

# *The ‘Problem of People’: British Colonials, Cold War Powers, and the Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong, 1949–62*

CHI-KWAN MARK

*Royal Holloway, University of London*

## **Abstract**

From late 1956 onwards, British colonial officials spoke of the postwar influx of Chinese refugees from the mainland to Hong Kong as a ‘problem of people’, with serious consequences on housing, social services and even political relations. The problem was also one of an international concern: both Communist and Nationalist China and the United States saw it in the wider context of their Cold War struggles. At first, the Hong Kong government was ambivalent about providing massive relief for the refugees, either by itself or by the United Nations. But by the late 1950s and early 1960s, the political importance of turning potential rioters into responsible citizens, and the Cold War implications of great powers’ involvement convinced British colonials that the only lasting solution to the problem was not overseas emigration (with outside aid) but full local integration (through trade and industrialization). The international history of the Chinese refugee problem epitomizes the local history of the Cold War over Hong Kong.

Since 1842, Hong Kong had been playing the triple roles of a British colony, a Chinese community, and a regional (even global) city. Although under British colonial rule, it was inhabited largely by Chinese immigrants who maintained close cultural, economic and political ties with the mainland and strong business networks in Southeast Asia. Taking advantage of its capitalist and legal systems, Chinese merchants, workers, revolutionaries and reformers came to the Colony to seek better economic opportunities or to further their political causes. For almost a century, the coming and going of immigrants, refugees and sojourners was largely unchecked, although the British colonial authorities did from time to time refuse the entry of, and

The author can be contacted at [chi-kwan.mark@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:chi-kwan.mark@rhul.ac.uk)

deport what they considered as dangerous and undesirable elements. With the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War and especially after the fall of Guangzhou, in 1940 formal immigration control was introduced on all persons, including persons of Chinese race. But it was Japanese invasion and occupation a year later that significantly transformed the demography of Hong Kong. As a result of either voluntary escape or forced expulsion by the Japanese occupiers, as many as one million Chinese left for the mainland, with the result that Hong Kong's population was reduced to merely 600,000 by the war's end.

After the defeat of Japan and the resumption of British rule in 1945, Hong Kong once again became a place for Chinese migration from the mainland, now engulfed in a civil war. Nevertheless, with the onset of the Cold War and the coming to power of the Chinese Communists in 1949, the situation was never the same again. By the end of 1946, the Hong Kong population was restored to the prewar number of 1,600,000; by 1950 it increased to 2,360,000. By the end of 1956, it was estimated to be over 2.5 million, approximately one third of which were refugees. The Hong Kong government's annual report for that year devoted the opening chapter to a review of a particular problem, a 'problem of people'. Simply put, the problem was about the consequences of excess population on finance, housing, education, medical services, social welfare, industry, commerce and even political relations and the law. When addressing the Legislative Council in early 1957, the Hong Kong Governor, Alexander Grantham, spoke of this 'human problem, a problem of ordinary men, women and children'. Underlying his speech was an implicit plea for greater international assistance to the seven hundred thousand Chinese refugees in the Colony. In essence, the 'problem of people' did not emerge out of the blue in 1956, for the chapter (which was reprinted several times as a separate pamphlet) was actually a review of the refugee problem in the past ten years. Nevertheless, the discourse of the problem by British colonial officials at that juncture represented a deeper appreciation of its permanent nature and the search for a lasting solution.<sup>1</sup>

The 'problem of people' was not merely an internal affair of Hong Kong; it also became a concern of the international community. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was called upon to extend its mandate to the refugees in Hong Kong. More importantly, after 1949 both Communist China and Nationalist

<sup>1</sup> *A Problem of People, A Reprint of Chapter I of the Hong Kong Annual Report, 1956* (Hong Kong, 1957); Meeting of 27 Feb. 1957, *Hong Kong Hansard: Reports of the Meetings of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong, Session 1957* (Hong Kong, 1957).

Taiwan saw the 'Overseas Chinese'<sup>2</sup> in the territory as part of their unfinished civil war. The United States, too, was involved in the Hong Kong refugee problem in the wider context of its Cold War foreign policy and immigration policy. The involvement of these powers, however, presented both opportunities and challenges to Hong Kong. It complicated the Hong Kong government's efforts to search for a possible solution to the problem and played a role in influencing the final outcome.

This article will examine the Chinese refugee problem from an international history perspective. It will focus on the interaction between international politics and local dynamics: how the emergence, development and resolution of Hong Kong's refugee problem was shaped by, and also helped shape, the Cold War interactions among Britain, the United States, China and Taiwan. As such, the article does not purport to be a detailed account of the Hong Kong government's housing and immigration policy with regard to refugees and immigrants, nor a comprehensive survey of the work of voluntary agencies, both local and overseas. By exploring the great powers' involvement with the refugee problem in Hong Kong, this paper will address a number of themes in international history, such as the global response to non-European refugee crises, American Cold War propaganda and immigration policy, and Britain's diplomatic relations with Taiwan and China.

## I

The crystallization of the 'problem of people' in the Hong Kong government's policy debates and public discourses was closely related to its immigration and housing policy. Notwithstanding the first massive wave of refugees immediately after the war, it was not until early 1949 that the Hong Kong government began to introduce a number of measures to control the population: all Chinese immigrants (except those from Guangdong) had to get an entry permit before coming to the Colony; all persons had to register and apply for identity cards; and the process of deportation of aliens and undesirable elements was simplified. These immigration control measures were aimed at coping not only with the increase in population, but also with the possible external

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, both Beijing and Taipei saw the Chinese in Hong Kong and Macao as different from the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. The former, denying the existence of any 'refugees', referred to them as '*Gangao tongbao*', whilst the latter used the term '*Gangao nanbao*' or '*nanqiao*'.

and internal threat to Hong Kong in view of the impending victory of the Chinese Communists in the civil war. The perceived threat did not materialize after the founding of the People's Republic in October, but the consolidation of the communist regime in the South triggered another wave of refugees coming to Hong Kong. In May 1950, a daily quota system was introduced to make the number of Chinese entering into the Colony roughly equal to the number leaving, while permitting an extra fifty legal migrants to stay. The quota system, however, was 'not strictly enforced' because China would, the British believed, 'resist such an attempt'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in the coming few decades the actual number of Chinese coming to, and subsequently staying in Hong Kong far exceeded that of those leaving for the mainland. The Hong Kong government basically adopted a lenient approach towards 'illegal' migrants: under a discretionary regime, they were permitted to legalize their stay in the territory by applying for identity cards. In February 1956, the colonial authorities dropped the quota system for a trial period of seven months. The result was to cause, however, more than 56,000 Chinese coming to stay in Hong Kong. The quota system was reimposed in early September. From this point onwards, the colonial authorities became increasingly concerned about the impact of the continuous flow of Chinese refugees on the community at large (thus the theme of the 'problem of people' in the 1956 Annual Report). Official public discourse substituted the term 'illegal immigrants' for 'refugees', their main difference being that, unlike the latter, the former were escaping out of economic (not political) reasons and thus should not be allowed to stay in Hong Kong.<sup>4</sup> It culminated in the government's policy of 'turning back' illegal immigrants from China in May 1962.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 'Immigration control in Hong Kong', Brief for Secretary of State, 23 Nov. 1959, CO 1030/769, The National Archives (TNA), Kew, Surrey, United Kingdom.

<sup>4</sup> In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the words 'refugees', 'squatters' and 'illegal immigrants' were used interchangeably in Hong Kong's official publications (and British archival records). But from the late 1950s onwards, the word 'refugees' became less frequently used, and the word 'illegal immigrants' was invoked by the government to exclude the newcomers at times of massive influx, for example in May 1962. Thus, it seems that these words were used not in a legal sense but as a mechanism for inclusion and exclusion. As one Hong Kong legal expert put it: 'A characteristic feature of the immigration regime in Hong Kong is its discretionary nature', which means that 'how an illegal immigrant was to be dealt with was decided by the prevailing executive policies and not by law.' Johannes Chan S. C., 'The Evolution of Immigration Law and Policies: 1842–2003 and Beyond', in Johannes Chan S. C. and Bart Rwezaura (eds.), *Immigration Law in Hong Kong: An Interdisciplinary Study* (Hong Kong, 2004), 7–8 and 29–31.

<sup>5</sup> *A Problem of People*, 5–6; Chan, 'The Evolution of Immigration Law and Policies', 1–16; Wong Siu-lun and Zheng Wan Tai, *Xianggang shenfenzheng toushi [Hong Kong Identity Card: A Perspective]* (Hong Kong, 2004), 120–30.

Why, despite the beginning of massive Chinese migration since 1945, did British colonial officials fail to come to grips with the immensity of the refugee problem until the mid- and late 1950s? It had something to do with Hong Kong's traditional policy of free entry for Chinese and laissez faire welfare policy. At first, Governor Grantham believed—though wrongly—that the movement of Chinese was neither a one-way phenomenon nor a permanent problem. He felt that once the situation on the mainland stabilized, the Chinese refugees would leave the Colony or move elsewhere, and together with the introduction of the quota system, the size of the population could be kept under control. Although most of the refugees were accepted on humanitarian grounds, Grantham strongly opposed provision of large-scale relief measures, lest it would encourage more refugees to come and the existing ones to stay. As he put it in 1952, there was 'no reason for turning Hong Kong into a glorified soup kitchen for refugees from all over China'.<sup>6</sup> Despite pressure from Whitehall for improvement, in the late 1940s and the 1950s the provision of social welfare to new migrants and established residents was kept to a minimum, for example, by caring for only the most vulnerable groups and taking remedial actions on an ad hoc basis. And despite the beginning of subsidized small-scale building schemes in the postwar years, until 1954 the government left housing largely to private enterprises (to be supported by free grants of land or interest-free loans).<sup>7</sup> The financial policy of Hong Kong was conservative and cautious. Notwithstanding annual budget surpluses since 1947–8 (with the exception of a few years due to special economic and political factors), the government was reluctant to commit itself to expensive public services, not least because of its desire to maintain financial autonomy from London.<sup>8</sup> Chinese new arrivals were expected to look to their relatives, *Kaifong* welfare associations or international voluntary agencies for help.<sup>9</sup> In a word, throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, British colonial

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Grantham, *Via Ports: From Hong Kong to Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, 1965), 153–6; Sidebotham to Johnston, 24 Oct. 1952, CO 1023/117, TNA.

