

## **BETWEEN TWO HOMES**

### **The Lives and Identities of Pakistani Women in Hong Kong**

**SO Fun Hang<sup>1</sup>**

Pakistanis have been in Hong Kong for generations because of the British government, which recruited some Pakistanis as policemen from Pakistan. Most of these Pakistanis usually keep connections with their relatives in Pakistan. Some Hong Kong Pakistani women visit their family in Pakistan every year. Some only return when there are major events like, weddings or funerals. Some do not go back to Pakistan as they may not have time or money, especially after they have children. As Clifford (1997:25) suggests that one should look at culture in terms of travel relations rather than roots and home, this paper explores how Pakistani women in transit between Hong Kong and Pakistan present their identities through dress. Information for this paper is based on my field-trip to Hassan Abdal and Lahore, Pakistan in January 2009. On this trip, I was accompanied by my informant, whom I named Jannat.<sup>2</sup> I met the 28 year-old woman through voluntary work at a community center in Hong Kong. She is married to a Hong Kong Chinese and now is the mother of two sons.

Pakistani women's experience of life is very different in Hong Kong compared to that in Pakistan. In Hong Kong, for example, Pakistanis is a minority group in a predominately cosmopolitan Chinese society, where religious beliefs are seemingly not so important. Also, there is more or less "gender equality," with the roles of men and women overlapping both at home and in the workplace. Meanwhile, in Pakistan, the Pakistanis pay a great deal of attention to Islamic religious practices, with men and women observing distinctive roles. Pakistani men, for instance, are responsible for household finances while Pakistani women take care of the domestic sphere.

#### **Pakistanis in Hong Kong**

Now, there are around 4700 Pakistani women in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department 2007:24). Around half of the Pakistani population has lived in Hong Kong for over 10 years (Census and Statistics Department 2007:34). Some Pakistani women are descendants of Pakistani men who arrived in Hong Kong in the 1950s to work as policemen. Some Pakistani women are descendants or are married to migrants from Pakistan who came to Hong Kong to work as security guards or watchmen (White 1994:114). Others came to Hong Kong after marrying Hong Kong Pakistani men.

Now in Hong Kong, most Pakistanis live lower-class lives (Census and Statistics Department 2007:63). Moreover, most Pakistani women face gender and racial discrimination (Tam 2007, Ku et al 2003, Ku 2006). As an ethnic minority, they are discriminated against by the mainstream Hong Kong Chinese. As Muslim women, they are culturally excluded and are subject to the patriarchal control.<sup>3</sup>

Most of these women live with their spouses in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department 2007:32-3). It is uncommon for Pakistani women in Hong Kong to marry people of other nationalities (5.4 percent) when compared to that of Pakistani men (20 percent)

(Census and Statistics Department 2007:31-2). While there is around 20 percent of Pakistanis who have attained post-secondary education, this figure is significantly lower than most of the other ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department 2007:46).<sup>4</sup> In addition, 13 percent of Pakistanis in Hong Kong have not received either early childhood education or any schooling at all (Census and Statistics Department 2007:46). There is a high sex ratio<sup>5</sup> imbalance of Pakistanis in the age group between 35 and 65, which means that Pakistani men in Hong Kong are likely to leave their wives in other countries (Census and Statistics Department 2007: 24). White's explanation (1994:118) informs us most Pakistani men marry in Pakistan and leave their families there so that "they can work longer hours and earn more if so the men can resettle at home sooner; and their wives are not exposed to the corrupting influence of Hong Kong life...If families do join the Pakistani men, it is often when the children have reached school age, and it is felt that the educational advantages outweigh the costs and other problems".

### **Reasons for the Abilities to Shift Identities**

Why are Pakistani women in transit able to shift their identities or perform their Hongkongese and Pakistani images at different times? I have discovered three main reasons. First, the images of Hong Kong and Pakistan differ significantly: Hong Kong provides a relatively safe and stable living environment equipped with welfare services compared to a politically unstable Pakistan. Whereas in Pakistan, the economy is stagnant, plus there is raging war with the Taliban and also widespread unemployment. Hong Kong on the other hand is an attractive city filled with hi-technology, a corruption-free government and has a flourishing economy. This image is deeply-rooted in the minds of Pakistanis in Pakistan and therefore largely contributes to the shifting identities of Hong Kong Pakistani women.

