

Diaspora Families Take Root: A Celebration of Cosmopolitan Hong Kong

Roger King, Pauline Yeung, Nakyung Lim
October 2025



Photograph by Stephen King

About KnitKnot Global

Founded by Pauline Yeung in 2024, KnitKnot Global is a consulting company with business lines in finance and innovation, family business and family office, and talent cultivation and development. Pauline's vision is to continue bringing people from different walks of life together for connection and community, not unlike embroidery, and to use words to weave together tapestries that tell compelling stories. In recent years, Pauline has worked with central banks, financial institutions, business schools, prominent families, and start-ups and entrepreneurs, bridging diverse cultures, building resilient networks, advising innovative initiatives, engaging in Track II diplomacy, and serving as a thought leader in global soft power. For more information, please visit <https://knitknotglobal.com/>

Table of Contents

1	Author Biographies
3	Introduction
4	葉落歸根 (yè luò guī gēn)
4	尋根問祖 (xún gēn wèn zǔ)
	Joung Hwan Kwak, Yang Won Sun Foundation
	Kiyotaka Ando, Nissin Foods
8	落地生根 (luò dì shēng gēn)
	扎根发芽 (zhā gēn fā yá)
	Hans Michael Jebsen, Jebsen Group
	Jim Thompson, Crown Worldwide
	Merle Hinrich, Hinrich Foundation
	Andrea Fessler, Premiere Performances Hong Kong
13	根深枝茂 (gēn shēn zhī mào)
	Aron and Mahesh Harilela, Harilela Group
15	植根于民 (zhí gēn yú mín)
16	Endnotes

Author Biographies



Roger King (金乐琦)

Senior Advisor and Founding Director, Roger King Center for Asian Family Business and Family Office

Roger King is Senior Advisor and Founding Director of both the Roger King Center for Asian Family Business and Family Office and the Thompson Center for Business Case Studies, and Adjunct Professor of Finance at The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). His teaching and research interests include family business, family office, entrepreneurship, and corporate and family governance.

Professor King was a former US Naval Officer; member of Technical Staff of Bell Telephone Laboratories (USA). He served at various leading positions: Chief Operating Officer of Orient Overseas (Holdings) Limited, listed on the Stock Exchange of Hong Kong (SEHK); Chairman and Founder of ODS System-Pro Computers Limited; Chairman of Euro-Asia Shipyard Limited; Chairman of Pacific Coffee Limited; President and Chief Executive Officer of Sa Sa International Holdings Limited, listed on SEHK; Board Director of Arrow Electronics Corporation, listed on the New York Stock Exchange; Supervisory Board member of TNT Express, listed on Amsterdam Exchange; President of Harvard Business School Association of Hong Kong; Honorary Consul for the Republic of Latvia in HKSAR; Standing Committee Member of the Zhejiang Province People's Political Consultative Conference.

Professor King is currently Honorary Court Member of HKUST; Board of Directors, Hong Kong Academy for Wealth Legacy; member of the Board of Governors of Tel Aviv University (TAU); member of the Ernst & Young Family Business Advisory Council; member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Family Business Strategy. Professor King is a graduate of the University of Michigan, BSEE; New York University, MSEE; Harvard Business School, AMP; and HKUST, PhD (Finance). He is the 2011 recipient of the HKUST Honorary Fellowship.



Pauline Yeung (杨宝莲)

Founder, KnitKnot Global

Fluent in English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Japanese, and conversant in French, Pauline Yeung is an entrepreneur, board director, and global leader in family wealth and international finance who has led forward-looking initiatives with financial institutions like Morgan Stanley, Hong Kong Monetary Authority, and the international organization for

central banks throughout her career. A graduate of Princeton University and Central Saint Martins, Pauline is the Founder of KnitKnot Global, a consulting firm that bridges strategy, policy, and creativity to deliver impactful solutions across Asia, Europe, and the United States.

In her prior role as a finance official in the HKSAR Government, Pauline spearheaded a landmark listing regime for biotech companies and new economy firms with weighted voting rights structures. She also developed fintech and family office strategies that mobilized private wealth for venture and impact investments on a global scale. Having curated the inaugural Family Office Symposium at the Asian Financial Forum, she serves today as a trusted biographer, researcher, and advisor for ultra-high net worth families, and teaches cross-cultural communication and management in the HKU Master in Family Wealth Management.

An art lover and cultural enthusiast, Pauline draws inspiration from Chinese calligraphy, Korean Dansaekhwa, and her encounters with artists like JR, Shepard Fairey, and Takashi Murakami. Actively engaged in international dialogue, Pauline is a Board Member of KEY (Korea Europe & You), an Asia 21 Next Generation Fellow at Asia Society, Fellow at Salzburg Global, Leadership Fellow at Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies, and a Delegate to the Australia-China Youth Dialogue. Her global adventures have seen her engage diverse stakeholders for French Korean gastronomy exchange, judge the Sachs Global Fellowship at Princeton University, and serve as Master of Ceremony for an event with the first Chinese astronaut in space. Back in 2003, she made history as the only Arts student to obtain 10 straight As in the Hong Kong public examinations.



