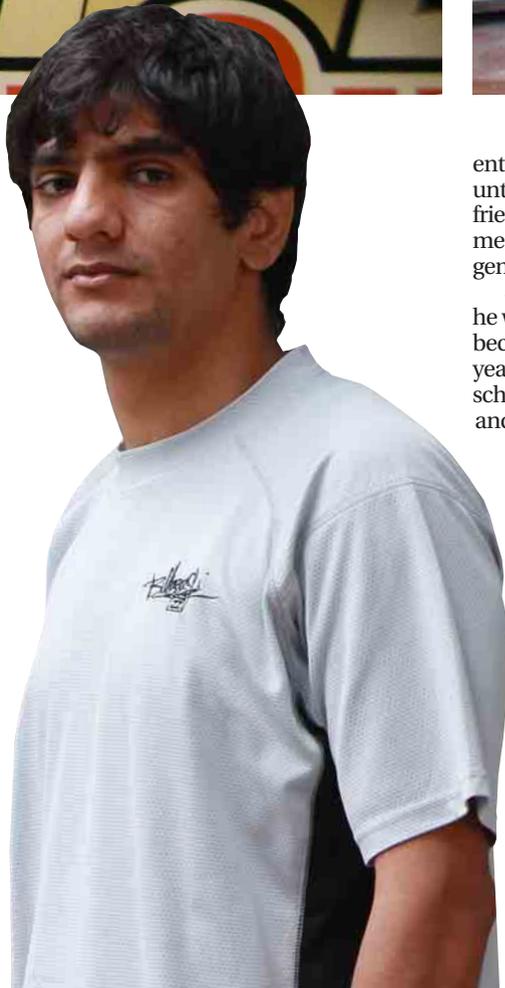




Vivek Mahubani (left), a Hong Kong-born Indian comedian, tells jokes in Cantonese. He won the “funniest Chinese person” title at the first Hong Kong Comedy Festival. Photo: Oliver Tsang

Tabassum Razzak (right), a cook, has introduced Pakistani cuisine to her local community. She was born in Hong Kong and speaks fluent Cantonese. She chooses to wear traditional garb. Photo: K.Y. Cheng

Mido Dhillon (left), founder of Mido Eyeglasses, is of Indian descent, but says he has long “lost” his ethnic identity. Photo: Jonathan Wong



entirely of South Asian students until six years ago. While making friends at school was easier, it also meant standards of Chinese were generally below par.

Shan realises that has to change if he wants to pursue his dream of becoming a policeman. So the 22-year-old juggles a busy schedule of school, working as an office clerk and Chinese classes.

His parents and younger brother sometimes feel Shan is wasting his time. “I’ve heard my brother say ‘What’s the point [of school and learning Chinese]. We’re outsiders in the city; we’re stuck with low-end jobs,’” he admits.

His father works as a driver and his mother is a domestic helper. But Shan hopes to break the mould. “Seeing [Qoser and Faifal] succeed makes me believe,” he says. “But it’s an uphill climb.”

Tabassum Razzak, a

At 22, Ali Shan (left) is learning Chinese to pursue his dream of becoming a policeman. Photo: Jonathan Wong

Pakistani mother of two, is well aware of this and is making sure her children “grow up like Hongkongers”. Although she wears traditional Pakistani garb and head wrap, she was born and raised in Hong Kong. “South Asians have been in Hong Kong for a long time. But for generations, whether it’s through choice or lack of opportunities, we have stayed within our own circles,” she says. “I believe it’s important to find a way into mainstream Hong Kong.”

That’s why both her children, a daughter aged eight and a 13-year-old son, attend a government school in Tin Shui Wai, where most of their classmates are Chinese. “I think, if you’re willing to adapt at a young age, and you learn the culture, Hong Kong can be a great place,” Razzak says. “My children love it here.”

While she speaks Cantonese and is as up-to-date on the latest television soaps as other housewives in her Tin Shui Wai estate, Razzak also prides herself in being able to maintain her Pakistani roots. She and her husband, Malik Mateen, agreed that their children would be raised in their Islamic faith.

“They are allowed some leeway

in areas to be more like Hong Kong kids, but when it comes to faith, they’re taught to remain true to our culture,” she says.

Razzak reckons she’s found a great balance in embracing Hong Kong and Pakistani culture. She works part time as a cook at the Tin Shui Wai Integrated Services Centre, where she often introduces Pakistani cuisine to the community. And her language skills have also made her a middleman of sorts between the Chinese and Pakistani communities in Tin Shui Wai.

Others families place less importance on maintaining their cultural heritage. Mido Dhillon, a spectacles designer, is of Indian descent, but says he has long “lost” his ethnic identity.

Growing up in Fanling, the 38-year-old says he lived like any other Hong Kong youngster.

His parents spoke Chinese to him and his sister, he says. They attended a local school, which is why they also read and write Chinese. Dhillon doesn’t believe ethnicity is an issue: “I just think of myself as a Hongkonger.”

Comedian Mahubani agrees with that notion. “The term

HELP TO FIT IN

Several community groups offer programmes to help South Asian youngsters integrate into society.

Teen Climbing Project

Organised by the Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children, the Teen Climbing Project is for children aged 10 to 16. Evening classes deal with subjects ranging from Chinese and English, to problem solving and social development skills. Classes run year round, and cost between HK\$80 and HK\$400 a month. www.hkspc.org; tel: 2396 0264

South Asian Programme Express

A series of weekend summer courses offering a wide range of recreational activities, including photography, art, writing and cultural development classes. Two age groups: six to 10 and 10 to 16. Runs from July to September. Fees range from free to HK\$80. www.hkspc.org; tel: 2396 0264

CHEER

Organised by the Hong Kong Christian Service, CHEER (Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents) is a continuous programme that’s open to all ages. Language classes in both English and Cantonese, translation services, and group outings that aim to integrate participants with local Chinese culture are just some of the offerings in this free programme. www.hkcs.org/gcb/cheer/cheer-e.html; tel: 3106 3104

Hong Kong Integrated Nepalese Society Recreation Programme

This free programme is open to all South Asians and involves several courses a month on subjects such as art, first aid training, English and Chinese language. www.hinshk.org; tel: 3427 9671

Chinese Proficiency Enhancement Project

Organised by Unison, the project sends retired teachers and volunteers to 22 city kindergartens to provide after-school Chinese language tuition. The free programme resumes in September. www.unison.org.hk; tel: 2789 3246

Hongkonger, much like New Yorker, isn’t really an ethnicity, but a state of mind,” he says. “I’m Indian by blood, I speak Cantonese and live in Hong Kong. I’m a bit of everything.”

Hong Kong is a “results-driven city”, he says. “If you’re good at what you do, people in Hong Kong will accept you.”

To retain their Indian cultural roots, Bhavna Mahubani and her husband tried to converse with Vivek and his sister in their mother tongue. But they eventually had to switch to English because their children’s grasp of Hindi was poor.

“My parents don’t speak Chinese and my Hindi isn’t good,” Vivek admits. That has its advantages: as children, he and his sister would talk in Cantonese whenever they wanted to keep secrets from their parents.

“It drove me wild, but I was also happy they were talking in Cantonese so well,” Bhavna says.

For Bhavna Mahubani and Razzak, what matters most is that their children are given the best opportunities for their future.

“Hong Kong is our home,” says Razzak. “All I want is for my children to be successful here and have a bright future. familypost@scmp.com