Second, due to the difference in living standards between Hong Kong and Pakistan, these Pakistani women have acquired two very different social statuses. The standard of living in Hong Kong is much higher than that of Pakistan, so the amount of monthly salaries in Hong Kong can be as much as ten times that of their counterparts in Pakistan. Therefore, if Pakistanis are able to save enough money before their return, they can assume middle-class lives in Pakistan.

Third, Hong Kong Pakistani women have experienced lives overseas and because of this, they are able to accumulate social and cultural capital. This is done through financial support, such as remittances; and the provision of networking or migration consultation to their relatives in Pakistan (c.f. Werbner 2002:65). These Pakistanis are able to capitalize on their knowledge of Hong Kong and experiences of migration, which in effect, constitutes to their higher social status and ability to shift their identities.

### **Dressing-up a Cosmopolitan Identity**

Now, borrowing Goffman's idea (1959:22), I consider the activities in which Jannat shifts her identities as "performances". The term "performance" refers to "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers". These performances may include change of clothes, the act of presenting gifts, sharing of expe-

riences, holding housewarming parties, and treating relatives at restaurants etc.

In this paper, I have chosen to focus on two means of performances, in which Jannat stage her identities: dress and investment on land properties. Dress in this sense, is a useful lens to understand how identities are presented and also how social status are differentiated. Ku (2006:291) reminds us, “Dress identifies the wearer’s community to other groups and communities, and may also reflect the other’s status”. Meanwhile Plüss (2006) notes how multi-ethnic Muslims in Hong Kong may re-territory or de-territory characteristics, by using clothes as a marker to assimilate the dominant Muslim groups. Next, I use Jannat, as a case study, to illustrate the ways identities have shifted through dress performances.

### *Wearing “western” Clothes in Pakistan*

When I followed Jannat back to Pakistan, Jannat wore what I consider, “western-style” clothes: for instance, a dark green turtle neck long-sleeve vest with a pair of blue jeans and a black scarf. She had straightened her hair before her departure and did not use a scarf for *hijab* – so that her hair would not be curved. Even though when she arrived at Rawalpindi Airport, she still did not *hijab*. When she reached her sister’s home, her sister was taken aback by her new mobile phone adorned with sparkling beads, and a teddy bear key-ring which attached to her handbag. The use of teddy bears as accessories seemed to be inappropriate for Muslims—as an informant said that there should not be any portraits, dolls or living beings around when they pray.<sup>6</sup> As one can easily see, there is clearly some difference in the style of Jannat’s code of dress in comparison to her relatives at home.

During the flight to Islamabad, I asked Jannat what she felt about her western clothes. She replied, “I am worried that they [her family in Pakistan] would not like me wearing these clothes....If they asked, “why do you dress like this?” I will answer, you asked me to wear like this!” Before she moved to Hong Kong, she did not wear any western clothes because she understood that in Pakistan, women’s dress code was closely observed. So on this trip to Pakistan, she challenged the moral standards by dressing differently for the first time – in front of her relatives. Jannat good reason to wear western clothes was because I also wore western clothing when we went to Pakistan together. So as I accompanied her in western clothes, she might feel more comfortable about wearing Western clothes too.<sup>7</sup>

### *Keeping a Good Image*

Even though Jannat wants to keep a cosmopolitan image, at the same time, she is keen to portray an image of a “good” and “moral” Pakistani woman. When Jannat arrived home, her mother accused her of not wearing the *dupata* (Pakistani scarf) in Hong Kong. However Jannat exclaimed that she did and asked me to “testify” for her. Also, on the first day, Jannat changed from her western clothes telling me, “My brothers did not blame me [for wearing Hong Kong clothes]. But all the people here [on the streets] would stare at me. I know it is not good to draw attention here.” Dress as described by Ku, reflects Jannat’s actions. She changed to Pakistani clothes in fear of criticisms from both relatives and strangers. In this way, “the social control of body” (2006:291) allowed Jannat to blend in and keep a socially acceptable image, as she switched from a Hongkongese identity to Pakistani.

### *Double Standards*

There is a double standard for Jannat in terms of whether western clothes are appropriate for

Pakistanis. Jannat wore western clothes when she went back, yet in general, she was uncomfortable when she saw other Pakistanis becoming more westernized. For example, Jannat did not like what she saw, when her neighbor, a Pakistani man (who took the same flight with us to Islamabad), wore an oversized red Adidas jersey with blue jeans. Later, on the way to Lahore, Jannat saw a woman dressed in a suit and her response was, “Many people wear this [these days]. They are from ‘advanced’ family.” “Advanced” or “modern” are negative comments as explained by my informants because wearing western clothes reveals their body shape and is not appropriate for “good” Pakistani women – however, it is thought that people from upper-class backgrounds may wear western clothes. So when Jannat commented on this woman, she showed her disapproval. Jannat did not expect that women in Pakistan should enjoy the prestige of wearing western clothes, which, she felt, was a privilege to Pakistanis overseas.