<sup>7</sup> Chan Kam-wah and Leung Lai-ching, 'Shehui zhengce yu "jiji bu ganyu"' ['Social Policy and "Positive Non-intervention"'], in Tse Kwan-choi (ed.), *Our Place, Our Time: A New Introduction to Hong Kong Society* (in Chinese) (Hong Kong, 2002), 317–8. On Whitehall's pressure for social welfare reform, especially housing, see David Faure, *Colonialism and the Hong Kong Mentality* (Hong Kong, 2003), 87–126.

<sup>8</sup> Lu Dong Qing and Lu Shou Cai, *Xianggang jingji shi* [*A History of Hong Kong Economy*], (Hong Kong, 2002), 164–7; Leo F. Goodstadt, *Uneasy Partners: The Conflict between Public Interest and Private Profit in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, 2005), 62–4.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Sinn, 'Shehui zuzhi yu shehui zhuanbian' ['Social Organization and Social Change'], in Wang Gungwu (ed.), *Xianggang shi xinbian* [*Hong Kong History: New Perspectives*], vol. 1 (Hong Kong, 1997), 198–200.

officials still found it ‘impossible to believe that this [influx of Chinese refugees] was in truth Hong Kong’s problem’, a problem that justified their direct intervention.<sup>10</sup>

In December 1953, however, a squatter fire in Shek Kip Mei propelled the Hong Kong government to find a lasting solution to the problem of squatters, the majority of whom were refugees. With more than 50,000 persons being made homeless, the government decided in 1954 to relocate all squatters in multi-storey resettlement estates. This marked, in official words, ‘an abrupt departure from previous policy’.<sup>11</sup> Due to the shortage of land and the difficulty of attracting sufficient private capital, the government had to use public funds to build permanent six storey buildings for a large number of squatters. Nevertheless, the decision for resettlement of squatters did not signify a fundamental change in the government’s approach towards the Chinese refugee problem *per se*. As Governor Grantham told the Legislative Council in March: ‘It is sometimes said that we are doing too much for the squatters, giving them better conditions than the tenement dweller gets. It should however be remembered that what we are doing for the squatter is not done primarily for his benefit but for the benefit of the community at large.’ It was believed that the squatters were a breeding ground for fire and disease, a great risk to public health and public order that had to be eradicated. Besides, the clearance of squatters was needed in order to free land for the large-scale low cost housing schemes designed for the rest of the population and for other valuable economic projects.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, the resettlement of squatters in multi-storey estates was meant to benefit not the refugees affected (although it did contribute to that outcome), but the community as a whole.<sup>13</sup> To Grantham, ‘there

<sup>10</sup> *A Problem of People*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Hong Kong Annual Report 1954*, (Hong Kong, 1955), 131–2. The official history’s portrayal of the Shek Kip Mei fire as a ‘turning point’ in Hong Kong’s housing policy has been disputed by scholars. Margaret Jones, for example, has argued that there was indeed continuity in housing policy from the 1930s, when the problem had been reviewed by the government, to the 1950s. See her ‘Tuberculosis, Housing and the Colonial State: Hong Kong, 1900–1950’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 37, 3 (July 2003), 653–82.

<sup>12</sup> Meeting of 3 Mar. 1954, *Hong Kong Hansard, Session 1954* (Hong Kong, 1954), 21–2. Iam-Chong Ip describes the resettlement project in the 1950s as a ‘semi-sanitary operation’, concerned with ‘public health’ and ‘public order’. See his ‘Welfare Good or Colonial Citizenship? A Case Study of Early Resettlement Housing’, in Agnes S. Ku and Ngai Pun (eds.), *Remaking Citizenship in Hong Kong: Community, Nation and the Global City* (London, 2004), 37–53.

<sup>13</sup> According to a report on the Chinese refugees in Hong Kong by the United Nations in 1954, ‘this resettlement [of squatters] is only indirectly related to the

should be no question of preferential treatment for refugees as against permanent members' of the Colony.<sup>14</sup> Refugees should not be singled out for the privilege of resettlement (and other social measures), at a time when many long-established, low-income residents who were not squatters were facing similar housing problems. For this reason, from mid-1954 onwards the government began not one but two parallel housing programmes—multi-storey resettlement estates for the refugees (under the Department of Resettlement) and low-cost housing for less well-off residents who were not squatters (under the semi-governmental Housing Authority).<sup>15</sup>

In addition, the economic situation in Hong Kong by that time imposed considerable constraints on the government's spending patterns. As a result of the United Nations (UN) trade embargoes on China during the Korean War, Hong Kong, a traditional entrepot between the mainland and the outside world, entered into a trade recession between 1952 and 1954. Not surprisingly, the colonial authorities were reluctant to make any long-term commitments to the Chinese refugees beyond their resettlement in multi-storey estates.<sup>16</sup> To recapitulate, although by 1954 Grantham was convinced of the need for large-scale resettlement as a solution to the overall squatter problem, his attitude towards the Chinese refugees *per se* had not fundamentally changed. He still harboured the belief that these refugees were 'not our own people but the efflux of a neighbouring country', and thus they should not be singled out for special relief measures at the expense of the rest of the population.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, by 1956–7 it became clear that the Chinese refugees were coming to stay, and many were still coming. The Hong Kong government now fully grasped the permanent nature of the problem. Significantly, once the policy of resettlement of squatters began (already a tremendous task in itself), it gradually went beyond the

refugee problem on the one hand, and to the housing problem on the other.' Dr. Edward Hambro, *The Problem of Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong: Report Submitted to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (Leiden, 1955), 115.

<sup>14</sup> Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 27 Feb. 1954, CO 1030/381, TNA.

<sup>15</sup> M. Castells, L. Goh and R.Y.W. Kwok, *The Shek Kip Mei Syndrome: Economic Development and Public Housing in Hong Kong and Singapore* (London, 1990), 18–20.

<sup>16</sup> Catherine Schenk, *Hong Kong as an International Financial Centre: Emergence and Development 1945–1965* (London, 2001), 14; Lu and Lu, *Xianggang jingji shi*, 197–200.

<sup>17</sup> Meeting of 3 Mar. 1954, *Hong Kong Hansard, Session 1954*, 20. Goodstadt has also argued that 'until the late 1950s, officials regarded the bulk of the population as sojourners who had fled the Mainland for temporary refuge from wars, revolutions and economic disasters, and who were not truly members of the community.' *Uneasy Partners*, 11.

initial purposes of resettlement. 'By setting itself up as the landlord of some 300,000 refugees,' the official annual review of 1956 asked rhetorically, 'did not [the Hong Kong] Government by that fact alone recognize them as an integral part of the population? And did this imply schooling for their children, care for their sick, more imported food [?]'<sup>18</sup> In other words, the Chinese refugees should not be seen as a transient population, but as a settled people. The government needed to provide them with not only housing, but also medical services, water, education and social welfare—in short, their full integration into the community. But by 1957, Grantham felt that the provision of housing and social services became such a heavy burden for the government and voluntary agencies alone to bear that additional assistance from the international community was essential. It took some time for British colonial officials to recognize that the only lasting solution to the 'problem of people' lay not in repatriation or emigration but in local integration. More importantly, in searching for a possible solution during this period the Hong Kong government was influenced not only by the ever-changing internal situation, but also by international forces beyond its control.

## II

The Chinese Communists saw the problem of refugees within the context of their general policy towards Hong Kong. They regarded the three treaties that governed the colonial status of Hong Kong as invalid, and British administration as temporary. To them, Hong Kong was always part of China, and its residents were all Chinese nationals. Despite the embarrassing fact that many Chinese had voted with their feet by fleeing to the British Colony, Beijing felt that it had the sovereign right and responsibility to protect the 'well-being' of the Chinese nationals there—refugees and indigenous residents alike. Thus, in response to the introduction by Hong Kong of a daily quota system that restricted Chinese entry into the territory, in May 1950 the Chinese Foreign Ministry made a protest to London, dismissing the British right 'to treat Chinese nationals the same way as foreign immigrants'.<sup>19</sup> China's concerns over 'the interests of the

<sup>18</sup> *A Problem of People*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Hong Kong to State Department, 10 May 1950, 893.1846G/5-1050, RG 59, Department of State Central Files, China Internal Affairs 1950-1954, reel 27, National Archives and Records Administration (NA), College park, Maryland, USA.

Hong Kong people' focused on three main areas. First of all, in the aftermath of natural disaster such as fire and typhoon, Beijing was quick to express sympathy and render support to the victims, many of whom were refugees living in the squatter areas. A case in point was the attempt, in early 1952, to send a 'comfort mission' to the fire victims in the Tung Tau Village squatter area. The British refusal to admit the comfort mission from Guangdong provoked a riot in Hong Kong and subsequently a political row between China and the colonial authorities over the latter's closure of some left-wing local newspapers which were sympathetic to the mission.<sup>20</sup> Besides, the Chinese Communists also reacted vigorously to what they saw as British 'persecution' of Chinese nationals in Hong Kong. In the summer of 1957, for example, China's propaganda was directed against the Hong Kong government's demolition of squatter huts for the building of resettlement blocks in the Wong Tai Sin area. As the official *People's Daily* complained: 'The Chinese Government cannot allow the traditional rights and interests and the peaceful lives of the Chinese inhabitants of HK and Kowloon to be violated without question.'<sup>21</sup>

But what worried Beijing most as far as refugees were concerned was the perceived Nationalist and American use of Hong Kong as a base of subversion against China. It was feared that Nationalist agents and American officials in Hong Kong, probably with British toleration, would manipulate the plight of the Chinese refugees in the Cold War struggle. One of such concerns was expressed towards the activities of the Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals, Inc., a pro-Nationalist American voluntary organization established to undertake relief work for intellectual Chinese refugees in Hong Kong (discussed later). As one communist news media asserted, between 1952 and 1956 the organization had 'carried out registrations among the so-called "refugee intellectuals" in Hong Kong and Macao on several occasions, established "editing offices" to print anti-communist publications, sent groups of so-called "refugee intellectuals" to conduct espionage activities among overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. . .'.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See Zhou Yi, *Xianggang zuopai douzheng shi* [A History of the Struggle of Hong Kong Leftists] (Hong Kong, 2002), 81–94.

<sup>21</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 September 1957, vol. 23, no. 13.

<sup>22</sup> New China News Agency, 20 Nov. 1958, extracted in FO 371/133337, F1695/1, TNA.

