

FORUM ARTICLE

Surveying Hong Kong in the 1950s: Western humanitarians and the ‘problem’ of Chinese refugees

LAURA MADOKORO

*Department of History and Classical Studies, McGill University,
Montreal, Canada*
Email: laura.madokoro@mcgill.ca

Abstract

At the end of the Second World War, there were over a million displaced persons and refugees in Europe alone. Hundreds of thousands of people were uprooted with the expansion of the Japanese empire across the Pacific Theater, and many others were similarly displaced when Japan was defeated. Others later fled civil conflicts, in South Asia, for instance, and in China, where thousands left the mainland during the final days of the Chinese Civil War. Among this massive displacement in Asia, unlike in Europe, only a few groups were identified as refugees. One such group consisted of the migrants in Hong Kong who, after 1949, were understood to be refugees fleeing communist oppression in the People’s Republic of China. This article examines the critical role that surveys (population studies designed to account for, and define, refugee groups) played in shaping particular, Westernized Cold War understandings of the refugee experience in Hong Kong. These surveys were organized by non-state interests and undertaken with financial support from major American philanthropies. In examining the objectives and methodologies of the refugee surveys conducted in Hong Kong in the early 1950s, in contrast with studies undertaken contemporaneously in Europe, this article observes that, although at the time the flaws in the surveys were recognized and regularly disregarded in the pursuit of broad political objectives, scholars have failed to adequately recognize the subjective nature of the surveys’ supposedly empirical evidence. As a result, the dominant European-based narrative about modern refugees has obfuscated the distinctive aspects of the refugee experience in Hong Kong.

Introduction

The situation of the Chinese refugees in Hong Kong is so complicated that any short treatment of the subject is almost bound to be misleading and certain

to be challenged. As in most refugee situations, the first question asked by the outsider, and the one which seem[s] to be the most simple to answer, namely, how many refugees there are in all, presents knotty problems. The question immediately arises, who is a refugee?

—James Read, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The question of how to define refugees is one that scholars have debated for several decades. Dissatisfied almost from the outset with the narrow definition enshrined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, experts have defined refugees using a variety of combinations of political, economic and social factors.¹ Some have pointed to cross-border movement as evidence of a uniquely modern refugee regime. Others have pointed to the existence of an institutionalized refugee regime as the defining trait of refugee movements since the Second World War.² Absent from this list is the idea of a refugee as a countable, and therefore, classifiable subject. Yet the modern refugee subject owes its unique character not to forced migration pressures—for these have existed throughout history—but rather to the practice of being surveyed and counted.

Exiles are understood to seek asylum on an individual basis.³ Refugees, by contrast, are understood to move in large groups, in significant numbers. Being able to account for refugees is a way of signifying the scale of duress. Statistics about refugee populations have therefore been instrumental in drawing attention to the circumstances of various populations. For instance, the United Nations High

¹ The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as someone who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country'. For critiques, see Bakewell, O. (2008). Research Beyond the Categories: The Importance of Policy Irrelevant Research into Forced Migration, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21:4, pp. 432–453; Scalettari, G. (2007). Refugee Studies and the International Refugee Regime: A Reflection on a Desirable Separation, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 26:3, pp. 36–50; Harrell-Bond, B. (2007). In Search of 'Invisible' Actors: Barriers to Access in Refugee Research, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20:2, pp. 281–298.

² For discussions that build on this terminology, see Agamben, G. (1995). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford; Nyers, P. (2005). *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond States of Emergency*, Routledge, London; Haddad, E. (2008). *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; Soguk, N. (1999). *States and Strangers: Refugees and Displacement of Statecraft*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

³ Tabori, P. (1972). *The Anatomy of Exile: A Semantic and Historical Study*, Harrap, London.

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports on the number of the world's refugees on an annual basis. In 2012, that figure was 10.4 million, with 28.8 million internally displaced people.⁴ Numbers are meant to signify need. Just as numbers have been 'woven into the very fabric of modernity', they have been central to convincing observers and potential interveners that a particular population movement is a humanitarian situation in need of attention.⁵ Yet numbers must always be thought of as interpretive, for, as Mary Poovey cautions, 'they embody theoretical assumptions about what should be counted, how one should understand material reality, and how quantification contributes to systematic knowledge about the world'.⁶ The surveys conducted on refugee populations in Europe and Asia after the Second World War illustrate this dynamic perfectly; despite their flawed premises and questionable methodologies and conclusions, they were instrumental for advocates invested in promoting an agenda of concern on behalf of various refugee populations.

From the Second World War on, surveying, and specifically counting and categorizing refugees, became a way to address the refugee question that vexed officials preoccupied with ordering the post-war world.⁷ Refugees and displaced persons reflected the chaos of wartime, and government officials, as well as United Nations (UN) workers, sought to find a remedy to their displacement. Often, however, refugee situations became protracted as governments ignored the pressing needs of displaced individuals. Part of the problem was in determining an appropriate solution. Earlier strategies, such as the population transfers that characterized the League of Nations' approach to refugees, were largely considered out of fashion, especially after the consolidation of the Soviet Union's hold over Eastern Europe.⁸ Two years after the end of the Second World War, there

⁴ Internally displaced people are uprooted and displaced but they do not cross international boundaries. *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c1d.html>, [accessed 16 September 2014].

⁵ Barnes, T. and Hannah, M. (2001). Guest Editorial, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 19, p. 379.

⁶ Poovey, M. (1998). *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. xii.

⁷ Cohen, D. (2011). *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

⁸ Weiss, P. (1954). The International Protection of Refugees, *The American Journal of International Law*, 48:2, pp. 193–221; Holborn, L. (1939). The League of Nations and the Refugee Problem, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 203, pp. 124–135. While the League's efforts are generally recognized to have been

were still 850,000 refugees and displaced persons in camps across Europe. Meanwhile, thousands of people were fleeing the tumultuous conditions created by the Chinese Civil War. In doing so, they were following a century-old practice of seeking refuge in nearby Hong Kong until times of strife on the mainland passed. By 1951, 700,000 people had moved from the Chinese mainland to nearby Hong Kong.

The first UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Gerrit van Heuven Goedhart was mandated to find a solution to the protracted refugee situation in Europe. He placed a premium on empirical evidence as a means of understanding the size of the refugee problem and galvanizing supporters to action. Crucially, advocates would adopt a similar strategy for creating awareness and engagement with refugee populations outside of Europe, most notably in Asia. These surveys were consistently initiated by non-governmental interests and supported financially by key American philanthropies. The groups they counted and defined were meant to spur governments into action at a time when states were reluctant to open their doors to global migration flows, and particularly to displaced persons and refugees suffering the effects of wartime traumas.⁹

Several refugee surveys were undertaken in the post-war period. The first was Jacques Vernant's study, *The Refugee in The Post-War World*, a study of refugees in Europe and the Middle East. In the same period, Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals undertook a small survey of refugees in Hong Kong, which was followed by a major UN study in 1954. These three surveys, discussed in detail in this article, offer a unique window through which to investigate the dynamics around refugee protection and assistance as it was envisioned in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The surveys were undertaken under a guise of objectivity that obfuscated, to a certain extent, what was at stake politically in defining the nature of the refugee problem and recommending solutions. Building on the literature that situates American philanthropy as an extension, rather than opponent, of state interests, this article investigates

a failure, Claudena Skran suggests that its work was critical in establishing the foundations of the contemporary refugee regime as it exists today. See Skran, C. (1995). *Refugees in Inter-War Europe: The Emergence of a Regime*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Marrus, M. (1987). *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

the rationales and methodologies employed in the major surveys of refugees in the colony to explore how the debate over who should bear ultimate responsibility for the ‘care and maintenance’ for refugees in Asia employed particularly Westernized notions of what constituted a refugee experience, where individual persecution was understood to be the paramount form of refugeehood.¹⁰

The surveys, which inscribed refugees with numerical significance, were critical both for justifying the work of various organizations on behalf of refugees and, in the context of refugees from the People’s Republic of China, signifying the breadth of communism’s evils. In theory, numbers were just numbers. In reality, however, the greater the quantifiable size of a given refugee population, the greater the evidence of persecution and evil. Such evidence gave weight to stories of oppression and suffering at the hands of the Communist regime in Beijing.¹¹ This demonization of the communist presence in Asia fed into American interests. As a result, the knowledge produced about refugees in Hong Kong was highly politicized and subjective, both in terms of how it was produced as well as how it was disseminated.¹² Despite the troubled context in which empirical knowledge about refugees in Asia was produced, it provided the basis for how refugee subjectivity was subsequently formulated. To paraphrase Trevor Barnes and Matthew Hannah and their observations on the work of numbers generally, refugee statistics partly constructed reality, ‘rather than only representing it’.¹³ Colourful rhetoric did the rest.

