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*The Raj on Nanjing Road: Sikh Policemen in Treaty-Port Shanghai**

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Abstract

Sikh policemen were an indelible part of the landscape of Shanghai in the first decades of the twentieth century, and have left their mark in the ways in which the city is remembered up to the present day. Yet their history has never been told and historians of the period have, at best, simply referred to them in passing. This paper redresses this gap in the literature by accounting for the presence of the Sikh branch of the Shanghai Municipal Police and exploring their role in the governance and policing of the International Settlement. This enriches our understanding of the nature of the British presence in China and the ways in which Indian sub-imperialism extended to China's treaty ports, for on the streets of Shanghai, and not Shanghai alone, British power had an Indian face.

Introduction

Sikh policemen were an indelible part of the landscape of Shanghai in the first decades of the twentieth century, and have attained iconic status in the ways in which this period of the city's past is remembered.

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Yet their history has never been told and historians of the period have, at best, simply referred to them in passing.[1] By accounting for their presence and their various roles in the governance and policing of the International Settlement, this paper demonstrates the importance of the Sikh branch of the Shanghai Municipal Police within the history of the city. It reveals an understudied site of Sikh migration, drawing on recent work on the Sikh diaspora[2] and developments in the sub-field of colonial policing, and enriches our understanding of the ways in which the British presence in China was influenced by Indian 'sub-imperialism':[3] on the streets of Shanghai, and not Shanghai alone, British power had an Indian face.

Anderson and Killingray, in their landmark volume, *Policing the Empire,* highlight the fact that colonial policemen were 'the most visible public symbol of colonial rule, in daily contact with the population and enforcing the codes of law that upheld colonial authority'.[4] Anderson and Killingray were driving home the importance of the surprisingly understudied colonial police forces in general.[5] But in the case of Shanghai's Sikh police this can be taken further, as

[1] The most comprehensive account in English is in Claude Markovits (2000). 'Indian Communities in China, c. 1842–1949', in Bickers, R. and Henriot, C. *New Frontiers: Imperialism's New Communities in East Asia, 1842–1953*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, pp. 62–64, yet Markovits is more concerned with Indian merchants. In Chinese, Xiong Yuezhi has paid the most serious scholarly attention to the Sikh policemen, though again his account is limited to a few pages: Xiong Yuezhi (2004). *Yizhi wenhua jiaozhi xia de Shanghai dushi shenghuo (City Life in the Cultural Melee of Shanghai)*, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, Shanghai, pp. 64–67.

[2] Tony Ballantyne (2006). *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina; Brian Keith Axel (2001). *The Nation's Tortured Body: Violence, Representation, and the Formation of a Sikh 'Diaspora'*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina.

[3] Tony Ballantyne (2002). *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, p. 15 and *passim*; Robert J. Blyth (2003). *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858–1947*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, p. 2 and *passim*.

[4] David M. Anderson and David Killingray (1991). 'Consent, coercion and colonial control: policing the empire, 1830–1940', in David M. Anderson and David Killingray. *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830–1940*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, pp. 1–2.

[5] Since Anderson and Killingray published twin volumes collecting the strands of the emerging scholarship on colonial policing (Anderson and Killingray (eds), *Policing the Empire*, and (1992) *Policing and Decolonization: Politics, Nationalism and the Police, 1917–65*, Manchester University Press, Manchester), the sub–field of colonial policing has continued to develop, most notably with the publication of Georgina Sinclair's doctoral work on colonial policing in the late stages of colonialism and decolonization. Georgina Sinclair (2006). *At the End of the Line: Colonial Policing and the Imperial Endgame 1945–1980*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.

their emblematic status made them symbolically more significant than the other branches of the Shanghai Municipal Police, both to the community they policed and to those who have remembered them since. This paper argues that they were and remain symbols of empire in the unique environment of Shanghai's International Settlement, where Britain's formal and informal empires overlapped and intersected.

Sikhs have featured in numerous popular portrayals of Shanghai during the treaty-port era. One famous example of Shanghai's Sikh policemen in popular culture is Tintin's adventure in *The Blue Lotus*, set in 1931. Hergé shows a Sikh directing traffic—their primary role within the police force—but also depicts three bloodthirsty Sikhs who are ordered to give Tintin 'a spot of corrective treatment' in the municipal prison.[6] Kazuo Ishiguro uses a description of Sikh policemen stacking sandbags against the threat of Japanese aggression in 1937 to set the scene as a detective mulls over his case at the British Consulate building in Shanghai, in his novel *When we were Orphans*.[7] Bruce Lee attacks a Sikh guarding the entrance to the Shanghai Public Gardens for refusing him entry in the 1972 film *Jing Wu Men* (*Fist of Fury*). Memoirs and popular histories written by former 'Shanghailanders'[8] reflect popular stereotypes of the Sikhs, such as that by former policeman Daniel Cormie who claims that 'the mentality of these men is on a par with a child of ten, their disposition happy, carefree and entirely uninhibited'.[9] There is no shortage of derogatory references to Shanghai's Sikh policemen in the canon of popular culture in both east and west.

In China, negative portrayals of Sikhs carry political resonance. Shanghai's Sikh policemen are infamous for their role in shooting

[6] They are instead subject to a severe beating themselves. Hergé (2002). *The Adventures of Tintin: The Blue Lotus*, trans. L. Lonsdale-Cooper and M. Turner, Egmont, London, first published 1936 in French, Paris, pp. 11, 32. Hergé was introduced to the Chinese art student Zhang Chongren from Shanghai in Brussels whilst writing *The Blue Lotus*. Their friendship had a strong impact on Hergé's views of Chinese culture and led him to strive to present an accurate portrayal of Shanghai with a less sympathetic perspective on colonialism than had characterized his earlier work.

[7] Kazuo Ishiguro (2000). *When we were Orphans*, Faber, London, p. 280.

[8] 'Shanghailanders' was the term used by British settlers in Shanghai to identify themselves. Robert Bickers (1998). Shanghailanders: The Formation and Identity of the British Settler Community in Shanghai, 1843–1937, *Past and Present*, 159: 161–211.

[9] Daniel G. Cormie, *Memoirs of a Shanghai Policeman*, arranged by Nora Cormie, unpublished memoir, Chapter 3.

Chinese protestors in what became known as the May Thirtieth Incident of 1925. Paintings such as '*Xueji*' ('Blood Sacrifice') by Ma Hongdao depict the event in such a way as to make it appear that Sikhs alone were shooting on the orders of Inspector Everson of the Shanghai Municipal Police, absolving Chinese members of the force of helping crush a demonstration which was a turning-point in the development of anti-imperialism, and marked the start of a major nationalist movement.[10] Sikhs are portrayed as the enemy, carrying out the dirty work of the imperial oppressors.

Chinese popular histories of Shanghai, of which there are many, invariably devote a paragraph to the Sikh policemen and their alleged cruelty.[11] Such publications usually include a reference to the slang term by which the Sikhs were known among Chinese, *hongtou asan*, which has been translated variously as 'red-headed monkeys', 'red-headed rascals', or 'turbaned number threes'.[12] All reflect their status in Chinese eyes as the vicious lackeys of their British masters. *Hongtou* is a reference to the red turbans that formed part of the police uniform for the Sikhs, while *asan* is thought to derive from the Sikhs' third-class social position in Shanghai, or from a transliteration of either the British exclamation 'I say' or 'ah, sir', as Shanghai's Chinese addressed the Sikhs.[13] Popular racist perceptions of Sikhs feed into a discourse which distinguished 'black devils' (*heigui*), the Indian troops of the British in nineteenth-century China, from the 'white devils' (*baigui*) who commanded them.[14] During disturbances in 1913 it was reported to the Chairman of the Shanghai Municipal Council that young Chinese 'say that they will endure Chinese or foreigners to safeguard the district but they will resist the "Black slaves"'.[15] Frank Dikötter has demonstrated that racism was and remains as prevalent in China as in Europe and North America, and the prevailing hierarchical views

[10] Pan Yunxing, ed. (1998). *Shanghai lishi youhua xinzuo (New Oil Paintings of Shanghai History)* Dongfang Press, Shanghai, p. 22.

[11] See, for instance, Wang Jinhai (2002). *Jiu Shanghai bao chou tu (The Ugly Old Shanghai)* Shanghai Science and Technology Press, Shanghai, pp. 84–85.

[12] Robert Bickers (2003). *Empire Made Me: An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai*, Penguin, London, p. 86; Betty Pei T'i Wei (1987). *Shanghai: Crucible for Modern China*, Oxford University Press, Hong Kong, p. 101; Frederick Wakeman (1995). *Policing Shanghai*, 1927–1937, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 343.

[13] Xiong Yuezhi, *Yizhi wenhua jiaozhi xia de Shanghai dushi shenghuo*, pp. 65–66.

[14] Frank Dikötter (1992). *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, Hurst, London, p. 38.