It should be emphasized that since most of the Chinese fled the mainland mainly for fear of communism, China did not indeed have too many cards to play. What Beijing did was primarily to employ its massive propaganda machine to win over the hearts and minds of the 'Overseas Chinese'. It would exploit every possible chance to twist events in such a way that maintained an image of 'motherland' in the minds of the people of Hong Kong. Otherwise, Beijing's policy was to leave Hong Kong alone under the principles of 'long-term planning and full utilization'. It relied on local communist supporters to infiltrate labour unions, schools and film and publishing industries, while ensuring that Hong Kong's ever-growing population would be supplied with sufficient and cheap foodstuff, raw materials and water.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Chinese Communist propaganda apparently also had another intended audience—the British. By linking the plight of 'refugees' with the alleged American and Nationalist activities in the territory, Beijing hoped to constantly remind the British that Hong Kong should not be involved in Cold War politics, lest China would intervene on behalf of the Chinese nationals there.

The Chinese Nationalists also saw the refugees in Hong Kong from a Cold War lens. To them, the escape of so many Chinese to capitalist Hong Kong was illustrative of the tyranny of the People's Republic, and the plight of these anti-communist refugees should be the concern of the 'Free World'. In 1950, the Free China Relief Association was set up in Taiwan to focus on the relief and resettlement of Chinese refugees throughout the world. Its agent in Hong Kong was the Rennie's Mill Camp Refugees Relief Committee. Rennie's Mill was a remote and isolated site at Junk Bay where the Hong Kong government, for political reasons, relocated disabled former Nationalist soldiers and other pro-Taipei refugees in 1950. The Rennie's Mill Camp gradually became a Nationalist stronghold with a refugee population of more than ten thousands and a self-governing committee. The Rennie's Mill Camp Refugees Relief Committee was responsible for a variety of work, such as resettlement of refugees in Taiwan and provision of funds, rice and education to the residents in the Camp.<sup>24</sup> In the words

<sup>23</sup> For studies of China's Hong Kong policy, see Deng Kaisong and Lu Xiaomin (et al.), *Yue Gang guanxi shi 1840–1984* [*A History of Guangdong-Hong Kong Relations 1840–1984*] (Hong Kong, 1997); Jin Yaoru, *Zhonggong Xianggang zhengce miwen shilu* [*A Secret Record of the Chinese Communist Hong Kong Policy*] (Hong Kong, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Wei Man, *Tai-Gang guanxi: jizhi yu fazhan* [*Taiwan-Hong Kong Relations: Institution and Development*] (Taipei, 1992), 20–1; The China Yearbook Editorial Board, *China Yearbook 1957–58* (Taipei, 1958), 455–7.

of one contemporary Nationalist supporter, the Rennie's Mill Camp was an 'international propaganda outpost', its residents an 'overseas anti-communist vanguard', and the Free China Relief Association a 'bridge' through which Taiwan's sympathy and assistance were rendered to the suffering people in Rennie's Mill.<sup>25</sup> In reality, though, the significance of Rennie's Mill Camp as a Nationalist outpost was more symbolic than actual. Although the concentration of a large number of pro-Nationalist elements did worry the colonial authorities, no serious trouble ever broke out in the Camp throughout the 1950s and early 1960s (when the Camp was finally closed down): Rennie's Mill was, in British intelligence assessment, more of a 'potential political problem'.<sup>26</sup>

The Chinese Nationalists did not confine their activities to the Rennie's Mill refugees, however. They also made efforts to focus international attention on the whole Chinese refugee problem. Since 1952, they had been pressing for discussion of the issue in various organs of the United Nations. In early January of that year, the Nationalist representative put forward its position at the UN General Assembly. It was argued that the mandate of UNHCR, confined to specific geographical (mainly European by that time) regions, should have universal applicability. This was especially the case for the Chinese refugees in Hong Kong, who were the 'victims of communist persecution'. But since Taipei did not have diplomatic representation in Hong Kong, the Nationalist representative said, UNHCR should be involved in the relief of these political refugees. For the next several years, the Nationalists continued to lobby for the extension of the UN mandate to Hong Kong.<sup>27</sup>

American interest in the Chinese refugees in Hong Kong first developed among some pro-Nationalist politicians and charitable and religious organizations. In February 1952, the Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals, Inc. (ARCI) was established in New York by a group of prominent American politicians, businessmen and scholars under the leadership of Congressman Walter H. Judd. Believing that more than 10,000 Chinese educators, scientists and technicians had taken refuge in Hong Kong since 1949, ARCI aimed at providing material aid

<sup>25</sup> K. P. Wu (ed.), *The Story of the Anti-Communist Activities of the Patriotic Refugees Now at Rennie's Mill Camp, Hong Kong* (in Chinese) (Taipei, 1958), 209-13.

<sup>26</sup> Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 6 June 1961, CO 1030/1321, TNA.

<sup>27</sup> The China Yearbook Editorial Board, *China Yearbook 1958* (in Chinese) (Taipei, 1958), 238; *Xingdao ribao*, 7 Aug. 1959.

and resettlement opportunities to these refugee intellectuals. Despite its declared aim, ARCI was more than a philanthropic organization. '[W]hile our purpose is not political but humanitarian', its official booklet wrote, 'inevitably there will be a creative cultural and political by-product if we succeed.' The main programme of ARCI was the registration and resettlement of refugee intellectuals, mainly in Taiwan and to a lesser extent in the West and Southeast Asia. It was also involved in vocational training, translation project and medical care.<sup>28</sup>

At first, Washington's attitude towards ARCI was far from enthusiastic. Under the presidency of Harry S. Truman, the Europe-centric administration displayed greater interest in escapees and refugees from the Soviet bloc than the Chinese refugees. Besides, the proposed idea of resettlement of Chinese intellectual refugees also had implications for American immigration law and policy, which by that time were discriminatory against non-European, Asian migrants. It was feared that an unknown number of Chinese refugees would enter the United States and become permanent residents.<sup>29</sup> From late 1952 on, the administration began to pay more attention to the Chinese refugees. The lack of sufficient funds had prevented ARCI from launching its operations in Hong Kong (beyond the registration of refugee intellectuals), with the result that there was growing pressure on Washington to assist the organization.

It was not until 1953 that the administration fully grasped the symbolic and instrumental value of the Chinese refugees in Hong Kong. Under Dwight D. Eisenhower, psychological warfare became an integral component of the US Cold War policy. It was believed that provision of aid to selected refugees in Hong Kong would result in 'the advancement of political, psychological warfare and intelligence objectives of the United States in the Far East.' For one thing, the mere fact that the United States was helping the Chinese refugees was itself a psychological weapon. It could help counter the communist propaganda allegation that the United States cared only about the white

<sup>28</sup> 'Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals, Incorporated' booklet, Phillip Jessup Papers, 1943-58 alphabetical, ACA-AID (Personal), Box A50, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, USA. For a detailed study of ARCI, see Ena Chao, 'The Cold War and the Refugee Assistance: A Case Study of Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals, 1952-1959' (in Chinese), *EurAmerica: A Journal of European and American Studies*, 27, 2 (June 1997), 65-108.

<sup>29</sup> Memo of Conversation, 23 May 1951, RG 59, Department of State Office of Chinese Affairs 1945-55, reel 22; Perkins to Merchant, 5 Sept. 1951, *ibid.*, NA.

race and discriminated against Asian peoples, while demonstrating the sympathy and concern of the American people. Besides, Chinese escapees from the mainland were regarded as a source of intelligence. They could provide the American Consulate General in Hong Kong with valuable information on the communist regime and the latest developments of their homeland. In the meantime, Chinese refugee intellectuals were experts themselves, in that their language skills and knowledge could be exploited for American propaganda purposes. Through financial support, the United States Information Service in Hong Kong sought to engage the Chinese writers and publishers to produce anti-communist propaganda materials designed for the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia.<sup>30</sup> At a covert level, the Central Intelligence Agency-funded Committee for Free Asia (later renamed Asia Foundation) was eager to finance some of the local publishing houses formed by anti-communist, anti-Nationalist refugee intellectuals, such as the Union Press, in the cultural Cold War against China.<sup>31</sup>

Beginning in 1953, the Eisenhower administration extended, on a limited scale, the Europe-oriented Escapee Program to the Far East. In July of the following year, the Far East Refugee Program, the operational arm of the Escapee Program in the region, was put into full operation, with permanent staff being assigned to Hong Kong. The Far East Refugee Program carried out its operations through American and international voluntary agencies on a contractual basis. It provided financial support to welfare and religious organizations operating in Hong Kong, such as ARCI, the Free China Relief Association, the National Catholic Welfare Conference, and the Lutheran World Federation. In the beginning, contracts were earmarked mainly for the resettlement abroad of Chinese political refugees; later, the Program's emphasis shifted to local integration projects such as low-cost housing, medical services, and vocational training.

It should be stressed that the Eisenhower administration's approach to the Chinese refugee problem was selective and limited in nature, demonstrating a mix of humanitarian concern and political

<sup>30</sup> McConaughy to Allison, 29 Aug. 1952, RG 59, Department of State Office of Chinese Affairs 1945-55, reel 27; 'Escapee Program submission FY-1954', Memo enclosed in Martin to McConaughy, 27 Oct. 1952, *ibid.*; Hong Kong to United States Information Agency, 10 Aug. 1954, RG 84, Hong Kong Consulate General Classified General Records of the United States Information Service, Hong Kong, 1951-55, Box 4, NA.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53: The Information Research Department* (London, 2004), 207.

and psychological considerations. To Washington, the problem was primarily a British responsibility, and thus the Far East Refugee Program was 'a selective one and not intended as a total solution to the problem.' Priority for American assistance would be given to 'a relatively small number of carefully selected refugees'—leadership elements, students and scholars—with a view to 'achieving maximum impact with limited funds'.<sup>32</sup>

The attitude of the Hong Kong government to international involvement in the Chinese refugee problem was something of a dilemma. On the one hand, any international aid should in theory be welcome, for it could help lessen Hong Kong's burden. But on the other, it was feared that any attempts to 'internationalize' the problem would entangle Hong Kong with Cold War politics. In early 1952, British colonial officials were concerned about the formation of ARCI and its future activities in the Colony. This occurred at a particularly politically sensitive moment when the row between China and Hong Kong over the proposed comfort mission to the 1951 Tung Tau Village fire victims was unfolding. As Grantham told the Colonial Office: 'We shall obviously lay ourselves open to Communist propaganda attacks if relief supplies from China are suppressed at the same time as arrangements are being made for Nationalist refugees in the Colony to receive assistance from American sources.' The governor was not unaware that Beijing's propaganda machinery was making much of the 'so-called Chinese Refugee Relief Commission' as 'an espionage organisation', which was the 'result of cooperation between the American imperialists and H.M.G.'.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, the Hong Kong government, under London's pressure, could not afford to offend such a prominent figure as Congressman Judd—and thus the US administration—by opposing ARCI's operations in the territory. But British colonial officials were eager to make sure that ARCI should focus on the resettlement of refugees overseas rather than local integration projects. In particular, the Hong Kong government did

<sup>32</sup> Report to the Operations Coordinating Board on assistance programs in behalf of refugees and escapees of interest under NSC 86/1, 18 Apr. 1956, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Records 1952-61, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 1; Operations Coordinating Board Progress Report on U.S. policy on defectors, escapees and refugees from communist areas (NSC 5706/2), 11 Dec. 1957, *ibid.*, Box 20, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (EL), Abilene, Kansas, USA.