¹⁰ The UNHCR and voluntary organizations consistently referred to its work in terms of the ‘care and maintenance’ of refugees, pointing to both short- and long-term priorities. See ‘UNHCR’, File 5475-EA-1-40, Part 15.1, RG 25, Volume 5152, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

¹¹ Many of these contemporary accounts were produced for Western audiences by publishing houses supported with American funding. See, for instance, Hughes, R. and Redl, H. (1962). *Exodus from China*, Dragonfly Books, Hong Kong. Journalists and scholars used Hong Kong as a base from which to learn about life behind the restrictive borders of the People’s Republic of China. See correspondence from New York Times Company–Foreign Desk Records, Box 131, File 10, New York Public Library; and Frolic, B. (1981). *Mao’s People: Sixteen Portraits of Life in Revolutionary China*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

¹² On the vested interest of experts, see Akami, T. (2002). Between the State and Global Civil Society: Non-Official Experts and Their Network in the Asia-Pacific, 1925–45, *Global Network*, 2:1, p. 65.

¹³ Barnes and Hannah, Guest Editorial, p. 380.

The UNHCR's campaign for relevance

Established in 1951, with a provisional three-year mandate to carry out the work of the recently defunct International Refugee Organization, the UNHCR was designed as a coordinating body to find solutions to the refugee situation in Europe. From its earliest days, the UNHCR was an organization that needed to prove its relevance and justify its existence beyond its initial, limited term. Producing scientific knowledge about refugee populations was central to these pursuits.

One of the great challenges confronting the UNHCR was how to define the scope of the international community's responsibility for refugees vis-à-vis that imagined by national governments. This was a question that preoccupied philanthropic organizations in the United States as well. Trustees of both of the Rockefeller and Ford foundations were concerned about refugee populations in terms of human welfare issues. In fact, throughout the Cold War, the 'Big Three'—as the Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford foundations were known—all focused in some way on international peace and human welfare, with special attention paid to questions of education and culture. This meant that their resources went directly to knowledge production, which in turn shaped understandings of the world and global civil society. The foundations' belief in 'elite governance' and what Edward Berman calls 'technologically-oriented experts' meant that much of their funding was directed towards the training of experts, particularly in the developing world, or the use of experts to develop solutions to identified problems, including those of the world's refugees.¹⁴ This outlook was born of a passionate belief in the righteousness of life in the free world and of America's global leadership. Yet the foundations' granting policies were explicit: money was not to be given to projects that fell, in their opinion, within the natural purview of the state.¹⁵ The question of the world's refugee populations therefore presented something of a dilemma for it was unclear who was ultimately responsible for the 'care and maintenance' (to use a popular phrase from the period) of refugees in Europe and Asia. To answer this question, refugees were universally problematized; Western surveys then produced raw data

¹⁴ Berman, E. H. (1983). *Ideology of Philanthropy: The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy*, State University of New York Press, New York, p. 6.

¹⁵ Bernard Gladieux to Joseph M. McDaniel Jr., 'Present Status of Refugee and Escapee Projects Under Study by New York Office', 10 March 1952, PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

that advocates could exploit for various political advantages. Individual refugee experiences were largely obscured in the process.

The first High Commissioner, Gerrit van Heuven Goedhart was known as ‘an outspoken and courageous spokesman’ for refugees and was a driving force in shaping international efforts around refugee protection after the Second World War.¹⁶ He wrote and published widely in order to raise the profile of refugee populations. Initially, Goedhart focused exclusively on ensuring that the UNHCR delivered in its task of finding solutions refugees under its mandate, namely refugees in Europe. At the core of his appeals was a call for material aid to solve ‘the problems of as many refugees as possible within the limits of the time and money available’.¹⁷ Goedhart’s proposed solutions involved ensuring that refugees had information about their home countries so that they could return if they so desired, identifying migration opportunities as well as promoting programmes for economic and social integration.¹⁸ Importantly, this approach facilitated a role for the UNHCR as a mediator and coordinator and established the rationale for financial and political support to refugees, beyond the boundaries of legal protection.

The earliest support for the UNHCR’s refugee work, aside from government contributions via the UN, came from the Ford Foundation in 1952, reflecting the latter’s increasingly international focus in the post-war period.¹⁹ In response to an appeal from Goedhart, the Ford Foundation gave \$2,900,000 to the UNHCR to coordinate the work of 15 voluntary agencies.²⁰ The Ford Foundation’s grant to the UNHCR

¹⁶ ‘ECOSOC, Final Report on Agenda Item 14: Report of the High Commissioner for Refugees’, in ‘Refugees and Stateless Persons (United Nations General Assembly)—Correspondence and Reports’, File 566–10, Part 2, RG 26, Volume 110, LAC.

¹⁷ Goedhart, G. J. van Heuven (1946). The Responsibility of the International Community for Refugees, *Ecumenical Review*, p. 448.

¹⁸ Goedhart, G. J. van Heuven (1953). People Adrift, *Journal of International Affairs*, p. 8.

¹⁹ Established in 1936, the Ford Foundation adopted a much more internationalist outlook after its granting policies were revised in 1950.

²⁰ In the gilded age of American expansion, men such as Andrew Carnegie and John Rockefeller accumulated millions of dollars in assets. In the late 1800s, the American government proposed changes to the taxation system that risked removing much of this wealth from the hands of the rich oil and steel magnates. The Carnegie and Rockefeller foundations, established in 1906 and 1913 respectively, were a solution to the dilemma of how to preserve this wealth while at the same time doing something that could benefit ‘all of mankind’. Fosdick, R. (1963). *Philosophy for a Foundation: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Rockefeller Foundation, 1913–1963*, Rockefeller Foundation,

was vital for advancing the organization's capacity to advocate on behalf of refugees. In acknowledging the grant, James Read of the UNHCR underscored its significance, noting that the Ford Foundation was discharging 'what was essentially a governmental responsibility'. Read was thrilled by the Ford Foundation's grant as he believed the support 'threw a bright spotlight on the refugee problem and made it impossible for governments to belittle it'.²¹ Although the grant was expressly intended to develop projects that would facilitate the local integration of refugees, Goedhart also saw the grant as a way of fostering 'private or official action on a wider scale'.²² The idea of the grant acted as a spark for subsequent activity on behalf of refugees and was part of the ongoing debate over who should bear responsibility for refugee populations in Europe. The idea was that if numbers proved sufficiently large, governments would then be forced to act. Wanting the UNHCR to have greater authority, Goedhart came to believe in the need to secure concrete evidence about the refugee condition in Europe. The idea of a refugee survey was born.

In soliciting additional funds for the purpose of a survey, Goedhart explained that he wanted to determine 'the magnitude of the problem that came within the competence of (the UNHCR's Office)'.²³ Goedhart deliberately depicted refugees as a problem in order to garner support for research on the size and character of post-war refugee populations in Europe. A problem required a solution and in response to Goedhart's appeals, the Rockefeller Foundation gave the UNHCR a \$100,000 grant to conduct a 'survey of the legal, economic and social conditions of refugees both in the countries of present residence and in those of eventual resettlement'.²⁴ The grant fitted in with the Rockefeller Foundation's general interest in international affairs in the 1950s. The results of the survey, however, proved relatively useless from a political perspective. Moreover, the drama around the report's release led the Foundation's staff to worry about

New York; Shaplen, R. (1964). *Toward the Well-Being of Mankind: 50 Years of the Rockefeller Foundation*, Doubleday, Garden City, New York, p. 3; Berman, *Ideology of Philanthropy*, p. 15.

²¹ James Read, *International Conciliation* 5 (1961–63), <http://heinonline.org>, [accessed 16 September 2014].

²² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ 'Introduction' to Vernant, J. (1953). *Refugee in the Post-war World*, Allen & Unwin, London.

whether they had risked their larger programme by becoming involved in the politicized situation in Europe.²⁵

The European context

From the outset, observers viewed the purpose of the UNHCR's European survey as 'primarily political', given that the High Commissioner was facing a vote on funding for the UNHCR in the upcoming session of the General Assembly.²⁶ It was clear to many that the survey's results were intended to buttress the UNHCR's shaky foundations. Upon receipt of the Rockefeller Foundation grant, the UNHCR commissioned Jacques Vernant of the Centre d'Études de Politique Étrangère in Paris to undertake a survey of Europe's refugees. Vernant was a philosopher with a wide range of interests in the fields of sociology and religion. The study he ultimately authored, *Refugee in the Post-war World*, is one of most frequently cited texts in the field of refugee studies.²⁷ Rather than focus on the root causes of refugee movements, which he maintained was impossible to do in the context of the modern nation-state where the political, the economic, and the social were deeply interconnected, Vernant concentrated entirely on what refugees had to do in order to survive, to integrate into the communities where they found themselves or to find opportunities further afield. With this broad focus, Vernant argued for holistic solutions, beyond mere questions of legal protection.²⁸

This broad, environmental outlook shaped the nature of the survey that Vernant undertook. Little empirical data was produced. Rather, the team's investigators—described as experts with 'practical experience of the conditions in which the refugee problem arose

²⁵ Nagelberg, J. (1985). Promoting Population Policy: The Activities of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the Population Council, 1959–1966, PhD thesis, Columbia University, New York, p. 52.

²⁶ High Commissioner to the United Kingdom to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, 11 July 1951, 'Refugee Survey Group financed by the Rockefeller Foundation', RG 26, File 3-24-13, Volume 114, LAC.

²⁷ Google Scholar reports 172 citations, including, recently, Cohen, D. (2011). *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, and the influential work by Zolberg, A. et al., (1989). *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

²⁸ Vernant, *Post-war World*, p. 24.

after the Second World War²⁹—relied heavily on existing data to complement their visits to various countries in Europe and the Near East.³⁰ Much of the data came from United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, the International Refugee Organization or was culled from Sir John Hope Simpson's 1939 survey of refugees in Europe.³¹ The survey provided numerical population figures alongside descriptive passages about the conditions in which the refugees found themselves. As a result, the Vernant survey revealed more about the circumstances and places in which people were living than about the refugees themselves or what had caused their flights, displacement, and/or relocation.

As Vernant saw it, the refugee problem was a problem of national protection.³² His main recommendation, therefore, hinted at a way of moving beyond individual state responsibility for refugees. Vernant proposed 'an international organization wielding international authority and acting as guardian to the refugees'. He maintained such an organization was 'absolutely essential' in order 'to avoid the risk of leaving to each individual Government the full and entire responsibility for leasing as it thinks fit, with the collective and individual refugee problems within its territory'.³³ Vernant seemed to be suggesting, quite pointedly, a future role for the UNHCR.³⁴ Not surprisingly, the solution he proposed was entirely in keeping with the problem that he had identified; large refugee populations were a

²⁹ High Commissioner to the United Kingdom to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, 11 July 1951, 'Refugee Survey Group financed by the Rockefeller Foundation', RG 26, File 3-24-13, Volume 114, LAC.

³⁰ The first stage of the Vernant survey was meant to cover Europe and the Middle East. However, it omitted Turkey, Spain, Finland, Iran, Israel, Luxembourg, and Portugal.

³¹ Simpson, J. H. Sir (1939). *Refugees: A Review of the Situation Since September 1938*, Royal Institute for International Affairs, London.

³² Or, as Hannah Arendt later suggested, the loss of home and the loss of the state's protection meant that 'the world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human'. Arendt, H. (1979). *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harcourt, Brace, San Diego, p. 302.

³³ Goodwin-Gill, G. (2008). The Politics of Refugee Protection, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 27:1, pp. 8–23.

³⁴ Vernant was already noting the increasingly fluid line between the migrant and the refugee, and the rise of the so-called economic dissident from the centrally controlled economies of Eastern Europe. While he recognized the clear political dimension to economic issues, he also remarked on the common failure of states to see persecution, other than by the light of their own premises. An international agency, he suggested, 'would be better placed to appreciate the realities and to determine refugee character, ideally by reference to the principles set out in the Universal Declaration'.

social phenomenon born of nationalism and the modern nation-state. The solution had to move beyond any one individual state.

The impact of Vernant's work in terms of advancing the UNHCR's mandate, and in garnering private support for refugee work, was sabotaged in part by the reaction to the provisional findings, which were published in a volume embossed with the logo of the UN, without having received final UN approval. The government of Egypt objected to the suggestion that Arab refugees found it difficult for them to 'mix with the Egyptian life'.³⁵ Moreover, the *New York Times* reported, 'Syria objected to the assertion in the document that she had recruited Moslems in Europe to fight Israel. Czechoslovakia objected to consideration of the Sudeten Germans on the same footing as other refugees.'³⁶ The Belgian delegate to the UN complained that the chapter referring to his country was not objective.³⁷ These countries demanded a public apology from the High Commissioner, who confessed that he hadn't read the report fully before endorsing it. The trustees of the Rockefeller Foundation were dismayed by the controversy and their close association with Vernant's work. They worried, above all, that the criticism would hinder their efforts to expand their programmes in the Middle East.³⁸

Even the UNHCR distanced itself from Vernant's survey, despite the report's support for an expanded role for the organization.³⁹ The controversy over the report's release coloured what should have been a high point in the UNHCR's early post-war struggle for survival. In contrast, present-day scholars regularly rely on the Vernant to understand the situation of refugees in Europe after the Second World War. Such deference testifies to the perception of the survey as an important empirical exercise. Yet, given that the survey dodged the messy question of defining refugees in legal terms, recycled empirical evidence, and proposed solutions that clearly served the purposes of the UNHCR, it also shows how knowledge produced about refugees

³⁵ Vernant Survey, 1.2 Projects 100 International, Box 21, File 144, United Nations—Refugee, Study, January 1952, Rockefeller Foundation Archives.

³⁶ 'UN to Disown Report by Rockefeller Unit', *New York Times*, 14 January 1952.

³⁷ Vernant Survey, 1.2 Projects 100 International, Box 21, File 144, United Nations—Refugee, Study, January 1952, Rockefeller Foundation Archives.

³⁸ See correspondence in Vernant Survey, 1.2 Projects 100 International, Box 21, File 144, United Nations—Refugee, Study, January 1952, Rockefeller Foundation Archives.

³⁹ 'S-0441-0261-21539 Report of the High Commissioner for Refugees', United Nations Archives.

in the early post-war period served specific institutional agendas. The Vernant survey was as much a publicity instrument to raise awareness about the condition of refugees in Europe, as it was an expert document. Subsequent surveys undertaken in Hong Kong would prove similarly problematic, politicized all the more by the spread of Cold War politics and the reluctance demonstrated by a number of Western countries to open their doors to refugees from Asia. As with the Vernant survey, scholars have ignored these troubled origins and turned to these early surveys for evidence about the texture of the refugee experience in Hong Kong.

Surveying Hong Kong

The British authorities were surprised to regain Hong Kong from Japan in the peace negotiations that followed the end of war in the Pacific Theater. From being a troubled, devastated society upon its return, Hong Kong evolved into an important economic resource and ultimately carried much symbolic weight as the last formal British colony. While decolonization movements spread throughout Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, the British retained control of Hong Kong. It was not a confident tenure, however. The Chinese Civil War and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 worried colonial authorities and their counterparts in London. Anxious about efforts by Beijing to force a premature return of the colony and Nationalist attempts to undermine the Communist regime in Beijing by waging a propaganda war in Hong Kong, British colonial officials adopted a policy of neutrality vis-à-vis the ongoing conflict, discouraging both Communist and Nationalist factions from using the colony as a base to raise funds or promote their respective agendas.⁴⁰ The idea was to depoliticize the colony as much as possible.