[15] Shanghai Municipal Archives (hereafter SMA), U1-2-427/1840: Stafford M. Cox to E. C. Pearce, 29 July 1913.

of the late Qing and Republican periods counted people designated as 'black', including Sikhs and other Indians, as inferior even to the white imperialists.[16] It is a racist characterization of the Sikh policemen that helps ensure the popular resentment felt towards them continues to this day.

Visitors to the Shanghai History Museum are presented with waxwork figures of Sikh policemen, and a recent blog based on a magazine article on Shanghai's Sikh policemen and the comments which follow demonstrate the continued interest in and significance of these historical figures.[17] Sikhs thus feature widely in all media concerning treaty-port Shanghai. Why were they such ubiquitous figures in contemporary portrayals of the International Settlement, and why do they continue to carry such emblematic power today? Why, indeed, were Sikhs brought to police the Settlement at all? Robert Bickers has succinctly identified 'a three-fold purpose' for the branch: economy, defence and display.[18] This paper analyses these three co-existing functions of the Sikh branch, as well as their other roles in the Settlement, drawing out the influence of British India on practices in Shanghai. It then considers other ways in which Shanghai's 'sub-imperial' connections to India impacted the Sikh community there and explores the mobility of the Sikh diaspora but also the limits to that mobility. A consideration of the growing influence of Indian nationalism and the position of Sikh policemen in wartime Shanghai concludes the account of the Sikh Branch of the Shanghai Municipal Police.

By clarifying the role of this prominent element of the British presence in China, this paper demonstrates both how the formal and informal empire overlapped and interacted and the significance of the Sikhs as symbols of empire in maintaining the British position in Shanghai. Thomas Metcalf and Robert Blyth have convincingly made the case that India exercised 'sub-imperial' control over British

[16] Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, pp. 77–79 and *passim*.

[17] 'Da Duhe', 'Jiu Shanghai zujie Yindu xunbu 'hongtou asan' bagong fengchao' ('Strike and Unrest among Shanghai Foreign Concession Indian Policemen or 'hongtou asan'), 18 August 2009, http://blog.163.com/cdy513124@126/blog/static/250480082009718827595 76/, [accessed 24 January 2012]; original article: Wu Zhiwei, 'Jiu Shanghai zujie de Yinbu fengchao' ('Unrest among the Indian Policemen of Old Shanghai'), *Dang'an chuqiu (Memories and Archives)*, No. 4 (2009), pp. 52–54.

[18] Bickers, *Empire Made Me*, p. 86.

interests throughout Asia and beyond.[19] As will be shown, colonial networks extending to India led to Sikhs policing outposts of empire from Shanghai to Ceylon, while the Government of India dictated the terms under which they were recruited. Yet perhaps more significantly the symbolic power of India in the imagining of the British empire, by the British and by other nationalities, has helped secure the position of Sikhs in the history of Shanghai.

The establishment of the Sikh branch: an economical decision

After Shanghai was opened as a treaty port in 1843, the infrastructure of the small and initially solely British-run settlement was overseen by a Committee of Roads and Jetties. In 1854 this was reformed as a Municipal Council, and in the same year for the first time a police force was established. Chinese were recruited to the force from 1864, and the idea of recruiting Sikhs was first seriously mooted by the Shanghai Municipal Council in 1883, as part of a major re-organization and increase to the size of the Shanghai Municipal Police.[20] One European constable for every two Chinese was considered the ideal ratio, but the cost of so many European salaries proved prohibitive. Instead, it was proposed to employ Sikhs who could be recruited at much lower wages, an idea supported by the new Captain Superintendent, J. P. McEuen, who had seen the Sikh Branch work well at his previous post as Deputy Superintendent in Hong Kong. The first Sikhs engaged by the Shanghai Municipal Police were recruited locally: Sikhs were already employed in Shanghai as private watchmen, as they would continue to be in increasing numbers throughout the existence of the foreign concessions, forming with the Sikh branch of the Shanghai Municipal Police a sizeable Sikh community. A bungalow on Carter Road was leased for the recruits from 1 September 1884, at first

[19] Thomas R. Metcalf (2007). *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860–1920*, University of California Press, Berkeley, pp. 1–14; Blyth, *Empire of the Raj*, pp. 2–8 and *passim*. Blyth's emphasis is on what he terms India's 'western sphere' from the Persian Gulf to eastern Africa, which he terms the 'empire of the Raj', but he stresses that Indian sub-imperial influence extended to Central, Southeast and East Asia.

[20] The Shanghai Municipal Police (hereafter SMP)was founded in 1854, the same year that the Shanghai Municipal Council replaced the Committee of Roads and Jetties in running the Settlement, which had existed since 1843 in accordance with the terms of the Treaty of Nanjing. Chinese were recruited from 1864.

for just three months as it was not known if this experiment would succeed. Sikhs were to remain on the force for the next 60 years.

Recruitment directly from Punjab commenced in 1885, when the Sikh sergeant was directed 'to arrange for twenty additional Sikhs to take the place of the eight foreign constables who are now short' when he returned home on leave, reflecting the comparative value attached to foreign and Sikh policemen.[21] In those early years the main responsibility of the branch was the policing of Bubbling Well Road, in addition to some regulation of traffic. The policing of this area, external at the time to the International Settlement proper, was dependent on subscriptions (not always forthcoming) from the local residents, in contrast to the rest of the Shanghai Municipal Police's responsibilities which were funded from the general rates paid to the Council. With the extension of the Settlement to include so-called 'external roads' areas in 1893 and 1899, and the purchase of the Carter Road station in 1895, the Sikh branch had by this time become a permanent feature of the Shanghai Municipal Police.

The strict scales of pay applied to all municipal employees ensured that Sikh incomes were kept proportionately lower than those of foreign policemen, and higher than those of Chinese, throughout this period. This both maintained the racial hierarchy of the force and secured the status of Sikhs as an economical alternative to foreign constables. Table 1 details the size of the Sikh Branch in relation to the other branches of the Force from 1900 to 1940, showing that the Sikh Branch remained the second largest branch after the Chinese throughout the period.

The Sikh branch as a defence force

Sikhs were first recruited to the Shanghai Municipal Police in order to provide more protection for the foreign community in the face of the swelling refugee population, as Chinese sought security within the Settlement from the turmoil in the surrounding areas due to the Sino-French War of 1884–1885. There was a precedent for the use of Indians in China in a defence role. Indian soldiers had been in Shanghai with the British since 1840 and the First Opium War, and Sikhs were used extensively, alongside other Indian troops, by

[21] *Minutes of the SMC*, Vol. viii, 15 June, 1885, p. 267.

TABLE 1
The Shanghai Municipal Police by Branch

		1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Europeans	Total Branch	73	223	203	511	470
	% of Force	9.25	13.62	9.15	10.47	9.59
Sikhs	Total Branch	159	392	513	691	524
	% of Force	20.15	23.95	23.13	14.16	10.69
Chinese	Total Branch	557	1022	1463	3477	3629
	% of Force	70.6	62.43	65.96	71.26	74.05
Japanese	Total Branch			39	200	278
	% of Force			1.76	4.1	5.67
Total		789	1637	2218	4879	4901

Source: Shanghai Municipal Police, *Annual Reports* 1900–1940.

the British in the Second Opium War (1856–1860) and especially in the 1900 Boxer War.[22] The model for recruiting Sikh policemen came, however, as did many changes to the Shanghai Municipal Police organization and structure, from Hong Kong. The British territory employed Sikhs in its police force as early as 1867. The Deputy Superintendent of the Hong Kong Police, C. V. Creagh, had been transferred from the Sind Police the year before as part of the new Governor's shake-up of the colony's ineffectual force, and he recommended 'his trusty Sikh Policemen' to improve its efficacy.[23] They impressed the official community with their dedication to duty; according to certain residents 'there was never so fine a body of men landed in China'.[24] Little wonder that the practice of employing Sikhs as policemen travelled north to Shanghai, where the British community had imperial pretentions and was strongly influenced by the practices of empire. In this period, Sikhs were beginning to be employed in policing and military roles in many corners of Africa and Asia: evidence, as shown by Metcalf, of the way the British empire was 'centred' largely on India rather than Britain.[25]

[22] For more on the involvement of Indians in this war, see Anand A. Yang (2007). '(A) Subaltern('s) Boxers: An Indian Soldier's Account of China and the World in 1900–1901', in Robert Bickers and R.G. Tiedemann, *The Boxers, China, and the World*, Rowman and Littlefield, Plymouth, pp. 43–64.

[23] Darshan Singh Tatla (1999). *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood*, UCL Press, London, p. 48.

[24] Norman Miners (1990). The Localization of the Hong Kong Police Force, 1842–1947, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 18:3, 302.

[25] Metcalf, *Imperial Connections*, pp. 250–281.