Jannat remarked, “Shame on you!” after seeing a photo on my camera of me wearing a sleeveless dress in a banquet. At that moment I was worried, not knowing, whether she was being serious or not. Later, she tried to show my picture to her female family members. Once I found out, I secretly deleted that photo after she returned my camera, in fear of arousing further criticisms or causing embarrassment. Afterwards, she exclaimed, “Where’s the picture?” when she tried showing it to other people. I embarrassingly said that “I deleted it!” Then, surprisingly, she said, “It is so beautiful! Why did you do that?” And it was not until this moment that I understood what she had actually thought about the photo. She had not been serious when she teased, “Shame on you”. After this, I was able to learn that Jannat has an open-minded view toward what I wear. I assume this is probably because I am a non-Muslim Hong Kong Chinese, therefore I can suggest that she judged Hong Kong Chinese and Pakistanis with different standards.

#### *Reasons for Multi-layered Standards*

It is not difficult to understand why Jannat has different criteria to judge Hong Kong Chinese and Pakistanis in Hong Kong, versus Pakistanis in Pakistan. On the one hand, she faces extreme pressure from her family members in Pakistan. They do not like women wearing “unpleasantly” sleeveless attire, which in turn has caused her to be cautious when she is choosing what to wear. Once, her brother jokingly said, “I will kill you, if I see you wearing a sleeveless shirt!” However, she is encouraged to wear western clothing by her husband, who is a Chinese Muslim.<sup>8</sup> To avoid social and cultural exclusion, her husband prefers that she wears western clothes. Therefore, Jannat believes she has the freedom to choose whatever she wants to wear— though not sleeveless tops, in Hong Kong. As for her expectations of the moral standards of Hong Kong Chinese, it seems that she is aware of the fashion sense of Hong Kong Chinese and also the difference in cultural values between Hong Kong Chinese and Pakistanis. So although she looked surprised when she first saw my photo, Jannat did not critically judge me, and reacted in a joking manner instead.

#### **Shifting Identities**

Through dress, Jannat shifts her identities between Pakistani and Hongkongese in front of different audiences. She wants to look good in front of her relatives whenever she goes back to Pakistan from Hong Kong. So it is normal for her to wear western clothes on the first day of arrival in Pakistan. She demonstrates her westernized image, which is different from the

female counterparts in Pakistan, to show her foreign image and higher social status. Jannat performs differently in front of her relatives in Pakistan and therefore, it can be understood that she also performs differently in front of other audiences. Next, I discuss how Jannat performs in front of different audiences at different situations. The case of Jannat can illustrate her shifting identities in front of three major groups of people: 1) her parents, 2) Pakistani men, and 3) Pakistani women.

#### *In Front of Parents*

The freedom of dress is conditional for most Pakistani women, for example, some Pakistani women, who live in Hong Kong, are forbidden to wear jeans by their parents at any circumstances. Such requests by their parents are to ensure that their daughters are moral and religious when they grow up in a non-Muslim society, which seems to be a dangerous and polluting place for Muslims. Some parents, however, accept the fact that their daughters have to wear western clothes when the latter have to go to work in Hong Kong. Jannat also follows the “moral rules” for Pakistani women— that is, wearing Pakistani clothes with *dupata* – or with *abaya* on top, depending on the family background and practices. Other Pakistani women also follow the custom of dress in the village they stay in.<sup>9</sup>

#### *In Front of Pakistani Men*

In Pakistan, Jannat wore *shalwar kameez* for most of the time. Otherwise, the men on the streets would stare at her. In Hong Kong, she is free to wear western clothes without *hijab* when she goes out alone – except when she walks near Muslim or Pakistani men. She was reluctant to walk near Chungking Mansion or the Kowloon Mosque once. She said, “Don’t get close to that area! The men will look at me and ask me to go home.” The existence of Muslim men determines her physical mobility and image presentation. When she is away from Pakistani men, she can wear what she likes, preferably western clothes, in Hong Kong – although she always keeps her *dupata*.

