of May 2005) (Kozo 2005).¹⁶²

Himalaya Singh happens at an interesting moment when Hong Kong is discussing a new law aimed at protecting the ethnic minorities from racial discrimination, however, the film just passed without any comment when it hit local screens. Many organizations concerned with local ethnic minorities worry that the government's decision about the anti-discrimination bill will not have any restriction on the media and the press. Stephen Fisher, Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs, says legislation does not specifically include media and press because we think freedom of speech need to be protected. The question itself could possibly involve so much sensitivity; therefore, this legislation does not prohibit publishers or media to use certain types of language and words. However, Unison's executive director, Fony Chow Sau-fong, says the general perception towards ethnic minorities is so negative, superficial and fragmented. In a survey conducted by the Unison, some respondents described ethnic minorities as "lazy, rude, impolite or filthy" and most of their impressions are shaped by media stereotypes besides direct contact with them. In the Unison's survey findings, as for the source of the perceived image of the ethnic minorities, 27.3% of respondents said from cinema and TV programmes; 21.6% from newspapers and magazines, while 65% from daily social interaction. Concerned groups urge the media to be objective towards ethnic minorities.¹⁶³

Bits of a Jungle

Chungking Express (1994), a film by Wong Kar-wai, loosely connected around the Chungking Mansions, represents the most influential cinematic canon of creating an extravagant and bourgeois spectatorship to view Chungking and South Asians as a particular kind of imaginary or imagined reality and simultaneously repression of people of color/other race. This film makes Chungking Mansions a lively hub of Asian gangsters and drug-mobs in the collective imagination of the people who view this film. Focusing on its process of production of meanings, this

¹⁶² http://www.lovehkfilm.com/reviews_2/himalaya_singh.htm

¹⁶³ "Legislating against racial discrimination - a consultation paper," *Media Watch*, Radio Television Hong Kong, 15 January 2005

film is largely driven by a kind of ‘instinct’ and unmediated feelings of stress, anxiety and fear. In Wong Kar-wai’s interview¹⁶⁴, he says an unsystematic mode of address has contributed to the making of this film. From the idea to filming to putting it in theaters he took just six weeks; filming *Chungking Express* as a vacation for a temporary break from *Ashes of Time*, which had driven him so mad because he thought too much about it. Instead of bothering so much with the details, he thinks just do it quick and by instinct just like the student’s films, without a high budget with a hand-held camera and a very mini crew. The reason for shooting in Chungking Mansions according to Wong Kar-wai is because “it is so mysterious. I was living in Tsim Sha Tsui when I was a kid, and I was never allowed to go inside and I imagined that there’s something very weird inside....”

The meaning production and organization of *Chungking Express* is bounded by, more or less consciously and unconsciously, Wong’s personal desire, obsession and interest, therefore, visually and literally Chungking Mansions is constructed as a special cultural space where elements of “other-ness” are grasped and juxtaposed arbitrarily to highlight a sense of “alien-ness” and “enmity” in terms of environmental space, human affectivity, communication difficulties and disconnection within a bigger theme of people experiencing a city in a given situation of “proximity without reciprocity” (Abbas, 1997: 54). At the first 45-second opening sequence, the audience are set to a journey of trespassing in an alien zone led by a mysterious woman. The fast-footing stepping inside the ground floor of Chungking Mansions where South Asians are consuming at the curry-joints and South Asians eateries, then going after the woman we see warren-like flophouses in the upper floor, and then an intestine-like hallway heading inside a flophouse and up to a spot of “darkness” before the film title “*Chungking Express*” in Chinese is introduced. The trespassing is expected to be more exciting and we are further tempted to a fantasy of unveiling more about the “unknown and forbidden” Other. The strange woman is a good tour guide because she is unreservedly swimming through the environs, she and the order of things there seem to be in an intimate closeness and complete totality.

¹⁶⁴ Mary Jane Amato & J. Greeberg, “Swimming in Winter, an Interview with Wong Kar-wai”, <http://www.kabinet.org/magazine/issue5/wkw1.html>

Wong Kar-wai takes a tendentious choice to represent another dimension of a city image signified by Chungking Mansions which Ackbar Abbas regards as “a space of disappearance” that “may be seen but not known” (Abbas, 1997: 48-54) and that is put under the most wide-ranging exploration in this film. The English title *Chungking Express* is “a portmanteau term for a portmanteau space”, where the Midnight Express in Chungking Mansions, a fast-food stall that the characters in the film patronize, is some sort of anchoring point of the two narrative and stylistic parts in the film. As referred by a film critic commenting the fabulous use of film title in Wong Kar Wai’s *Chungking Express* (Yu Fai, 1995: 13), the Chinese title literally translated is *Chungking Jungle* which implies the characteristic that Chungking Mansions is set in the jungle of a big city, probably the city edge; jungle also implies the “forest” which analogically means “dense mass” “mess and disorder” and “confusion or bafflement”. Its English title *Chungking Express* highlights the word “express” instead of “jungle” / “forest”. “Express” implies the meanings of “quickness” (e.g. express delivery; express train), “clearly stated/understood” and “particular”. Thus, “jungle” is an institutional and structural context; “express” is the main theme and approach of the film to discover the “particulars” and the little episodes in life like the love episodes of the protagonists here. *Chungking Express* is an attempt to tell, “every particular is a bit of a jungle”, thus Abbas finds Wong Kar-wai’s works as engagement in the kind of representational politics which describes mutation of disappearance, particularly of space and affectivity (Abbas, 1997: 49).