<sup>33</sup> Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 25 Jan. 1952, CO 1023/117; Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 8 Sept. 1952, *ibid.*, TNA.

not look with favour on any proposed project which would 'require a lowering (or changing) of Hong Kong Government standards on education, medical practice, etc'. For this reason, the government refused to approve the Medical Clinics Project and the Union College Project conceived by ARCI, for they would require a change in regulations regarding such things as standards for medical practitioners and recognition of Chinese language teaching.<sup>34</sup>

British reservations about ARCI's activities, indeed, reflected their general position on the Chinese refugee problem in the early 1950s. To Grantham, Hong Kong should not become so attractive a place that refugees would want to come—and stay—and any massive relief work carried out there would only contribute to that outcome.<sup>35</sup>

### III

As a result of continuous lobbying and pressure from the Chinese Nationalist government, the Free China Relief Association and other interested parties, UNHCR agreed to give formal consideration of the Chinese refugee problem in 1954. Since Britain did not extend its ratification of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees to Hong Kong, it was questionable whether the Chinese refugees were eligible for legal protection and material assistance by the High Commissioner. After securing a grant from the Ford Foundation, UNHCR decided to send a survey team to Hong Kong to investigate into the whole problem.<sup>36</sup> Headed by Dr. Edward Hambro, the mission visited the Colony between 28 April and 1 August, and subsequently produced a full report covering such issues as the social and economic position of refugees, possible solutions to the problem, and above all the eligibility question. The report was considered by the United Nations Refugee Fund (UNREF) Executive Committee in May 1955 and by various United Nations organs in the next two years. But it soon became clear that the legal status of Chinese refugees in relation to

<sup>34</sup> Hong Kong to State Department, 27 Feb. 1953, White House Office, National Security Council Staff Papers 1953–61, Psychological Strategy Board, Central Files Series, Box 11, EL.

<sup>35</sup> Sidebotham to Johnston, 24 Oct. 1952, CO 1023/117; Steel to Judd, 2 Dec. 1952, *ibid.*, TNA.

<sup>36</sup> McKenzie to Harris, 6 Mar. 1953, CO 1023/117; Record of Conversation, 29 Oct. 1953, *ibid.* TNA.

the High Commissioner's mandate was too complicated an issue for the member states to resolve.

The source of the eligibility question lay in the existence of the 'two Chinas' after 1949—the People's Republic on the mainland and the Republic of China on the island of Taiwan. The majority of the states in the United Nations recognized the government in Taipei as the official government of China. For these states, the 'political immigrants' in Hong Kong were not, from a strictly legal point of view, 'refugees' who fell under the High Commissioner's mandate, since in theory they could be protected by their (Nationalist) government without fear of persecution. To aid these peoples would imply that they were victims of persecutions by their (communist) government, and would constitute a tacit recognition of the People's Republic. But for those states which recognized Beijing, the 'political immigrants' in Hong Kong were 'refugees' within the mandate since they were citizens of no other state and could benefit from the protection of no other government. (The Soviet Union, however, did not consider them as 'refugees' and simply denied the existence of the problem.) In other words, there was a deep division of opinion within the international community as to whether the refugees in Hong Kong were eligible for UN assistance, a division which was as much political as legal in nature. The report of the Hambro mission thus offered a mixed conclusion on the eligibility question. On the one hand, it argued that the Chinese political immigrants in Hong Kong were '*de facto* refugees' (as Taipei was incapable of protecting them) who should be 'of international concern'. On the other hand, although it recognized that London's recognition of Beijing had rendered diplomatic protection of the Chinese refugees by Taiwan impossible, the High Commissioner could not extend its mandate to them 'as long as the Government in Taipei is accepted as the Government of China by the organs of the United Nations'. In a word, legal technicality and political complications made it difficult for the United Nations to provide legal protection and material aid to the Chinese refugees in Hong Kong.<sup>37</sup>

If the possibility of UN assistance to Hong Kong was excluded by the Hambro mission, neither could resettlement in Taiwan and emigration to other countries offer a long-lasting solution to the refugee problem. Since mandatory repatriation was not a considered

<sup>37</sup> Hambro, *The Problem of Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong*, 125–34; Louise W. Holborn, *Refugees: A Problem of Our Time: The Work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1951–1972*, vol. 1 (Metuchen, New Jersey, 1975), 688–90.

option and voluntary return a realistic one, from the beginning the British, Chinese Nationalists and the Americans all concentrated on exploring the possibility of the resettlement of the Chinese refugees outside of the Colony, especially in Taiwan. Between 1949 and mid-1954, through the efforts of the Free China Relief Association, ARCI and other voluntary organizations, approximately 125,000 refugees were admitted to Taiwan from Hong Kong. But the number of refugees admitted annually to Taiwan continued to decline since 1949. Taipei became increasingly unwilling to accept more refugees from Hong Kong due to its political security concern—fear of possible infiltration by communist ‘fifth columnists’—and economic reasons—the island’s growing population and financial difficulties. Thus, the Hambro mission concluded that the possibility of large-scale resettlement in Taiwan in the near future was rather limited. On the other hand, the emigration of Chinese refugees to foreign countries was regarded as ‘a problem of considerable complexity’. Apart from Taiwan, Southeast Asian countries, the traditional hosts of the Chinese diaspora, offered some emigration opportunities for the refugees in Hong Kong. However, because of the rise of nationalism and the indigenous prejudice against the Chinese minorities, in the 1950s the emigration of any large number of Chinese refugees to Southeast Asia was not thought to be feasible.<sup>38</sup>

Neither was the United States willing to open its door to large-scale Chinese emigration. Until the mid-1960s, American immigration law and policy were geographically and racially discriminatory in character. In particular, the United States had a long-tradition of restricting and discriminating against Chinese immigrants. The restrictive immigration policy was relaxed somewhat in 1953, when the Refugee Relief Act was passed which made provision for the entry of 2,000 Chinese refugees (non-quota refugees) in addition to the annual quota of 105 Chinese immigrants (quota immigrants).<sup>39</sup> But the increase was, of course, too small to make an impact on the hundred thousand Chinese refugees in Hong Kong by 1954. To the United

<sup>38</sup> Hambro, *The Problem of Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong*, 71–83.

<sup>39</sup> In addition to the 2,000 visas assigned to them, Chinese refugees could also apply for the extra 3,000 visas assigned to Asian refugees as a whole under the Refugee Relief Act. Dai Chaowu, *Meiguo yimin zhengce yu Yazhou yimin, 1849–1996* [*U.S. Immigration Policy and Asian Immigrants, 1849–1996*] (Beijing, 1999), 143–65. Also see Michael G. Davis, ‘Impetus for Immigration Reform: Asian Refugees and the Cold War’, *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 7, 3–4 (Fall-Winter 1998), especially 127–37.

States, though, the Refugee Relief Act was as much about Cold War propaganda as about humanitarian relief. As one State Department's official noted: 'The Refugee Relief Act of 1953 can do very little quantitatively but a great deal qualitatively. Numerically speaking, very few of them [refugees in Hong Kong] can benefit by the Act. Yet that is far less important than the principles of selection of those who are to gain that greatly prized privilege of entry into the United States.'<sup>40</sup>

The Hong Kong governor found the conclusions of the Hambro report 'rather disappointing'. Indeed, from the beginning, his attitude towards the mission (not out of his own initiative) and the possibility of UN relief for the Chinese refugees generally was ambivalent. After realizing that an international team would come to investigate the conditions of Hong Kong, Grantham was anxious to make sure that the team should be headed by someone who would 'not have a strong anti-colonial bias', and who could work 'in close accord with officials of the Hong Kong Government, particularly where political or security considerations are involved'. The Hambro mission came at a time when the Hong Kong government was debating and subsequently adopting a new policy of resettlement and low-cost housing in the aftermath of the Shek Kei Mei fire. Notwithstanding the decision to clear the squatters, Grantham's attitude towards massive relief for Chinese refugees was such that they should not be given 'preferential treatment' as against the indigenous population, either by the Hong Kong government or by the United Nations. To him, 'any distinction between "refugees" and the rest of the population is quite unreal' and 'it is generally not only undesirable, but impossible, to allocate funds for the exclusive use of "refugees".' Grantham did not oppose outside assistance, of course, but it 'should be given without strings attached', so that the government would be able to use it 'to benefit the community as a whole'. He still believed that 'the search for solutions to the [refugee] problem should concentrate on the possibilities of outside resettlement and not on relief schemes within the Colony.'<sup>41</sup> In a word, by 1954 Grantham had yet to be convinced of the urgency of UN involvement in massive relief work for the Chinese refugees. A

<sup>40</sup> Memo by Kenney, 6 May 1954, RG 59, Department of State Office of Chinese Affairs 1945-55, reel 37, NA.

<sup>41</sup> Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 9 Mar. 1955, CO 1030/382; Buxton to Walker, 21 Jan. 1954, CO 1030/381; Colonial Office to Hong Kong, 12 Dec. 1953, CO 1023/117, TNA.

combination of internal events and international developments would soon change his mind.