#### *In Front of Pakistani Women*

In Pakistan, Jannat presented her cosmopolitan image in front of her female relatives. This does not necessarily have to be done through dress, but by talking about her knowledge about Hong Kong. For instance, she can talk about the high-tech transportation and comprehensive welfare system in Hong Kong. However, there is no need for Jannat to show-off in front of other Pakistani women who also reside in the territory because they usually understand the difficulties their countrymen encounter in Hong Kong.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, there are some occasions where Pakistani women in Hong Kong still have to adopt another persona. For instance, Jannat wanted to present a good image in front of a British Pakistani who visited her neighbor one day. Jannat was invited by her neighbor, Adaza, to meet her sister-in-law from the United Kingdom. Before Jannat went to meet this British Pakistani visitor, she put on her makeup and golden earrings as well as a purple and golden *shalwar kameez*.<sup>11</sup>

Living in Hong Kong, Jannat has less control from her distant family – because she does not have any Pakistani relatives from Hong Kong and does not live in a joint family household. This grants Jannat a lot of freedom in her leisure time in Hong Kong. She does not only watch pornography on cable television at home, but also talks openly about sex with her friends. At the home of her friend, Jannat and her friends commented on the size of the penis

of their husbands, and looked at their palms to check their future.<sup>12</sup> I was surprised by their amusing conversation and openness toward sex because such conversation was unusual even among Hong Kong Chinese. Although I do not understand Punjabi, I could tell from their gestures and certain keywords that they were talking about sex. Later, when I asked Jannat what they had talked about exactly, Jannat gleefully replied, “When you are married, you will understand.”

During the visit to Pakistan, one day, Jannat and her brother were watching music videos on an Indian television channel. The music video resembled the movie “Unfaithful” and was overtly sexual. Jannat talked to me in Cantonese in front of her brother – so that he did not understand the conversation. She said, “You know, I subscribed playboy channel in Hong Kong... I am married, so it is ok to watch it. My religion does not allow [me to do so]. But I only watch it; I don’t do it practically.”

Jannat might not have such a chance to talk about sex when she went back to Pakistan because she did not keep contact with any friend she had in Pakistan and therefore did not meet her friends in private when she went back to Pakistan. Even though before she was married, it was not easy for her to hang out with friends in Pakistan. On the contrary, her physical mobility and freedom increase in Hong Kong because she is a mother and is free from supervision from her relatives in Pakistan.<sup>13</sup> While Jannat stays in Pakistan, she lives under the same roof with her parents, brothers, and sisters-in-law, and their children, which means that there is little privacy. Jannat explained, “I cannot watch this [pornography] if I lived in Pakistan. The neighbors come by...” Jannat was frank about her habits of watching pornography or talking about sex during our conversations. Moreover, she is also cynical about some phenomena of Pakistanis in Hong Kong. She said, “Hong Kong Pakistani men sleep with Indonesians and Filipinos while their wives are in Pakistan. When they have sexual desire, they meet their girlfriends. So, there is no difference between Muslims and non-Muslims.”

Through the views and performances of Jannat, we can see that Jannat holds complicated array of multiple identities. On one hand, Pakistani women are expected to be the followers of Islam, uphold their Pakistani identity and the honor of family even though they migrated overseas – and this is done though dressing properly – with *dupata* and *shalwar kameez*<sup>14</sup> and sometimes *abaya* when they go out. Jannat is religious in a lot of ways: she defends for Islam, is faithful to *Allah* and strictly practices concepts of *halal* and *haram*. She was very careful about the play of dress when she was in Pakistan: because if she did not perform her role as a good Muslim Pakistani woman by dressing “properly”, her family members in Pakistan would be upset and strangers on the street may pass comments on her.

On the other hand, Pakistani women are not the defenders of their religion. However, religious and Pakistani cultural practices are sometimes overlapped. Thus while Jannat dresses in western style, she challenges the patriarchal family tradition, religion, and hence the conventional Pakistani identity.

### **A Cosmopolitan Identity in Pakistan**

Apart from dress, some Pakistani women use their investment in properties to show off their middle-class status in Pakistan although they have lower-class status in Hong Kong. This transnational transfer of wealth improves their social status in Pakistan and comforts them psychologically.

As a dishwasher, the social status of Jannat is low in Hong Kong. She lives in a public housing estate, which indicates that she is not well-off in Hong Kong. She has to work because her husband only earns around HK\$10,000 per month, which is barely sufficient to cover household expenses. The transportation fees of her elder son cost HK\$800 a month. She has to work in order to spare some money to pay for the air tickets to Pakistan, in addition to supporting her family finance in Hong Kong.