Nakyung Lim (林奈炅)

Executive Editor,

Preface Technopreneur Program Seoul Final Report

Based in Seoul with strong ties to Hong Kong, Nakyung Lim is an Economics student at Yonsei University and a member of the 3 Campus Consortium for East Asia Program with Keio University and the University of Hong Kong. Her experience spans finance, public institutions, and AI-driven companies, including work as Executive Editor of the Technopreneur Program Final Report. A multilingual communicator and published researcher, she engages in public dialogue by hosting Google Developer Groups events, running a podcast, and speaking at TEDx, the Korea-Japan Millennium Forum, and GEEF.

Diaspora Families Take Root: A Celebration of Cosmopolitan Hong Kong

Introduction

Hong Kong has long been a city of movement—of capital, of ideas, and of people. For over a century, Hong Kong has welcomed an influx of expatriates, entrepreneurs, and professionals, ranging from ambitious traders, pioneering missionaries, to bureaucrats and diplomats, who have shaped its landscape in profound ways. Some have come for short-term assignments, leaving a temporary imprint before returning home, while others have stayed, fully integrating into the city's business and social landscape.

Hong Kong has maintained 3rd place globally and continued to rank first in the Asia Pacific region in the Global Financial Centres Index 37 Report, and the city's status as an international financial centre reflects both the diversity of talents already here and the attraction for people from near and far who have come in the pursuit of promising opportunities¹. As a gateway city in Asia strategically positioned at the crossroads of East and West, Hong Kong's cosmopolitan identity has not only shaped its economic fortunes but has also cultivated a unique and layered cultural fabric with the integration of diverse communities.

Hong Kong values the contributions of non-ethnic Chinese individuals in various fields. Suhanya Raffel, the Sri Lankan-born director of the M+ Museum, has played a key role in Hong Kong's cultural transformation into a global arts hub, with M+ welcoming 2.1 million visitors in its first year of operation². Winfried Engelbrecht-Bresges, the German CEO of the Hong Kong Jockey Club since 2007, has not only led one of the most prestigious horse racing institutions in the region but has also overseen philanthropic initiatives in Hong Kong with the Club being the largest taxpayer in the city and one of the top 10 charitable donors in the world³.

Meanwhile, Umberto Bombana, the Italian celebrity chef known as the “King of White Truffles,” has cemented Hong Kong's reputation as a fine-dining capital with his three-Michelin-starred restaurant, 8½ Otto e Mezzo Bombana. His restaurant, which opened in 2010, became the first and only Italian restaurant outside Italy to receive three Michelin stars in 2012, and he and his team have retained this honor for eleven consecutive years⁴.

In this study, we focus on diaspora families in Hong Kong, more precisely non-ethnic Chinese diaspora families in business and entrepreneurship in the city, which are a specific subset of Hong Kong's global community. Our thesis is that Hong Kong is not only a stepping stone to the world but also a place where these families have taken root.

We turn to the deeply layered Chinese concept of roots (根, gēn) to analyse these case studies, where the word roots (根, gēn) is a term in Chinese that conveys ideas of belonging, identity, and permanence. While historically used in academic research to describe the experiences of overseas Chinese communities, we apply six distinct but interrelated Chinese idioms containing the term roots (根, gēn) to examine non-ethnic Chinese diaspora families in Hong Kong⁵.

Hence, we present an equally compelling yet underexplored narrative, examining how these families retained or developed deep-rooted connections both to their ancestral heritage as well as to their new homes. In doing so, we illuminate the varying degrees of connection and commitment these families have made to the city, examining their long-term influence.

At a time when Hong Kong is redefining its global position and continuing to brand itself as "Asia's World City", it is more critical than ever to understand the archetypes and roles of non-ethnic Chinese diaspora families, such that we gain a deeper appreciation of how Hong Kong continues to evolve as a centre of commerce, culture, and cross-border migration.

葉落歸根 (yè luò guī gēn)

When leaves fall, they return to their roots. To return to one's place of origin.

葉落歸根 (yè luò guī gēn), literally translated as "fallen leaves return to their roots," is a deeply rooted cultural concept that signifies the natural tendency of individuals to return to their place of origin, particularly in later stages of life or after a long period abroad. This idea is tied to Confucian values of filial piety and ancestral reverence, emphasizing the importance of maintaining one's heritage and familial connections⁶.

As a city of movement, it is not surprising that Hong Kong has welcomed professionals from foreign lands who saw the city as a temporary destination. For example, family and extended family members of Korean chaebols and European family businesses have worked in Hong Kong before leaving or returning to their respective countries.