The city is not in its clichéd mode of representation; a typical skyline of metropolitanism has disappeared and destroyed by drawing attention to and making visible the “reverse hallucination” (meaning *not* seeing what *is* there) (Abbas, 1997: 6). Starting from the opening scene the audience are confronted with the “anachronistic industrial landscape” (Stokes & Hoover, 1999: 194) in which the city seems to be just awoken from a silent, blue-lit long night, the cloud-and-smog filled sky is swirling and dehydrating, these are also traces of time-passing; while the dense and suffocating city space is magnified through high angle pointing to buildings with smokestacks which superimpose an anomalous city upon a postmodern, post-

industrial landscape. The city and the people are confronting loneliness though this film gives a “comic, even affectionate turn” to it (Abbas, 1997: 54). The voice-over narration from undercover cop He Qi Wu (starred by Takeshi Kaneshiro) intrudes the silence/loneliness: “we rub shoulders with each other every day ... We may not know each other. ... But we may become good friends someday.” The depiction of the counterpoising of space and affectivity is in dynamics of “proximity without reciprocity” (Abbas, 1997: 54) and affective relationship is undergoing a process of negotiation and sharing even within the 0.01 cm of space of the closest encounter, dominantly a specific form, in a world of brief urban contacts where loneliness is commonplace.

Wong’s sensitiveness at space and spontaneity of modern urban life definitely gives the audience penchant for viewing and enthrallment. However, his insight in discovering and recovering the particulars from the culture of disappearance fails somehow to see that there are also particulars (lots of little stories) made invisible by the homogenization of Chungking Mansions and Chungking people. The unrepresentation is to do with “techniques of disappearance” (Abbas, 1997: 8), here Wong is apparently successful in inventing a form of visuality that problematizes the clichéd images of Hong Kong as a city in representation, meanwhile, in the cost of making Chungking images disappear in clichés (negative, monotonous) of visual representations. Here, the camera is not only depriving the sovereignty of the represented people in Chungking Mansion where every Indian-like face is faltered to be faceless, but also exercising the hegemonic power of camera of “capturing the real” as it calumniates Chungking as a zone of “unknown” and “uncertainty” or a space of recognizable “ruination” and “danger” in imagination of a (representative) utopia. The sensual slow-motion shots and the striking camera movement, and editing style which open *Chungking Express* with a cop (#223/Wu) chasing a drug suspect in a dizzy and compressed ambience of the mansions, and the exaggerated blues and reds are self-consciously used in eroticizing and mystifying the dimness and exoticism.

Wong's provocation of fantasy leads to the creation of a highly mystified woman (starred by Brigitte Lin Ching-hsia) who represents as a synonym to the Chungking Mansions. She seems to be a definite insider and totally merges with Chungking Mansions and everybody there. Her blonde wig, designer trench coat, sunglasses and heavy make-up are symbolic signs to tell her difficulty and incapability of "revealing" herself to others or even to herself. "Sometime, somehow I became a cautious person. Every time I wear a raincoat I put on a pair of sunglasses. One never knows when it's going to rain, when it's going to shine." She is stunningly gorgeous, but she is also dangerous. One shot rhythmically captures the drug smuggling operation that she is orchestrating with Indian smugglers: the way in which the drugs are secreted for transport – sewn into clothing, hammered into shoe heel compartment, hidden in stuffed animals and even hidden inside fake tummy. The drug-traffickers are amazingly professional and cunning; their images are significant to stigmatize Chungking Mansions as well as the South Asians in general. Almost all shots capturing Indians (or other minorities) seem to imply that they are doing something weird or exchanging messages about some dirty businesses. Not only Asian gangsters (an American gangster is shot dead in the film), Chungking is also a haven/hall for illegal immigrants and prostitutes (one shot shows cop #223 who has not made any big case in half a month rigorously catching an Indian man for overstaying in Hong Kong). Those analogies seriously conventionalize Chungking Mansions and Chungking people including all minorities there with a stereotyped image – the social evils in a modern society.

A similar approach of writing the "others" is overwhelmingly adopted in other forms of writing like documentation, reports, and news. But very handily they appear to be too much stereotypes, over-simplification and fragmented familiarity. So this research will seek to locate "heterogeneity" and "plurality" of other ethnicity and culture in representation.

Spatial Representation: Chungking as Heterotopias and its Ambiguity of Meanings

Chungking is definitely a ‘jungle’ in the city, of other space different from the official representation of Hong Kong. Thanks to Wong Kar-wai’s contribution in promoting widespread curiosity through his writing/portrait of this special space as well as the global circulation of this film, Chungking Mansions has been intriguing many imaginations and fascinations, and has become a site of pilgrimage of Wong’s fans and many others. Chungking Mansions constitutes an “other space” inserted in a highly developed site of commercial operations and tourist attractions. I would like to deal with the kind of geographical imagination taken for granted in the collective spatial experience implicit in our habitual ways of thinking, seeing and acting by disrupting their stability through an engagement with the hybridized spatial order and possible spatial transformations disclosed by the Chungking Mansions. The greatest implication and cultural significance of this “other space” is that the heterogeneity at work in this other space actually reflects the generating energies of the heterogeneity of the South Asians inhabiting and operating within this different space. Now let me draw on Michel Foucault for a mapping of the configuration of multiplicities masked by the misleading unity of a single name and a single building.

