Multiracial Britishness

What does it mean to be British? To answer this, *Multiracial Britishness* takes us to an underexplored site of Britishness – the former British colony of Hong Kong. Vivian Kong asks how colonial hierarchies, the racial and cultural diversity of the British Empire, and global ideologies complicate the meaning of being British. Using multilingual sources and oral history, Kong traces the experiences of multiracial residents in 1910–45 Hong Kong. Guiding us through Hong Kong's global networks, and the colony's co-existing exclusive and cosmopolitan social spaces, this book uncovers the long history of multiracial Britishness. Kong argues that Britishness existed in the colony in multiple, hyphenated forms – as a racial category, but also as privileges, a means of survival, and a form of cultural and national belonging. This book offers us an important reminder that multiracial inhabitants of the British Empire were just as active in the making of Britishness as the British state and white Britons.

Born and raised in Hong Kong, Vivian Kong is Lecturer in Modern Chinese History and Founding Co-Director of the Hong Kong History Centre at the University of Bristol. She has published on diasporas, civil society, and press debates in interwar Hong Kong.

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Global Networks in Hong Kong, 1910–45

Vivian Kong
University of Bristol

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獻給我親愛的父母 — 江國有和蕭月嫦
以及我永遠懷念的爺爺 — 江永浩

For my parents, who made everything possible,
and in the loving memory of my late grandfather

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appears in 'Exclusivity and Cosmopolitanism: Multi-ethnic Civil Society in Interwar Hong Kong' (issue 5 of volume 63 of The *Historical Journal*). I am grateful that the publishers, Taylor & Francis and Cambridge University Press, allowed me to reuse the material from these earlier works in this book.

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Note on Terminology

It is necessary to clarify some of the terms used in this book before proceeding further – including those referring to different communities in colonial Hong Kong. I should make it clear that I am aware that 'race' and the perceived difference between races are constructions. Terms used at the time describing race, such as 'Chinese', 'British', and 'Eurasian', are problematic, and some of them are contested. Nonetheless, these social constructs had important implications for issues such as belonging, identification, and nationality. I therefore employ these terms only to understand the particular experiences of different communities in colonial Hong Kong.

Hong Kong was inhabited not only by the Chinese but also by many other races. These included those of the 'British race', a term that colonial officials used to describe those with unquestioned family origins in the British Isles, sometimes including Australians and Canadians. They were generally known as 'British' and held a distinctive social status in Hong Kong. Throughout this book, I will call them 'white Britons' to distinguish them from the people of colour in the colony who also identified themselves as Britons. My use of the term should not be taken as an indicator that I believe this whiteness was anything more than a discursive category.

Some clarifications should also be made about my use of the terms 'Eurasian' and 'Portuguese' in reference to two communities of 'mixed' ancestry in Hong Kong. The term 'Eurasian', originating in British India, referred to children born there to European fathers and Asian mothers. Its usage soon spread to the rest of the British Empire and later across the globe to refer to individuals of 'mixed' European and Asian ancestry.[1] On the China coast and in Hong Kong, the term was used to describe individuals of mixed ancestry – mostly of European and

[1] More on the history and meaning of the term in other parts of the British Empire, China, and the North America, see Emma Jinhua Teng, *Eurasian: Mixed Identities in the United States, China, and Hong Kong, 1842–1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 5–7.

Chinese (and sometimes Parsee, Middle-eastern, or Japanese) ancestry.[2] Historically speaking, many first generation Eurasians were illegitimate children and grew up with little connection with their European fathers. Nevertheless, there is a distinct, prominent community that originates from such circumstances, which, in the minds of those within and outside the community, occupies an intermediary place in Hong Kong's colonial society.

While also of 'mixed' ancestry, the 'Portuguese' were known as a population distinct from the Eurasian community. Also known as 'local Portuguese' and 'Macanese', most were descendants of Portuguese who, since the sixteenth century, had come from Portugal to Asia and had relations – mostly within matrimony – with the native populations. These Portuguese migrated from other Portuguese enclaves in Asia – such as Goa – to Macau as it became a Portuguese holding in China. Hong Kong's economic opportunities lured many to migrate from Macau to the colony from the 1840s onwards. Because of their cultural and religious practices and link with Portugal (albeit tenuous)[3], the 'Portuguese' experienced sociopolitical circumstances distinct from the Eurasian community.