These efforts were compromised not only by Nationalist and Communist Chinese incursions but also by the humanitarian agenda that emerged in the colony in the post-war period. In 1951, Communist authorities expelled Western missionaries from mainland China. Rather than leave the region entirely, many missionaries relocated to Hong Kong and re-established their humanitarian networks in Kowloon and the New Territories. Congregations and the public at

⁴⁰ Mark, C-K. (2004). *Hong Kong and the Cold War: Anglo-American Relations 1949–1957*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

home supported their work as well as that of international charities such as CARE, the Lutheran World Service, the American Friends Service Committee, and, later, Oxfam. The colony became the focus of Western humanitarian campaigns that were deeply informed by the politics of the global Cold War. While many of the missionaries remained focused on an agenda of care and relief, other organizations used the refugee situation for explicitly political ends. Foremost in this regard was the group known as Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals.

The politics of surveying

Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals was established in 1952 by Walter Judd, a former medical missionary who served in the American Congress as the representative from Minnesota from 1943 to 1963. Judd was a prominent member of the China Lobby—a loose coalition of pro-Nationalist, anti-Communist individuals, which wielded considerable influence on America's China policy after 1949.⁴¹ Described as the source of 'the most sustained criticism of American China policy in the House of Representatives', Judd 'regularly inserted into the *Congressional Record* his own observations on China's need for more aid' and provided evidence in the form of letters, and magazine and newspaper articles of Americans' desire to combat communism in China.⁴² Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' stated mandate was to 'provide material aid and arrange resettlement and rehabilitation of non-Communist Chinese intellectuals who are destitute, ill or in danger as refugees from totalitarian oppression'.⁴³ As Yung Kai Chung Kenneth notes, Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals expected the exiled intellectuals 'to play a leading role in the reconstruction of a democratic China if China was "returned to the Free World" one day'.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Bachrach, Stanley D. (1976). *The Committee of One Million: 'China Lobby' Politics, 1953–1971*, Columbia University Press, New York, p. 4 and p. 212. Dean Rusk of the Rockefeller Foundation described the China Lobby as 'a force to be reckoned with, even though it intentionally or unintentionally misrepresented the situation in the Far East'. Rusk, D. (1990). *As I Saw It*, W. W. Norton, New York, p. 175.

⁴² Koen, R. (1974). *China Lobby in American Politics*, Harper & Row, New York, pp. 84–86.

⁴³ See correspondence in PA 52–90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

⁴⁴ Yung, Kai Chung Kenneth (2007). *Personal Sympathy and National Interests: The Formation and Evolution of Congressman Walter H. Judd's Anti-Communism, 1925–1963*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Hong Kong University, Hong Kong, p. 200.

The organization's mission was broadly conceived and was no doubt informed by the activities of the Free China Relief Association, established in Taipei in 1950. Chiang Kai-Shek established the Free China Relief Association under the pretext of assisting famine victims on the Chinese mainland. More critically, the Free China Relief Association was to gather support for the regime in Taipei among the overseas Chinese. Although the Free China Relief Association presented itself as a 'civil charity organization', it received financial support from the American and Nationalist governments and its activities were closely aligned with state interests in Taipei and Washington.⁴⁵ Like Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals, the Free China Relief Association advanced a specific kind of humanitarianism in order to support a larger political programme. From the moment it was established, the Free China Relief Association lobbied the General Assembly of the UN and various UN bodies, including the UNHCR, to do something on behalf of Chinese refugees in Hong Kong. Throughout the 1950s, its representatives charged international representatives with turning a blind eye to the needs of refugees in Asia in favour of those with 'white skin' in Europe.⁴⁶

The Free China Relief Association is generally acknowledged for the key role it played in making the Chinese refugee issue in Hong Kong one of 'international concern' at the UN. However, in the context of the refugee surveys undertaken in Hong Kong, its role is somewhat more troubling.⁴⁷ The inflated statistics produced by the Free China Relief Association to advance the Nationalist cause, especially the claim that there were over one million refugees in Hong Kong, pervaded the surveys undertaken by Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals as well as the UN and therefore contributed to misconceptions about the nature of the migrant population in the British colony. The Free China Relief Association's claim of over a million refugees in Hong Kong inspired one of Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' first concrete

⁴⁵ Trench to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 23 October 1957, CO1030/778. Cited in Wong, Yiu Chung (2008). *The Policies of the Hong Kong Government Towards the Chinese Refugee Problem, 1945–1962*, PhD thesis, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong. The Free China Relief Association 'became' a private voluntary organization after 1950 in order to continue operating in countries that no longer recognized the government of Taiwan.

⁴⁶ Judd to Hoffman, 17 September 1952, PA 52–90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

⁴⁷ Peterson, G. (2008). To Be or Not To Be a Refugee: The International Politics of the Hong Kong Refugee Crisis, 1949–1955, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 36:2, pp. 171–195.

initiatives: a survey of the refugee population to determine how many intellectuals were in the colony, how they might be assisted, and to promote America's interest in the plight of refugees from communist China.

To conduct the survey, Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals approached the British government for permission to proceed and asked the Ford Foundation for funding. In both instances, Congressman Judd attempted to make Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' work appear as modest and apolitical as possible. In fact, he told Anthony Eden, the British foreign secretary, and officials in Hong Kong that it was a 'completely non-political effort'. Judd assured them that the group's 'sole purpose' was to 'give immediate relief and where possible to resettle (the intellectual refugees) in useful work'. Its initial request of the Ford Foundation was for \$25,000 to conduct an 'on-the-spot' survey of the refugee populace in Hong Kong. In his request, Judd toned down his rhetoric on the 'free world' in the hopes of imbuing the proposed survey with an additional level of gravitas. Nevertheless, staff at the Ford Foundation were suspicious of Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' poorly disguised political agenda, even as they recognized the importance of assisting refugees as a way of fostering international peace and stability.⁴⁸ Although the Trustees refused the group's request, the Foundation's president, Paul Hoffman, quietly used \$5,000 in discretionary funds to assist the survey. The source of the grant, however, was kept secret. Hoffman, reflecting the views of the Ford Foundation, was wary of becoming involved in overtly political work.

The survey that was initiated was rather superficial. Father Frederick A. McGuire, a missionary and the group's vice-chairman, and James Ivy, a member of the Committee for a Free Asia, arrived in Hong Kong on 9 February 1952 and departed less than a month later on 5 March 1952. McGuire and Ivy's first initiative was to consult with the Hong Kong government, along with officials in the American Consulate and the United States Information Service based in the colony. From their conversations, McGuire and Ivy gathered that officials were wary about the political implications of Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' work as the two were repeatedly cautioned 'to give careful consideration' to this aspect of their survey. As noted previously, the government of Hong Kong was generally mistrustful

⁴⁸ Memo by John B. Howard, 'Chinese Refugees—Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals', 28 January 1954, PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

of outside interest in the colony's displaced population for fear that the plight of the newly arrived migrants would be exploited politically.

Anxieties about the refugee and squatter populations as potential vehicles for social strife were heightened in 1952 when a devastating fire in the squatter settlements at Tung Tau killed 20,000 people. In the aftermath of this loss, the Communist regime in Beijing sought to gain political advantage by sending a 'comfort' mission to care for the survivors. After much wrangling, the colonial government denied admission to the mission, triggering a violent riot on 29 April 1952. McGuire and Ivy were in the colony as tensions escalated. Their presence unnerved colonial officials who wanted to prevent it from becoming public knowledge that 'an American organization using American personnel and American funds was being permitted to carry on a programme of assistance to a particular group of Chinese while the Red regime was prohibited from taking similar action in caring for their own people'.⁴⁹ While the Hong Kong government didn't block their survey from taking place, McGuire and Ivy nevertheless concluded that the colonial government was paying close attention 'to the manner in which (the relief programme) would be conducted' and they proceeded cautiously.⁵⁰

Following their initial meetings with colonial officials and American representatives, Ivy and McGuire organized the distribution of a questionnaire to 'get a fair sampling of the numbers of refugees, their conditions' as well as their general needs. The form was distributed through 'trustworthy' and 'reliable' agents such as the leaders of clubs, fraternities, alumni associations, and educational leaders. The term 'refugee' was not defined. Intellectuals were categorized as 'all those who had a minimum of two years' education with a college or university of recognized standing, or the equivalent thereof'.⁵¹ Of the 4,000 questionnaires distributed in the few short weeks that the team was on the ground, 1,207 were completed and returned. Based on this sampling as well as conversations with 'intellectual leaders', the Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals team concluded that there were probably about 10,000 refugee intellectuals in need of assistance.⁵²