Genealogy of Chungking Mansions as Heterotopias

The Chungking Mansions has undergone a series of changes throughout its history over the past decades. According to some versions, Chungking Mansions was built in 1964 and serving as married quarters for the British Army. Today it offers a range of budget accommodation – one of the reasons that makes it worldly famous. Once it marked an important page in Hong Kong history. The article entitled “Signs of the times” in *Sunday Magazine of South China Morning Post*¹⁶⁵ has briefly outlined the changes in the cultural life in intervals of every 10 years since 1965, the rental property rate of office space in Chungking Mansion in 1965 was 80 cents per square foot. Such an indicator signifies more its faded/forgotten glory as an important commercial and residential space in earlier times. According to an RTHK’s documentary¹⁶⁶ which reveals Chungking’s original appearance, Chungking

¹⁶⁵ “Signs of the times”, *South China Morning Post*, 7 January 1996, p.10.

¹⁶⁶ “Chungking Mansions,” *Hong Kong Connections(Chinese)*, Radio Television Hong Kong, 27 March 1988.

Mansions consists of 5 interconnected blocks of 18 stories each. According to information of the Land Registry the value of premise then was \$12 million. It was originally designed for accommodating 500 households with 3000 residents, however, today the number has increased by 2 to 3 fold, most of them floating or short-term residents who come for business and tourism. The Chungking Mansion Mall was an atypical and outstanding design then: the biggest and newest mall with a total 50,000-square-foot space, 3-storey shopping mall, four escalators and basement car park. Now time has washed away its glory though its multiplicity/diversification has not changed, it is “part of a sprawling series of tenement blocks that are part thriving export centre, part tourist trap, part fire trap, part budget guest house mecca, part seedy brothel and drug-ridden slum”.¹⁶⁷ This kind of social memory is deeply historical, but engaged in present possibilities and hopes for the future.

Mimi Chan, who owns a wig shop on the ground floor, has rented property since Chungking was built in 1964. Back then, she says, it was very different. “I remember when it was first built it was a place where movie stars lived.”¹⁶⁸ Young Kam-gun, a retired tailor, came to Hong Kong in 1949 from Beijing and worked as a tailor for Indian millionaire Hari Harilala when he first came to the Mansions in 1965, and ever since he has lived at Chungking. He remembers Chungking in better days. “At one time, there were Royal Air Force officers and British Army Colonels living here. It was full of luxury apartments.” The malls downstairs were full of jewellery and tailor shops just like the malls of a luxury hotel.¹⁶⁹

Today Chungking remains a place where events of meeting and parting take place frequently. It seems that Ho Qi Wu’s optimism on human relationship is producing resonance to some people: “we rub shoulders with each other every day ... We may not know each other. ... But we may become good friends someday”. One day you may find your “unexpected” bosom friends here. Many tourists staying in Chungking have the same idea to make more friends and exchange life experience

¹⁶⁷ Richard Cook, “Miles apart”, *South China Morning Post*, 28 September 1997, p.16.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

among each other. RTHK produced a documentary on Chungking Mansions¹⁷⁰ in which this kind of “friendship” is found. David, a repair worker from England, is now a singer and has been staying in Hong Kong for two months. He likes to stay in the pantry to meet new friends every night after dinner. This night he meets Wendy, a reporter from New Zealand; Denis, social worker from Australia; two Japanese female University students – one is majoring in Chinese Literature, the other in Japanese History, both have just travelled to China; Jane, British, who likes travelling while working, is now working in Hong Kong as secretary and she is a long-term resident in Chungking. They spend time chatting together, and that night they talk about social security schemes in Britain and Australia; the Japanese student also explains to them why Japanese women do not work after marriage. Their topics are boundless and open to everyone as if the place has been used to fluidity throughout all these years.

Driven by the radical changes taking place in local and globalized economies during last couple of decades, Chungking’s established structure has been gradually destabilized. Its changes help us to question that assumed homogeneity of the locale as well as its implicit boundedness. Chungking Mansions has always been a prime site¹⁷¹ – if the individual owners of separate units could all be persuaded to sell, the block could, in theory, be redeveloped as grade-A office space with huge commensurate returns. New development projects are vying to position Tsim Sha Tsui as Kowloon’s Lan Kwai Fong.¹⁷² It seems that Chungking can no longer choose to stagnate or refuse changes like this; indeed pressure is mounting that its position of geographical centrality, the (stagnated) heart of the city for long, must be re-beating again to re-image/rejuvenate itself as a vital part of “Asia’s World City”; its re-imagining must be in line with the public reconstruction of the city’s meaning. No fewer than three entertainment and restaurant development projects are vying to re-make Tsim Sha Tsui (Minden Avenue and east of Nathan Road) into Kowloon’s

¹⁷⁰ “Chungking Mansions”, *Hong Kong Connections (Chinese)*, 27 March 1988.

¹⁷¹ The Lippo group bought a 60,000-square-foot chunk of Chungking in 1993 for \$680 million and divided a section of the first floor and the entire second floor into a shopping podium containing something like 200, 300-square-foot stores. For the details, see *South China Morning Post*, 28 September 1997, p.16.