The men recruited to the Sikh branch were almost without exception ex-sepoys from rural families with limited resources. Migration was seen as an honourable solution to financial problems faced by such families as the fragmentation of land-holdings and rising land prices placed their position under threat.[26] Competitive pay (up to five times that offered in the Indian Army)[27] and conditions, including nine months' leave on half pay with passage to India on the completion of a five-year term, made the Shanghai Municipal Police a tempting option for Sikhs looking for such work. The preferred method of recruitment was selecting men, or, from 1905, having men selected by Indian Army recruiting staff, directly from Punjab. This was an effort by the Government of India to exercise control over the spread of Indian subjects abroad, but as Indians continued to make their own way eastwards in search of work, the Shanghai Municipal Police, like forces in Malaya and elsewhere, also recruited locally.[28] Those who were not taken by the Shanghai Municipal Police generally found employment as watchmen for private firms, although there also existed a 'floating population' of destitute Indians, many of them Sikhs, which caused concern to the municipal authorities.[29]

Members of the Shanghai Municipal Police were housed in barracks, trained in drill and musketry, dressed in khaki, and subject to the hierarchy and discipline of military life. This reflects the wider imperial notion that colonial police forces constituted the first line of defence against internal security threats, which has been explored by Georgina Sinclair and David Killingray.[30] Without the perception of the Shanghai Municipal Police as a force (alongside the Shanghai Volunteer Corps) for maintaining order against the same potential internal threats to security faced in the colonies, Sikhs would never have been recruited. The 'Irish model' of the Royal Irish Constabulary,

[26] Markovits, 'Indian Communities in China', p. 63.

[27] Metcalf, *Imperial Connections*, p. 125.

[28] Shanghai Municipal Council, *Report for the Year 1892 and Budget for the Year 1893* (hereafter, for example, SMC, *Annual Report 1892*), p. 48.

[29] Two such Sikhs were deported in 1916, described as 'hopeless drunkards ... incapable of reform', 'a constant source of expense to public funds in the prison' and 'a danger to the rest of the Sikh community and to public order'. British Library, London (hereafter BL), IOR/L/PS/11/72, file P514/1914: Skinner Turner, Shanghai Supreme Court, to Sir Edward Grey, India Office, 8 September 1916.

[30] Sinclair, *At the End of the Line*, p. 4; David Killingray (1999). 'Guardians of Empire', in David Killingray and David Omissi (1999), *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c. 1700–1964*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p. 11.

though not the monolithic influence once claimed,[31] provided the precedent for this quasi-military style of policing so at odds with the traditions of the English constable.[32] It was then developed in India and rapidly became the colonial norm, applied wherever the threat of insurgency existed. The Royal Irish Constabulary which had been the primary influence on the Hong Kong Police, became, in turn, the model for the Shanghai Municipal Police.[33] Whenever there were difficulties with the Sikh branch, the Shanghai Municipal Council requested the temporary transfer of an Indian officer with expertise in managing Sikh sepoys to recommend improvements. Most notable amongst them was sometime Hampshire County cricket player Captain E. I. M. Barrett, who had commanded a Sikh regiment in the Indian Army prior to his appointment to head the Sikh Branch of the Shanghai Municipal Police and who went on to become Commissioner of Police.[34] The Indian Army provided the most significant model for Shanghai policing practice, not least in recruiting Sikhs: evidence that in this form Blyth's 'empire of the Raj' extended to China.

This exchange of ideas, practices and personnel in policing between different parts of the formal and informal empire illustrates a key aspect of colonial rule. The colonial lives of servants of the British Empire facilitated the spread of certain practices and values around the globe, as explored by David Lambert and Alan Lester.[35] Sites of colonial settlement were not only linked to the metropole in London, they were inextricably connected with each other in what John Darwin recently identified as the 'British world-system'.[36] As he, alongside Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, argues, this 'British

[31] See Richard Hawkins (1991). 'The "Irish model" and the empire: a case for reassessment', in Anderson and Killingray, *Policing the Empire*, pp. 18–32.

[32] Anthony Clayton and David Killingray (1989). *Khaki and Blue: Military and Police in British Colonial Africa*, Ohio University Center for International Studies, Athens, Ohio, p. 5.

[33] Bickers, *Empire Made Me*, p. 65.

[34] Similarly, the services of W. C. Clarke were obtained by the SMP in 1925 from the Indian Police, when he brought 80 Sikhs and Punjabi Muslims with him, and Major Frederick W. Gerrard arrived from India in 1929. SMC, *Annual Reports 1925* and *1929*. When Clarke was promoted to Director of Criminal Intelligence in 1927 he was succeeded as Assistant Commissioner (Sikhs) by Captain E. R. Kennedy, seconded from the Indian Army's Kumaon Rifles. SMC, *Annual Report 1927*, p. 33.

[35] David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds (2006). *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

[36] John Darwin (2009). *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830–1970*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

world' embraced both the formal empire and spheres of informal colonial influence in South America and China.[37] It was a network of shared ideals about how society should function, which included ideas concerning policing and social and racial hierarchy, which are amply evident in the practice of employing Sikhs to police multiple sites of British settlement. Tony Ballantyne's helpful conception of the empire as 'a complex conglomeration of overlapping webs' develops this theme of horizontal interconnection, by emphasizing how 'certain locations, individuals or institutions in the supposed periphery might in fact be the centre of intricate networks themselves'.[38] Thus India was at the centre of one web of empire, whilst Hong Kong and its police force were similarly at the centre of a further web that extended to the Chinese treaty ports such as Shanghai.

The structure of the Sikh Branch illustrates the importance of the influence of imperial practices, notably in India, on British communities in places like Shanghai, and the shared military model for colonial police forces. The most senior member of the Sikh Branch was the Jemadar, a term borrowed from the Indian Army where it denoted the lowest rank of Viceroy's Commissioned Officer at which level an Indian could command a platoon. He was considered crucial in maintaining order among the men, especially in the wake of disturbances such as those of 1906, when Jemadar Sardaga Singh was sent from the 47th Sikhs to help restore order and discipline to the Sikh branch of the Shanghai Municipal Police.[39] Below the Jemadar were Havildars and Naiks, equivalent to sergeants and corporals, followed by the constables. The use of Indian military ranks demonstrates both the influence of practice in India on that of the Shanghai Municipal Police, and the close relationship between policing and soldiery in the protection of the formal and informal empire.[40]

Sikhs enjoyed a reputation as a 'martial race', alongside Gurkhas and Scottish Highlanders. This built on their self-perception as a warrior

[37] Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, eds (2003). *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity*, F. Cass, London, pp. 7–8.

[38] Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race*, p. 15.

[39] SMA, U1-1-82: Minutes of the Watch Committee, 7 December 1906; SMC, *Annual Report 1906*, p. 42.

[40] In 1907 the Government of India overestimated this close relationship, demanding that the Sikh branch should be employed under military rules of discipline. But the SMC had to portray the SMP as a civil police force, as insisted upon by the consular body. BL, IOR/L/PJ/6/749, File 586/06: Telegram from the Viceroy to the India Office, London, 14 May 1907.

people, ordered by the Tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, to carry the *kirpan* dagger at all times and fight to preserve the faith.[41] Men from North-Western India, including Punjab, were also considered naturally tough due to the harsh conditions of the mountain states, in contrast to the inhabitants of the southern plains of Madras, not hardened by cold winters and difficult terrain.[42] During the Sikh Wars of the 1840s, British officers were impressed by their enemy's manliness and the advanced nature of the Sikh army, capable of inflicting heavy damage on the might of the Raj. The British spoke of their Sikh adversaries in language reminiscent of the public school playing-field, of worthy opponents who played up and played the game.[43] It was feared such good soldiers might rise again against the British if given arms, but in 1857 the majority of Sikhs proved their loyalty by helping crush the rebellion. The uptake of Sikh soldiers gradually increased, so in 1875 they made up 44 per cent of the Bengal Army,[44] and accelerated from the reorganization of the Indian Army in the 1880s. By 1900 Sikhs represented just one per cent of India's population, but 20 per cent of the army.[45] 'The Sikh' was described in recruiting handbooks for the Indian Army as the perfect soldier: 'manly in his warlike creed, in his love of sports and in being a true son of the soil; a buffalo, not quick in understanding, but brave, strong and true'.[46] It was owing to this perception that Sikhs were favoured by the British in defence roles in India and beyond.

This perception of Sikhs as a 'Martial Race' had encouraged the Shanghai Municipal Police to follow Hong Kong's example and look to Punjab for cheaper alternatives to British constables. Sikhs were also employed by the British in Tientsin, Amoy, and Hankow, as well as further afield in Singapore, Malaya, Burma, Kenya and elsewhere.[47]

[41] Sita Ram Kohli (1922). The Army of Ranjit Singh, I, *Journal of Indian History* (n.s.), p. 196.

[42] Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora*, pp. 62–64.

[43] Heather Streets (2004). *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p. 66.

[44] Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora*, p. 64.

[45] Bernard S. Cohn (1996). *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 110.

[46] R. W. Falcon (1896). *A Handbook on Sikhs for the Use of Regimental Officers*, Pioneer Press, Allahabad, Preface.

[47] Mike Brogden (1987). An Act to Colonize the Internal Lands of the Island: Empire and the Origins of the Professional Police, *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 15, 196–197; Karam Singh (2009). *The Sikh Police Contingent: Custodians of the Empire*, Karam Singh, Singapore.