In reporting the final results of the survey, McGuire and Ivy conceded that they had not secured comprehensive or conclusive

⁴⁹ 'Preliminary Report', PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

evidence.⁵³ They were aware of their finding's limitations and they compensated for this with rhetorical flourish, reflecting Stephen Legg's observation that 'quantitative methods do the job of counting, but not necessarily the job of explaining'.⁵⁴ The survey's final report declared that the refugee intellectuals' sole hope lay 'in an effort on the part of American philanthropy to save them for lives of future usefulness'.⁵⁵ The report described the desperate conditions in Hong Kong and highlighted the fact that 'more than 2,000 people gathered before our unpublicized headquarters in Hong Kong on March eleventh, because the rumor had spread that an American mission had arrive to care for refugee Chinese intellectuals'. This rhetoric was deliberately constructed in order to obtain financial support from potential donors. In their financial appeals, Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals staff emphasized the importance of the survey in demonstrating America's interest in the plight of Chinese refugees in Hong Kong. McGuire and Ivy wrote, 'the very fact that a survey party came to Hong Kong to gather factual information concerning the intellectual refugees has aroused hope in the hearts of these people'.⁵⁶ This pointed rhetoric was paired with an elaborate series of recommendations in the hopes of convincing potential donors, such as the Ford Foundation, of the critical need in Hong Kong.

McGuire and Ivy suggested a programme of 'direct relief' to the almost 3,000 American-trained intellectuals in the colony, the establishment of 'refugee-manned commissaries' so that intellectuals could buy food at cost or at reduced prices, the creation of medical clinics staffed by refugee physicians, and the development of work and self-help projects to 'utilize the talents of as many of the intellectuals as possible and give them the opportunity to support themselves and help the community as a whole'.⁵⁷ McGuire and Ivy also recommended the establishment of a 'truly representative Chinese University' to take advantage of all the professors in the colony. While these recommendations were somewhat divorced from the survey's findings, they enabled to Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals to further its fund-raising appeals, raise awareness about the refugee situation in

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Legg, S. (2005). Foucault's Population Geographies: Classifications, Biopolitics and Governmental Spaces, *Population, Space and Place*, 11, p. 143.

⁵⁵ 'Preliminary Report', Ford Foundation Archives.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Hong Kong, and suggest a politically helpful interest in the refugees' welfare that far surpassed that of the United States government and the American populace generally. The manner in which Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals problematized the refugee situation in Hong Kong and the solutions it proposed were symptomatic of how Chinese refugees were understood by observers in the West. The People's Republic of China's closed borders, which prevented curious Western eyes from exploring life behind the 'Bamboo Curtain', created a space in which people—inspired by Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' clever rhetoric—could imagine a life of oppression and deprivation based on the politicized environment of the global Cold War.

Despite its empirical failings—perhaps mitigated by the rhetoric about the free world and the possible contributions that could be expected of the refugee intellectuals—the Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals survey was pivotal in convincing the Ford Foundation that there was valuable work to be done in the British colony on behalf of Chinese refugees.⁵⁸ It also provided the framework for the Ford Foundation's discussions of the refugee situation in Hong Kong generally. Staff and trustees consistently repeated Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' unsubstantiated figure, borrowed from the Free China Relief Association, about the presence of 'more than a million refugees' in Hong Kong. The Ford Foundation also accepted Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' claim about the character of the refugee population, specifically that the 'cream of the anti-Communist Chinese intelligentsia and businessmen are now concentrated in Hong Kong'.⁵⁹ The fact that the refugees were described as intellectuals and anti-communist had a profound influence on the Ford Foundation's view of the situation. The emphasis on the refugees as intellectuals dovetailed with the Foundation's interest in developing global expertise, especially when it was attuned to America's political interests. The Ford Foundation's sense of a significant, and important, problem only grew after Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals began to register people as intellectual refugees.

In the first five months of Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' registration programme, 23,000 applications were received. Officers estimated that approximately 25 per cent of the applicants did not meet the criteria for eligibility. Of those who did, the group estimated that 15 per cent of the registrants were educators

⁵⁸ See correspondence in PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

⁵⁹ 'Preliminary Report', Ford Foundation Archives.

(professors, teachers, writers), 4 per cent were technical experts (agriculturalists, engineers, architects), 36 per cent were what they called 'sedentary' (bankers, administrators, government servants, lawyers, accountants), 1 per cent were medical experts, and the majority—44 per cent—were ex-military and police who only qualified because of Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' broad definition of what constituted an 'intellectual'—essentially a loose interpretation of the criterion that applicants have two years of education with a college or university of recognized standing.⁶⁰ As the registration process proceeded, it became clear that the numbers were going to exceed the expected figures. By September, Judd was estimating a roster of approximately 25,000 refugee intellectuals who, along with their dependents, made up a total population of 100,000. Despite Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' own rhetoric and its seeming grasp of the situation, the organization was forced to realize that it did not have the funds to deliver on many of its promises, despite an extravagant launch and a series of high-profile gala dinners designed to solicit support for its actions from prominent Americans.⁶¹ The organization proceeded to advertise broadly, taking out full-page advertisements in the *New York Times*, to solicit additional funds from donors. These efforts met with little support. The Carnegie Foundation was primarily interested in the funding of colleges in Hong Kong and the Rockefeller Foundation preferred to fund individual scholars directly.⁶² Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals therefore returned to the Ford Foundation.

From 1952 to 1954, Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals requested over two million dollars from the Ford Foundation for various projects, including the refugee resettlement programme, a Free China Literary Institute, a New Asia College, and a China Institute.⁶³ These latter projects were a mix of educational and promotional initiatives. The

⁶⁰ In crafting a definition that essentially defined anyone with two years of education as an intellectual, Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals knew that it was making it possible 'for a large number of ex military and ex-police to apply for registration on the basis of military academy or similar training'. *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Dean Rusk delivered the opening address at the Hotel Plaza fund-raising event in New York on 28 April 1952.

⁶² Dean Rusk recalls, '... we always tried to keep the Rockefeller Foundation out of politics ... Most people abroad accepted us for what we were—a private philanthropy with no political fish to fry, operating independently of Washington ...'. Rusk, *As I Recall It*, p. 186.

⁶³ Bernard Gladieux to H. Rowan Gaither, 'Problems of China Area', 25 June 1953, PA 52–90 Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

plan for the Free China Literary Institute, for instance, involved the translation of pro-Western materials for distribution among various Chinese audiences. For its part, the Ford Foundation was unsure about the extent to which it wanted to fund these various ventures. 'The need is great,' conceded Bernard Gladieux, assistant to the Foundation's president, but 'we are not fully satisfied that the programmes have been carefully planned or that ARCI has demonstrated satisfactory administrative competence.'⁶⁴ This impression came from staff contacts with the organization as well as communications with the UNHCR representative in Hong Kong, James Read.⁶⁵ It was also the result of discussions with other organizations with which the Ford Foundation had long-standing relations. For instance, the Foundation was a major contributor to the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organization dedicated to relieving suffering and working for peace. The Friends had relocated from the Chinese mainland to Hong Kong after 1951, along with other religious groups, when the Communist government ordered the departure of Western missionaries. Lewis Hoskins of the Friends counselled against making funds directly available to the Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals and cautioned the Ford Foundation about being associated too closely allied with Judd and his pro-Nationalist sentiments. Hoskins suggested that neither the Friends nor the Ford Foundation wanted their 'motives for helping these unfortunate people to be misunderstood by people on both sides of the bitter controversy in that area'.⁶⁶ In part because of the risk inherent in supporting private organizations such as Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals, whose activities were geared towards treating refugee issues as Cold War concerns, staff at the Ford Foundation were increasingly inclined to view refugee issues as the responsibility of governments. Staff came to believe that the problem was too significant, and often too politically sensitive, to be addressed with private philanthropic funds.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Gladieux to Joseph M. McDaniel, Jr., 29 December 1952, PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

⁶⁵ 'Report to the High Commissioner on Trip to South East Asia', James M. Read, in PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

⁶⁶ Lewis Hoskins to Arnold, 12 May 1952, PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