¹⁷² “Night Movers”, *South China Morning Post*, 23 December 2002, Feature, p.1.

Lan Kwai Fong. The investment involved in the task of makeover is astonishing and it is expected that the new look heart emerges in 2005.¹⁷³ However, this is also a violent form of cultural imperialism imposed by the notions of ‘modernization’ and ‘consumerism’ in which the special cultural practices of old Chungking is totally denied. Ironically, the newly re-imaged Chungking is named as “Chungking Express” after Wong Kar-wai’s imagination, this name tells the lack of imagination of the Hong Kong government and the property giants; therefore, there is a wonder that the so-called ‘cultural policy’ always becomes a policy of anti-culture. Their mistake is not difficult to understand as in their vision there is no place for the South Asians as well as for other forms of cultural imagination. Now the biggest LCD screen hanging on the outer wall of Chungking building is an initial makeover step to reverse the habit of “*not seeing what is there*”, pedestrians are more willing to give notice to the building. However, there comes another irony “what they see is not what is there” because the space that is for seeing is limited to the leisure spaces dominated by the service and retail industries. Spatial production of meaning is re-organized and commodified in the economics of cultural exchange. However, the big TV screen and the new shopping site “Chungking Express” are selling something of “other space” (the capitalist and homogenous space); yet the complicated set of relations in the original ‘other space’ (heterogeneous) are irreducible to and unsuperimposable on each other.

Space in Memorial Representation

Ethnicity in Hong Kong is an imagination that is often written over by big cultural institutions. For instance movies like *Chungking Express*, the mass media and newspapers are often subjugated to a knowledge that “both privilege and exclude particular readings, specific voices, certain aesthetics, forms of authority, specific representations, and forms of sociality” (Giroux, 1992: 20). However, the shared cultural landmark of Chungking Mansions is a special piece that preserves the social

¹⁷³ The Miramar Hotel and Investment Company, Henderson Land and Sun Hung Kai Properties and entrepreneur Giacondo Maurello – one of the first restaurateurs attracted to Lan Kawi Fong in the early 80s are competing for TST’s reinvention project. The \$6-billion project envisages 50 restaurants, pubs, karaoke bars, Internet cafes and clubs centred around an eight-sq-metre television screen and balcony stage for live performances. For the details, see *South China Morning Post*, 23 December 2002, Feature p.1.

memories of the Other, the people living there. Subaltern perspectives are operative in the spinning personal stories, folk histories, local practices or social memories in the forms of non-systematic and anecdotal representations radically different from those produced through the dominant regime of representation, they indicate the “unwritten” plurality of meanings of ethnic minorities who are historically and culturally attendant to make Hong Kong truly a place of multiculturalism and international capitalist centre.

I have learnt a piece of anecdote from a Pakistani man who owns a travelling company in Chungking. According to him, Chungking has a glamorous and unique history. I was told that Chungking was built about 76 years ago by a rich Filipino who was a doctor or engineer (Chungking people can provide no definite answer). He bought a piece of land, where the Chungking Mansions stands presently, from the British government at a lease of 996 years. It is said that in the old days Chungking Mansions marked a brilliant success in architectural history of Hong Kong. The man explained to me that Chungking is a very strong building, though it is now 76-year-old, its walls are still strong enough to compare to other 20-year-old buildings. He also said that Chungking Mansions was built with good quality cement and clear drinking-water, in the past clear drinking water was scarce resource to be used to build houses, but Chungking did. When Chungking Mansions was built, it was used for mainly residential use for expatriate professionals like doctors and engineers who came from the Middle East or South East Asia. It is because at that time Hong Kong had limited local talents/professionals so many of the highly educated professionals were imported from nearby countries. Now those professionals have already moved out from Chungking. Starting from the 60s, the Filipino owner gradually sold out all his properties piece by piece to different numbers of small owners. But its meaning and function have not changed much; it is still the centre of the minority groups. Even nowadays the huge process of gentrification cannot threaten to crush Chungking because of the 996-year of land-use agreement and a strong community force that Chungking has built for so many years.

Of course it is not evidently-proved history, but if we take history as a kind of “collective memory” and narration alike fiction, then more importantly it is the narrator’ s/narrators’ acts of retrieving the past in a particular form that deserve our attention. The subjective works of memory reveal the prime sources for contemporary self-production in relation to others. The relationship between our present selves and our past selves, are, after all, another form of self-other relations (Johnson, et al., 2004: 128). From their narrations we should learn to see what is valued as important in their shared memories and understand how these shared memories create meanings to their existence of being today, and what sort of sentiments, desires and expectations they need for their every day life and for future hope. The special formation of Chungking Mansions has shared some kind of emotional bonding and ethnic identification among people who represent it through their memories and people who are familiar to this story. When the very existence of Chungking Mansions is under increasing threat from the property development companies, individual and group memories can have very strong strategic value in mobilizing support for those directly affected and for those in alliance with efforts against the effects of homogenization from the ever expanding processes of commodification in the destruction and marginalization of the heterogeneous vitality of the local.