Another example is Merlin Swire, a sixth-generation member of the Swire family, who in 2021 stepped down from his role as chairman of Swire Group after three years in Hong Kong and returned to London to run John Swire & Sons, the parent company of the Swire Group. While Swire's deep-rooted presence in Hong Kong has made it an integral part of the city's economic landscape, with leading businesses notably in aviation (Cathay Pacific), beverages (Swire Coca-Cola), and property development (Swire Properties), the Swire family itself has maintained strong ties to the United Kingdom⁷. This ongoing connection to their homeland aligns with the Yè Luò Guī Gēn archetype, where we can observe a return to one's origins even as business expansion and prolonged engagement continues abroad.

尋根問祖 (xún gēn wèn zǔ)

*To search for one's roots and ask about one's ancestors.
To trace one's ancestry, origins, or heritage.*

Meanwhile, the concept of 尋根問祖 (xún gēn wèn zǔ) symbolizes a deep inner aspiration to reclaim one's origins. In many cultures, the legacy handed down from one's ancestors goes beyond mere bloodline and functions as a core element in shaping the identities of individuals and communities. "Seeking one's roots" is more than tracing a family genealogy; it is a journey aimed at preserving culture, reflecting on history, and

reaffirming identity⁸. Along this journey, many people sponsor initiatives to safeguard their ethnic heritage or establish institutions that strengthen cultural bonds across the diaspora.

Joung Hwan Kwak, the founder of **Cowell e Holdings**, and his family are a representative example. After moving from Korea to Hong Kong in the early 1990s, Kwak built successful businesses across diverse industries yet never forgot his cultural roots. He developed Cowell e Holdings into a manufacturer specializing in core components such as camera modules for mobile devices and optical image stabilization (OIS) units and grew it into a key link in the supply chain connecting East Asian manufacturing with global consumer markets, supplying to Apple and other global brands⁹.



Sponsorship of the musical Hairpin, photograph courtesy of Yang Won Sun Foundation

Having established himself within Hong Kong's community of successful entrepreneurs, he and his wife, Yang Won Sun, have also shown deep commitment to preserving Korean heritage. Recognizing that Korean diaspora communities around the world often struggle to maintain their identity in unfamiliar environments, they founded the **Yang Won Sun Foundation** in 2020.

Guided by the vision of "a world where people empathize with and respect one another and grow closer together," the foundation's mission is to deepen understanding of Korea, promote Korean culture globally, and contribute to the sustainable development of Korean communities¹⁰.

Since its establishment, the foundation has engaged Korean diaspora communities worldwide, fostering connection and collaboration across diverse groups. It also

undertakes initiatives to help people around the world better understand and experience Korea, while broadening the scope of what Korean identity and recognition can encompass.

In concrete terms, it supports Korean diaspora communities not only in Hong Kong, Korea, the United States, and the United Kingdom, but also in places such as Poland, Ethiopia, and Brazil, running more than 10 grant projects in 2025 alone. These include support for Korean Studies at the University of Cambridge and the University of Tübingen in Germany, and sponsorship for an exhibition of Korean diaspora women artists in Washington D.C. and a taekwondo program for youth in Brazil.



Hangeul Design Competition in Hong Kong, photograph courtesy of Yang Won Sun Foundation

As with Joung Hwan Kwak from Korea, **Kiyotaka Ando**, the grandson of **Nissin Japan** founder **Momofuku Ando**, has also traced his origins and heritage in Japan even as he settled in Hong Kong and made the city its home.

After graduating from Keio University and working in Mitsubishi as well as Nissin Japan, the third-generation Ando moved to Hong Kong to oversee strategic planning and management for the group in Hong Kong and China. He currently serves as Chairman of the Board, Executive Director, and Chief Executive Officer of Nissin Foods Company Limited, which is traded on the Main Board of the Stock Exchange of Hong Kong Limited under the stock code 1475¹¹.

Ando's grandfather was a legendary founder. As the inventor of Chicken Ramen in 1958, Nissin Japan had the distinction of launching the world's first instant noodles¹². In 1968, the company launched the first pack of Demae Iccho, which means "one meal for take

away.” In 1971, the company further launched Cup Noodles, the world’s first cup-type instant noodles¹³. In the subsequent years, Nissin Japan launched the Cup Noodles Big Cup, Nissin Rice Vermicelli Cup, Demae Iccho Bar Noodle, and Cup Noodles Light, continuously staying at the forefront of product innovation¹⁴.

While stationed in Hong Kong, Kiyotaka Ando searched for his roots by honouring the legacy of his grandfather, notably by establishing a museum dedicated to sharing the visionary founder’s innovation journey. On 5 March 2021, the date that marked the 111th birthday of Momofuku Ando, Nissin Foods announced the launch of the CUPNOODLE MUSEUM in Tsim Sha Tsui in Hong Kong. The museum pays tribute to Momofuku Ando, who “dedicated his entire life to thinking about food in new and creative ways¹⁵.” As the museum notes, for 96 years, Momofuku “practiced creative thinking and never quit until he achieved his goal¹⁶.”

