Money Circulations and Fabric Exports from China to Dubai through Indian Diasporic Connections

An anthropological lecture by Cheuk Ka-Kin
Friday 18 November at 7:00 p.m.
Hong Kong Museum of History
Lecture Hall, Ground Floor, 100 Chatham Road South, Tsim Sha Tsui
All are welcome! Space, however, is limited to 110 seats.
The lecture is conducted in English.

Chiefly drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in the district of Keqiao in Zhejiang Province, China, and other related field sites—including India and Hong Kong—since 2009, this talk will show that irregular financial transactions play a significant role in the sustenance of otherwise tenuous business relations between Indian traders and Chinese suppliers in the China–Dubai fabric trade. Much of the fabric exported from Keqiao to Dubai relies on intertwined formal and informal transactions operated by Indian diasporic trading networks. These labyrinthine transnational money transactions aim to circumvent institutional hurdles and overcome deficiencies in operating capital, yet inherent to this system is a cycle of payment lags that cause tense relations between payers and payees. Such money transactions facilitate eventual payment in most cases, most of the time and maintain enough trust to keep the trade network alive. Furthermore, the interlocking circuits of money circulations also prevent the overaccumulation of wealth and power by any particular stakeholder involved in the international trade and defy or at least circumvent the formal political authority of state and financial institutions that seek to curtail such practices. These transactions, thereby, create a larger space for business survival among the grassroots players, especially Indian traders who may not have enough capital available when they initiate a deal with a Chinese supplier.

Dr. Ka-Kin Cheuk is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Chinese and History at the City University of Hong Kong. He holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Oxford. His research revolves around the study of migration, transnationalism, and inter-Asian connections, with ethnographic focuses on China, Hong Kong, India, and the Middle East. Having conducted fieldwork over the past 17 years on the Sikh diaspora in Hong Kong and on Indian traders in southeast China, he is currently developing a new project on the transnational flower industry and environmental ethics in China and Scotland.

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