Heterotologies: An Analysis of Chungking Mansions

According to Foucault, heterotopia is marked by the disruption of boundaries and its resistance to homogenization. Among the most popular forms of geographical imagination or knowledge about Chungking Mansions as an “other” space is that there is only life of devil and crime confined in a ghostly place. Chungking Mansions is identified as a hell of “lost souls” (displaced souls and displaced bodies away from and unconnected with their home countries) who lose hopes and meanings of life and their lives are just “prison, Chungking, prison, Chungking” (Yan & Kong, 2000: 23). YWAM’ s Inner City Ministries¹⁷⁴, a religious organization formed by six people from different parts of Asia, approaches

¹⁷⁴ YWAM’ s InnerCity Ministries is reaching out to the poor and needy of the Hong Kong’s immigrant minority communities, <http://www.ywamhongkong.org/innercity.htm>.

Chungking as victim of city violence and modern inhumanity in religious discourses. Meanwhile, news articles report that Chungking Mansions is particularly a forbidden and terror-claiming/terrorized zone even for U.S. army troops, who happen to possess the most advanced weaponry in the world. The USS Constellation Battle Group arrived in Hong Kong in November 2002 for a scheduled port visit. Approximately 7,700 crewmembers of the ships had a chance to sightsee, shop and enjoy recreational activities. However, under the expanding nationwide paranoia brought by the effect of expected massive attack by Al Quida, and particularly for security reason, army officials warned soldiers not to visit Chungking Mansions and Mirador Mansions where most of the Middle-east and Indian-Pakistani settle and mingle around during their visit in Hong Kong.¹⁷⁵

Chungking Mansions as a unique heterogeneous space of both inside and outside the centre for commercial and tourist activities hence has the “curious property of being in relation with all the other sites” (Foucault, 1986: 24) considered essential for the maintaining of the metropolis. It occupies a prime spot at 40 Nathan Road, but it is not culturally and socially recognizable as “central/centre”. Located right in the middle of Tsim Sha Tsui where lots of fabulous and expensive buildings such as the Peninsula Hotel, Holiday Inn, Hong Kong Arts Center, and uncountable numbers of luxury shops, this makes Chungking Mansions totally “un-matching” and inconceivably “alien” to a metropolitan city image. People reveal their disappointment toward its existence, saying “It is impossible to understand how an eyesore like Chungking Mansions could be allowed to exist in the tourist area of Tsim Sha Tsui ... If there is one building that Hong Kong should be ashamed of it is Chungking Mansions ... It should be demolished now, before it kills hundreds of people.”¹⁷⁶ Perhaps, this old-looking, ugly and dirty “urban ghetto” could not be that easily overlooked. The lack of big neon signs heralding its existence and the huge maze of inexpensive shops and cut-price shops on its ground floor indicate a kind of limited consumption pattern in contrast to an overwhelmingly bourgeois and conspicuous consumption surrounding it. Different from the popular discourses and

¹⁷⁵ Epoch Times, 22 November 2002 and Yahoo News (online), 22 November 2002.

¹⁷⁶ Brian Smith, “Disgraceful building”, *South China Morning Post*, 4 May 1998, p.16.

consumption practice valuing “taste”, “life-style” and “brandings”, Chungking style of consumption is definitely a peripheral type of “low” and “bad” taste. However, Chungking Mansions is well known for providing cheapest accommodations – guesthouses – for budget tourists and backpackers who are interested only in a bed at the lowest cost. Moreover, it also attracts overseas labourers from Asia, Africa and the Middle East for they can rent rooms at lower price in Hong Kong. At concrete material base it indeed serves many people’s needs. So much so, people’s antagonism against Chungking Mansions is more about an untold cultural elimination / bias which is incompatible to a common sense notion of “modernity”, like saying, “... they also make a prominent tourist area of Hong Kong seem like a bazaar in a Third world country, thereby making a mockery of Hong Kong’s self-proclaimed status as “Asia’s World City”.”¹⁷⁷ At this level of representation of differences, Chungking Mansions is a symbolic meeting point of both zone of affluence and zone of deprivation which has microscopically exposed another side of “development” – pressing problems of poverty, city margins, subaltern, social segregation, and cultural marginalization – all these everyday realities will never be featured in the metropolitan city image narration. Besides, its underlying contextual reality is a global context of international division of labor as well as rapid growth of a modern city, therefore, a complicated nexus between the Chungking and racial minorities in Hong Kong need to be drawn together to help understand the existence of poverty and city alien inside the Chungking.

Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that makes them both isolated and penetrable. Entry and exit are regulated in many ways: by compulsion, by rites and purifications or by illusions of freedom, where subtler boundary disciplines are imposed (Foucault, 1986: 26). Chungking Mansions in this sense also creates the most problematic space for local Hong Kong people to take part. It is a freely accessible place yet we hesitate to step into this ethnicized spot and are always haunted by the feeling of being out of place within it in the face of the difference of their languages, gestures, ways of dealing, cultural signs like music and

¹⁷⁷ Vince Pinto, “Tourist area resembles Third World bazaar”, *South China Morning Post*, 17 June 2001, p.13

songs or even the veiled message for asking about prostitution. Furthermore, though we are free to enter and explore the place, upon entering we are at once excluded from coming into touch with its very life. We could hardly understand the codes exercised there and the entry door of the restaurant selling curry does not lead into the doors where the ethnic families live. However, as reading it from a progressive angle as B. Genocchio points out,

“embracing an emporium of knowledges in a weave of media, artistic forms, experiences, representations and practices, they are at once sites of displacement and contradiction. With a strangely secular magic they are thus able to inscribe instability into a given spatial order, and in turn generate the potential for shaking the very foundations of that order by temporarily effacing the accepted relationships that define and limit it” (Genocchio in Watson and Gibson, 1995: 43).