The museum in Hong Kong spans nearly 10,000 square feet and offers a distinct experience compared to the CUPNOODLES MUSEUM in Osaka Ikeda or Yokohama. At the My CUPNOODLES Factory, visitors can create their own personalized and one-of-a-kind Cup Noodles. They can design the exterior of their cup, choose from four soup bases, and pick four toppings from a selection of twelve—resulting in up to 5,460 possible flavour combinations.¹⁷

Other highlights include the Demae Iccho Factory, where guests can handcraft their own Demae Iccho noodles, going through the full process of kneading, rolling, steaming, seasoning the dough, and finishing it off with flash-frying. Additionally, the My Granola Factory offers a rare and immersive experience that explores the story and production of granola, making it one of the most exclusive workshops of its kind globally.

For Hong Kong, the two cases above from Korea and Japan underscore the city’s role not just as an economic hub but as a place where heritage and business intersect, where business leaders like Kwak and Ando contribute to the city’s economy while also leveraging the historical and cultural roots of their birthplaces to foster international dialogue and exchange. The 尋根問祖 (xún gēn wèn zǔ) paradigm thus offers valuable insights into how individuals and businesses can thrive and contribute while staying connected to where they originally came from.



Kiyotaka Ando at the Nissin Foods Annual Conference in 2025, photograph courtesy of Nissin Foods

落地生根 (luò dì shēng gēn)

To fall to the ground and take root.

To settle down and establish oneself in a new place.

扎根发芽 (zhā gēn fā yá)

To take root and germinate.

To start something meaningful and nurture its growth.

The Chinese idioms 落地生根 (luò dì shēng gēn) and 扎根发芽 (zhā gēn fā yá) capture the profound journey of non-ethnic Chinese diaspora families that embed themselves in new environments, going beyond business endeavours to actively participate in civic life in Hong Kong.

One prominent non ethnic Chinese family business in Hong Kong is **Jebsen Group** which continues its 130-year presence in the city under the leadership of **Hans Michael Jebsen**. Born in Germany and educated at the University of St Gallen in Switzerland, Jebsen moved to Hong Kong in 1981 and has been Group Chairman since 2000. While the legacy businesses of Jebsen Group are in shipping and trading, as the company has evolved the group has come to offer extensive and specialised local market access for over 200 of the world's premium brands.



Hans Michael Jebsen at the 110th Anniversary Celebration of Blue Girl, photograph courtesy of Jebsen Group

The group's beverage portfolio includes beer, wines and spirits, and wellness beverages; the group has been selling Blue Girl beer since 1906 and also imports and distributes Japanese sake, mineral water, kombucha, as well as New and Old World wines. In another main line of business Jebsen Motors, the group has represented Porsche for 70 years in Hong Kong and Greater China, offering sales, aftersales, and other services across eight major cities in the region.

Serving as a bridge that connects East and West, Jebsen Group is also a sustainability leader that seeks to go green and reduce its carbon footprint. Since 2013, the company has achieved carbon neutrality for 11 consecutive years¹⁸. In 2023, through efforts in

carbon management, energy efficiency, and a paperless "digital first" approach, the Group achieved notable environmental progress: greenhouse gas emissions were reduced by 16%, electricity use dropped by 19%, and carbon intensity declined by 4% compared to previous years¹⁹.

Jebsen Group's commitment to sustainability has also helped it plant seeds and roots alongside non-profits in Hong Kong. A WWF Hong Kong member since 2000, the Group attained Double Diamond Member status in 2004. In 2023 alone, the group contributed HKD15.52 million towards sustainability-related initiatives²⁰.

But Jebsen Group's community engagement extends beyond environmental efforts. In healthcare, arts, and sports, it has also made a meaningful impact. Through Project Morning Star, over 260,000 children have received vision screenings, and the same number of residents have engaged in children's eye health education²¹. The "Life is Art" program offered 428 hours of art education and 4,200 internship hours, while the Jebsen InspiringHK Sports Program provided 19,620 training hours²². In 2023, the Group's employees contributed a total of 827 volunteer hours²³.

As a reflection of the Jebsen family's deep involvement in the Hong Kong community, Jebsen himself has played key leadership roles in various sectors. He has served as a Trustee of WWF Hong Kong, a member of the Hong Kong SAR Government's Council for Sustainable Development and Advisory Council on the Environment, and as an Advisory Board Member of the Hong Kong Red Cross. Additionally, he chaired the Asian Cultural Council in Hong Kong, led the HKUST Business School Advisory Board, and established the Jebsen Educational Foundation, which funds two professorships at HKUST.

By nurturing institutional roots while maintaining transnational networks through their Danish-German heritage, the Jebsen family exemplifies how sustained investment in a host community's economic, environmental, and social ecosystems enables both individual legacy-building and collective prosperity.