Even though she only earns HK\$3000 (around US\$370) a month, she can show an image of being middle-class and independent in Pakistan.<sup>15</sup> One of Jannat's brothers works as a telephone operator and earns Rs11000 a month (around US\$136.218). So Jannat earns much more than her Pakistani counterparts in her hometown.<sup>16</sup> This is because the living standard in Hong Kong is much higher than that in Pakistan. As mentioned previously, Hong Kong is more prosperous than Pakistan. This concept is deeply-rooted in the mind of my informants, who often remind, one Hong Kong dollar equals to 10 Pakistani rupees. In this way, Jannat can afford to dine out in middle-class range restaurants in Pakistan when she's back and offer gifts to her family members, such as a Versace aftershave cream and perfume, and a web camera for her brother.<sup>17</sup> I assume Jannat would not have been able to consume these goods and services had she not moved to Hong Kong.

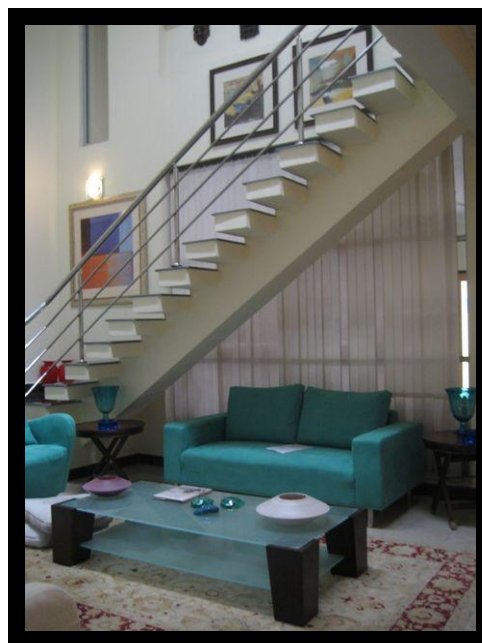
#### *Buying Land and Properties*

The best example that reflects Jannat's middle-class status in Pakistan is probably her financial capability to buy land and property. She bought one piece of land of around 5 *marla* (1100 square feet)<sup>18</sup> in her hometown near her mother's home. She sold this piece of land as soon as there was a good price. In addition, she bought another piece of land near the airport of Rawalpindi, which is believed to be a place of having a high economic return.<sup>19</sup> When she went back to Pakistan in 2009, on the same day of arrival, she visited her single-storey house of 5 *marla*, in Bahria Town in Rawalpindi, which was still under construction. This house costed her Rs3,199,000 (US\$39,457.8) which was bought with her husband's savings. Bahria Town<sup>20</sup> is a district filled with private housing in Islamabad. It is regarded as the upper-middle class and is situated in a safe area. The brother-in-law of her sister, who lives in United Kingdom, owns the same kind of house and is situated right next to Jannat's house.

When Jannat and I visited Bahria Town, we first went into the show houses which were well designed by the developer, and were furnished with luxurious imported furniture and electrical appliances, including an oven and a shower-room with massage functions.<sup>21</sup> There were two types of show houses: the first was a one-storey, and the same size as the one Jannat bought; while another was a two-storey, which was much more expensive and about six times as big as the first. When Jannat went back to Hong Kong, she showed pictures of the show houses to her friends (See Figures 1-2), although her house would not be as beautiful as the show house. Actually her house is still under construction and cannot be used for showing off (See Figure 3).



**Figure 1:** This is the dining room and table decorated by the property developer of Bahria Town. Jannat showed these pictures to friends in Hong Kong, especially the Hong Kong Chinese, as if this was her house.



**Figure 2:** This is a house in Bahria Town used as a showroom for the potential buyers. It is six times bigger than the house Jannat bought.



**Figure 3:** This is the actual house which Jannat bought. Her mother and sister are inspecting the place during the construction progress.



*Knowledge about Hong Kong and China*

Jannat's experience in Hong Kong becomes an asset for her to perform her Hongkongese identity. Her neighbors and relatives came to visit her in Hassan Abdal after they heard that she was back from Hong Kong. In front of her female counterparts in Pakistan, Jannat demonstrated her cosmopolitan image. For example, as her sisters-in-law were curious about what Hong Kong is like and asked about the size of Hong Kong, the transportation system as well as Chinese culture and language, Jannat became the representative of Hong Kong as she began to explain to them. In terms of food and drinks, Jannat also used it as a demonstration of her new image: she shared the "Bing Hung Cha" [bottled red tea] with her sister and sisters-in-law. Yet none of them liked it – they felt that it was a strange drink – but because of this contrast in taste between Jannat and her relatives, her Hongkongese image is more pronounced.