#### IV

In early February 1956, the Hong Kong government dropped the quota system for several weeks in order to facilitate visits between the Hong Kong residents and mainland Chinese during the Lunar New Year. The Guangdong authorities responded by easing their exit restrictions, and Hong Kong later extended the period of its relaxation. Between February and September, the relaxation of immigration controls on the border resulted in an additional 58,000 Chinese immigrants coming to stay in Hong Kong. Together with the natural increase, by the end of that year there was an increase of 135,000 residents, bringing the total population to more than 2.5 million. The colonial authorities were propelled to reimpose the quota system in September, a decision which triggered Beijing's criticism.<sup>42</sup> In reviewing the housing position in 1956, the Hong Kong Annual Report wrote that 'the real seriousness of the situation lies in its apparent development from bad to worse'. Since the beginning of the programme of large-scale resettlement in 1954, over 200,000 squatters had been resettled, yet an even greater number of people living in roof-tops and congested areas remained to be housed. A Special Committee, set up in February 1956 to examine the whole housing problem, recommended in the middle of that year that 'the resettlement programme should be expedited.' The problem was not just about housing. There was also an acute shortage of hospital beds and trained medical staff, especially at a time when tuberculosis became one of the most serious health problems. This was the same situation for primary schools (despite the steady growth in the number of children students), not to mention secondary schools and places in higher education. In a word, as the Annual Report for 1956 wrote, Hong Kong was facing a 'problem of people'.<sup>43</sup>

It is important to ask why the situation seemingly took a dramatic turn for the worse in the course of 1956, from the relaxation of

<sup>42</sup> Deng and Lu (et al.), *Yue Gang guanxi shi 1840-1984*, 255-7; Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 11 Sept. 1956, CO 1030/250, TNA.

<sup>43</sup> *Hong Kong Annual Report 1956* (Hong Kong, 1957), 1-30 and 144-57; *Hong Kong Annual Report 1957* (Hong Kong, 1958), 184-99.

border control in February to the discourse of the 'problem of people' by the end of that year. The increase in population was, of course, one reason, even though the annual growth rate of that year was actually slower than that of the previous years (a little more than five percent since 1952). Another related reason was the Hong Kong government's concern about the slow progress in resettlement and the inadequacy of public services. As a matter of fact, however, there was a political twist to the refugee problem by late 1956. On 10 October, riots broke out in Kowloon and Tsuen Wan as a result of disputes over the display of Guomindang flags in resettlement estates. The subsequent clashes between Nationalist and Communist sympathizers left more than fifty dead, with the latter suffering more from the rioting. Believing that Nationalist agents were behind the rioting and the colonial authorities were unwilling to punish the real 'culprits', Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai warned that the People's Republic 'could not permit further Hong Kong disorders on the doorstep of China', and it had 'a duty to protect the Chinese nationals' there. The October riots forced Governor Grantham and the local British commander to reassess the internal security of Hong Kong. They both concluded that a sufficiently large garrison was essential for the government to maintain law and order and to deal with future unrest which would otherwise give Beijing a pretext for intervention. But their reassessment came at a time when the British home government was considering reducing the Hong Kong garrison in the wider context of its general defence review. It is not the aim here to examine in detail the internal and external security of Hong Kong after the October events.<sup>44</sup> Suffice to say, Grantham's attitude to the Chinese refugees was greatly influenced by these events, especially Zhou's warnings: the problem, if left unresolved, would have the potential of giving China a pretext for intervention to protect the Hong Kong people.

The interconnection, in Grantham's mind, between refugees and riots could be discerned when he addressed the Legislative Council in February 1957. During that meeting, Grantham talked about the theme of 'problem of people' in the opening chapter of the 1956 Annual Report, a copy of which had been brought to the Council. In Hong Kong where a large number of under-privileged children lived, he said, it was crucial to 'turn potential little hooligans into

<sup>44</sup> For a full account, see Chi-kwan Mark, 'Defence or Decolonisation? Britain, the United States, and the Hong Kong Question in 1957', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 33, 1 (January 2005), 51-72.

responsible citizens'. In this aspect, he appraised the value of some boys' and girls' clubs run by voluntary agencies on the large rooftops of resettlement buildings. This was demonstrated during the October riots, when members of one of the rooftop clubs at Li Cheng Uk refused to participate in the rioting on the streets. In order to prevent youngsters from becoming 'rioters or members of a Triad society', Grantham continued, the government thus approved the proposed three-year programme of the Boy's and Girl's Clubs Association in the multi-storey resettlement estates. His conclusion was that local integration projects such as the boys' and girls' clubs were 'a very practical form of social defence', projects which became all the more important in view of the Kowloon disturbance.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, by late 1956 the October riots had added a political dimension to the Chinese refugee problem, highlighting the importance of turning potential trouble-makers into responsible residents through local integration in the fullest sense. The removal of the quota system in the middle of that year demonstrated that the Chinese refugees were coming to stay. In addition, opportunities for emigration overseas became fewer and fewer.<sup>46</sup> In view of the arduous tasks ahead and a (final) recognition of the permanent nature of the problem, Grantham felt that Hong Kong needed, and deserved, greater assistance from the international community. Thus, at the end of his 'problem of people' speech to the Legislative Council, Grantham made an implicit plea for assistance: 'I said it was remarkable how much we have done. I venture to add that it is also remarkable how little help we have received from outside. I am aware of, and most grateful for, the large and generous assistance that has been given by the voluntary agencies, but the problem is too vast for them and ourselves alone to solve.' In this regard, he mentioned the recent efforts by the UNREF Executive Committee to give consideration to the Chinese refugee problem. But he also added a word of caution: 'I only hope that the matter will be dealt with as a problem of people and not as a game of political football.'<sup>47</sup> In essence, the timing of Grantham's speech was

<sup>45</sup> Meeting of 27 Feb. 1957, *Hong Kong Hansard, Session 1957*, 22-3.

<sup>46</sup> For example, during the period of July-Sept. 1955, only 1,022 Chinese refugees were resettled abroad from Hong Kong under the Far East Refugee Program, including 759 to Taiwan and 284 to the United States. First quarterly report FY 1956 on Far East Refugee Program in Hong Kong/Macau Area, 15 Oct. 1955, RG 84, Hong Kong Consulate General Classified General Records of the United States Information Service, Hong Kong, 1951-55, Box 6, NA.

<sup>47</sup> Meeting of 27 Feb. 1957, *Hong Kong Hansard, Session 1957*, 29-30.

closely related to the growing international interest in the refugee problem in late 1956 and early 1957. The possible involvement of the United Nations presented an opportunity for assistance to the Chinese refugees that could be exploited by Hong Kong, but at the same time the risk of entanglement with Cold War politics that had to be managed.

Since the completion of the Hambro mission to Hong Kong in 1954 and the adoption of its report by the UNREF Executive Committee a year later, no action had been taken regarding aid to the Chinese refugees. But through the continuous efforts of the Free China Relief Association, the UN Association in Hong Kong, and various international charitable organizations, the Chinese refugee problem was brought to the agenda of the UNREF Executive Committee at its 4th session in February 1957.<sup>48</sup> As before, the question of the eligibility of Chinese refugees for assistance by UNHCR continued to be a divisive issue among the member states. Besides their legal and political differences, another practical obstacle to extend the mandate to Hong Kong was insufficient funds at the disposal of UNHCR. In the first few years of its operations since 1951, UNHCR had been subjected to financial and operational constraints imposed by its founding members, which were interested mainly in European refugees. It was not until after the 1956 Hungarian Uprising and the subsequent refugee crisis that the international community saw refugees as a permanent problem and attached more importance to UNHCR. Yet contributions from governments to various UN refugee projects for non-European refugees remained slow and insufficient.<sup>49</sup> It is not surprising that in 1957 there were no uncommitted funds on the part of UNHCR to assist the Chinese refugees in Hong Kong. Unable to make a clear decision, the UNREF Executive Committee adopted a resolution that the question should be examined at the 12th session of the General Assembly later in the autumn when considering the future activities of the Office of the Higher Commissioner.<sup>50</sup>

The attitude of the Hong Kong government towards the resolution was one of reservation. As the Hong Kong political advisor assessed it, discussions in the General Assembly, which was polarized between the two ideological blocs, 'could be positively harmful to Hong Kong

<sup>48</sup> Holborn, *Refugees: A Problem of Our Time*, 688–90.

<sup>49</sup> Gil Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path* (Oxford, 2001), 7–8 and 74–75.

<sup>50</sup> Report on the 4th Session of the UNREF Executive Committee, 29 Jan.–4 Feb., A/AC.79/60, CO 1030/777; Colonial Office to Hong Kong, 21 Feb. 1957, *ibid.*, TNA.

if it is confined to the making of cold war points'. Rather, he felt that the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), 'with its comparative freedom from publicity', was a more suitable venue for discussion since it could be 'more easily concentrated on the humanitarian problem and away from politics than in the General Assembly'.<sup>51</sup> The British were particularly suspicious about the aims of the Chinese Nationalists with regard to Hong Kong's refugees. To them, the Nationalist delegation in the United Nations only 'intend[ed] to exploit discussion politically without necessarily bringing any appreciable benefit to the refugees'. They were doubtful about the sincerity of Taiwan to admit refugees from Hong Kong. 'All the Nationalists need to do to help the situation', the Hong Kong governor lamented, 'is to make their immigration policy less restrictive'. Underlying the British suspicions and doubts was Hong Kong's delicate relationship with Communist China. Thus, when Taipei expressed its desire to obtain membership of the new session of the UNREF Executive Committee, the British found it 'unacceptable' since this 'would give Nationalists scope for interference and increase the tension between the Colony and Communist China'.<sup>52</sup>

The Chinese Nationalists, on the other hand, felt that the British delegation in the United Nations had been playing too passive a role in seeking international assistance to Hong Kong. In their view, the British were not eager to have any resolution adopted by the General Assembly, but merely wanted to discuss the question in a general way. What London wanted, the Nationalists criticized, was to put the Hong Kong government in charge of any funds which the United Nations might be able to provide, without the direct involvement of UNHCR and Nationalist China.<sup>53</sup> In short, political differences and mutual suspicions pitted Britain and Taiwan against each other, making it even more difficult for the United Nations to reach a decision on Hong Kong.

Ironically, on the question of UN aid to Chinese refugees important differences existed not only between Britain and Nationalist China, but also between the Hong Kong authorities and the home government. Realizing that it was the Chinese Nationalist delegation and representatives of the UN Association of Hong Kong which took the initiative during the previous meeting of the Executive Committee,

<sup>51</sup> Ledward to Dalton, 5 Mar. 1957, CO 1030/777; Grantham to Johnston, 19 June 1957, CO 1030/778, TNA.

<sup>52</sup> Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 26 Sept. 1957, CO 1030/778, TNA.