Another prominent example of a diaspora family that has taken root in Hong Kong is that of **Jim Thompson** of **Crown Worldwide Group**, an American entrepreneur who with his wife Sally have come to see Hong Kong as home. Born in 1940 in Jersey City, New Jersey, Thompson graduated from San Jose State University with a degree in Aeronautical Engineering. Drawn to Asia in the 1960s, he initially settled in Japan, where he launched Transport Services International in 1965 with a modest capital of USD1,000²⁴. The business, which began with international moving services, quickly expanded as global trade routes opened and expatriate flows surged.

In 1970, Thompson relocated the company's operations to Hong Kong—where free-market policies and world-class infrastructure made it an ideal base for expanding international operations. In 1975, the company was renamed Crown Pacific and later Crown Worldwide Group, in light of its global geographic footprint. Today, Crown Worldwide operates in around 50 countries with more than 200 offices, serving multinationals, governments, and private clients²⁵. Hong Kong remains the headquarters of the business even though Thompson's daughter Jennifer, who is now Group CEO, is based in New York.

Thompson's role in the community has extended far beyond the logistics industry. He has served on the board of the Hong Kong Trade Development Council and has been an advisor to various policy and business bodies. His contributions to civil society, including

support for the Changing Young Lives Foundation, the Asian Youth Orchestra, and the Society for the Promotion of Hospice Care, highlight his broader sense of responsibility to the city. In 2003, he spearheaded the adaptive reuse of the historic Central Ordnance Munitions Depot, converting it into the Crown Wine Cellars. This project, awarded a UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Award in 2007, not only preserved a colonial-era military site but symbolized Thompson's integration into the city's cultural memory.²⁶



Jim Thompson of Crown Worldwide, photograph courtesy of Crown Worldwide

What marks Thompson's alignment with the concept of taking roots in foreign soil is not just his sustained presence but the nature of his contributions. Economically, he created employment, brought in foreign capital, and helped establish Hong Kong as a critical node in global supply chains. Socially, his philanthropic endeavours and policy engagement demonstrate a thoughtful connection to local challenges and aspirations. Culturally, his efforts in heritage conservation show a sensitivity to the historical layers of the city that many transient entrepreneurs overlook. Thompson and his wife Sally are thus protagonists in a story that is not one of return or nostalgia for the distant past, but of continuity in a new place and a conscious decision to plant new roots and let them grow.

When it comes to developing roots in Hong Kong, another entrepreneur that comes to mind is media innovator **Merle Hinrich**, founder of **Global Sources**. He arrived in East Asia from Nebraska in 1965, accepting his first job as an advertising sales executive in Tokyo after graduating from Thunderbird School of Global Management²⁷. When it came time to found his own publishing company, he chose Hong Kong to set down roots. He founded Trade Media Limited in the lively entrepot because it was an ideal base for his mission of catalyzing trade between East Asia and the West. In February 1971, he launched *Asian Sources*²⁸, the monthly B2B magazine that connected large-scale buyers in North America and Europe with verified manufacturers across Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and of course, Hong Kong.

Hinrich's multicultural team went factory to factory, working with clients to write advertising copy and photograph their products, enabling them to effectively reach English-speaking merchandizers²⁹. This product-led approach to advertising was then new

to manufacturers across Asia's Four Tiger economies. Working with *Asian Sources* opened overseas markets to them, enabling export-led growth even for small to medium enterprises³⁰.

By the mid-1970s, *Asian Sources* had become an indispensable resource for buyers across retail chains including Sears, Walmart, Target and Tesco. Through manufacturing, it spurred cross-border trade, generated wealth, and elevated entire communities. In fact, *Asian Sources'* success reflected the region's prosperity. From 1970 to 1994, the value of merchandise exported from Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore rose by more than 3,500 per cent³¹. Watching Asia's growth solidified Hinrich's belief that success in trade had to be inclusive, sustainable and mutually beneficial.



Merle Hinrich at the Global Sources China Sourcing Fair in 2007, photograph courtesy of Hinrich Foundation

With the decades, the Asian Sources Media Group evolved into a media giant with a portfolio of specialist titles and business publications. Ushering clients into the digital age, the group set up their email, built their websites, then unified them into Asian Sources Online, the platform it launched in 1995³². The infrastructure allowed active buyers to easily find Asian suppliers online, with geographic and vertical portals including electronic components, telecommunications, hardware, as well as fashion and machinery. The groundbreaking innovation led *The Economist* to dub Merle Hinrich "Asia's e-commerce king", and its competitors to follow suit, including Alibaba³³.

The Asian Sources Media Group was rebranded to Global Sources Online Limited³⁴ and listed on NASDAQ in 2000 under the ticker GSOL. Extending its print and digital operations into trade shows, Global Sources large-scale fairs dominated AsiaWorld Expo, filling all its 10 halls and putting Hong Kong on the international map for merchandizing³⁵. The multimedia company served a community of more than 1 million buyers internationally, and by 2011, employed 3,000 people in 60 offices worldwide³⁶ including the Philippines, Japan, China, India, as well as Europe and North America. In 2017, Hinrich sold his interest in Global Sources to Blackstone, though his impact persists beyond the commercial realm.