Not only have the remittances in material given Pakistani women higher social status in Pakistan but also the ideas and values that they brought from Hong Kong. Some Pakistani women, like Jannat, would bring about their ideas of fashion and taste of food and drinks upon their return to Pakistan. When she shows that her taste is different, she demonstrates the values that she has adapted to in Hong Kong. This is what Levitt (2001) calls social remittances. It is not just about financial support but ideas and practices that are transferred individually from the migrants to their sending community. When Jannat transfers the social remittances from Hong Kong to Pakistan, she also transforms her social status in Pakistan and the lives of her relatives.

The performances of investment imply that there is a high cost; the quality of life of Pakistani women in Hong Kong may be affected because of the enormous expenses in Pakistan. The relatives may think that Hong Kong Pakistani women are rich enough to send them remittances. They may depend on their generous relatives in Hong Kong for financial aid or sponsorship in dowries, electrical appliances or tuition fees. This is why; there are often complaints about the demands of new electrical appliances or even cars and vans among informants against their relatives in Pakistan. This is because sending remittances or building new houses, which shows their social status, "limits the possibilities for prosperity for the majority of transmigrants" (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001:89). Some middle-aged Pakistani women who live in Hong Kong said that rather than having money to help out family in Pakistan, they would instead save money for the dowry of their daughters.

This paper has, so far, described how Jannat shifts her identities through dress and investment performances. We can see that the identities of Pakistani women appear to be more fluid and flexible than it seems; Jannat and other Pakistani women do not seem to experience unease about their identities and contradictory performances. So how do Jannat and her relatives think about her identities? When Jannat and I were traveling in Lahore, Pakistan, I asked her brother whether he thought Jannat was a Pakistani or not. Her brother said, "She is half Pakistani, half Hongkongese." Jannat overheard our conversation and said, "I am 75 percent Pakistani and 25 percent Hongkongese." Jannat said so because she has a Chinese husband in Hong Kong and has lived in Hong Kong for almost 10 years. Nevertheless, Jannat does not consider herself as a Hongkongese in front of her Pakistani friends – "I am 100% Pakistani." She said. She seemed to be worried if her friends in Hong Kong would laugh at her in saying, "I am 75 percent Pakistani." This seems that Jannat has a degree of flexibility in conceiving and presenting her identities strongly depending on her

audiences and the situations she is find herself in.

This can be explained by the ideas of Werbner (2002:64), who says that Pakistanis in Britain have collective identities referred to as “a series of encompassing moral communities on a rising social scale, defined by language, region, or sectarian affiliation.” They can be “British – Pakistani – Muslim – Punjabi – Asian – Black – Mancunian – Sunni – Deobandi – Jhelmi – Gujar” while these identities do not necessarily contradict with one another when it comes to practice (Werbner 2002:64). So it seems that Pakistani women between Hong Kong and Pakistan may also have such collective identities and can shift between these identities without much contradiction.

## Conclusion

We have seen in this paper why and how some Pakistani women downplay or highlight their identities depending on different audiences and situations. Rytter (2009:3) who studies the negotiation of identities of Pakistanis in Denmark, says, “the enactment of identities is dependent on the specific local context and the recognition of significant others.” In front of relatives in Pakistan, they are careful in presenting their overseas Pakistani identity. In front of Pakistani men, they are concerned about their moral image while they may be more relaxed in front of their close female friends. In different contexts, their identities change in order to fit their social statuses, backgrounds, genders and expectations of the audiences.

What would it be like if the relatives of Hong Kong Pakistani women deliberately challenged these performances of identities? Throughout the two trips to Pakistan<sup>22</sup>, it seems that the relatives of my informants do not take these identities presented for granted. Some know that my informants have a lower-class status in Hong Kong and yet they do not challenge the Hong Kong Pakistani women openly. These Hong Kong Pakistani women can make use of their lives in Hong Kong and Pakistan to shift between “Pakistani” and “Hongkongese”, from “cosmopolitan” to “traditional” successfully only with the considerate help of their relatives. However, some Pakistani women from Hong Kong are careful about whether they are too intimidating to their relatives in Pakistan – because of how they act in front of their relatives. They downplay their financial abilities or are respectful to the elderly because they want to be seen as (or are) humble people. Some informants may even be very honest about the actual situation of their lives in Hong Kong so as to eliminate the illusions of their relatives in Pakistan, who hope for more remittances to be sent from Hong Kong.

