

# QUIS CUSTODIET IPSOS CUSTODES: SEDITION, SURVEILLANCE, AND THE MAKING OF THE WATCHMEN ORDINANCE 1928

## Introduction

This research examines the Hong Kong Watchmen Ordinance 1928, which ostensibly regulated private security personnel but functioned as a sophisticated anti-sedition mechanism targeting Indian watchmen. The legislation emerged during the Ghadar movement, when Indian nationalist activities threatened British imperial stability across Asia.

## Objectives

- Analyze the legislative history and political motivations behind the Watchmen Ordinance 1928
- Examine how colonial authorities used legal frameworks to surveil and control the Indian diaspora
- Investigate the "in-between" identity of Indian watchmen as both colonial enforcers and surveilled subjects
- Explore the broader patterns of peripheral power within the British Empire

## Methods

- Archival research using Colonial Office records, Hong Kong Legislative Council proceedings, and National Archives of India documents
- Analysis of contemporary newspaper reports and legal cases
- Examination of correspondence between Hong Kong, London, and Indian governments
- Comparative study of deportation laws and surveillance mechanisms across the empire

## Result

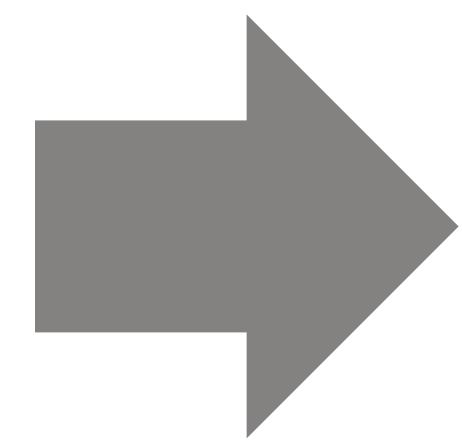
- The Watchmen Ordinance created a three-fold coercion mechanism:
  - Surveillance: Required registration and licensing of all Indian watchmen with police oversight
  - Control: Prohibited moneylending activities and restricted employment mobility
  - Deportation: Provided legal justification for removing "undesirable" Indians

## Conclusions

The Watchmen Ordinance exemplifies how colonial legislation served multiple purposes: regulating economic activity, maintaining social order, and implementing surveillance systems while avoiding constitutional challenges. It demonstrates the ways peripheral powers within the British Empire exercised authority through seemingly neutral legal frameworks that functioned as instruments of social control. The research reveals how the "in-between" identity of Indian watchmen—as both colonial enforcers and surveilled subjects—was shaped by competing imperial interests and local governance needs.

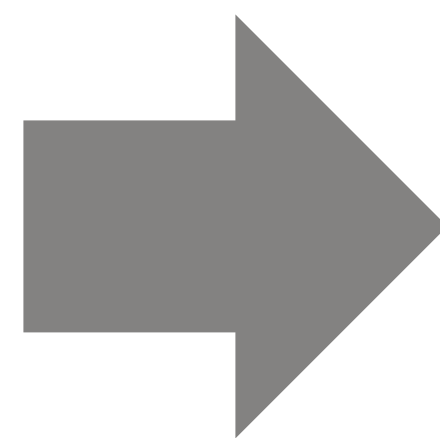
1914-1915: Ghadar Movement

- 1914: Ghadar Party forms across Asia
- 1915: Hong Kong Indian Contingent: 425+ men
- 1915: British authorities concerned about "anti-British feeling" among Indians



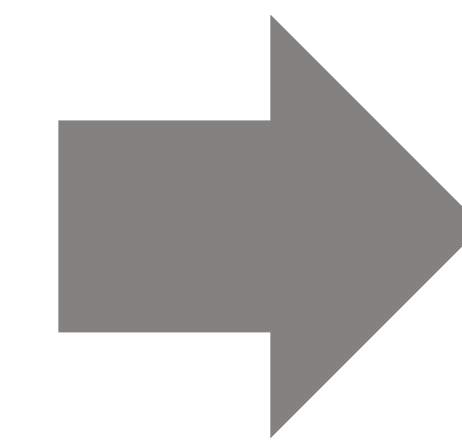
1917: First Legislative Attempt

- 1917: Draft Indian Watchmen Ordinance proposed
- 1917: Deportation Ordinance enacted
- 1917: Li Hong Mi case challenges deportation powers