An early advocate for cultivating talent in Hong Kong, he launched scholarship programs for his employees in the mid-1980s and collaborated with institutes of higher learning

around the world to shape programs for trade leadership. Today, the Hinrich Foundation continues his philanthropic mission, dedicated to advancing mutually beneficial and sustainable global trade through trade research and education. Since it was established in 2012, it has supported more than 270 scholarships to students mainly from Asia.

As his roots deepened in Hong Kong, Hinrich's influence across the region branched wide, creating opportunities for entire ecosystems that nurtured trust in trade.

Similar to the cases of Hans Michael Jebesen, Jim Thompson, and Merle Hinrich, the story of **Andrea Fessler**, a cultural entrepreneur who founded **Premiere Performances Hong Kong (PPHK)**, is a vivid embodiment of how diaspora families can develop roots in the city. Since arriving in Hong Kong in 2004 as a corporate lawyer educated at Harvard Law School, Fessler has established herself as a central figure in Hong Kong's music and cultural landscape. She set about to address what she saw as a cultural void in Hong Kong, which, despite its cosmopolitan energy, had a somewhat underdeveloped classical music scene when compared to New York, London, and Tokyo³⁷.



Andrea Fessler and Cho-liang Lin at a concert in 2013, photography courtesy of Premiere Performances Hong Kong

As Fessler and her husband, hedge fund manager Davide Erro, decided to stay in Hong Kong long-term, she founded PPHK as a registered charity in 2007 to address the lack of chamber music and solo recitals in the city, contributing her passion, vision, and resources to enriching its cultural soil³⁸. Under Fessler's leadership, PPHK quickly evolved from a single recital series to a multifaceted organization. The Recital Series was launched in 2007, followed by the Hong Kong International Chamber Music Festival (now Beare's Premiere Music Festival) in 2009, the Family Series and Chamber Music in Schools program in 2102, and the Jazz Series in 2024³⁹. These initiatives brought world-class musicians to Hong Kong and provided a stage for emerging talent, fostering both international exchange and local artistic development.

Fessler is proud that PPHK's impact extends beyond elite concertgoers. Through outreach and education, nearly 60% of the 30,000 annual audience members are students, many of whom would otherwise lack the opportunity to come in touch with live classical music.

PPHK has inspired a new generation through school concerts and interactive programs: surveys show that 70% of students would like to attend more concerts in the future, over 75% of students are inspired to practice their instrument more.⁴⁰

Fessler's journey was not without obstacles. The competitive arts scene, high operating costs, and the challenge of sustaining a non-profit in a city with limited public funding for the arts required resilience and adaptability. After the departure of PPHK's founding artistic director, Fessler successfully recruited renowned violinist Cho-Liang Lin to ensure artistic excellence and international relevance. She also leveraged grants, such as the Springboard Grant from the Home Affairs Bureau, to expand her team and professionalize operations⁴¹.

Fessler's contributions have been widely recognized: she received the Chief Executive's Commendation for Community Service, was named a Top 30 "Mover and Shaper" in Classical Music by Musical America and won the "Master of the Arts" award at the AmCham Women of Influence Awards⁴². These accolades reflect not only personal achievement but also the broader social value of her work in rooting international cultural standards within Hong Kong's local context.

The journey of the personalities described above thus reaffirm Hong Kong's role as a fertile ground for those committed to 落地生根 (luò dì shēng gēn) and 扎根发芽 (zhā gēn fā yá), where foreign seeds, once planted, grow into enduring pillars of cosmopolitan vitality.

根深枝茂 (gēn shēn zhī mào)

Deep roots and flourishing branches.

A strong base supports abundant growth and development.

Finally, 根深枝茂 (gēn shēn zhī mào) can be used to describe the Harilela family's flourishing presence in Hong Kong where several generations of socioeconomic integration have resulted in as many as 165 family members calling the city home as of 2025. With deep roots and abundant branches, the family has become one of the most recognizable non ethnic Chinese families in Hong Kong.

The Harilela family initially discovered Hong Kong as a passageway enroute to Shamian Island in Guangzhou. After seeing the possibilities in 1929, they decided to move to Hong Kong, where **Naroomal Harilela** established a company in 1931. Naroomal's son **Hari Harilela**, who was born in 1922 in Hyderabad, Sindh (now Pakistan), founded the **Harilela Group** in Hong Kong in 1959 with brothers George, Peter, and Bob, pivoting from textiles to real estate during the 1960s industrial boom⁴³. Under his leadership, the group expanded to own and develop properties across Asia, Europe, and North America. Today, the group's portfolio includes 15 hotels globally, including Hong Kong's Holiday Inn Golden Mile and the London and Hong Kong-based brand *The Hari*⁴⁴.