Such “imported homes” created by deterritorialized populations to retain contact with their homelands through recreating their homelands in a foreign setting (Wong, 1997: 34) brings new power to them to change identity of “city stranger” to “Chungking insider”. And this socially constructed counter-site has somehow embodied a form of “resistance” to our increasingly surveyed, segregated and simulated socio-spatial order when we as Hong Kong majority are de-powered to be the outsider of Chungking so that our arrogance of the “city master” would be shocked and upset as the heart of the city is no longer ours. Chungking Mansions, as an explicitly lively museum or theme park of different cultures in Hong Kong, constitutes a spatially and culturally tangible arena for alternative cultural articulation and practice of critical, progressive, transformative cultural politics and democratic participation. We may not reach the door of other cultures, yet we are closer to the door of cultural awakening that I am not the master, you are not the slave; you and I are equally one of the participants in this space.

Conclusion

The above represents a new concept of seeing the “others”, and more exactly the relation between “we” and “other”. This chapter intends to engage in critical

cultural research with an edge for redefining social relations. Its tactic is to uncover and re-discover the diversified representations of South Asians and Chungking Mansions by drawing on their particularities that have been traditionally unnoticed in dominant discourses. This chapter also wants to suggest that the ability to allow boundaries to be disrupted rather than trying to cling to settled boundary by means of the technique of othering is essential to engage relations of difference in productive dialogue for the transformation of both the self and the others. By deploying Foucault's discursive/theoretical invention *heterotopology*, the study, analysis, description, and "reading" of these other/different spaces, I try to problematize the normal practice of othering that forecloses the possibility to relate to oneself and the other in productive ways.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

As a Hong Kong Chinese among the 95% of the majority, after migration from Guangxi province in China and resettlement in Hong Kong society, I have been living in Hong Kong for more than twenty years. Placed in the peripheral position of an immigrant from the lower social strata, I tend to have sensitivity towards the “minorities” and have awareness of the social conditions especially problems of racial discrimination and social inequality that most minorities are facing in Hong Kong. That is why I am concerned with the South Asian ethnic minorities and I am interested in exploring a more nuanced and multifaceted picture of these ethnic/cultural minorities. My experience enables me to see that monotonous/monologic characterizations are necessarily detached from contents of living experiences. With regard to the multiplicities of living realities, such characterizations can only be abstract simplifications susceptible to the dangers of homogenization and essentialization sustained by a system of binary oppositions. In fact the mainstream discourse of minorities is inscribed within such a polarizing disposition, pitching the South Asians against the majority Chinese population while homogenizing and essentializing both, reducing the diverse lived experiences of the South Asians to a solitary form of ‘social loser’ or ‘social burden’ in discourses serving for the purposes of branding Hong Kong as a World Class City inheriting capitalist ideologies and values. The research question “Approaching South Asians in Hong Kong” is first motivated by the experiences of my personal involvements

outside the academic institutions, and slowly comes to become an object of critical study for my research. It starts from an inquiry of my personal concern as well as personal experiences that shocked me and led me to question the assumptions and presuppositions I encountered in these experiences.

Hardly could I get through the main entrance of the Chungking Mansions where the little doorsill was unimaginably crowded, many hands holding food menus were swaying in front of me and blocking my vision and way. My friend, Aditi, an Indian woman, could take it so easily. I guessed maybe my Chinese face brought me this trouble. I tried to walk closer to her, so that I could get some sort of ‘protection’. Maybe her apparent ‘Indian-ness’, which is the protection for me, could make a symbolic meaning to the people in Chungking that “I am neither a total outsider nor an unfriendly intruder”. Somehow they could get it, so they withdrew their hands and menus but responded with smiles. I followed her quickly straight to an old-looking staircase leading to the second floor. Still I could feel some “special” gazes that I might feel “strange” to get in touch with from the people standing along the corridor. However, I knew for them it was a natural response to see a Chinese-like girl following an Indian woman so closely. The staircase was just too narrow to let two people walk shoulder to shoulder, so I still went after her. A few Indian-like/Pakistan-like men and women were waiting at the other end of the stairs; just at the time I reached the place where they were standing I suddenly sensed that “at our closet point we were just 0.1cm apart” (*Chungking Express*, 1994). This was my first time to Chungking and that is also my first impression of Chungking Mansions.

The next time we went we managed to get through the main entrance with much less difficulty. The little doorsill was still as crowded as usual, but the hands holding food menus did not try to catch us. My husband who is Indian was holding my hand and walking with me closely. Maybe his “Indian-ness” explained to the people that I was also a part of Chungking, this kind of shared “sameness” made me more qualified to be an “insider”. Probably they took me as Indonesian or Nepalese. Yet I could sense some people standing along the corridor looking at us so strangely

and some of them were also whispering behind us. I did not understand their language, but their curious facial expressions told us that they were discussing about us. However, I knew for them it was a natural response to see a Chinese-like girl walking so closely with an Indian man. We neglected the strange gazes and tried to search for an Indian restaurant for dinner. But our curious glances frequently directing to the people and things (as I was attracted to see the beautiful decorations and Indian movie posters, and he was shocked as I did the first time to see so many different ethnic people in such a special building) betrayed that we were “new comers” there. Thus, a man came forward to us and asked: “do you need a hotel room?” We promptly said: “no! We don’ t.” Obviously we had no big suitcases we should not be tourists looking for any hotel room. Why would he ask us this question? From that question, I knew that the man might think us as sex worker and client.