1921-1927: Legal Challenges

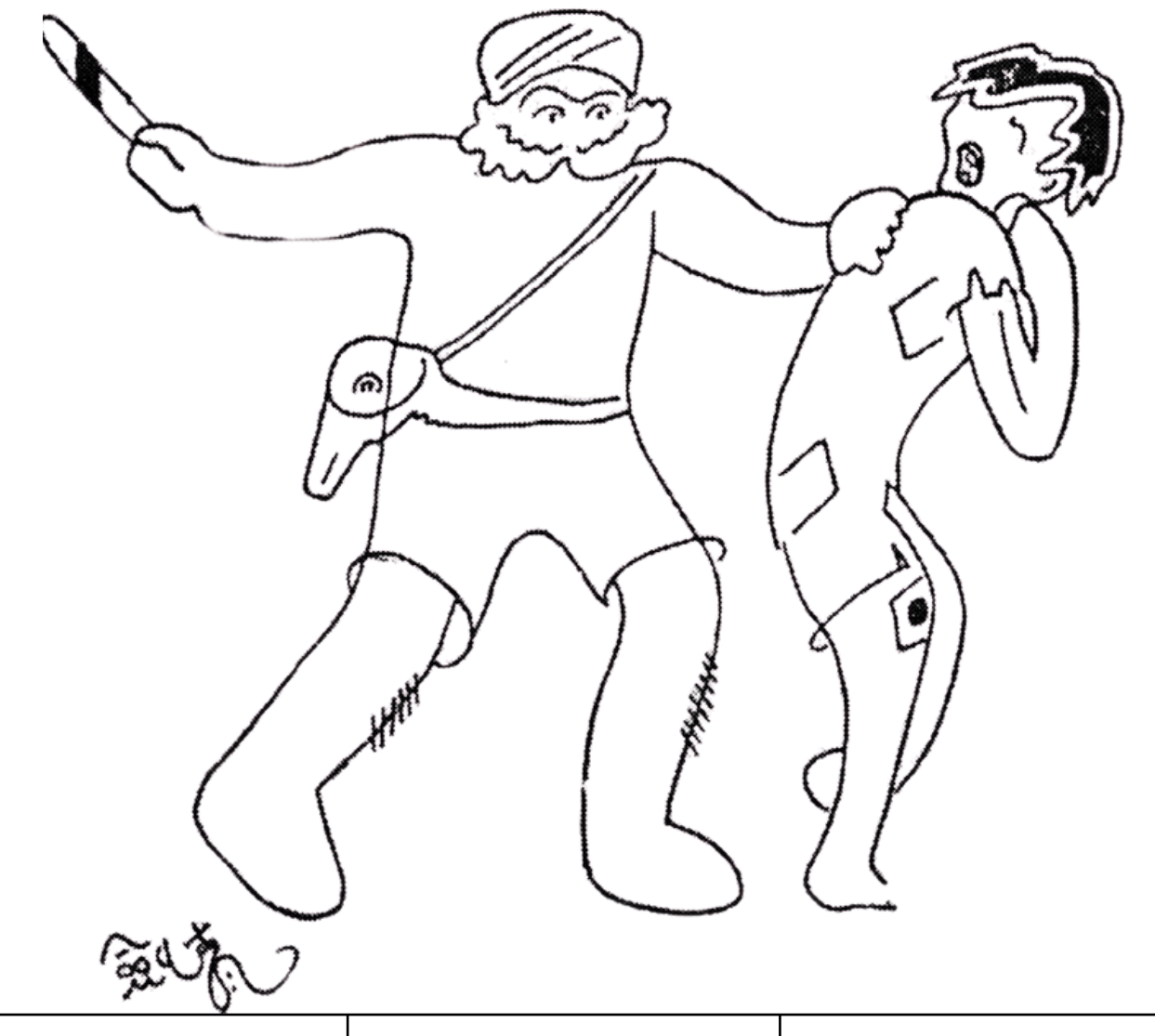
- 1921: Deportation Ordinance amended to target "undesirable Indians"
- 1922: Colonial Office restricts deportation after Indian protests
- 1927: Hong Kong police supply ~600 watchmen to private employers