The practice of policing by strangers has a long pedigree, back to the 1829 Metropolis Police Improvement Bill which instigated what is often described as the first modern police force.[48] Charles Rowan and Richard Mayne, the first commissioners of the London Metropolitan Police, favoured agricultural labourers for policing the urban working class, as they were thought to possess the necessary combination of attributes: physical strength and 'stoicism and deference'[49]—the same traits identified in Sikhs. By recruiting from outside the community to be policed, Rowan and Mayne hoped to obtain men 'free from "improper connections" with local residents that might create cross-pressures and thus cause the men to be indecisive and unable to do their duty'.[50] It was believed crucial for 'local residents to be allowed to become acquainted with bobbies only in their police role', a belief that was exported throughout the British Empire. In Malaya, the Chinese were thought to take sides in disputes, exacerbating them, whereas Sikhs remained objective.[51] For similar reasons, in British Africa policemen were recruited from the border areas of the colony or from neighbouring colonies, as well as from Europe.[52]

The Shanghai Municipal Council adopted the same principles in Shanghai. Chinese constables were principally recruited from northern areas, local men being seen as inferior, and British recruits were ideally brought directly from home as Europeans were believed to deteriorate once settled in the Far East. Norman Miners points out that the preference for aliens in policing was based on prejudice not evidence, officials in Hong Kong choosing to ignore the success of Chinese District Watchmen in their territory as well as in Shanghai, Singapore and Macau, while Chinese police constables were as reliable (or unreliable) as Europeans or Sikhs.[53] Nevertheless, faith in the principle of policing by aliens was strong. Sikhs, manifestly different with their turbans and beards, were the ultimate strangers to police Shanghai.

[48] Many historians would, however, dispute this simplified characterization of the London Metropolitan Police. David Taylor (1997). *The New Police in Nineteenth Century England: Crime, Conflict and Control*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p. 2.

[49] Taylor, *New Police*, p. 47.

[50] Wilbur R. Miller (1977). *Cops and Bobbies: Police Authority in New York and London, 1830–1870*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 26.

[51] Thomas Metcalf (2005). *Forging the Raj: Essays on British India in the Heyday of Empire*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 292.

[52] Mike Brogden (1987). The Emergence of the Police—the Colonial Dimension, *British Journal of Criminology*, 27:1, 11.

[53] Miners, Localization of the Hong Kong Police Force, pp. 312–313.

The Sikhs' turbans, beards and dark complexions certainly made a strong impression on the Chinese of Shanghai, featuring in every description of these hated men. In 1917, one magazine published a mock folk song that opens: 'Every year, the Sikh policeman's turban is red. Every year, the Sikh policeman's head is black' and bemoaning how 'completely foreign' these men seemed in the Chinese city.[54] Images such as Figure 1, published in 1936, show Sikh policemen attacking Chinese on the street. A cartoon in the 1940 Chinese Art Association magazine (Figure 2) identifies a Sikh with a Scottish highlander and an English inspector as 'famous things in Shanghai', with a caption describing the Sikhs as having 'faces covered with hair'. These examples are typical of the kind of images found in the contemporary popular Chinese media; stereotypical views remained fairly static throughout the period of Sikh employment in the Shanghai Municipal Police.

The Chinese term for the policemen of the foreign concessions and Hong Kong is '*xunbu*', unrelated to '*jingcha*' ('policeman'). The origins of the term are unknown, but it bears the sense of a defence force, probably originating from the title of the Qing forces who guarded the nine gates of Beijing.[55] With this name the concession forces were never accepted by the Chinese as a regular police force, and the Sikhs exemplified the resentment felt towards all foreign *xunbu*.

The importance attached to the Sikh branch for the defence of foreign interests in Shanghai was demonstrated following riots in 1905, when the Council proposed to increase the number of Sikhs from 250 to 1,000.[56] At the Annual Meeting of Ratepayers where the decision was approved, 'the Sikh' was described as 'not a very

[54] Unknown author (1917). 'Shici lu: Yindu yao' ('Collection of Verses: Indian Policeman Folk Song'), *Taiping Yang (Pacific)*, 1:5, 1–2.

[55] Unknown author (1937). Shanghai zhanggu: Cong zujie bufang, Shoudao Yinbu, Yuebu, Ribu (Shanghai Anecdotes: From the Foreign Concession police forces, the Indian, Vietnamese and Japanese policemen), *Shanghai Shenghuo (Shanghai Life)*, 1:6, 12–13.

[56] The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), FO 228/2518, file 19: SMC Chairman to the Foreign Secretary of the Government of India, 19 January 1906. A crisis was averted by military from the men-of-war in port, but it was feared that on another occasion the Settlement would have to fight insurgency alone, in which case its present forces were insufficient. BL, IOR/L/PJ/6/749, File 586/10300: SMC Chairman to the Under Secretary of State, India Office, 31 March 1906. On the 'Mixed Court' riots of 1905 see Bryna Goodman (1995). *Native Place, City and Nation: Regional Networks and Identity in Shanghai, 1853–1937*, University of California Press, Berkeley, pp. 187–193.

Figure 1. Cartoon of Sikh policeman hitting rickshaw puller.[57]

good detective' but 'the best person in a riot'.[58] Their role for defence rather than to police was clearly the driving factor behind the proposed increase. It was blocked, however, by the consulate because such an increase would be 'in effect an armed British occupation of the Settlement, and objections would most probably be raised by the other foreign powers'.[59] Instead only 250 additional men were sent from India, on the understanding that they would be regular police and not a 'standing army which does political work' for Britain.[60] The Sikhs were thus a potential source of conflict between the British and the other nationalities living in the Settlement. A strike by the Sikh

[57] Xiao Jianqing (1936). *Manhua Shanghai* (*Cartoons of Shanghai*), Jingwei shuju, Shanghai, p. 24.

[58] Quoting Mr Wilkinson, as recorded in the minutes and published in the *North China Daily News*, 14 March 1906.

[59] TNA, FO 228/2518, file 82: Sir Pelham Warren to J. P. McEuen, 3 May 1906.

[60] *Minutes of the SMC*, Vol. xvi, 1 October 1906.

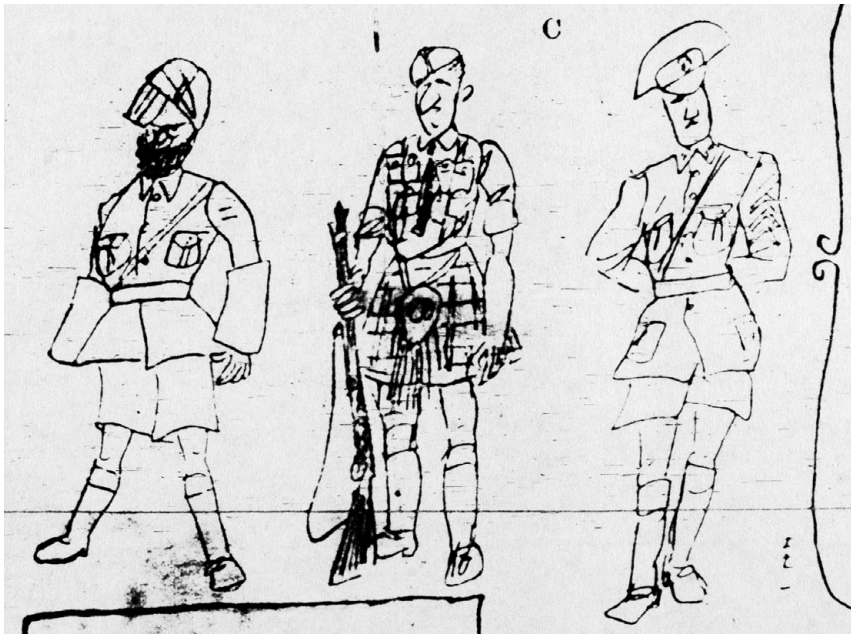

Figure 2. A Sikh policeman, a Scottish highlander and an English inspector.[61]

branch later in 1906 put paid to further increases in the short term,[62] but the fact that the ratepayers adopted the initial proposal shows that they saw the Sikhs primarily as a defence force.

Sikh constables were highly valued, with their physically impressive appearance, for riot policing. They earned a significant role in the Reserve Unit, created after the May Thirtieth protests of 1925 to provide a rapid response to street disorder. Devised by W. E. Fairbairn (who became Chief Inspector of the unit and later a Police Superintendent), its members were trained to approach demonstrators in 'cavalcade' formation: two lines of 12 Chinese carrying batons with Europeans on each flank followed by 12 Sikhs brandishing a four-foot *lathi* (a length of bamboo tipped with brass, also used by Reserves in the Indian Police).[63] This disciplined force was called out upon news of labour disputes and riots, but also to combat

[61] Unknown artist (1940). Shanghai, *Guo Yi* (*National Art*), 1:5–6, p. 80.
[62] SMA, U1-1-82: Minutes of the Watch Committee, 16 August 1906.
[63] Sinclair, *At the End of the Line*, p. 28; Peter Robins (2005). *The Legend of W. E. Fairbairn: Gentleman and Warrior, The Shanghai Years*, CQB Publications, Harlow, pp. 130–131, 138.

fires and to back up the regular police against armed robbers and in campaigns such as the 1929 crack-down on gambling.[64] The Sikhs thus performed their defence duties in a variety of ways and their presence reassured the Shanghailanders that their community had protection, performing the function of colonial police forces around the empire and borrowing practice from India.