The Harilela family's philanthropic endeavours have also significantly impacted the city's educational and social sectors⁴⁵. Hari Harilela made generous donations to Hong Kong Baptist University and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, notably

funding initiatives such as the International Writers Workshop and the Consul-General-in-Residence program. He also spared no effort in fostering friendly and fruitful ties between Hong Kong and India.

As another sign of taking root in Hong Kong, Hari Harilela served on the Hong Kong SAR Election Committee from 1996 to 2006 as one of the people responsible for electing the city's chief executive. In 2009, Hari Harilela received the Grand Bauhinia Medal, the top honour awarded by the Hong Kong SAR Government.

The Harilela family's 25,000-square-foot Kowloon Tong mansion—home to several generations of family members—reflects traditional Indian family values and underscores their commitment to maintaining cultural heritage while embracing their Hong Kong identity. Indeed, the mansion stands as a physical testament to their unshakable roots in Hong Kong with a legacy that has passed from the earlier generations to the next.

Hari's son **Aron Harilela** currently serves as Chairman and CEO of the family business, and, like his father, actively contributes to Hong Kong's economic and social fabric through his participation and leadership in organizations like the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce and the Independent Commission Against Corruption. Aron also has a deep passion for art and established the Hari Art Prize to foster a vibrant network of artists and art enthusiasts. The Hari Hotel Hong Kong, which opened in December 2020, showcases a dynamic collection of artworks by emerging global artists.



Aron and Mahesh Harilela at the Hari in 2025, photography courtesy of Harilela Hotels

Aside from Aron, other members of the Harilela family have made important contributions to Hong Kong. **Mahesh Harilela** serves as Family Council Convenor of Harilela Hotels Ltd and launched the Harilela 100 Talk Series at the Harilela Mansion that celebrates the diversity, openness, and cosmopolitan nature of Hong Kong through insightful discussions. Another family member, **Shalini Mahtani**, is one of the most respected voices on social issues in Hong Kong and currently serves as the Founder and CEO of the Zubin Foundation, an integrated service provider for ethnic minorities that supports 12,000 service users in Hong Kong with a core team of 28 staff.

This multigenerational integration illustrates how non-ethnic Chinese diasporic families can become an integral part of the cultural and social fabric of Hong Kong. The Harilela family's story is not merely one of business success but of sustained contributions across various sectors, exemplifying the principles of 根深枝茂 (gēn shēn zhī mào) with deep roots and flourishing branches.

植根于民 (zhí gēn yú mín)

Rooted in the people.

Being closely connected to and supported by the people or the community.

In conclusion, Hong Kong's cosmopolitan identity is not merely a product of its economic dynamism but of generations of diaspora families that have chosen to plant roots in its soil. The stories of non-ethnic Chinese diaspora families in Hong Kong reveal a vibrant tapestry of commitment, integration, and embeddedness that enriches the city's identity. Far from being transient guests, many of these families are deeply rooted contributors whose investments in business, philanthropy, arts, and sustainability reflect the dynamic interplay between global migration and local community-building in their chosen home Hong Kong.

In many ways, the idiom 植根于民 (zhí gēn yú mín)—“to be rooted in the people”—captures the essence of diasporic integration: when individuals and families are not only successful in their own fields but become intimately connected to the broader community. Going beyond financial success, this speaks to a social contract where diaspora families are deeply invested in the future of Hong Kong, contributing to the well-being, aspirations, and collective future of a community that they have made a conscious decision to join.

The legacy of non-ethnic Chinese diaspora families challenges Hong Kong to foster policies and narratives that celebrate such integration, ensuring its diversity remains a wellspring of resilience. In the roots of these families, we see not just the city's past and present, but the blueprint for its enduring vitality, for the current generation, and for the many generations to come.