<sup>53</sup> *Xianggang shibao*, 30 Sept. 1957; 12 Nov. 1957; 26 Nov. 1957;

the Hong Kong political advisor wrote to the Foreign Office that 'public opinion in Hong Kong will expect the United Kingdom representative to take some initiative in future discussions on this problem and to try to give it a constructive twist.' On the other hand, contrary to Hong Kong's advice the Colonial Office, Foreign Office and the Treasury all felt that it was in the best interests of the Colony to try to avoid discussion of the problem at ECOSOC in mid-1957, and instead 'to reserve our fire for the General Assembly in the autumn'. The main reason for the British government to play down the discussion in the Executive Committee and hopefully later in ECOSOC was its unwillingness to commit funds to refugees in general and the Chinese refugees in particular. Under a financially-stricken Conservative government, the policy was to restrict any fresh contributions to the refugee programmes of the United Nations. But 'any U.N. commitment to Hong Kong would almost certainly involve a fresh U.K. contribution to U.N.' Since the British government was not prepared to spend any extra money on the refugee problem through the United Nations, 'it cannot beg too loudly'. But there was also a specific reason for London's refusal to make a financial contribution to the refugees in Hong Kong. To the Treasury, Hong Kong, with its yearly budget surpluses, was 'financially able to meet the cost of the housing and welfare needs of the refugees'.<sup>54</sup>

If Britain was unwilling to make a financial contribution to Hong Kong through the United Nations, neither was the United States, the largest single donor of that international organization. To the Eisenhower administration, the Chinese refugee problem was primarily a British responsibility, and the United States would focus on assisting those leadership and intellectual elements who could contribute to the Cold War cause. Through its direct (contributions to the Shek Kei Mei fire victims and distribution of surplus food) and indirect (financial support to voluntary agencies through the Far East Refugee Program) assistance, the United States was already the largest source of support to Chinese refugees outside the Colony. In 1957, the administration was not prepared to commit extra money to Hong Kong through the United Nations.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Ledward to Dalton, 5 Mar. 1957, CO 1030/777; Colonial Office to Hong Kong, 27 May 1957, *ibid.*; Memo by Colonial Office, 29 Aug. 1957, CO 1030/769; Treasury to Colonial Office, 11 June 1957, CO 1030/783, TNA.

<sup>55</sup> Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 2 Jan. 1957, CO 1030/825; Cabinet Steering Committee on International Organisation, I.O.C.(57)37, 17 May 1957, CO 1030/777, TNA.

As the British had reservations about contribution to Hong Kong through the United Nations, they saw the need to refrain the Chinese Nationalist delegation from stirring up debate during future discussions. The Americans were willing to bring pressure to bear on Taipei for exactly the same reason. It was agreed that the approach of the British delegation in future meetings would be to make a statement of Hong Kong's difficulties and to make an appeal for a UN gesture of sympathy, while working behind the scenes for the passing of a suitable resolution. The emphasis should be on 'securing that the UN publicly demonstrated its interest and sympathy in Hong Kong's problems and acknowledged their international character by making some gesture of assistance' rather than on 'the apparently hopeless task of trying to extract large sums of money from UN members'.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, during the meetings of ECOSOC and the Third Committee in late July and early November respectively, the Chinese refugee question 'generated very little heat or indeed interest'. Whilst the Chinese Nationalist delegation reiterated the view that something should be done for Hong Kong's refugees, the British gave a factual account of the problem and appealed in general terms for assistance. Other representatives including the Americans, moreover, merely expressed sympathy with the Chinese refugees.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, clamour for assistance to the refugees in Hong Kong by various voluntary agencies and by informed world opinion continued throughout 1957. The Hong Kong United Nations Association announced the formulation of a five-year US\$ 100 million aid programme for Hong Kong, to be submitted to the forthcoming session of the General Assembly in the autumn. The Free China Relief Association, moreover, made a four-day visit to Hong Kong and subsequently announced that the Nationalist government would submit a US\$ 100 million relief programme to the General Assembly on behalf of the Chinese refugees.<sup>58</sup> However unrealistic and propagandistic these programmes might be, they did keep the momentum of world interest in the Chinese refugee problem.

Against this backdrop, on 26 November the General Assembly met and finally passed a resolution on the refugees in Hong Kong. In view of the political and legal differences over the eligibility question and the

<sup>56</sup> Johnston to Edmunds, 21 Aug. 1957, CO 1030/783, TNA.

<sup>57</sup> Colonial Office to Hong Kong, 13 Aug. 1957, CO 1030/778; New York to Foreign Office, 14 Nov. 1957, CO 1030/779, TNA.

<sup>58</sup> Hong Kong to State Department, 12 Sept. 1957, 746G.00(w)/9-1257, RG 59, Department of State Central Decimal Files 1955-59, Box 3268, NA.

lack of uncommitted UNHCR's funds, a new formula called the 'good offices' was introduced. It was conceived as a practical way of dealing with controversial non-mandate refugee problems.<sup>59</sup> The resolution recognized that the plight of Chinese refugees in Hong Kong was 'of concern to the international community'. Although these refugees were not declared within its mandate, the High Commissioner was authorized to use his 'good offices' to make arrangements for contributions by governments and non-governmental organizations to Hong Kong.<sup>60</sup>

The adoption of the UN resolution received a mixed reception from the Hong Kong society. Right-wing newspapers praised it for providing a solution to the refugee problem, not least because of the efforts of the Free China Relief Association since 1952. Other local presses generally expressed gratification that Hong Kong's was at long last recognized as an international problem, but cautioned that what was needed were deeds not words.<sup>61</sup> But the most reserved of all views perhaps came from Governor Grantham, who was about to retire towards the end of the year. What disappointed him most was not the lack of concrete support from the United Nations, but that from his home government. In making his farewell address to the Legislative Council in December, he responded to London's expressed view that Hong Kong was financially able to carry the burden of refugees alone by saying: 'It is true that so far we have borne the burden and have not gone bankrupt in the process. But at what a cost!'<sup>62</sup> The fact that the United Kingdom was involved in the relief of the Hungarian refugees after 1956 put London in a particularly bad light. What widened the differences between the governor and Whitehall in 1957 was the coincident dispute over Hong Kong's contribution towards the cost of imperial defence. Rather than providing assistance to the Chinese refugees, the Conservative government, eager to make defence cuts for the sake of the economy, was pressing the colonial authorities to make a greater financial contribution, lest the existing garrison in Hong Kong would have to be reduced. This put Grantham in a difficult position locally. He worried that the Finance Committee (with an unofficial majority) would recommend to the Legislative Council that

<sup>59</sup> Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics*, 92–3.

<sup>60</sup> Holborn, *Refugees: A Problem of Our Time*, 692.

<sup>61</sup> *Xianggang shibao*, 28 Nov. 1957; *Xingdao ribao*, 5 Dec. 1957; Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 30 Dec. 1957, CO 1030/779, TNA.

<sup>62</sup> *Evening Standard*, 18 Dec. 1957, extracted in CO 1030/779, TNA.

Hong Kong's annual defence contribution of one million be diverted to squatter resettlement in the event that London was unable to aid the refugees.<sup>63</sup> In short, for all the international attention and debates over the Chinese refugees during 1957, the burden seemed to have been passed back to Hong Kong by the close of that year.

## V

For the next two years after the passing of the UN resolution on the Chinese refugees, the response of the international community was negligible. But the winds of world opinion sympathetic to Hong Kong's cause, though less intense than in 1957, continued to blow.<sup>64</sup> Within Britain, the refugee problem was occasionally raised by members of Parliament partly to embarrass the government. In response to Grantham's farewell address in late 1957, John Rankin of the Labour Opposition asked whether the Conservative government regarded it 'as a very serious matter when a Governor of the experience of Sir Alexander Grantham makes a devastating attack on the Government for their irresponsibility in regard to the financial aspect of the refugee problem'. This prompted the Secretary of States for Colonial Affairs, Lennox-Boyd, to reply: 'I do not recognise in the hon. Member's rather flamboyant language the actual speech made by the retiring Governor.'<sup>65</sup>

Against this background, in 1958 three British private citizens came up with the idea of a 'world refugee year', an idea which was later endorsed by the British government. On 5 December, the General Assembly adopted a resolution, sponsored by Britain, the United States and a number of other states, launching the World Refugee Year.<sup>66</sup> The aims of the World Refugee Year, which was to open on 30 June 1959, were to 'focus interest on the refugee problem', to 'encourage additional financial contributions from governments, voluntary agencies and the general public', and to

<sup>63</sup> Johnston to Edmunds, 21 Aug. 1957, CO 1030/783, TNA.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, *Hong Kong Standard*, 24 June 1958, 10 Apr. 1959, and 10 July 1959.

<sup>65</sup> Oral answers to questions, 20 Mar. 1958, *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, Session 1957-58, vol. 584, 1415-6.

<sup>66</sup> Y. K. Wang, *A Report on the Hong Kong Rennie's Mill Refugees Camp—For the World Refugee Year—1959-1960* (in Chinese) (Hong Kong, undated), 1-2; *Xingdao ribao*, 9 Nov. 1958.

‘encourage additional opportunities for permanent refugee solutions’ through ‘voluntary repatriation, resettlement or integration’.<sup>67</sup>

The World Refugee Year provided an incentive—and a pretext—for the British government to make a financial contribution to Hong Kong. Because of Hong Kong’s annual budget surpluses and the more pressing needs of other British colonies, the Treasury had hitherto opposed a grant to assist the Chinese refugees on financial grounds. In view of this, Robert Black, then the Hong Kong governor, suggested that London could ‘help the Colony with its refugee problem in the context of World Refugee Year’, and the reason for it ‘would not be economic, but political’—to ‘restore confidence in Hong Kong’ after the 1956 riots. The Colonial Office agreed that the World Refugee Year would be ‘an excellent pretext for the political gesture’ suggested by Black. It was believed that British contribution to Hong Kong, the only colony with a refugee problem, could be justified as ‘a once-for-all operation’, thus eliminating ‘the difficulty of creating a precedent for requests from other territories’.<sup>68</sup>

The international community reacted to the launching the World Refugee Year with great enthusiasm. Forty-five countries immediately announced their participation, and the number subsequently grew to more than sixty. The Chinese refugees in Hong Kong, estimated to be one million by 1960, also benefited from this highly publicized world-wide effort. The US government pledged to contribute a total of US\$ 280,000 to Hong Kong, and the British government US\$ 200,000. The Chinese Nationalist, meanwhile, made a contribution of US\$ 10,000, to be divided between the refugees in Hong Kong and UNHCR’s normal programme for refugees. When the World Refugee Year was drawn to a close on 30 June 1960, an estimated total of US\$ 4.5 million was donated to Hong Kong by various governments, voluntary associations and individual citizens.<sup>69</sup>

In order to make the best of the donated funds, the Hong Kong government prepared a list of projects which it felt were important but, due to other priorities, could not be undertaken at the moment or completed earlier. They included six four-storey community centres and additional primary schools in or near the resettlement estates,

<sup>67</sup> United Nations Office of Public Information, *United Nations Review*, vol. 5, no. 9, Mar. 1959, 39–41.