These Pakistani women – despite the fact that they are of lower-class in Hong Kong – are able to show their higher-class status in Pakistan through dress and investment because of their social and cultural capital. This paper offers this perspective and it helps us to understand Pakistani women living between two places: Pakistani women have very different lives in Pakistan, which is almost unimaginable by the majority of Hong Kong Chinese, who simply see these Pakistani women as an ethnically discriminated group in Hong Kong.

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> So Fun Hang is currently completing her M.Phil. dissertation at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her E-mail address is funniso@gmail.com.

---

<sup>2</sup> All informants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

<sup>3</sup> In Hong Kong, some informants complain that their fathers are not happy with them if they wear western clothes. Some say that they do not go out of the public housing estate in the evening because their husbands do not allow them to do so. An informant hid at the corner in a weekday afternoon when she saw a friend of her husband walking nearby. She did not tell her husband that she would go out on that day. In order to avoid conflicts with her husband, she always goes into hiding. However, some Pakistani women are relatively relaxed in terms of clothes and physical mobility when compared to others. Jannat has a liberal Hong Kong Muslim Chinese husband. Therefore, she feels easier to change to western clothes and work outside home. Another informant shared that she had a fight with her husband in order to gain permission to take up full-time work outside of the home. As Pakistani men are busy at work in Hong Kong, Pakistani women have to do grocery shopping – unlike in Pakistan, men do the grocery shopping. Therefore, Pakistani women have more chances to go outside their homes in Hong Kong.

<sup>4</sup> The educational attainment (highest level attained) for Indians in post-secondary level is around 46 percent while it is around 73 percent for Koreans. For Nepalese, it is around 15 percent. However, the proportion of Nepalese who have upper secondary education level is 40 percent when compared to 25 percent of Pakistanis.

<sup>5</sup> Sex ratio is the number of males per 1 000 females (Census and Statistics Department 2007:5).

<sup>6</sup> When my Muslim friend heard about Jannat is fond of teddy bear decorations, she said surprisingly, “She is not a Muslim!”

<sup>7</sup> When another informant, Adaza, 39, went back to Pakistan in the summer of 2009, she also shifted her identities in front of her relatives. She wore the nicest *shalwar kameez* (Pakistani attire), which was given by her brother from United Kingdom. Although this was thick and too hot for summer, she used it because it looked the best among all her old clothes. Similar to Jannat, Adaza, also tried to demonstrate her good image in front of her relatives in Pakistan.

<sup>8</sup> Despite the fact that Jannat is married to a Hong Kong Chinese Muslim, she still reflects a lot of similarities with other informants who go back to Pakistan. Dress is the common way for informants to present their identities and attitude to their religion. Other informants have tried to play low key when they go back to Pakistan. Apart from dress, certain activities or performances can show the higher status of the Pakistani women who travel back to Pakistan. One used her professional camera to take pictures when she went back to the village where she was born. She showed the pictures that she took in Australia and Hong Kong to her friends. Another informant held a housewarming party for her new house, which cost Rs10,000 (HK\$1,000). This confirms her improved economic situation and higher social status in Pakistan than that in Hong Kong.

<sup>9</sup> For example, if young married women wear black *abaya* (an overgarment worn covering the whole body of the Muslim women), young Pakistani women from Hong Kong may follow suit during their stay in Pakistan; if older married Pakistani women wear white shawl in the village, instead of an *abaya*, older informants may do the same – with slight differences to show they are not from the same town occasionally.

<sup>10</sup> Although Jannat is a dishwasher, she lied that she was a hair washer in a salon in front of some distant friends in Hong Kong. This is because working as a dishwasher is a more low-paid and lower class job than being a hair washer.

<sup>11</sup> The British Pakistani woman whom Jannat visited also presented her identities through dress. Even though she was inside the home of her relative, she wore 4-inch high-heel shoes with her *shalwar kameez*. This seems that performances can be witnessed in both Jannat and the British-Pakistani woman. The only one whom I find did not perform her identities was the relative of the British Pakistani woman – at the time of visit, she was doing housework.

<sup>12</sup> Pakistani men usually leave their homes or go into the room when their wives receive female guests. So when the women talk about sensitive issues, they make sure that the Pakistani men cannot hear the content.