[2] See Vicky Lee, *Being Eurasian: Memories across Racial Divides* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), pp. 2–3.

[3] See Felicia Yap, 'Portuguese Communities in East and Southeast Asia during the Japanese Occupation', in *Portuguese and Luso-Asian Legacies in Southeast Asia, 1511–2011, Vol. 1: The Making of the Luso-Asian World: Intricacies of Engagement,* edited by Laura Jarnagin (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011), pp. 205–28.

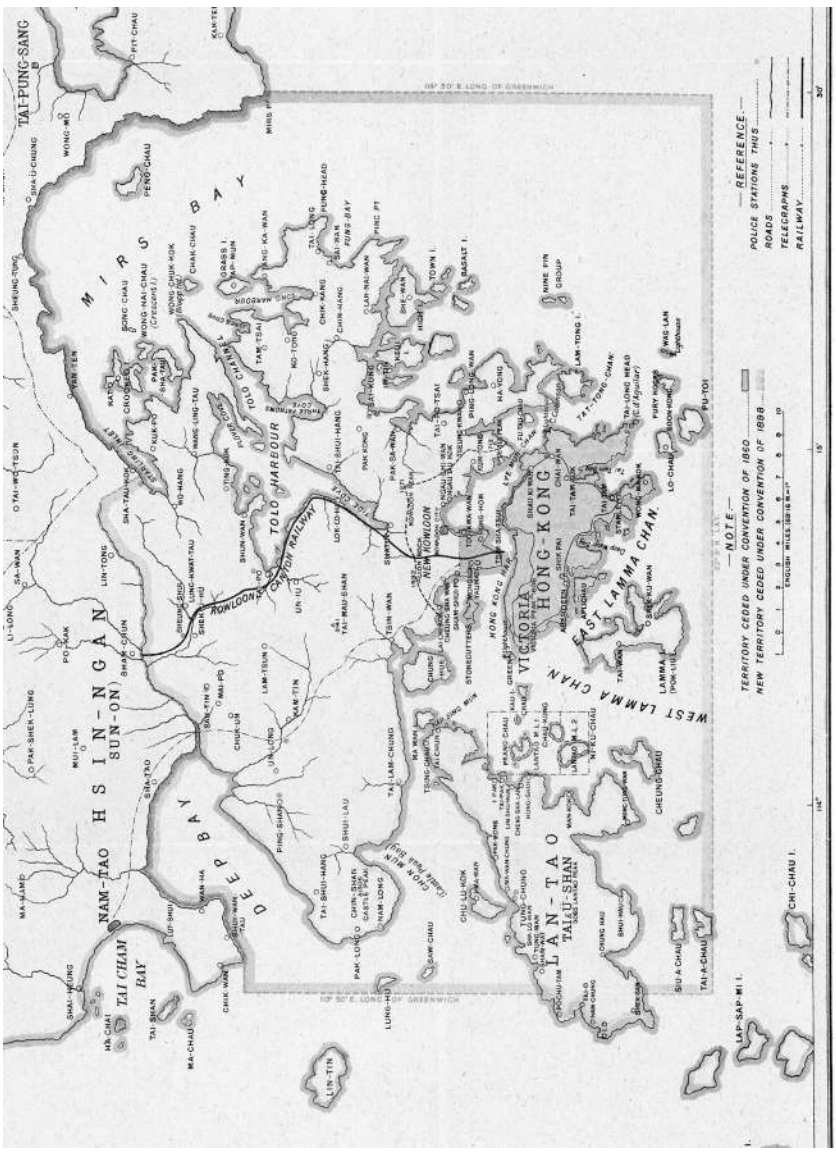

Figure 0.1 Map of the colony of Hong Kong