1928: Watchmen Ordinance

- March 1928: Ordinance passes with amendments
- 1928: Requires registration of all non-Chinese watchmen
- 1928: Indian community petitions against discrimination

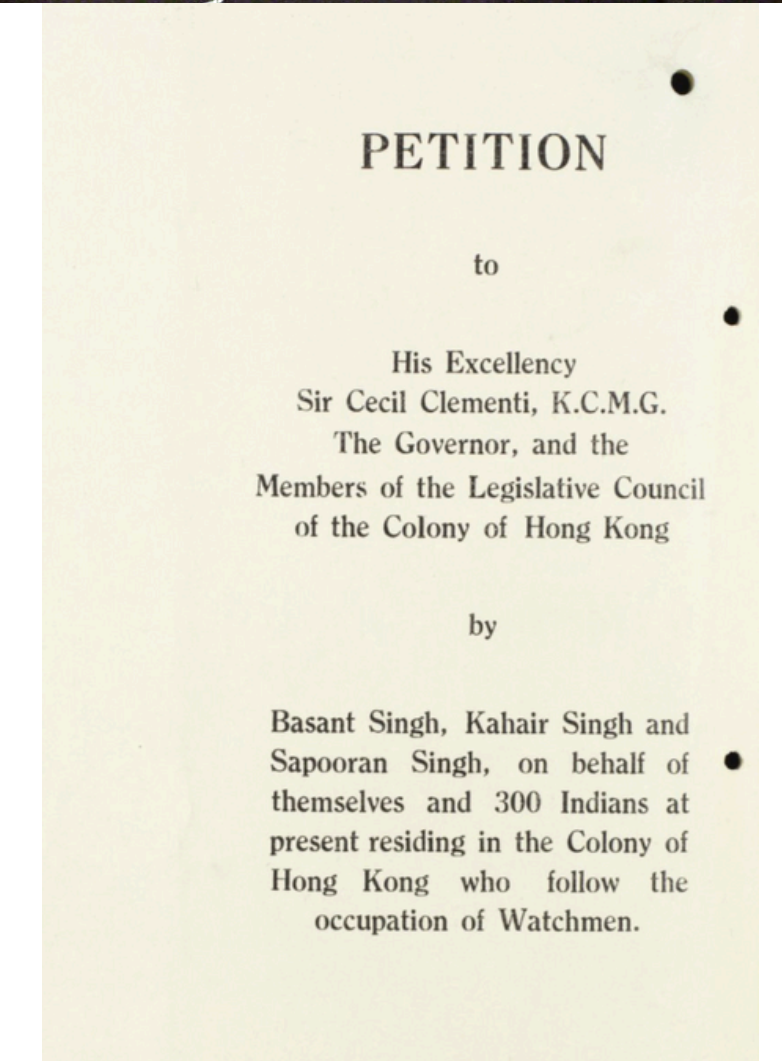
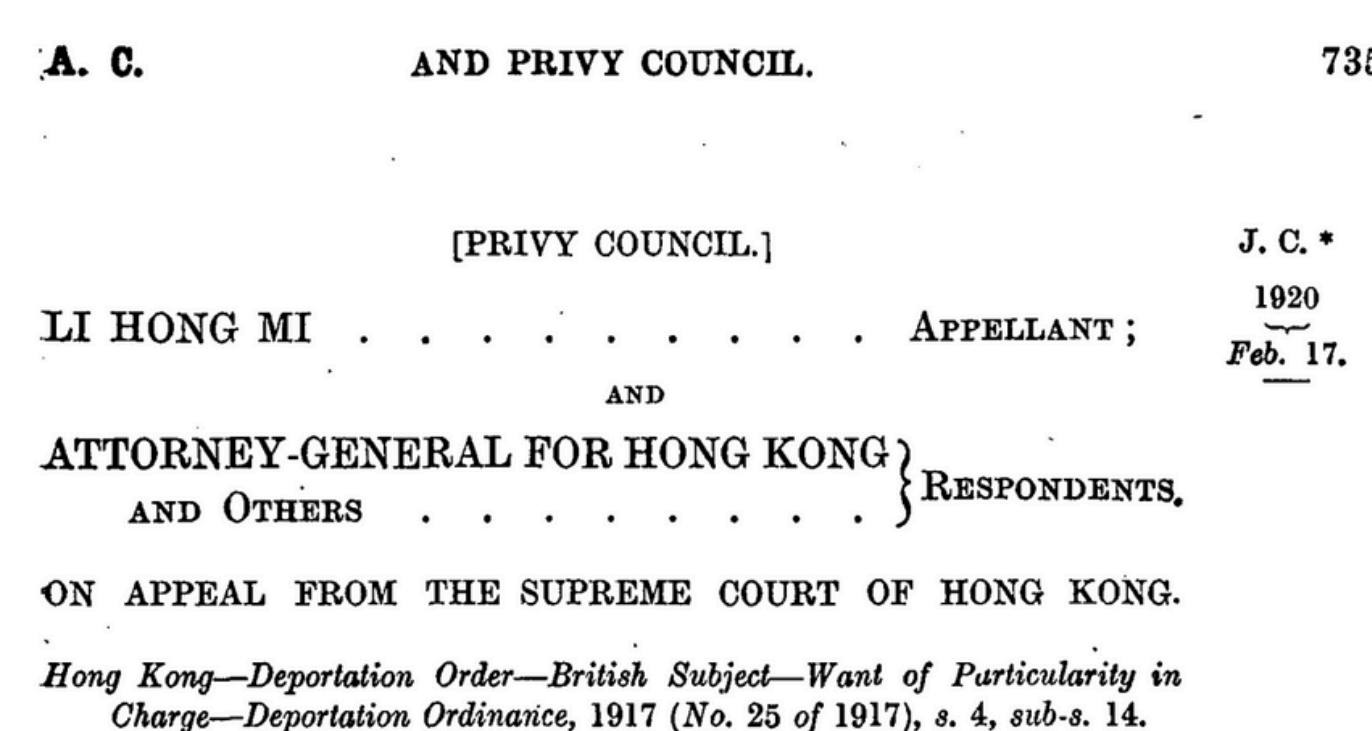
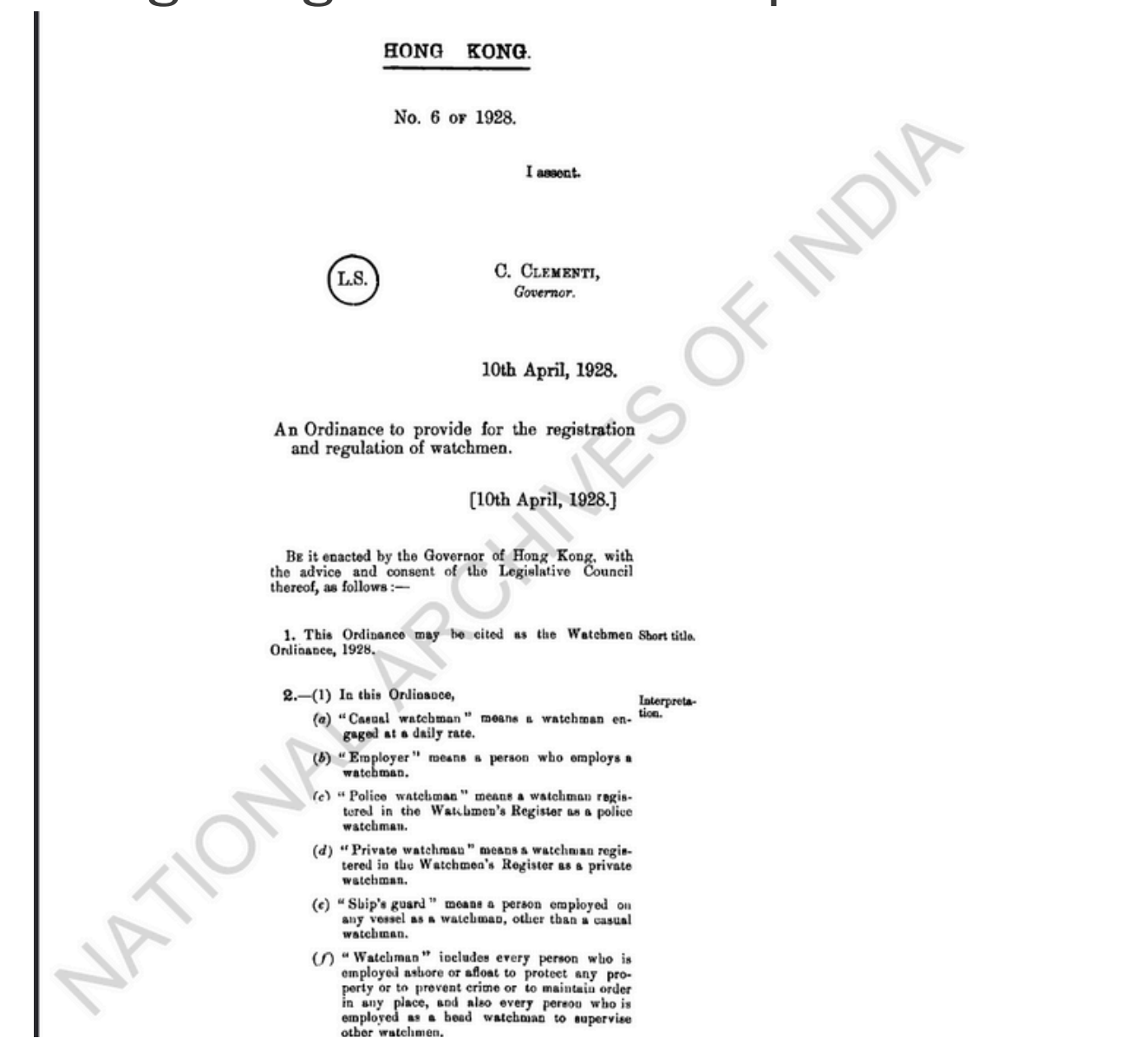
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Year	Chinese Watchmen	Non-Chinese
1901	177	202
1901	389	388
1901	597	391
1901	1027	465

### Graphic Set 1: Diaspora and Revolution, clockwise:

1. Gurdit Singh, leader of Komagata Maru, on board the ship in Vancouver Harbour
2. Cartoon of Sikh police hitting rickshaw puller in Shanghai
3. Bhagwan Singh of Ghadar Party
4. Hong Kong Government Report on the number of Watchmen in Hong Kong, 1901-1931



### Graphic Set 2: Coercion and Petition, clockwise:

1. Draft of the Watchmen Ordinance
2. Francis Henry May, Governor of Hong Kong proposing the original Indian Watchmen Ordinance
3. Petition of Indian watchmen against legislation
4. Li Hong Mi v A-G of Hong Kong, regarding the constitutionality of deporting British subjects

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