Sikhs as symbols on display

Sikh constables gratified the Settlement's British elite by providing a reminder of the British Raj on every street corner. Sikhs on foot and on horseback provided escorts and took part in celebratory parades, boosting British prestige. The Shanghai Municipal Police's first horse was purchased in 1884,[65] the same year the first Sikhs joined the force. The new recruits, with their reputation as good horsemen,[66] soon augmented this section and mounted Sikhs became a fixture of the Settlement. They were paraded on special occasions,[67] lending celebrations and ceremonies an air of imperial dignity, much to the satisfaction of the British. The Settlement had long shared what Bryna Goodman calls a 'British vogue for Jubilees',[68] though this predilection was far from confined to the British community. Figure 3 shows the prominent position afforded the Sikhs at events such as the coronation of Edward VII. These occasions carried political significance: George V's Jubilee in 1935 was the perfect opportunity for the British community to use the Sikh branch to demonstrate British imperial authority in the changing political landscape of the mid-1930s, as American and particularly Japanese influence was in the ascendancy.

Sikhs in the Indian Army had taken part in many of the Empire's military campaigns, making them perfect symbols of the might of

[64] Bickers, *Empire Made Me*, pp. 192–193; E. W. Peters (1937). *Shanghai Policeman*, ed. Hugh Barnes, Rich and Cowan, London, p. 70.

[65] *Minutes of the SMC*, Vol. viii, 17 November 1884, p. 208.

[66] This reputation dates to Guru Arjan Singh's seventeenth century cavalry. Ram Kohli, 'Army of Ranjit Singh', pp. 193, 208.

[67] BL, IOR/L/PJ/6/749, File 586/06: Major-General A. R. Martin, Adjutant General in India, to Lieutenant-Generals and General Officers Commanding, Divisions and Independent Brigades, 22 August 1906.

[68] Bryna Goodman (2000). Improvisations on a Semi-Colonial Theme; or, How to Read a Celebration of Transnational Urban Community, *Journal of Asian Studies,* 59:4, 892.

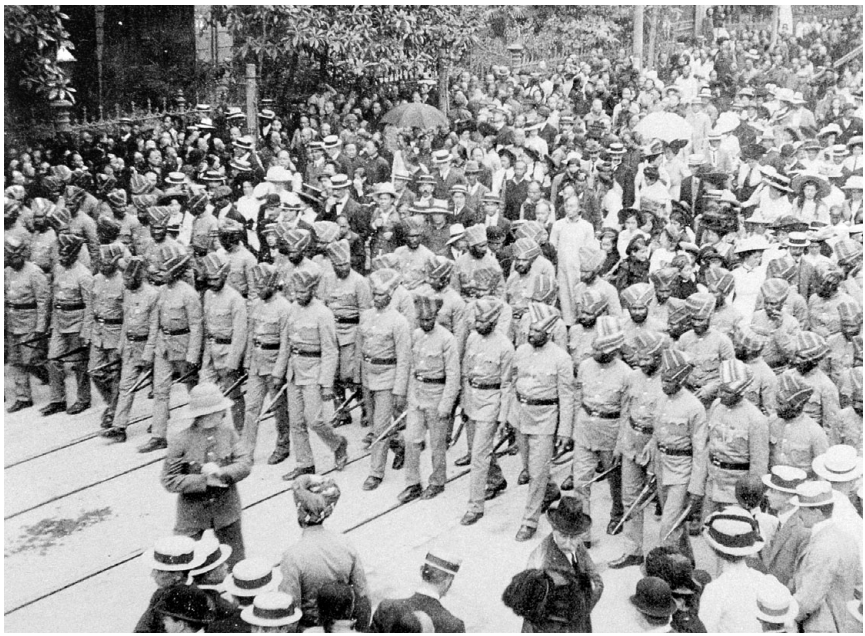

Figure 3. Parade celebrating the coronation of Edward VII in 1901, Sikhs in front.[69]

imperial Britain for the benefit of both the Chinese and foreign communities in Shanghai. Throughout the period, the British used occasions like Empire Day, coronations and royal birthdays to strengthen their imperial identity, and Sikhs invariably featured in the festivities. All the nationalities of the Settlement sought to impress each other on such occasions: in the words of Robert Bickers, 'showing off was *de rigueur*'.[70] But none could match the ubiquitous Sikhs as a symbol of international influence, directing traffic on every corner, thousands of miles from their British-owned homeland. In this way the Sikh branch was just as significant as a symbol of the 'empire of the Raj' as it was a useful element of the police force.

[69] Lynn Pan with Xue Liyong and Qian Zhonghao (1993). *Shanghai: A Century of Change in Photographs 1843–1949*, Hai Feng Publishing Co., Hong Kong, p. 31, used with kind permission of Lynn Pan. The caption reads: 'Though Shanghai was never a British colony, it often felt like one. . .An American was later to say of the International Settlement that "it's about as international as the Tower of London or Westminster Abbey."'.

[70] Robert Bickers (1999). *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism, 1900–1949*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p. 106.

Policing the streets of Shanghai

Mark Finnane rightly stresses the point that colonial policing took many different forms according to local circumstances,[71] and even within the small space of Shanghai's International Settlement the police had a variety of functions. The Sikh branch may have been born out of a desire for greater defence and for the prevention of crime to be carried out more economically, and it may have been celebrated for its symbolic value, but the majority of the Sikhs' daily working lives were spent executing the mundane duty of directing traffic. In line with its reputation as China's first modern city,[72] Shanghai's traffic was notoriously heavy and chaotic. In what has been characterized as its uncontrollable streets, modern trams and motor cars shared streets rarely wider than 40 feet with 'such pre-historic vehicles as the Chinese wheelbarrow'. By 1916 there were 3,000 rickshaws per square mile in the Settlement,[73] the drivers of which often disregarded the rules of the road. The role of the Sikh police was to attempt to bring order to this urban space by directing the traffic, a far cry from the work for which their supposed martial nature was thought to fit them. As Metcalf makes clear, however, whatever work Sikh policemen were given in colonial settings, their primary purpose was in fact 'to overawe and intimidate the local population, in part by their sheer physical size'.[74] Shanghai again adhered to the colonial pattern.

Conditions on point duty could be arduous—the men stood virtually motionless for shifts of up to 12 hours in the extremes of Shanghai's weather to direct traffic—and to make matters worse, their efforts were frequently ignored. In 1938 3,026 cases of 'disregarding police signals or instructions' were recorded: the most-committed traffic offence.[75] Sikh policemen were unable to command the respect of foreigners or Chinese. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that they

[71] Mark Finnane (1991). 'The Varieties of policing: colonial Queensland, 1860–1900', in Anderson and Killingray, *Policing the Empire*, pp. 33–51.

[72] A small body of literature now exists on Shanghai's modernity, though it has focussed largely on literary and intellectual culture. Leo Ou-fan Lee (1999). *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1945*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Meng Yue (2006). *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis; Shu-mei Shih (2001). *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917–1937*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

[73] SMC, *Annual Report 1916*, p. 31a.

[74] Metcalf, *Forging the Raj*, p. 293.

[75] SMC, *Annual Report 1938*, p. 103.

occasionally employed their black and white signalling batons to hit recalcitrant Chinese road-users. The open hostility between Sikhs and Chinese, exacerbated by a significant language barrier, set the scene for low-level violence. Sikhs arrived in Shanghai with no knowledge of Chinese, and although skills in both Chinese and English were rewarded, the bonus paid for passing English examinations (up to $5 per month) exceeded that for demonstrating Chinese language ability (up to $2), demonstrating the different emphasis placed on each language.[76]

In support of Metcalf's argument that Sikhs were intended to intimidate the local population, those in Shanghai were actually encouraged to employ corporal punishment against Chinese:

> Years of experience have proved that these men [Chinese rickshaw and wheelbarrow pullers] obey police signals not so much from any respect for the law as from the fear of consequences to themselves if they do not. The traffic baton serves as an outward emblem of the physical force behind the law.[77]

There were certainly many instances when Sikhs had to be punished for mistreatment of Chinese, but the same was true of the foreign constables, and brutality also characterized the relationship between Chinese policemen and rickshaw men in Beijing:[78] the enduring stereotype of the brutal Sikh policemen was undoubtedly an exaggeration. It was usual for alien police forces to be despised by those they helped the British to rule: the Shosa-speaking people of Southern Rhodesia called policemen from the Ngoni '*Imbga dza vasungale*', 'white men's dogs'.[79] Sikhs became a surrogate target for Chinese resentment of Euro-American imperialism, and the racist views noted above also contributed to the Chinese perception of Sikhs as violent. Yet this perception should not be dismissed lightly, with heartfelt anger expressed in 1903 at Sikh constables roughly searching the persons of examination candidates and widespread outrage over

[76] SMA, U1-1-82: Minutes of the Watch Committee, 8 December 1903.