<sup>13</sup> However, as Jannat is married to a Hong Kong Chinese, she is “famous” in the Pakistani community. So how she acts is also subject to gossip.

<sup>14</sup> Amongst Hong Kong Pakistani women whom I interviewed, only a few of them wear western clothes. Those who wear western clothes are usually those who work – they find that they have to change to western clothes at work because their supervisors do not want them to wear *shalwar kameez*.

<sup>15</sup> As a working woman who can speak both English and Cantonese, Jannat seems to be more capable than the other female relatives. She is the only daughter who is married to a Hong Kong Chinese overseas. She works in Hong Kong while her sisters-in-law stay at home mostly or work in a parlor inside their homes. Jannat once said, “I don’t like staying at home and talk, talk, talk. Instead I like to be busy and work and earn a living. Otherwise, I would think about Pakistan.”

<sup>16</sup> Her brother does not want her to work outside home. Her family in Pakistan tried to send her a sewing machine because they think that she can sew and earn money by selling the clothes at home.

<sup>17</sup> When she came back to Hong Kong, she also brought a lot of clothes for her friends. She spent over HK\$3000 only on shopping in Pakistan. Later, I realized that she sold most of the clothes she bought in Pakistan to an Indian woman and earn HK\$20 (around US\$2) for each set of clothes.

<sup>18</sup> One *marla* equals to 272.25 square feet, or 25.2928 square meter.

<sup>19</sup> Jannat has to pay an installment of Rs15000 every three months. She transfers the money to her brother who does the transaction for her. She has asked if I could lend her HK\$3000 for her investment.

<sup>20</sup> Bahria Town is developed by a Turkish company and is located next to other expensive housing called Garden city and Safari Homes. This residential area seems to be very new with no facilities such as schools, commercial centres or shopping malls nearby.

<sup>21</sup> The flat of Jannat in Hong Kong is a two-bedroom flat of 400 square feet in a public housing estate. It is gradually equipped with plasma television and new sofa. However, it is not as luxurious as the one she visited in Bahria Town. The house that Jannat will have in Bahria Town is not as beautiful or luxurious as the house shown by the developer. Jannat will find it very expensive to equip her house in the same way. Obviously, a shower room with massage functions is too expensive for her to afford.

<sup>22</sup> I went to Pakistan with Jannat for the first time in January 2009. In summer 2009, I went to Pakistan again with another informant, Adaza. I spent two weeks at her place and then stayed at the home of another informant for one week.

---

**Bibliography**

- Census and Statistics Department. 2007. *Hong Kong 2006 Population By-census Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities*. Hong Kong: CSD.
- Clifford, James. 1997. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Glick Schiller, Nina and Georges Eugene Fouron. 2001. *Georges Woke up Laughing: Long-Distance Nationalism and the Search for Home*. Durham: Duke Univ. Press.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. "Performances." In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, pp. 28-82. London: Penguin.
- Ku, Hok Bun. 2006. "Body, Dress and Cultural Exclusion: Experiences of Pakistani Women in 'Global' Hong Kong." *Asian Ethnicity* 7(3): 285- 302.
- Ku, Hok-bun, Kam -wah Chan, Wai-ling Chan and Wai-yea Lee. 2003. *A Research Report on the Life Experiences of Pakistanis in Hong Kong*. Centre for Social Policy Studies, Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic Univ.: S.K.H. Lady MacLehose Centre.
- Levitt, Peggy. 2001. *The Transnational Villagers*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.
- Plüss, Caroline. 2006. "Becoming Different while Becoming the Same: Re-territorializing Islamic Identities with Multi-ethnic Practices in Hong Kong." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29(4): 656-675.
- Rytter, Mikkel. 2009. "A Sunbeam of Hope: Negotiations of Identity and Belonging among Pakistanis in Denmark." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 1-19.
- Tam, Maria S.M. 2007. "Being Female and Ethnic Minority: Gender and Social Capital among the Nepalese in Postcolonial Hong Kong." *First Global Conference: Multiculturalism, Conflict and Belonging*. Oxford, UK: Mansfield College. 3-6 September 2007.
- Werbner, Pnina. 2002. "The Place which is Diaspora: Citizenship, Religion and Gender in the Making of Chaordic Transnationalism." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28(1): 119- 134.
- White, Barbara-Sue. 1994. *Turbans and Traders: Hong Kong's Indian Communities*. Hong Kong: Oxford Univ. Press.