Why Does “South Asians in Hong Kong” Become an Object of Critical Study?

From these relatively ‘common’ experiences recurring in a site of ‘unfamiliarity’ that the Chungking Mansions usually brings us, I try to ask myself questions like: what kind of cultural and social relations that I (as of other local Hong Kong Chinese - the majority) and they (predominantly the so-called South Asian ethnic minorities – the minority) are constructing and practicing in this special space? How are these relations related to cultural and historical formations? How can these explicitly differentiated borders (physically and conceptually) be created and used to work for hidden political and social agenda? What are the ‘rules’ guiding the particular kind of thinking model about ‘culture’ and cultural practice? I also try to depart from a question of the encounter of a *heterotopic* space to a wider social and cultural context in contemporary Hong Kong, exploring South Asians in different aspects of cultural process and the ways that the mainstream society manage and incorporate cultural diversity.

Thinking ‘culture’ as a terrain of conflict and contestation that enjoys a more or less canonical status as the founding concept of cultural studies, I focus specially

on the concept of ‘representation’ as a radical cutting edge for the study of South Asian ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. Thus, the *possible* meaning(s) this experience of encountering the ‘other space’, in Foucault’s theoretical discourse, can be (re)produced and interpreted as a complicated process of cultural translation/transformation, (continual struggle over) multiplicity/ multiplication and fluidity/fluidization of social and cultural meanings, continual interplay of and negotiation with cultural politics and politics of identity. I started the research from the inquiry itself and sought appropriate resources from different places.

Summary of the Chapters

The thesis does not intend to provide a cohesive picture that normally historians (positivist works) working on a specific ethnic group in a society would provide. Instead, I try to focus on some core debates that have been manifesting the kind of common mis/conception and mis/representation of ‘South Asians’ in Hong Kong. Different themes and questions are emphasized and teased out in the different chapters. The core topics covered in the thesis are multilateral and interrelated to each other in the circuit of meaning production, distribution and consumption about ‘South Asians’ in Hong Kong.

Chapter one reveals primarily historical, socio-political and institutional conditions/contexts for the production of authoritative texts about ‘South Asians’ based on the interests of specific classes or groups. Besides its challenge of a predominant production of knowledge/discourse on this subject as if it can be merely a homogenous representation / utopia, the chapter also urges for an urgency to include the discussion of “South Asian ethnic minorities in Hong Kong” within a cultural studies framework in which culture is seen as a key site of the production, re-production as well as transformation of the social relations of everyday life. This chapter provides a macro perspective that the discussion of South Asian ethnic minorities cannot fail to see its complicated relations in and with the complexity of the whole colonial and post-colonial history, political economy of production as well

as the cross-cultural encounters and interactions of peoples in processes of colonization, decolonization and the later forms of globalization such as the migration of people from South Asian region to Hong Kong for various reasons. This contextualization challenges the simplifying, homogenous thinking that normally fixes “South Asians” into a utopian space of imagination and representation.

In the heterotopic site of politics, “South Asians” is a politically constructed collective identity especially when they strive for their self-representation and assert political rights which are denied by the mainstream society. However, among the South Asians themselves there are numerous differences or contradictions interwoven and embedded in deep social and cultural positions. Therefore, I try to read historical and social “facts” carefully, attending to details, complicated processes, and different perspectives with the purpose of interrogating the wider social text in which ‘South Asian’ subjects are produced and which simultaneously provide them space of interruption, disruption, negotiation with homogenisation or reinforcement.

Chapter two reveals some major political struggles in the political site that throughout the years the South Asian communities have engaged and practiced in campaigns for citizenship and political representation. It teases out the complexity of the cultural elaboration of some emergent political identities in the so-called “South Asians’ movements”. Yet the use of the term or identification as “South Asians” is still very much useful, though problematic, to South Asian people to find a rallying point in forming solidarity because the subject position of the South Asian ethnic minorities, a disenfranchised group, is important to confront the unacknowledged social and power structures in the mainstream society. This chapter looks at the questions of culture-as-power in the terrains of power struggle within which powerful social relationships are played out and possibilities for social betterment are opened up or closed down (Johnson, et al., 2004: 10). It should be noted that their heterogeneities and multiplicities should / could not be repressed or concealed in such a single naming, and therefore their lived realities, consisting of many voices/views (polyvocality) of the South Asian communities, are evaluated as

powerful resources to fight against the wider social context and its structures of inequality.

Chapter three focuses on a heterotopic educational and linguistic site. This chapter is a continual exploration for understanding the heterogeneity of the group because “South Asians” as an organizing political identity cannot deal with the differences in everyday life where language is acutely problematic for South Asians who are in fact multi-linguistic communities. Worse, the hegemonic educational system in Hong Kong has no recognition of their differences. This chapter explores how the conditions and effects of the mainstream Hong Kong education system have unequally and disproportionately affected ethnic minority students. It argues that notions of cultural diversity and special cultural upbringings that have importantly constructed the children’s subjectivities should be well catered and incorporated into critical pedagogical practices in schools.