[77] SMC, *Annual Report 1917*, p. 30a.

[78] David Strand (1989). *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 82.

[79] Lawrence Vambe (1972). *An Ill-fated People: Zimbabwe Before and After Rhodes*, Heinemann Educational, London, p. 125, quoted in David Killingray (1986). The Maintenance of Law and Order in British Colonial Africa, *African Affairs*, 85:340, 423.

an alleged indecent assault committed by a Sikh policeman in 1919.[80] The resentment of the Sikhs has persisted in Shanghai to the present.

The Sikhs' duties extended far beyond directing traffic. Accounts of Sikhs apprehending criminals and records of medals awarded for 'conspicuous gallantry' to Sikh members of the force demonstrate that their duties as policemen could entail all the elements of detection and danger experienced by other nationals within the Shanghai Municipal Police. Awards given by the Council reveal a high regard for at least some Sikh policemen: between 1926 and 1941 six were presented with Distinguished Conduct medals, while 1,631 were departmentally awarded. Several Sikhs were killed or wounded in the execution of their duty, suggesting that policing in Shanghai was not devoid of the risk to life and limb that they had faced in their earlier careers in the Indian Army. In 1921 a Sikh was shot dead as he attempted 'to intercept an armed Chinese'.[81] In 1939 constable Mala Singh earned a Distinguished Conduct Medal for 'great bravery and devotion to duty when attacked by a gang of armed assassins' at the light standard at a busy intersection.[82] Directing traffic was evidently more eventful than might be assumed. Indeed, Captain Barrett justified arming points-men by pointing out that they were, 'by virtue of the fact that fixed Traffic Posts are well known to residents, frequently the first to receive information regarding the committal of crime'.[83] This also demonstrates how conspicuous their position on the streets of the International Settlement was, enhancing their power as symbols of the 'empire of the Raj'.

(Constrained) Mobility

Tony Ballantyne has explored the way that the annexation of Punjab in 1849 brought its population into interregional and global structures which afforded new opportunities for mobility.[84] As noted above, Sikhs were both recruited directly from Punjab to Shanghai and made their own way east, frequently arriving in Shanghai via other ports of call

[80] No author (1919). Yindu xunbu yu kaosheng (Indian policemen and examination candidates), *Jiangsu*, 6, 154–155; (1919). Yinren weixie busui zhe baoxing (Outrage at Indecent Assault by Indian), *Shenbao*, 26, 30 March.
[81] SMC, *Annual Report 1921*, p. 43a.
[82] SMC, *Annual Report 1939*, p. 93.
[83] SMA, U1-3-2790/4062, Part 1: Captain Barrett's Report, 30 October 1928.
[84] Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora*, pp. 69–70.

such as Hong Kong, and often making their way on elsewhere if they failed to find permanent employment in China.[85] The Sikhs employed in the Shanghai Municipal Police had successfully found employment overseas, but they became increasingly aware of their potential for further mobility across the 'webs of empire' and beyond. As migrants far from their homelands their local ties to Shanghai were comparatively weak, so when news reached them of better opportunities overseas they naturally wanted to seize them.

The first serious strike of the Sikh branch occurred when the Council refused a petition for increased pay submitted by the branch in September 1906.[86] The demand was occasioned by news of Sikhs in Siberia and Canada earning $60.00–$100.00 per month, many times the wages offered in China. Transnational networks of Sikhs informing each other of overseas opportunities constitute another example of the layered webs of connections described by Ballantyne. Policemen who were able to resign did so in order to leave Shanghai for the promised high salaries elsewhere, whilst colleagues who remained bound by their contracts sought dismissal for misconduct. Others presented false letters from home seeking termination of their contracts to attend urgent family business, but when they travelled north rather than taking passages to India their resignations were cancelled.[87] Unable to leave Shanghai, the men demanded a 50 per cent pay rise with a petition worded by a European lawyer. He met with severe censure in the *North China Herald* for supporting Sikh demands, but he responded that by 'sending the letter to the Chairman of the Council I only followed the precedent established when the foreign members of the police petitioned for more pay, which was allowed'.[88] This demonstrates the double standards in operation: it was unacceptable for Sikhs to make demands but less of a threat when the lobbyists were European.

[85] Metcalf, *Imperial Connections*, p. 112.

[86] Spontaneous refusals of duty had occurred in 1891 and 1897 over terms of employment, but not on the scale of the strikes of 1906 and 1910. *Minutes of the SMC*, Vol. x, 11 August 1891, p. 350; Vol. xiii, 20 August 1897, pp. 46–8; and 22 March 1897, p. 50.

[87] SMC, *Annual Report 1906*, pp. 39–40.

[88] Letter to the Editor, *NCH*, 5 October 1906, p. 26. The editor had declared this 'the most unsavoury feature of this whole affair', finding it 'regrettable in view of the circumstances obtaining in the Settlement that there should be any foreigner in Shanghai so lacking in public spirit as virtually to aid and abet these policemen in a step that amounted to a breach of discipline'. *NCH*, 5 October 1906, p. 9.

The strike ended with the arrest of eight alleged ring-leaders, but it was not until an inquiry was completed by Major Hall (sent on the Shanghai Municipal Council's request by the Government of India) that the matter could be laid to rest. Ten alleged agitators were deported and King's Regulations, as used in the British and Indian Armies, were brought onto the statute book so that in future emergencies the Captain Superintendent had a magistrate's power to inflict serious penalties for ill-discipline.[89] The strike highlighted the problem that no foreigner within the Shanghai Municipal Police could communicate with the Sikhs in their own language, relying instead on interpreters. An Assistant-Superintendent with a grasp of Urdu was therefore appointed: Captain Barrett.

It was anticipated that Barrett's appointment, combined with the new Jemadar and Gurdwara, would prevent future unrest. However, another strike seeking a pay rise in response to reports of high wages in other parts of the world occurred in 1910. Again, a petition was submitted with the aid of a European and an inquiry was held. Ten men were convicted under King's Regulations and dismissed.[90] The branch did not strike again. The response of the Shanghai Municipal Council to the Sikhs' protests—calling in a Major of the Indian Army to conduct an inquiry; introducing and employing King's Regulations; employing a Captain of the Indian Army with Indian language abilities—demonstrate its close relationship to the Indian colonial authorities and the impact of sub-imperialism on the Shanghai Municipal Police. Moreover, the decisive action taken to prevent Sikhs bound by agreements from leaving the service to seek opportunities further afield reveals the limits to the mobility enjoyed by Sikhs and other colonial subjects within the 'webs of empire'.

Indian Army influences on the preservation of Sikh religious tradition

The Sikh religion was viewed with favour by the British authorities, unlike the suspicion with which many non-Christian creeds—including Chinese and Hindu beliefs, seen as superstitious—were regarded.[91]

[89] *Minutes of the SMC*, Vol. xvi, 10 October 1906, p. 342.
[90] SMA, U4618–46/8/L: Memorandum by Captain Superintendent, 1 August 1910.
[91] Nicholas Thomas (1994). *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 14.

David Omissi echoes claims made by contemporaries that it was at least partly due to the Indian Army that orthodox Sikhism was preserved and strengthened. Only Sikhs who had undergone the baptismal *pahul* ceremony could enlist,[92] and as soldiery offered reliable and honourable employment young men rapidly subscribed to orthodoxy: by 1900 young men were converting to Sikhism to increase their chances of being selected as soldiers.[93] Once in the army they were accompanied everywhere by the regiment's copy of the Granth, the Sikh holy book, and were obliged to observe the orthodoxy of the *Khalsa*. The British believed religion reinforced a strong *esprit de corps*, enhancing Sikh loyalty.

Although the Shanghai Municipal Police paid little attention to the religious needs of its early Sikh recruits, as their numbers grew the men successfully petitioned for a place of worship: a Gurdwara. In 1905 plans for the building were obtained from Hong Kong and subscriptions worth $8,000 were raised from the Sikh community (both Sikhs employed by the Shanghai Municipal Police and those employed privately as watchmen), demonstrating their desire for a place of worship. The Gurdwara opened in 1908 and became a place to meet as a community, to observe the rituals they were accustomed to practicing in Punjab, and, when one could be obtained, receive guidance from the Granthi, the religious leader (literally 'reader of the Granth').[94] The Council's hopes for the Gurdwara were less spiritually-minded. Its construction heralded an increasingly close adherence by the Shanghai Municipal Police to Indian Army practices in the management of Sikhs. Difficulties with the branch, in the form of strikes and Indian nationalism, resulted in the view that the only way to manage the men was to follow practice in India. Captain Alan Boisragon wrote that:

> [the Gurdwara] will undoubtedly prove beneficial to the local Indians, in that it will provide a place of worship in proper conditions, will watch over their general conduct and ensure stricter adherence to the rules of their caste. It is an admitted fact that the further an Indian travels and settles the more easily and quickly does he deteriorate, morally and physically, and it is fully

[92] G. F. MacMunn (1911). *The Armies of India*, Adam and Charles Black, London, pp. 134–135; David Omissi (1994). *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860–1940*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, p. 95.