<sup>68</sup> Brief for Secretary of State by Burgh, 23 Nov. 1959, CO 1030/769, TNA.

<sup>69</sup> United Nations Office of Public Information, *United Nations Review*, vol. 6, no. 1, July 1959, 26–7; vol. 6, no. 6, Dec. 1959, 22–7 and 70–2; vol. 6, no. 5, Nov. 1959, 18–9; vol. 6, no. 11, May 1960, 5; *Xingdao ribao*, 28 Oct. 1960.

medical facilities for tuberculosis, reception centres for children in need of care, and the like. As the official Annual Report wrote, 'these projects should be ones of permanent value, and not merely of a temporary or palliative nature'. Projects, such as the building of a four-storey community centre at Wong Tai Sin resettlement estate, were selected because they would 'be of real assistance in the task of integrating new-comers into Hong Kong in the fullest sense as well as providing for a much needed expansion in a number of social welfare activities'. In this regard, the Hong Kong government's approach towards the Chinese refugees/immigrants in 1960 was very different from that a decade ago. Whilst it had harboured doubt, even as late as 1954, that they were indeed Hong Kong's problem that justified government's direct intervention, by the early 1960s it became clear that the refugees were coming to stay and their full integration into the community was the only solution. What was needed was not only to build more resettlement estates (though the programme still had a long way to go), but also to accelerate 'the process of integrating them more closely and making them feel they are citizens of Hong Kong'.<sup>70</sup> It should be added that the changing economic structure of Hong Kong also allowed the government to contemplate providing more social services to the population.<sup>71</sup> In the early 1950s, the economy was severely affected by the Korean War embargoes on China. But thanks to those embargoes, experienced and well-off entrepreneurs from Shanghai and their less resourceful counterparts from Guangdong adapted to the situation by developing light manufacturing industries, especially textiles. They were assisted by the necessary capital provided by the British banks and the availability of a cheap labour force composed of the Chinese refugees and immigrants. By the end of that decade, Hong Kong's export-oriented, labour-intensive industrial economy began to take off, providing the government with more financial resources and the population more job opportunities.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> *Hong Kong Annual Report 1959* (Hong Kong, 1960), 15–22; *Hong Kong Report for the Year 1960* (Hong Kong, 1961), 171–2.

<sup>71</sup> For example, in 1958 the Department of Social Welfare was set up, at first focusing on the problems of poor people and disaster victims but later expanding to youth welfare and social development. In the early 1960s, the government also started the formal training of social workers. Nevertheless, not until the early 1970s did the government adopt a truly proactive approach to social welfare. Liu Shurong, *Jianming Xianggang shi [A Concise History of Hong Kong]* (Hong Kong, 1998), 270–1.

<sup>72</sup> Nyaw Mee-kau, 'Xianggang gongye fazhan de lishi guiji' ['The Historical Path to Industrial Development in Hong Kong'], in Wang (ed.), *Xianggang shi xinbian*, vol. 1,

But the project of local integration was soon threatened by another massive wave of Chinese refugees in early 1962. By that time, China was suffering from the economic chaos of the Great Leap Forward, which resulted in widespread famine. Due to a number of reasons—resistance of the urban residents to work in the countryside, the Guangdong authorities' deliberate removal of exit controls in order to ease their economic problems, etc. - from mid-1961 onwards Chinese refugees began to enter the Colony through a number of exit points. The exodus increased substantially in April 1962, reaching its climax the next month when as many as 100,000 people were crossing the border.<sup>73</sup> In response, the Hong Kong government announced that these newcomers were not 'refugees' but 'illegal immigrants' whom it would 'turn back' at the border. It further elaborated on the doctrine of 'turning back': any illegal immigrants who were arrested at the border would not be permitted to enter the Colony, and by implication persons who had escaped detection and made their way to the urban areas were not affected by this doctrine. As Governor Black later explained: '[The] Government had no choice but to take the action... because there is a limit to the number of people we can absorb if we are to make our declared policy of integration successful...'.<sup>74</sup> The Hong Kong government's policy of 'turning back' refugees, however, aroused criticism from the international community. Indeed, from the beginning the May refugee crisis was closely watched by the foreign capitals.

The U.S. administration under the presidency of John F. Kennedy had been observing since 1961 the economic and political situation in Communist China as a result of the Great Leap Forward. Although most contemporary officials and observers failed to grasp the seriousness of famine on the mainland (some even denied its existence)<sup>75</sup>, some forward-looking, middle-rank officials in the Department of State did give serious consideration to the possibility of food aid to China in the wider context of relaxing U.S.-China

391–5. On the contribution of Shanghainese cotton spinners in particular, see Wong Siu-lun, *Emigrant Entrepreneurs: Shanghai Industrialists in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, 1988).

<sup>73</sup> See Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution: The Coming of the Cataclysm 1961–1966* (New York, 1997), 205–6; Ezra F. Vogel, *Canton under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949–1968* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), 292–6.

<sup>74</sup> Meeting of 27 Feb. 1963, *Hong Kong Hansard, Session 1963* (Hong Kong, 1963), 30.

<sup>75</sup> See Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: China's Secret Famine* (London, 1996), 287–305.

relations. Thus, the administration's response to the exodus of Chinese to Hong Kong was bound up with its review of China policy. Within the United States, there were voices and demands from Congress, the public and non-governmental organizations for taking action on behalf of these refugees.<sup>76</sup> Not only the United States, but the United Nations was also concerned about the situation as a result of pressure from various voluntary organizations and from Taipei. The High Commissioner wanted to raise urgently with London the question, especially concerning the Hong Kong government's position on 'refugees' and 'illegal immigrants'. In a meeting of the UNHCR Executive Committee in mid-May, the Chinese Nationalist delegation expressed its regret that the Hong Kong authorities were 'in breach of international law by returning these would-be immigrants whence they came'. It further stated that they were 'denying the right of asylum to refugees in a way that was inconsistent with all accepted codes of civilized behaviour, and urged the intervention of the High Commissioner's Office in this situation'.<sup>77</sup>

Throughout the May crisis, the British sought to avoid direct intervention by any of the great powers. It was believed that since the exodus of Chinese was the result of the breakdown of exit control by the Guangdong authorities, the only solution was to secure China's cooperation in stopping the indiscriminate flow of refugees and in restoring the normal movement of Chinese at one exit point (at Lowu). Only through a low-key approach could the day-to-day issues between the Hong Kong and Guangdong authorities, such as the movement of people, be resolved in a practical manner. In May British officials met with their Chinese counterparts to persuade them to restore cooperation and order on the border. Indeed, Beijing also desired to end the exodus of desperate Chinese from Guangdong, an exodus which had already damaged China's image in front of the world.<sup>78</sup> Thus, when the Hong Kong government 'turned back' illegal immigrants, the Guangdong authorities were cooperative to accept their return. But any direct intervention by the United States or the United Nations, the British feared, 'could be harmful to our

<sup>76</sup> Washington to Foreign Office, 20 May 1962, FO 371/164883, F1821/26; Washington to Foreign Office, 20 May 1962, PREM 11/4187, TNA.

<sup>77</sup> Geneva to Foreign Office, 18 May 1962, CO 1030/1312; Memo by Marshall to Key, 17 May 1962, *ibid.*, TNA.

<sup>78</sup> On 17 May, Premier Zhou Enlai instructed the Guangdong authorities to take urgent action to stop the exodus, lest it would have serious consequences politically and economically. Deng and Lu (et al.), *Yue Gang guanxi shi 1840-1984*, 295-6.

chances of restoring border control in cooperation with the Chinese authorities'.<sup>79</sup>

But the greatest obstacle to restoration of cooperation on border control, as the British saw it, came from the Chinese Nationalists. Not only did they criticize Hong Kong's policy of 'turning back' refugees, they also tried to seize the initiative to 'resolve' the crisis.<sup>80</sup> During the meeting of UNHCR Executive Committee on 22 May, the Chinese Nationalists made a five-point statement declaring that the government would admit into Taiwan those refugees who wanted to come, offer a contribution of 1,000 tons of rice to the Hong Kong government to feed these refugees, and establish a special committee to deal with the problem, among the others.<sup>81</sup> To the colonial authorities, however, these proposals were all 'impracticable' and amounted to 'no more than a propaganda exercise, which the Nationalists themselves would be glad to see founder, particularly if they can put the blame on us, and the flood of refugees across the frontier has stopped'. British officials did not see the need for rice, for they were able to feed the illegal immigrants during their short stay in Hong Kong before repatriation to the mainland. Nor did they believe in the practicality of the proposed emigration scheme, given the rather limited number of refugees admitted to Taiwan in the past.<sup>82</sup> The British had always been suspicious about Nationalist intentions regarding assistance to Hong Kong's refugees. The international situation in early 1962, however, reinforced their suspicions. At a time when the May crisis was unfolding in Hong Kong, another crisis in the Taiwan Strait was in the making. Believing that the exodus of refugees to Hong Kong was a clear sign of the impending collapse of the communist regime, Chiang Kai-shek intensified preparations for his return to the mainland by persuading Washington to support Taiwan's sabotage and covert operations against Communist China. Taiwan's actions provoked a massive military buildup on the part of the People's Republic and consequently a war scare—thus the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis. British leaders in London were deeply worried

<sup>79</sup> Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 15 May 1962, PREM 11/4187; Memo by Zulueta, 19 May 1962, *ibid.*; Foreign Office to Geneva, 21 May 1962, CO 1030/1312, TNA.

<sup>80</sup> See The China Yearbook Editorial Board, *China Yearbook 1962* (in Chinese) (Taipei, 1962), 286–7 and 333.

<sup>81</sup> Colonial Office to Hong Kong, 23 May 1962, CO 1030/1312, TNA.