In the major terrains of conflict and contestation and of incorporation and resistance, for instance, the legislation against racial discrimination, and integration and negotiation in formal education system and linguistic policies, South Asian communities are in continual search for and praxis of the cultural politics of social intervention, the politics of social movements and social transformation at personal and social arenas.

This thesis also takes social structures of inequality seriously and tries to complicate the way in which we have become accustomed to understanding those structures, particularly in everyday imagination of the Other, a utopian mode of thinking as a habitual practice. Chapter four focuses on textual analysis of a few selected media texts and of Chungking Mansions – the other space – that have inferred the way of life of the South Asian ethnic communities from their public representation. *Heterotopologies*, associated with the work of Foucault (1967), makes a critical challenge to the homogenous / homogenized model of conceptualizing ‘space’ by exposing its multiplicity and historicity. It unravels the way in which certain taken-for-granted truths are not universal or timeless but

products of specific historical and political agendas. I also realize that sometimes the structural formations manifest in appearance of ingrained/subtle forms and in the history of cultural formations. Thus, chapter four chooses to take poststructuralist strategies to unravel discourses that mediate our understanding of the world. For instance, value formation and prejudice foundation are *constitutive* of some predominantly unjust social relations and social practices within Hong Kong society.

As exposed in the South Asians' struggles in the three arenas, there is a potentially infinite number of 'truths' or ways of approaching and transforming the reality. I am not inclined to find out a 'best solution' for those questions; after all it is up to the people to live their own lives, for better or for worse. However, I think a good and valid research, aiming at contributing to efforts for social transformation and social justice, should be aware of its own historical, political and social investments, continuously reflecting on its own commitments. It should also expose the historicity, political investments, omissions and blind spots of social 'truths' (Saukko, 2003: 21).

What Can This Research Most Usefully Aspire To Be?

Against the realist claims of 'truths' / 'true' representation about South Asians, I intend to take a politically conscious and selective approach to the question of the "South Asians" in Hong Kong. I try to depict the processes in which the South Asian minorities are reshaping social relations and transforming the forms of living reality. My purpose, in contrast to the realist approach to give 'true/accurate' definition to South Asians, is to provide readers a particular angle or representation among many to read the South Asian communities more critically. The cultural studies approach understands 'culture' in a political sense as Tony Bennett points out, that "culture emerges as a set of relations and practices that is involved in managing the social by acting on it rather than as a mediated reflection or expression of relationships that are rooted in the social" (Bennett, 1998: 11). Therefore, my thesis, as a response to the changing historical and political conditions constitutive of the South Asian ethnic minorities, a specific contemporary order, aims to offer a critical

analytical tool for the questioning of the dominant structures and relations and events that have constituted the conditions of existence and effects on the South Asian ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.

I, as a writer to give and reconstruct meanings to this specific group, try to position myself in a relatively ‘de-centered’ or ‘peripheral’ position to see the others in a shortened distance both in material and conceptual senses. Simultaneously, this distanced position helps me to estrange the taken-for-granted assumptions that effect the kind of racial bias and all racist norms, and to alienate an enclosed world view that is not open to the ‘other’ and ‘difference’. As culture happens and functions in reciprocity / mutuality / relations, therefore, respect for the South Asian ethnic minorities and possibilities of transforming social relations can only be given full weight if conceptualizations of knowledge, culture and politics are subject to revision and self-reflexivity. Stuart Hall suggests a way to work for ‘racial/social equality’ by highlighting the contestation of the notion of ‘ethnicity’, a key new cultural politics, in the British Black Movement. He writes that contestation should be carried out in a critical fashion and is necessary:

What is involved is the splitting of the notion of ethnicity between, on the one hand the dominant notice which connects it to nation and ‘race’ and on the other hand what I think is the beginning of a positive conception of the ethnicity of the margins, of the periphery (Hall, 1992: 258).

This shows important insights and validities to Hong Kong Chinese to reflect on the building of communal relationship among majority/Hong Kong Chinese and minorities across boundaries of differences in language, colour, ethnicity, nationality, history, etc. Decoupling ethnicity from the dominant discourses and equivalence with nationalism, imperialism, racism and all sorts of violence of the state is crucial to emancipate the social participants from a tense racial relationship. This also provides a useful post-colonial critique to question and emancipate ourselves, the so-called new Chinese nationals/subjects, who are traumatized in a crossroad of colonial legacy and post-colonial society, from the confused identity constructed by clashes of colonial remnant/effect and an enforced/fostered hegemonic conception of Chinese-

ness or Chinese ethnicity. We should think about how to represent and practice a non-coercive and a more diverse conception of ethnicity that is people-centered and attentive to cultural diversity by acknowledging their history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity.

This thesis admits the kind of ‘partiality’ that is inevitable to all approaches of representation as it is a necessary human condition of knowledge production. I expect my reading and writing on ‘South Asians in Hong Kong’ will be subjected to interpretations that are always followed by other interpretations, in an endless chain, as the ‘circle of meaning’ is ever in its production, distribution and consumption of culture. I bear in mind that my role in representation is not “transparent” as those involved in interpretations in the production and organization of meanings are bounded temporally and spatially, enabled as well as constrained by the particular experiences, cultures, and social horizons effective in the shaping of our subjectivities. In other words, it is our duty to remain vigilant with regard to the affective driving forces of our agencies underlying all critical practices.

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