⁶⁷ The numbers (including the cost of resettlement to Taiwan, which was estimated at \$350 per person) suggested that the size of the problem was one that required government intervention. The Rockefeller Foundation was also wary of contributing to work that its staff believed was the responsibility of governments. Staff noted in

Even though Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals was the ‘only organization in the field’ working on the refugee issue in Hong Kong, Ford Foundation trustees delayed a decision on funding in anticipation of what would comprise the new Eisenhower administration’s so-called ‘Asia policy’.⁶⁸ What became clear, in early 1953, was that President Eisenhower, unlike his predecessor, saw the threat of communism in Asia as being of paramount importance. Reflecting this new level of concern, the American government gave Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals \$250,000 in February 1953 to aid with the refugee resettlement programme. Most of the refugees were intended for Taiwan though some were also admitted to the United States, further eroding the long-standing barriers on migration from Asia.⁶⁹ The government of the United States assumed further responsibility for refugees, at least in terms of legal obligations, with the passing of the 1953 Refugee Relief Act and the expansion of the escapee programme to Hong Kong. The 1953 Act allowed for 209,000 ‘non-quota’ immigrant visas to be issued up to 31 December 1956, which included room for up to 3,000 Asian refugees in the Far East and 2,000 visas specifically for Chinese refugees.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, the Escapee Programme, which was initially designed to resettle refugees from the Soviet bloc, expanded to Hong Kong in 1954 and provided immigration visas to qualified individuals. In response to all of these changes, staff at the Ford Foundation felt affirmed in their growing sense that refugee problems were the proper domains of governments. As a final gesture, the Ford Foundation gave Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals \$200,000

1954 that the United States government had contributed significant sums to Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals. They were reluctant to use the Foundation’s funds to support its work since the amount of money involved suggested that this was ‘to a considerable extent an instrumentality of the United States Government, which has contributed \$410,000’. See R64 (Nelson A. Rockefeller), Series L, Box 4, F-27 Aid to Chinese Intellectuals, 1952–55, Rockefeller Foundation Archives.

⁶⁸ Gladieux to Joseph M. McDaniel, Jr., 29 December 1952, PA 52–90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

⁶⁹ For a detailed discussion, see Hsu, M. (2012). The Disappearance of America’s Cold War Chinese Refugees, 1948–1966, *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 31:4, pp. 12–33.

⁷⁰ ‘Asian Refugees in the Far East’ were defined as ‘refugees, including Chinese persons, who: a) At the time of application for a visa are residing within the district of an American consular office in the Far East, and 2) are attributable by as much as one-half of their ancestry to a people or peoples indigenous in the Far East’. ‘Chinese refugees’ were defined as ‘refugees who: a) are of Chinese ethnic origin, and 2) whose passports for travel to the United States are endorsed by the Chinese Nationalist Government or its authorized representatives’.

for the resettlement of refugees to Taiwan, with the understanding that this would be the last of the Foundation's gifts to the organization. The Ford Foundation was still interested in refugee issues but it was growing increasingly suspicious of Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' politicized approach.

It was in this granting climate that High Commissioner Goedhart returned to the Ford Foundation for financial support to undertake another refugee survey, this one under the auspices of the UN. This survey, the second one that the Ford Foundation would fund for Chinese refugees in Hong Kong, was expressly designed to shift responsibility for refugees in the colony away from private philanthropic interests. It was an outlook that was very much in keeping with the changing understanding of refugee issues as understood by staff at the Ford Foundation. As with the Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' survey, the UN survey produced contested empirical evidence about the nature of the refugee population in Hong Kong.

A more neutral approach?

Parallel to the discussions at the Ford Foundation about who should bear responsibility for the refugee situation, conversations at meetings of the High Commissioner's Advisory Committee were revolving around the same question. In 1953, the Nationalist government in Taiwan introduced a motion to the Committee to have the Chinese refugees included within the scope of the High Commissioner's mandate. The UNHCR was supportive of this initiative. The UNHCR's ongoing desire to expand its mandate beyond the initial three-year term meant that it took particular notice of the refugee situation in Hong Kong. This interest was due in part to a need to secure a more permanent mandate but there was also international pressure (aside from the efforts by the Nationalist government in Taiwan) for the High Commissioner to act. Some of this pressure was born of the obvious disparity between how refugees in Europe were being assisted by the international community, in contrast to the sparse attention afforded refugees in Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. There was a sense of a strong, if unspoken, colour line at play in the operations at the UNHCR. From Bangkok, UNHCR representative, Aami Ali, wrote to the High Commissioner, reporting on the harsh criticism he was hearing. According to Ali, it appeared

that the UNHCR was 'soft pedalling' the problem of Chinese refugees and said it was hard to explain 'to people in Asia why UNCHR refuses to recognize the only Asian refugee problem which might fall within its scope'.⁷¹

After much discussion, the High Commissioner's Advisory Committee agreed that the question of eligibility could only be addressed if more concrete information was obtained about the actual condition of the refugees in Hong Kong.⁷² This research required financing and the UN, once again, turned to American philanthropic foundations for support. In approaching the trustees at the Ford Foundation for the necessary funding, High Commissioner Goedhart explained he wanted to determine whether the refugees fell under his mandate but, more importantly, he wanted to look at concrete solutions.⁷³ Ford Foundation staff saw his focus on a 'programme of action' as a welcome break from the legal debate that had plagued many of the discussions about refugee protection in Hong Kong and the politicized approach pursued by Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals.⁷⁴

The High Commissioner's appeal came at an opportune moment as the staff of the Ford Foundation were in the midst of determining the direction of their overseas activities. While the trustees had rejected a comprehensive programme in Asia, staff members were still free to bring forward 'individual projects on the basis of merit' that might contribute to the Foundation's overall objectives.⁷⁵ Bernard Gladieux recognized that a survey such as the one the High Commissioner was proposing could assist 'substantially with our own broader analysis of the total problem'. The deputy High Commissioner, James Read, who had embarked on an earlier survey of refugee situations in Southeast Asia on behalf of the UNHCR, provided valuable ammunition for the

⁷¹ Ali, UNCHR Branch Office (Bangkok) to Hoveyasa, UNCHR (Geneva), 23 September 1953, Fonds UNHCR 11 Records of the Central Registry, Series 1, Classified Subject Files, 1951–1970 15/2/HK, Box 262, Part 2, UNHCR Archives.

⁷² I. H. Harris to Mr. Sidebotham, 19 October 1953, CO 1023/117 Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong (1952), National Archives of the United Kingdom.

⁷³ Goedhart to Ford Foundation, 7 May 1953, PA 52–90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

⁷⁴ At the UN, the question of who formed the legitimate government of China and whether the refugees could theoretically obtain protection from the Nationalists in Taiwan meant the question of refugee protection at Hong Kong was at a diplomatic stalemate.

⁷⁵ Goedhart to Ford Foundation, 7 May 1953, PA 52–90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

idea of a refugee survey in Hong Kong. Read told Ford staff how hard it was to get an accurate picture of what was going on in Hong Kong:

No one knows how many of these people fled for reasons of fear of persecution, a basic consideration in establishing the claims to refugee status under the High Commissioner's mandate. No one knows how many of them are destitute, although the Hong Kong authorities mentioned the figure of 300,000.⁷⁶

Like Goedhart, Read believed an 'adequate survey' was necessary because he mistrusted Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' advertised figure of 1,200,000 refugees.⁷⁷ Read relayed the UNHCR's recent experience in requesting evidence from Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals of the high-skilled clientele on whose behalf they were advocating. Upon receiving a sample of 28 case files from Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' Hong Kong office, Read 'looked over this material and was impressed with the high quality and practical skills represented in that group, including, as it did, a research man in artificial fibres, an expert in fertilizers, a pharmacist, a military engineer, a civil engineer and a physician'. He said,

I had expected a larger percentage of lawyers and teachers. In fact, the skills were so usable that . . . I suspected that ARCI had sent in a specially selected group, but their representatives in Hong Kong, Mr. Howard and Mr. Au denied this. They maintained that there were simply 28 people who happened to drop in at their office while they were looking for candidates to send to (the UNHCR).⁷⁸

Interested in having more scientific evidence as it considered how to shape its own funding programme and somewhat troubled by Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals' approach, the Ford Foundation's trustees approved a grant of \$50,000 to the UNHCR for the purpose of undertaking a refugee survey in Hong Kong.