[93] Falcon, *Handbook on Sikhs*, p. 119; Streets, *Martial Races*, p. 214.

[94] Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora*, p. 27.

anticipated that by the establishment of this institution an effectual check will be placed on his general behaviour.[95]

These hopes proved unfounded in subsequent years as troubles arose due to tensions between Sikh policemen and their counterparts outside the force, most of whom were watchmen, who reportedly insulted the police and failed to cooperate in running the Gurdwara through its committee. The insults may have been nationalist attacks on Sikhs serving the British, the imperialist rulers of India.

Tensions also existed within the Sikh Branch. In December 1912, Jemadar Dewa Singh was murdered by a Sikh constable in what was described as 'one of the most serious blots upon the reputation of the Sikh community living in Shanghai which has ever occurred'.[96] The subsequent inquiry led to the conviction and execution of Narain Singh and the conclusion that the act was due to hostilities between two Sikh sects within the branch: the Jemadar, a Malwa, had been working to heal the rift between his group and the Majhas.[97] It was found necessary to open a separate Gurdwara solely for members of the Shanghai Municipal Police in 1916. This was done with much ceremony: Shanghai Municipal Council Chairman E. C. Pearce officially opened the building in the presence of the British Consul, Council members and other major figures of the Settlement.[98] Such 'distinguished patronage' demonstrates the significance attached to the religious well-being of the Sikh branch, in line with practice in the rest of India. Captain Superintendent Kenneth John McEuen (son of J. P. McEuen, who had overseen the introduction of Sikhs to the force) was happy to report that:

> religious matters appear to be in a more healthy state among the Sikhs than has been the case during the last ten years. This is much more important than is apparent to the outside observer, as religion is a very strong factor in the everyday life of a Sikh.[99]

In the following years both Gurdwaras were described as 'flourishing',[100] but they would again become a focus for political

[95] SMC, *Annual Report 1905*, p. 23.
[96] SMC, *Annual Report 1912*, pp. 27–28.
[97] SMC, *Annual Report 1913*, p. 35a. The Malwa region lies south of the River Sutlej in Punjab and Majha is north of the river. Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora*, p. ix: map drawn by David Hood.
[98] SMC, *Annual Report 1916*, p. 26a.
[99] SMC, *Annual Report 1916*, p. 24a.
[100] SMC, *Annual Report 1917*, p. 25a; *1918*, p. 23a.

developments of serious concern to the Council as the problems in India flowed into Shanghai along the channels connecting the two.

Indian nationalism

Sikh loyalty was trusted wholeheartedly by the British at the outbreak of the First World War. More Sikhs than any other group of Indians fought in the conflict, and a 1916 letter from a Punjabi Inspector of Police to a Jemadar of the 6th Cavalry in France demonstrates why: 'you are very fortunate in that you have got a chance to defend your country and serve the British Government'.[101] But as political opposition grew in India, the British feared Indian loyalty the world over would be eroded.

Shanghai was first affected in 1914 when the *Kamogata Maru* docked on its way to Vancouver in an abortive attempt to demand Sikh rights to Canadian citizenship.[102] This was the first major incident linked to the *Ghadr* movement,[103] based in San Francisco but spreading the message of self-determination around the world wherever there were Sikhs, including Shanghai. The *Ghadr* found some willing to listen: in 1916 a Lahore court found 106 men guilty of sedition, six of whom were former members of the Shanghai Municipal Police, dismissed at the time of the *Kamogata Maru*'s docking in Shanghai.[104] Soon, with increased resentment of India's wartime sacrifices and post-war financial costs,[105] and the galvanizing 1919 Amritsar massacre, revolutionary nationalism took root. The *Akali* movement (1920–1925) became the first Sikh mass anti-government movement, but although *Akali* pressure on potential candidates not to enlist affected

[101] Eshar Singh (Punjab) to Jemadar Jai Singh (6th Cavalry, France), 19 January 1916, in David Omissi (1999). *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914–18*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, p. 140.

[102] Krushwant Singh (2004). *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II: 1839–1974, 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 178.

[103] 'Ghadr' translates as 'mutiny'. For more on the *Ghadr* see Richard G. Fox (1985). *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*, University of California Press, Berkeley, pp. 117–118, and Richard J. Popplewell (1995). *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire 1904–1924*, Frank Cass, London, pp. 245–259.

[104] TNA, FO 228/2702, file 42: Consul-General to Sir John Jordan, 4 May 1916.

[105] The expense of the 1.5 million men supplied by India for the war was borne by Indian taxpayers. P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins (1993). *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction 1914–1990*, Longman, London, p. 181.

Shanghai Municipal Police recruitment,[106] disaffection was slow to reach Shanghai's Sikhs. McEuen reported:

> The political situation in the Punjab has been extremely grave during 1922, but it was only towards the end of the year that the Sikhs in Shanghai realised the position of affairs in their own country. It is no exaggeration that the Sikh nation, from being the most loyal of all Indian nations, has for the time being become the most disaffected.[107]

The *Ghadr* newspaper was distributed in China from 1914 and possession of seditious material became an offence punishable by dismissal from the Shanghai Municipal Police.[108] Papers depicting Indian nationalists in chains were found in Sikh police barracks in 1923, so from the following year Sikh constables were required to sign a promise to abstain from all 'political controversy'.[109] They could not fail, however, to be affected by the local and regional growth in nationalism.

Fears of anti-British activism meant closer surveillance of Sikh activities, with the formation in 1927 of an Indian Section of the Criminal Investigation Department.[110] Sikhs were similarly used in surveillance in Malaya, owing to the higher degree of trust placed in them by the British compared with other nationalities.[111] The British shared intelligence about Indian nationalism across the imperial networks which spanned the empire. Sikhs were of invaluable assistance in intelligence work in Shanghai with their knowledge of the Indian community and its vernaculars, but for these men such surveillance of their fellow countrymen cannot have been easy. The danger they faced is demonstrated by the request of three men transferred from the Special Branch to retain their firearms for at

[106] SMA, U102-5-29: W. Beatty to K. J. McEuen, 27 August 1924. For more on the Akali movement see Tai Yong Tan (1995). Assuaging the Sikhs: Government Responses to the Akali Movement, 1920–1925, *Modern Asian Studies*, 29:3, 655.

[107] SMC, *Annual Report 1922*, p. 57a.

[108] SMA, U1-3-2429: Sikh Police Orders: *Political Opinions*, 29 May 1923. A Sikh constable was dismissed in April 1915 after the *Ghadr* newspaper was found on his bed. TNA, FO 228/2299, file 41: SMC Captain Superintendent to Consul-General, 13 April 1915.

[109] SMA, U1-3-2429: Deputy Commissioner of Police Johnson to the Acting Secretary of the SMC, 2 June 1923; SMA, U102-3-29.

[110] As the threat of nationalism grew worldwide, the scale of policing increased apace. Killingray, 'Guardians of Empire', p. 11. For the activities of the Criminal Investigation Department (hereafter C.I.D.), see Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai*, pp. 142–145, and Bickers, *Empire Made Me*, pp. 100–102.

[111] Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora*, p. 71.

least a month after returning to uniform as they feared for their safety following their surveillance activities.[112]

By 1929 the Indian Section of Shanghai's Criminal Investigation Department held 2,000 photographs and 1,000 biographies of Indians in Shanghai, approximately two-thirds of the total Indian population, including 125 men suspected of 'sedition'. Detailed records and the knowledge of Indian vernaculars of the Sikhs who worked in the Criminal Investigation Department enabled comprehensive intelligence of the Indian community outside the police, the entirety of which was viewed with suspicion. Indian nationalists were thought to be encouraged by Chinese nationalism, particularly the May Thirtieth movement, to promote their own anti-British cause. McEuen was convinced, however, that good conditions of employment and the influence of loyal older officers would ensure the branch's reliability. The following autumn the men justified his confidence with their efforts to control local hostilities, which 'threw a good deal of extra work on the Branch. This however was carried out with the utmost cheerfulness, the Sikhs, as always, proving to be at their best when faced with a situation of this description'.[113] Yet British confidence in Sikhs which, since they had proved their loyalty in 1857, was a comfort to the British community in Shanghai, was becoming increasingly insecure as both Chinese and Indian nationalisms were growing in the 1920s.

Sikh policemen were again used for surveillance work when the Gurdwara became the focus of nationalist violence in April 1928. The Criminal Investigation Department Indian Section's duties expanded into attending Gurdwara meetings and the censorship of circulating literature, correspondence to and from Indian prisoners of Amoy Road Gaol, and Indian-language books in the prison library. Records were kept on Indians leaving Shanghai and detailed enquiries were made into the background of Indians applying to work for the Shanghai Municipal Police.[114] These duties gradually passed over to Special Branch Section Four, which also employed Sikh constables. This Section often acted on information and requests from the Delhi

[112] The request was denied, deemed 'irregular'. NARA, SMP, D8/8: C.I.D. Office Notes, D.S. A. Rhind to the Acting Commissioner of Police, 24 October 1929.