Endnotes

- ¹ "HK ranks 3rd as global finance hub." *News.gov.hk*, Mar 20. 2025, https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2025/03/20250320/20250320_173128_257.html.
- ² "M+ Review 2022." *M+*, 26 Mar. 2023, pp.13. <https://webmedia.mplus.org.hk/documents/mplus-review-2022-en.pdf>.
- ³ "Winfried Engelbrecht-Bresges." *Tatler Asia*, <https://www.tatlerasia.com/people/winfried-engelbrecht-bresges>.
- ⁴ "8 1/2 Otto E Mezzo Bombana." *Otto E Mezzo Bombana*, <https://www.ottoemeezzobombana.com/>.
- ⁵ L. Ling-chi Wang (1991). *Roots and Changing Identity of the Chinese in the United States*. Daedalus, 120(2), 181–206. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20025379>
- ⁶ Voss, B.L., et al. "The Archaeology of Home: Qiaoxiang and Nonstate Actors in the Archaeology of the Chinese Diaspora." *American Antiquity*, vol. 83, no. 3, 2018, pp. 407-426. doi:10.1017/aaq.2018.16.
- ⁷ Chan, Gary. "The History of Swire Group: Hong Kong Began 146 Years Ago." *South China Morning Post*, 5 May. 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/business/article/1941580/history-swire-group-hong-kong-began-146-years-ago>.
- ⁸ Voss, B.L., et al. "The Archaeology of Home: Qiaoxiang and Nonstate Actors in the Archaeology of the Chinese Diaspora." *American Antiquity*, vol. 83, no. 3, 2018, pp. 407-426. doi:10.1017/aaq.2018.16.
- ⁹ "COWELL: 1415.HK Profile." *Yahoo Finance*, <https://finance.yahoo.com/quote/1415.HK/profile/>.
- ¹⁰ "Who We Are." *Yang Won Sun Foundation*, <https://www.yangwonsunfoundation.org/who-we-are>.
- ¹¹ "Corporate Profile," Nissin Group, <https://www.nissingroup.com.hk/en/about-us/corporate-profile/>
- ¹² "Our History" Nissin Foods Hong Kong, <https://www.nissinfoods.com.hk/eng/history>
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ "About CUPNOODLES MUSEUM," https://cupnoodles-museum.com.hk/about_us
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ "My CUPNOODLES Factory," <https://www.cupnoodles-museum.com.hk/exhibitions/1>
- ¹⁸ "Carbon Neutrality," Jebsen Group, <https://www.jebesen.com/sustainability-framework/climate-action/>
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Jebsen Group Sustainability Report 2023–2024. Jebsen Group, 62. Aug. 2024
- ²¹ "Community Contribution," Jebsen Group, <https://www.jebesen.com/sustainability-framework/community-contribution/>
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ "Our Leadership." Crown Worldwide Group, <https://www.crownworldwide.com/our-leadership>
- ²⁵ James E. Thompson: 2010 Hall of Honor Recipient." International Association of Movers (IAM), <https://iamovers.org/hall-of-famer/james-e-thompson-2010-hall-of-honor-recipient/>
- ²⁶ "Crown Wine Cellars," <https://www.crownwinecellars.com/cellar/site-history/>
- ²⁷ Trade Media Limited, *The First 45 Years: the history of Global Sources and its contribution to global trade* (Trade Media Limited, 2017), 8

- ²⁸ Trade Media Limited, *The First 45 Years*, 13
- ²⁹ Trade Media Limited, *The First Twenty Five Years 1971-1996*, (Trade Media Limited, 1997),
- ³⁰ Trade Media Limited, *The First 45 Years*, 28
- ³¹ Trade Media Limited, *The First 45 Years*, 29
- ³² Trade Media Limited, *The First 45 Years*, 80
- ³³ Trade Media Limited, *The First 45 Years*, 80
- ³⁴ In January 2005, Global Sources had a team of more than 1,300 people in 44 locations – from *Global Sources: The First 45 Years*, Trade Media Limited, 70
- ³⁵ Trade Media Limited, *The First 45 Years*, 158
- ³⁶ Trade Media Limited, *The First 45 Years*, 205
- ³⁷ "For the Love of Chamber Music: Andrea Fessler." Tatler Asia, Jan 21. 2013, <https://www.tatlerasia.com/lifestyle/entertainment/for-the-love-of-chamber-music-andrea-fessler>
- ³⁸ "Premiere Performances: The People." Premiere Performances Hong Kong, <https://www.pphk.org/about/overview/>
- ³⁹ Premiere Performances of Hong Kong. LinkedIn, <https://www.linkedin.com/company/premiere-performances-of-hong-kong/?originalSubdomain=hk>
- ⁴⁰ "Chamber Music in Schools," Premiere Performances Hong Kong <https://www.pphk.org/education-outreach/chamber-music-in-schools/>
- ⁴¹ "Andrea Fessler." *South China Morning Post*, 19 Oct. 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/hk-magazine/article/2036764/andrea-fessler>.
- ⁴² "AmCham Women of Influence Awards 2021 Distinguished Judge: Andrea Fessler." American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, <https://www.amcham.org.hk/sites/default/files/content-files/WOI%202021/WOI%20Judge%20Bios%2021/AndreaFessler2021.pdf>
- ⁴³ Mogul, Rhea. "Hong Kong stories: How the late Hari Harilela built his empire from scratch and gave back to society." *South China Morning Post*, Aug 14. 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/yp/discover/lifestyle/features/article/3065814/hong-kong-stories-how-late-hari-harilela-built-his>.
- ⁴⁴ "Company Information: About Us." *Harilela Group*, <https://www.harilela.com/about-us/company-information/>.
- ⁴⁵ Harilela, Aron. "Diversity for Betterment of Society." Hong Kong Baptist University, Jul 27. 2023, <https://foundation.hkbu.edu.hk/en/node/13379>