The refugee survey got underway on 3 June 1954 and the fieldwork was completed on 15 July 1954. As a result of efforts to depoliticize discussions of Chinese refugees in Hong Kong, there had been considerable wrangling about who should be appointed head of the survey team. Staff in the British Colonial Office did not want anyone who was 'likely to beat the anti-Communist drum, nor anyone with a

⁷⁶ 'Report to the High Commissioner on Trip to South East Asia', James M. Read, in PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Read, *International Conciliation*.

strong anti-colonial bias'.⁷⁹ They hoped for 'someone colourless and business-like'.⁸⁰ For its part, the UNHCR wanted to avoid appointing a British national for fear of biasing the mission. Staff at the UNHCR also thought that the political value of the final report would be 'enhanced' if the head was not British, particularly in the United States where they hoped to secure more funding.⁸¹ They eventually got their man: Edvard Hambro's most redeeming quality seems to have been his immaculate international pedigree. The son of Carl Hambro (former Norwegian representative to the League of Nations), the young Hambro had worked for seven years as registrar at the International Court at The Hague and was pursuing research at Cambridge University at the time of his appointment.⁸² The British Foreign Office accepted his nomination but later remarked that he was 'surprisingly ignorant of Far Eastern Affairs'.⁸³ The rest of the survey team consisted of an economic consultant, a social consultant, and investigators with backgrounds in social casework. An employment classification analyst and occupational analysis officer were also attached to the survey.

The governor of Hong Kong was 'lukewarm' about the work of the Hambro mission.⁸⁴ As with the Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals survey, colonial officials cautioned the Hambro team not to promote or draw any attention to its activities. Politically, there was a great deal at stake. The survey's findings had the potential to radically affect the fate of the refugees in Hong Kong and future UNHCR operations. If the mission found that the Chinese refugees were eligible under the High Commissioner's mandate, then a new programme would result and, as one American authority indicated, it would probably

⁷⁹ FC 18221, Problem of European Refugees from Mainland China in Hong Kong: Survey by UN High Commissioner for Refugees, FO 371/110378 Far Eastern-China (1954), National Archives of the United Kingdom.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Foreign Office to the Governor of Hong Kong, 6 April 1954, CO 1030/381 Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong (1954-1956), National Archives of the United Kingdom.

⁸² Foreign Office to Geneva, 2 April 1954, CO 1030/381 Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong (1954-1956), National Archives of the United Kingdom.

⁸³ FC 1822/35 (B) Problem of European Refugees from Mainland China in Hong Kong: Survey by UN High Commissioner for Refugees, FO 371/110379 Far Eastern-China (1954), National Archives of the United Kingdom.

⁸⁴ Harris to MacIntosh, 26 April 1955, CO 1030/382 Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong (1954-1956), National Archives of the United Kingdom.

result in an extension of the High Commissioner's mandate.⁸⁵ This would mean a more permanent UNHCR presence in Hong Kong, which both the British and Hong Kong governments opposed. As one Foreign Office official remarked, it would be 'politically embarrassing to have outside bodies administering camps or making relief payments in the colony'.⁸⁶

From the outset, Edward Hambro and his team took a broad view of the scope of their work. They deemed the 1951 Convention definition of a refugee to be too limiting and decided to place the refugee situation in Hong Kong as understood 'in the juridical sense' against 'a broader and more comprehensive background'.⁸⁷ At early staff meetings, the team deliberated over how best to define the term 'Chinese refugee' before abandoning this approach completely and pursuing research on 'the position of the various groups which compose the present Chinese population of the Colony'.⁸⁸ The mission staff decided, 'as a starting-point ... to examine the situation of *all the people* (emphasis added) who had left the mainland of China and felt that they could not return on account of fear of political persecution'.⁸⁹

The broad liberties Hambro assumed in interpreting his mandate were later reflected in the survey's methodology, its findings, and, ultimately, in the mission's recommendations. Hambro and his team used a loosely defined survey sample. The survey included 'persons of Chinese race and covered the whole of the Island of Hong Kong, Kowloon and the leased territories north of the boundary of Kowloon known as the New Territories, including the islands within the jurisdiction of the Government of Hong Kong'.⁹⁰ Twenty interviewers were charged with gathering evidence. They were all Chinese 'and mostly men of the intellectual class'.⁹¹ Many of the interviewers were graduates of Hong Kong University's social study course and the

⁸⁵ Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor of Hong Kong, 30 November 1954, 160-1-34 Refugees Problem—a) Proposed Survey of. Hong Kong Public Records Office.

⁸⁶ Background Briefing to Advisory Committee Meeting, 1954, CO 1030/382 File 418/403/02 Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong, 1954-1956, National Archives of the United Kingdom.

⁸⁷ Hambro, E. (1955). *The Problem of Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong*, A. W. Sijthoff, Leyden, p. 4.

⁸⁸ Summary Record of the 1st Staff meeting, 3 May 1954, Fonds 23, Box 1, Summary records of staff meetings, UNHCR Archives.

⁸⁹ Hambro, *Problem of Chinese Refugees*, p. 4.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

Faculty of Arts. In some areas, Western missionaries who worked among the Chinese population in Hong Kong were recruited to assist with the survey. Participants were asked to answer 23 questions which addressed topics such as the composition of their family, the date of their arrival in Hong Kong, and the kinds of assistance they had received in the colony. Question 14 asked about their reasons for leaving China and listed seven possible options:

- i) actual persecution of the household (or its members)
- ii) actual persecution of relatives or friends
- iii) fear of persecution
- iv) unspecified political reasons
- v) economic reasons
- vi) mixed (political and economic) reasons
- vii) unknown reasons

Questions 20 to 22 dealt specifically with the issue of resettlement and any efforts the individual might have made to leave Hong Kong previously and where they would be amenable to going. Initially, the survey team had hoped to obtain a sample of 5,000 households. Ultimately, they received 4,600 completed questionnaires, providing information about 17,682 people.⁹² In addition to the refugee survey, the Hambro mission also culled refugee registration information from the Free China Relief Association. As noted previously, the data from this organization was particularly politicized. Much like Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals, the Free China Relief Association was prone to rhetorical flourishes, if not outright exaggerations, in its discussions of the refugee population in Hong Kong.

Nevertheless, the Hambro mission did strive for scientific authority. Interviewers were briefed on how to tackle their research prior to undertaking the survey. They were told to 'approach the problem objectively' and not to 'select groups for interview'. Rather, they were to 'try to get answers from Hong Kong-born and refugees, illiterates and intellectuals, and persons from all provinces of China'.⁹³ The interviews were to be conducted privately and all information was to be kept in confidence. The mission's final report included comparative population statistics (specifically growth in various urban areas of

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 140–141. The survey team acknowledged there might be some discrepancy in the statistics, suggesting that the corresponding figures might be 10 to 15 per cent below what they had estimated.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

Southeast Asia), comparative vital statistics, population growth and distribution in Hong Kong, place of birth, age and sex distribution, occupations, income, accommodations, and the condition of students. The survey also documented the economic conditions in the colony, examining vegetable production, imports, exports, and industrial establishments. As noted previously, the Hambro mission pursued a generous and ambitious interpretation of its mandate. As a result, the survey ultimately provided a vivid image of Hong Kong's population as a whole, while only hinting at what historian Peter Gatrell describes as the 'contours' of the refugee experience.⁹⁴

Table XIV of the survey detailed the 'Distribution of Post-war Immigrants in Hong Kong According to Reasons for Leaving China'. It broke down, on an annual basis, from 1945 to 1954, the reasons for leaving China according to: political reasons (including actual persecution of household or its members, actual persecution of relatives or friends, fear of persecution, and unspecified), economic reasons, political and economic reasons, and 'unknown'. Of those who responded, 53.2 per cent listed political reasons, 37.2 per cent listed economic reasons, while 8.5 per cent cited political and economic reasons for leaving China. This translated into 435,000 people who had left China for political reasons. These barren statistics meshed with rumours and speculation about what life was like behind the 'Bamboo Curtain'. To this end, the survey also detailed 'positive refugee criteria' among the Chinese in Hong Kong. This referred to the reasons why political immigrants, politico-economic immigrants, immigrants for unspecified reasons, and economic migrants might be considered refugees. The criteria included flight from China for political reasons, unwillingness to return to China immediately for political reasons, registration with refugee organizations in Hong Kong, former membership of political organizations in China, and no correspondence with relations or friends in China. The behaviour of the migrants in Hong Kong was therefore a factor in understanding the character of the 'problem' as much as the original reasons for leaving. All of this contributed to the survey's assessment of possible solutions: repatriation, resettlement or emigration.