[113] SMC, *Annual Report 1924*, p. 37.

[114] US National Archives, Record Group 263, Files of the Shanghai Municipal Police Special Branch (hereafter NARA, SMP), D8/8: C.I.D. Office Notes, 18 June 1929.

Criminal Investigation Department,[115] once more demonstrating the colonial network of which Shanghai was a part and, moreover, the ways in which ties between the informal and formal empire were strengthened in response to threats such as Indian nationalism.

Despite its usefulness for surveillance, concerns about the wisdom of contributing to the Indian population in Shanghai brought the existence of the Sikh branch into question. In 1930 eight members of the branch were arrested for possession of anti-British literature distributed by the Indian Youth League.[116] They were dismissed but remained in Shanghai, and anti-British activities continued. It was decided in 1930 that the Sikh branch, too great a liability, would 'be gradually reduced with a view to its eventual abolition'.[117] Events thwarted such plans for a quiet end to Sikh duties.

War

The Second World War both tightened and severed the networks and connections which had grown up throughout the world over the preceding decades. Britain mobilized the forces of the empire for the war effort at the same time as links between different parts of the formal and informal empire were cut. In Shanghai, the Japanese occupation of the Chinese-administered areas of the city from 1937, and especially the occupation of the foreign settlements from December 1941, gave anti-British members of the Sikh Branch an opportunity to take significant action against their employers. After the war the British Government declared that the majority of the 3,000 Indians in China had remained loyal during the occupation, some assisting the Allies, and of those who aided the Japanese, many had little choice.[118] Some, however, actively opposed British interests before and during the Japanese occupation. Opposing the British in Shanghai became an act of Indian nationalism sanctioned by the new Provisional Government of Free India, but the long faith in the loyalty of Sikhs noted above made this particularly hard for the British to

[115] Frederic Wakeman Jr. (1988). Policing Modern Shanghai, *China Quarterly*, 115, 412.

[116] SMC, *Annual Report 1930*, p. 96.

[117] SMA, U102-5-31/2: Minutes of the Watch Committee, 26 September 1930.

[118] BL, IOR/L/PJ/8/336, File 108/41a, p. 112: Press Office Bureau, Government of India, 'Unofficial Notes: Relief of Indians in China', 25 January 1946.

bear. American interrogation of three Sikh prisoners of war revealed that they had belonged to the Shanghai Municipal Police before being sent to Saigon by the Japanese in 1942, where they found their way into the Indian National Army and fought against the Allies.[119] Sikh transnational mobility was now a source of danger for the British.

The Axis powers recognized the potential of undermining British support among their Indian subjects early on. The Indian Army was important within the British armed forces and destabilizing it was of clear benefit to an enemy of Britain. Moreover, if the loyalty of the sub-continent were damaged, British attention would be diverted from the war in Europe, to German advantage. Propaganda was therefore targeted at Indians in China through pamphlets and radio broadcasts. The British responded, fighting the war of words with daily news bulletins—on paper and broadcast via radio—and public screenings of pro-British films in Gurmukhi and Urdu.[120] There had long been concern that the presence of so many 'martial' Sikhs and other Indians in non-British territory might give rise to a situation where British imperial subjects would fight for an enemy of Britain,[121] but for the first time this had become a real possibility and the British in Shanghai did their best to prevent it.

Japanese control of the Shanghai Municipal Council tightened until, in August 1943, the administration of the International Settlement was formally handed over to the Special Municipality in puppet Chinese hands. British and American civilians were interned, but Indians were not; indeed, some Sikh policemen became camp guards in positions of power over their former employers. A small minority abused this power, and following the Allied victory an investigation was held into alleged war crimes committed by Kartar Singh and Bhola Singh, both police constables, in 1943. They were accused of torturing Chief Inspector W. Hutton and fellow policeman J. M. Watson for attempting to communicate with groups outside the

[119] US National Archives OSS, RG 266, E182a, box 8, folder 59, (hereafter NARA, OSS), 'Summary Report on Indian Political Affairs in Japan-occupied China', PG 266/OSS/E182, pp. 1–6: *Interrogation on Shanghai Police and Chopra's School, Penang*, New Delhi, 14 August 1945. See Bernard Wasserstein, *Secret War in Shanghai: Treachery, Subversion and Collaboration in the Second World War* (New York, 1998), pp. 182–183.

[120] NARA, SMP, D9411/14(c): Report by DSI Young of the meeting of the Indian Publicity Sub-Committee, 5 August 1940. It was claimed 'considerable enthusiasm greeted the showing' of the British War Picture to 400 Sikhs in August 1940.

[121] Metcalf, *Imperial Connections*, p. 129.

internment camp.[122] Beaten and imprisoned for ten days with no water and just an occasional bowl of rice to eat, Hutton died and Watson required hospitalization. The accused were released in April 1948 as the deadline for war crime convictions passed, producing an outcry in Shanghai and Hong Kong. In response the case was reopened and the two Sikhs were convicted and jailed in Hong Kong in December of that year.[123] It signified a difficult final chapter for the branch that had been an object of British pride for decades.

In the last months of the war, the services of the remaining Sikhs on the force were terminated and they were repatriated following the surrender of Japan in August 1945.[124] There were not enough ships to take them all to India immediately, and the cost of passage soared in response to the high demand: there was little desire to stay in Shanghai. The majority had left by mid-December, with aid from the Government of India.[125] This was an unhappy finale to the history of the Sikh branch. Coming to Shanghai to seize the opportunities afforded by the webs of empire emanating from India, they became caught in the politics of war. Following the war, the International Settlement which they had helped police for so long no longer existed and there was no role for Indian policemen on the streets of Shanghai. The Indian face of the British presence in Shanghai was dead, along with its imperial pretentions.

Conclusion

The Sikh policemen of Shanghai, an understudied site of Sikh migration, were powerful symbols of British imperial might in a city on the periphery of the empire. The history of the branch presented here illustrates the ways in which the informal empire of Shanghai's International Settlement overlapped with the formal British empire, and the extent of the influence of India's 'sub-imperialism' on colonial policing. The 'webs of empire' were evident in the networks of men

[122] TNA, WO 325/58, file 149/26.
[123] Bickers, *Empire Made Me*, p. 325.
[124] NARA, SMP, Box 119, Police List: Police Orders (F), box F/2-143.
[125] Press Office Bureau, Government of India, 'Unofficial Notes: Relief of Indians in China', pp. 112–113. Indians numbering 782 had already been repatriated as refugees from Shanghai in 1938 aboard the *SS Elephanta*. BL, IOR/L/PJ/7/1347, File 4548, pp. 1–2: Director of Sea Transport at the Board of Trade, London, to the Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, 18 January 1938.

like Captain Barrett who linked policing in Shanghai to the police and armed forces of British India, and in recruitment in cooperation with the Government of India. 'Webs of empire' were also evident in the consular networks which shared concern over events such as the proposed expansion of the branch in 1906, and intelligence networks united in their battle against Indian nationalism. They also extended to the networks of Sikhs themselves who communicated the pay that was obtainable in different corners of the British world and joined to varying degrees the growing tide of Indian nationalism. The Raj—the 'jewel' in the imperial Crown—and Britain's informal empire in China's treaty-ports, came together in the ubiquitous figure of the Sikh constable on point duty, dealing with rickshaws and cars in an attempt to bring order to the chaotic streets of Shanghai. Moreover, exploring the Sikh community reminds us of the variegated nature of the 'British' enterprise in China, which was always multi-racial. British-protected subjects in China included Sikh and other Indian nationals, as well as Straits Settlement Chinese and Eurasians.

This is not an exhaustive survey. It is confined to Sikh police in Shanghai rather than including those in other treaty ports in China, which would be a fruitful source of comparison if space permitted. Explicit Sikh voices are absent due to a lack of written records left by the men themselves and the fact that for long periods there was no one else in the police force who understood their language. It has been possible to convey some of their responses to their situation in China at certain times, such as when they went on strike, but this is an initial outline of the history of the Sikh branch and more work remains to be done. What has been achieved here is an exploration of the institutional rationale behind employing Sikhs to police Shanghai, and the ways in which they exemplify the way different parts of the formal and informal empire intersected, which has only just begun to be appreciated.

Employed to serve the three-fold purpose of economy, defence and display, Sikhs were found on every street corner ensuring the smooth-running of the Settlement traffic. Police constables in any society are among the primary representatives of the state to the ordinary individual. Thus the Sikhs of treaty-port Shanghai were symbols of the British community's power over the Chinese population and of British predominance within an international settlement, and have since assumed iconic status. Their importance in the history of Shanghai, due not least to their role in the shooting of 30 May 1925, guarantee them an enduring legacy. Racist characterizations of the Sikhs have

proved long-lasting, and today in both Chinese public memory and foreign popular culture they are the most famous of treaty-port Shanghai's foreign communities, supplanting the British who brought them from India as the defining feature of foreign imperialism in China.