<sup>82</sup> Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 23 May 1962, CO 1030/1312; Tamsui to Foreign Office, 25 May 1962; *ibid.*; Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 22 May 1962, PREM 11/4187, TNA.

about the impact of the crisis on Sino-British and Anglo-American relations; and the Hong Kong governor was anxious to seek American support for restraining Chiang from using the Colony as a launching base against the mainland.<sup>83</sup>

Fortunately, shortly after the Chinese Nationalists put forward their five-point programme, on 26 May Chinese officials in Guangdong reestablished effective exit control. The May exodus thus ended as suddenly as it had begun. During April and May, more than 60,000 persons were arrested and returned to China, but a roughly equal number successfully made their way into the urban areas of Hong Kong.<sup>84</sup> The low-key approach adopted by the Hong Kong government seemed to have worked. As a communist official expressed to the British, the Guangdong authorities were 'appreciative of the way in which we had handled the present problem', and particularly that 'the efforts made by the Taiwan and U.S. Governments to make political capital out of what had occurred had been ignored'.<sup>85</sup>

The May exodus in Hong Kong also made an impact on the American society. As a result of widespread publicity surrounding those dramatic events, on 29 May the Senate Sub-committee to Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees began its hearings on the refugee problem in Hong Kong and Macao. During the hearings which lasted for five days until early July, U.S. officials and representatives of charitable and voluntary organizations testified before the Senate.<sup>86</sup> Partly to fence off any possible criticism of the administration's discriminatory immigration policy before the hearings, President Kennedy announced on 24 May that he would use the attorney general's parole power to admit some 14,000 Chinese refugees from Hong Kong. Preference would be given to family union cases, those who had already applied for admission to the United States, and to professionals, specialists and skilled workers. While it went beyond the 1953 Refugee Relief Act and the 1957 Refugee-Escapée Act, both of which accepted just a token number of Chinese in Hong

<sup>83</sup> For details, see Noam Kochavi, *A Conflict Perpetuated: China Policy during the Kennedy Years* (Westport, Connecticut, 2002), 114–5; Nancy Tucker, *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945–1996* (New York, 2001), 177 and 190.

<sup>84</sup> *Report for the Year 1962* (Hong Kong, 1963), 212–3.

<sup>85</sup> Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 22 May 1962, PREM 11/4187, TNA.

<sup>86</sup> See Hearings before the Senate Subcommittee to investigate problems connected with refugees and escapees, 87th Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 'Refugee problem in Hong Kong and Macao', 29 May, 7, 8, 28 June, and 10 July 1962 (Washington, D.C., 1962).

Kong, the 1962 parole did not, however, mark a radical departure from American immigration policy. The number of Chinese to be admitted was still small, and the process of admission highly selective. But for Kennedy the announcement at that particular moment was of Cold War significance: it could improve America's image in Asia without necessitating a radical change in American immigration law that would cause a political backlash at home.<sup>87</sup>

As the American Consulate in Hong Kong assessed the local response to Kennedy's announcement: 'US admission of refugees welcomed here as helpful gesture but recognized as only a gesture.' There were criticisms, it continued, that the United States was interested in 'only the most talented and skilled refugees' and those 'who have arrived some time ago and are not in dire need'. Governor Black suggested to the Colonial Office that the Hong Kong government 'should pour cold water on emigration schemes'. While emigration 'might benefit individuals', he said, 'it would be unlikely to have any significant effect on the Colony's problem of population'.<sup>88</sup> Significantly, by the early 1960s it became all too apparent to the Hong Kong government that the only solution to the 'problem of people' was not overseas emigration but local integration. In this regard, the most needed projects for full integration for which it desired international contributions included technical colleges, community centres in resettlement estates, recreation spaces in slum areas, and so forth. Thus, Black appraised a grant of \$250,000 by the US government in July 1962 for building and equipping the Hong Kong Technical College. '[I]t advances kind of training and skills Hong Kong urgently requires', he explained, 'if it is to survive as a free community, Hong Kong's livelihood being no longer derived from entrepot operations but from the products of its industries which in turn depend on overseas trade.'<sup>89</sup> Truly, in order to fully integrate the one-million newcomers into the community, Hong Kong, now an industrial economy, needed more jobs for its people and open markets for its manufactured goods. Unfortunately, since the late 1950s Hong Kong had been subject to pressure from its Western trading

<sup>87</sup> See Davis, 'Impetus for Immigration Reform', 137-42.

<sup>88</sup> Hong Kong to State Department, 15 June 1962, 746G.00(w)/6-1562, Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files, Hong Kong 1960-Jan. 1963, Internal and Foreign Affairs (CCF), reel 1 (Bethesda, Maryland, 2002); Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 1 June 1962, CO 1030/1312, TNA.

<sup>89</sup> Hong Kong to State Department, 21 June 1962, 846G.49/6-2162, CCF, reel 6; Hong Kong to State Department, 4 July 1962, 846G.432/7-462, *ibid.*

partners—the United States and the United Kingdom in particular—to restrict, voluntarily, the export of its cheap textile products. Such pressure resulted in the adoption in 1961 of what later became the first of a series of voluntary quotas by Hong Kong textile industries.<sup>90</sup> In view of growing protectionism in the early 1960s, Governor Black argued: 'The most practical method of [international] assistance is therefore to afford Hong Kong products fair access to world markets.' In other words, 'Hong Kong's rapid industrialization is the key solution to its Problem of People', said Colonial Secretary Burgess.<sup>91</sup>

## VI

The international history of the great powers' involvement with the Chinese refugee problem was the local history of the Cold War over Hong Kong. From the beginning, the Cold War powers saw the Chinese refugees within the context of their foreign policy objectives and rivalries. Both the Chinese Communists and Chinese Nationalists sought to win the hearts and minds of the 'overseas Chinese' as part of their unfinished civil war. But since the Chinese refugees chose to vote with their feet and very few decided to return to the mainland, China seemed to be the more defensive of the two rivals. By employing its massive propaganda machinery, though, Beijing did have some success in impressing upon the British the importance of avoiding entangling the refugee question with Cold War politics. The Chinese Nationalists, on the other hand, were more anxious to seize the initiative. Through the Free China Relief Association, they played an important role in the relief and resettlement of the most anti-communist of all refugees, and in the process made much propaganda value of their efforts. But Taipei, too, recognized the limits of its assistance to the Chinese refugees, not least because of its internal security concern over the migration of some communist 'fifth columnists' from Hong Kong and the existing social and economic problems in Taiwan. As a result, the Chinese Nationalists were eager to involve the United Nations in the refugee problem, an involvement which had the added

<sup>90</sup> Nancy Tucker, *Taiwan, Hong Kong and the United States, 1945–1992: Uncertain Friendships* (New York, 1994), 205–6.

<sup>91</sup> Hong Kong to Colonial Office, 1 June 1962, CO 1030/1312, TNA; *A Problem of People: Extracts from a statement by a former colonial secretary of Hong Kong, Mr. C. B. Burgess [June 1962]* (Hong Kong, undated), 5.

advantage of increasing the prestige of the Republic of China on the world stage. The response of the United States to Hong Kong's refugee problem was inextricably linked with its foreign policy and immigration policy. To decision-makers in Washington, the Chinese refugees were an important instrument of the Cold War: a symbol of repudiation of communism, a source of intelligence on the mainland, and experts in the production of Chinese-language propaganda material. The administration provided financial support to the relief and resettlement of Chinese refugees in order to demonstrate the American concern and sympathy for the Asian peoples on the one hand, while finding opportunities to exploit the contrasting ways of life between capitalist Hong Kong and communist China on the other. But Washington saw the refugee problem primarily as a British responsibility; thus, American assistance had to be selective and confined to a small group of leadership and intellectual elements and to relief projects which could contribute to the Cold War cause. This is not to suggest that what the Americans did was all about politics and propaganda. Indeed, realpolitik and humanitarianism were not necessarily mutually exclusive. By supporting American and international voluntary agencies through the Far East Refugee Program, the United States did become the biggest source of support to the Chinese refugees outside of the Colony.

The involvement of the great powers opened up opportunities for international assistance to the refugees in Hong Kong. But it also complicated the efforts by the Hong Kong government to seek a possible solution by injecting Cold War politics into the problem. British colonial officials were particularly suspicious about Nationalist intentions in relation to the refugees, a suspicion which was to a large extent grounded on Hong Kong's delicate relationship with its communist neighbour. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the British approach was to avoid 'internationalizing' the refugee problem: no attempt was made to raise the issue at the United Nations, the Hambro's mission in 1954 being the initiative of the Chinese Nationalists and UNHCR. Believing (wrongly) that the Chinese migration was a temporary phenomenon, and constrained by its traditional *laissez faire* welfare policy and the new Korean War embargoes on China trade, the Hong Kong government lacked both the will and the means to assume the burden of large-scale relief for the Chinese refugees. Rather, it was believed that emigration and resettlement offered the best solution, and any massive relief efforts by the United Nations would work against this by attracting more refugees to come. But by 1956-7, a combination of internal and external events propelled the government

to see the refugee problem in a new light. The 1956 riots had added a political dimension to the problem by highlighting the importance of turning potential trouble-makers into responsible citizens through full integration. By 1957, international interest in the Chinese refugees had developed to such a level that the problem, whether British officials liked it or not, was now high on the agenda of the United Nations. Realizing that the burden of fully integrating seven hundred thousand refugees was too heavy for the government and voluntary agencies alone to bear, Governor Grantham sought to grasp the opportunities for international assistance, while at the same time trying to prevent the problem from becoming a game of political football within the United Nations. Yet, the international community was divided over the eligibility of the Chinese refugees within the mandate of UNHCR, and was unwilling to commit funds for their relief. It was not until 1960, under the context of the World Refugee Year, that substantial donations were made to Hong Kong. Nevertheless, by that time Hong Kong had transformed itself from an entrepot in the shadow of the Korean War embargoes, into an industrial economy which allowed the government to spend more on public services for a settled population.

The Hong Kong people were not passive actors in the development of the refugee problem. Being all ethnic Chinese themselves, refugees, immigrants, and indigenous residents alike experienced no great social and cultural barriers to live and work together. Although a sense of local identity had yet to emerge in the 1950s and early 1960s,<sup>92</sup> they all desired to better their economic and social lives in Hong Kong through hard working. It was their labour, entrepreneurial skills and capital, together with the favourable business environment provided by the government, that made Hong Kong an economic miracle. By the 1960s, what the 'refugees' needed most was not food and clothing but jobs; what Hong Kong depended on was not aid but trade. In a speech in June 1962, the colonial secretary quoted the classic words of Winston Churchill: 'Give us the tools and we will finish the job.' 'For us in Hong Kong today', Burgess elaborated, 'the necessary tools are the opportunity to trade freely, a reasonable access to world markets, and a vigorous capital programme. Given these, we too will finish the job.'<sup>93</sup>

<sup>92</sup> On the development of local identity among the refugees/immigrants, see Agnes Ku, 'Immigration Policies, Discourses, and the Politics of Local Belonging in Hong Kong (1950–1980)', *Modern China*, 30, 3 (July 2003), 326–60; Steve Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, 2004), 167–70 and 180–3.

<sup>93</sup> *A Problem of People: Extracts from a statement by a former colonial secretary of Hong Kong*, 5.