For each of these solutions, the mission envisioned some kind of international or UNHCR intervention in the form of either

⁹⁴ Gatrell, P. (2011). *Free World: The Campaign to Save the World's Refugees, 1956–1963*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 3.

administrative and/or financial support. Having established that there was a numerically significant refugee population in Hong Kong, the Hambro mission felt confident about proposing solutions that required a coordinating role for the UNHCR. On the question of emigration, the mission concluded, 'the prospects of resettling Chinese refugees abroad are very limited, owing to the immigration policies practiced by most Governments'.⁹⁵ The mission therefore envisioned a role for the High Commissioner's office whereby it could intervene with other potential receiving countries to determine whether they would be willing to broaden their existing categories of migration or introduce special measures akin to those in the United States, namely the 1953 Refugee Relief Act.⁹⁶

The vast majority of the mission's conclusions and recommendations dealt with the question of refugee integration in Hong Kong where the economic and social problems of 'poverty, over-population and unemployment' abounded.⁹⁷ Instead of an enhanced role for the government of Hong Kong, the mission suggested expanding the practice of using voluntary agencies such as the International Social Service, the World Lutheran Service, and the World Council of Churches to meet the needs of refugees.⁹⁸ At the same time, Hambro and his team acknowledged that the voluntary agencies were unable to carry out a large rehabilitation scheme with the means that were currently available to them. The inference seemed to be that the international community had a contribution make to the estimated HK\$35 million required to care for the refugee population in Hong Kong each year.⁹⁹ The governor of Hong Kong disliked such interventionist solutions and remained cool about the work of the survey.¹⁰⁰ Other organizations, including Oxfam and the World Council of Churches, recognized that the Hambro survey legitimated their interest in providing relief to the refugee populace in the

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 79.

⁹⁶ Hambro, *Problem of Chinese Refugees*, p. 128.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 130.

⁹⁸ The International Social Service was established in 1924 with the objective of assisting migrants moving across international borders. In the post-war period it became deeply involved with family reunification issues in Europe and in facilitating international adoptions through the documentation of individual cases.

⁹⁹ Hambro, *Problem of Chinese Refugees*, p. 112.

¹⁰⁰ It was a view shared by senior colonial administrators as well as the authorities responsible for security in the colony. See Annual Report. Hong Kong Police. 1951–52. Chapter XV, 'Special Problems', p. 46.

colony.¹⁰¹ However, they enjoyed only limited success in using the survey to their advantage.¹⁰² The solutions that the Hambro survey proposed were beyond the scope of what most governments envisioned in terms of refugee relief.

Discussions of the Hambro Report in the High Commissioner's Advisory Committee achieved very little of substance. The Nationalist delegate lobbied intensely to have the refugees included under the High Commissioner's mandate. He cited verbatim the various sections of the report where Hambro inferred that, although the refugees were not technically and legally under the mandate of the high commissioner, their humanitarian situation was comparable to that of many others in the world who were receiving UNHCR attention and their need alone was sufficient reason to engage international action. The resolution that was eventually passed was an empty one, requesting only that the High Commissioner 'give sympathetic encouragement to Governments and organizations with a view to their assisting in alleviating the problems of Chinese refugees in Hong Kong and to report to the Committee, when he deemed it necessary, any progress made in the implementation of the Resolution'.¹⁰³ Even though the Hambro survey failed both to determine whether the refugees fell under the mandate of the UNHCR or to secure tangible results, it successfully drew attention to the refugee situation in Hong Kong. The problem was that the results reflected data about a refugee populace that governments and philanthropic organizations alike were unprepared to deal with. When Goedhart approached the Ford Foundation with a request to reallocate \$7,000 left over from the survey grant to pursue fund-raising activities, the Foundation refused, declaring that funding for refugee programmes was now outside of the Foundation's remit.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor of Hong Kong, 29 May 1957, CO 1030/777 Refugees from China in Hong Kong (1957–1959), National Archives of the United Kingdom.

¹⁰² Where the survey proved most useful was in ensuring that the Chinese refugees in Hong Kong were prioritized during the United Nations World Refugee Year (1959–1960).

¹⁰³ Document A/AC.79/12, referenced in Extract from the Report on the Third Session of the UNREF Executive Committee (Geneva, 26 May–1 June 1956) Document A/AC.79/41, Fonds UNHCR 11 Records of the Central Registry, Series 1, Classified Subject Files, 1951–1970 15/2/HK, Box 262, Part 3, UNHCR Archives.

¹⁰⁴ Ford Foundation to Goedhart, 18 April 1956, PA 52–90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

Conclusions

The impact of the refugee surveys undertaken in Europe and Hong Kong was uneven and yet, in producing discrete knowledge, they were instrumental in shaping the work on behalf of refugees in the post-war world. The Vernant survey in Europe problematized the refugee issue in terms of the national but failed to produce tangible solutions. The Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals survey, while hardly methodologically rigorous, galvanized support among American interests for a refugee resettlement programme. The Hambro survey, by contrast, created seemingly objective, empirical knowledge about the refugee situation in Hong Kong. The mission's recommendations, however, went largely unheeded.

With each of these surveys, there was an effort to produce knowledge about refugees in order to develop solutions to what observers constructed as a problem, both in terms of human suffering and international peace and security. Yet in each case, the empirical knowledge that was produced was born of flawed methodologies where surveyors essentially sought information that would affirm previously held beliefs. In the case of the Vernant and Hambro surveys, the underlying premise of the research was that evidence of large numbers of refugees in need could justify the existence, and expansion, of the UNHCR and other UN agencies. The Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals survey, by contrast, was intended to demonstrate American interest in refugees in Asia as well as highlight the evils of the communist regime in Beijing. The idea, informed by a modernist appreciation of science and empiricism as solutions to the world's problems, was that demonstrating numerical need could galvanize support for refugee needs. This did not happen.

Instead, donors recognized the methodological flaws in the surveys and, instead of treating the work as accurate science, chose to selectively interpret certain aspects of the surveys for political advantage. By contrast, scholars have regularly turned to the Vernant and Hambro studies in particular for evidence of the size, and character, of the refugee populations in Europe and Asia. The gulf in how refugee surveys were produced and used by contemporaries and how they have been interpreted subsequently by scholars has led to a conflation of experiences, with Western ways of knowing reproducing Cold War refugee subjects in Asia. Private interests and non-governmental organizations were at the core of this knowledge production. This crucial role has long been neglected, with serious

repercussions for both how the refugee subject has been understood as well how refugees' relationships with governments, critics, and supporters have been represented.

As noted in the introduction to this article, conventional scholarship emphasizes the role of governments in instrumentalizing refugees to foster strong ties between citizen, nation, and state. The production of knowledge by humanitarians and private interests served, and continues to serve, a similar purpose. By considering refugees and their circumstances as a 'problem', the surveys and their proponents reinforced the notion of refugees as a distinct, knowable category. The refugee surveys undertaken by Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals and the UN, with support from the Ford and Rockefeller foundations produced knowledge that was used to advance various political agendas, many of which were infused with Cold War politics. Consideration of the important role non-governmental actors played in the production of knowledge about refugees in Europe and Hong Kong complicates standard analyses of refugees as the subjects of state governmentality projects. It also highlights the challenges of teasing out the unique experiences and circumstances of Chinese refugees in Hong Kong when so much of the contemporary research about this population was produced by Westerners (with assistance from Chinese researchers) for Western consumption. A first step towards unpacking the accumulated knowledge about Chinese refugees in Hong Kong is recognizing the wide range of private interests involved in the production of the modern refugee subject and understanding their respective agendas vis-à-vis refugee populations. Doing so advances, and complicates, the manner in which refugees have been universally defined and problematized since the Second World War.