

**20<sup>th</sup> Century Philanthropic Responses to Crisis Moments**  
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**Contribution by Dr. Laura Madokoro, Carleton University**

\*Research in progress, please do not circulate.

**Abstract**

The Second World War and the onset of the Cold War in Asia witnessed the movement and displacement of millions of people. Hong Kong, under the control of Japan after 1941, reverted to British control at the end of the Second World War. During this time, it also became home to hundreds of thousands of people in search of refuge. Based on research originally undertaken for *Elusive Refuge: Chinese Migrants in the Cold War* (Harvard University Press, 2016), this paper will explore the role that the Ford Foundation played in shaping the debates around the question of how to respond to the plight of refugees in the colony. This paper underscores how research conducted with support from the Ford Foundation was essential to debates over whether there was a refugee crisis in the colony, and the extent to which the international community had an obligation to respond.

**Keywords**

Refugees, Hong Kong, Ford Foundation, *kaijongs*, humanitarian crisis

**Introduction**

The theme for this year's conference, *Navigating in Turbulent Times: Perspectives and Contributions from the Third Sector*, is a provocative and engaging one. In my mind, it immediately inspired the question of "navigating what?" Not surprisingly, the possible answers to this question are multifold. In my case, I have opted to use the idea of "navigating politics and perceptions" to inform my paper, with the idea that in developing solutions for refugees in Hong Kong, the Ford Foundation and the research it supported navigated the complicated politics of the cold war in Asia and the return of British imperialism. At the same time, it helped construct perceptions in the west of both a refugee crisis and possible solutions that involved western actors.<sup>1</sup> The result, I will argue, was an overarching and unfair focus on a role for western actors with only some, and entirely inadequate, attention to the existing

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<sup>1</sup> In thinking about the idea of crisis as constructed, I am thinking deeply about the question of a refugee crisis for whom? In this vein, see Peruniak, B., Milner, J. and M. Bradley. *Refugees' Roles in Displacement and Building Peace: Beyond Beneficiaries* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019).

and highly capable Chinese associations that played an essential role in the provision of relief and welfare in postwar Hong Kong.

The focus of this paper is on research funded by the Ford Foundation in the early 1950s to determine whether there was a refugee crisis, or “problem” in Hong Kong. Hong Kong had long been a place of mobility to which Chinese migrants moved to, from and through on the basis of political, social, economic, village and familial circumstances. During the Japanese occupation (1941 – 1945), many people fled to the Chinese mainland. With the resumption of the civil war and the eventual rise to power of the Chinese Communist Party thousands moved to Hong Kong. By 1951, the wartime population had grown by over a million people. Some were returning, hoping to resume their pre-war lives while others were moving to the British colony for the first time. As with any large-scale population movement, there was a mix of people and motives. People also moved with varying degrees of self-sufficiency, meaning that the question of what support they required, if any, was a difficult one to address. Answers to the question of whether the migrants required any support would ultimately be bound up with British colonial policies, cold war politics and structural racism that privileged the condition of European refugees and the work of western humanitarians above others.

I originally undertook the research that informs a portion of this paper a decade ago when I was putting together the manuscript that eventually became *Elusive Refuge: Chinese Migrants in the Cold War* (Harvard University Press, 2016). At the time, I was interested in questions around knowledge production and how the research funded by the Ford Foundation sought to measure and quantify refugeehood (the lived experience of being a refugee). The question of crisis arose then, as it does now, for in researching the size of the refugee problem in Hong Kong, people were simultaneously trying to ascertain whether there was a crisis on the ground and whether international (read western) intervention was required. There was divergent pressure from the United Nations, American politicians, British colonial authorities in Hong Kong, and the communist regime in the People’s Republic of China about whether the movement of people into Hong Kong after 1949 should be treated as a refugee crisis. As I detailed in *Elusive Refuge* and in an article on western humanitarianism that appeared in the *Journal of Modern Asian Studies*, the question of crisis was paramount because the information garnered from surveys funded by the Ford Foundation was used to affirm both the nature

of refugeehood in Asia and the extent to which international intervention was required.<sup>2</sup> In this case, identifying a crisis would imply the need for intervention, specifically western intervention despite existing work on behalf of refugees undertaken by Chinese organizations.

In seeking answers to the nature of the refugee condition in Hong Kong, the Ford Foundation supported two surveys. The first was overtly political, organized by Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals (ARCI) a pro-Guomindang organization in the United States. This survey proposed an important role for western actors in providing relief in the colony. The second survey was meant to be more neutral and was commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This survey, led by Dr. Edward Hambro (a Norwegian diplomat), ultimately determined that there was a “refugee problem” but that international intervention, in the form of UN recognition of the people in Hong Kong as refugees, was not required. According to the Hambro mission, work on behalf of the people in Hong Kong could largely be carried about by what we now call the “third sector”.

In returning to the Ford Foundation’s involvement in funding research on refugees in Hong Kong, I would like to explore the ways in which the work of the third sector was understood. I am especially interested in understanding how the ARCI survey and the Hambro mission viewed the work of western and Chinese charities and whether it discerned any differences in terms of scope and responsibility. As historian Elizabeth Sinn and others have noted, there was a long history of charitable and voluntary work in Hong Kong, most notably by the Tung Wah hospital (est. 1870) and a number of *kaiifong*, (mutual aid organizations), clan, neighbourhood, and village associations.<sup>3</sup> In my own work, I recognized the important work these organizations were doing. However, as my earlier preoccupation was with how western actors were engaging with the question of refugees in Hong Kong (if at all), I did not pay sufficient heed to how Chinese work in the third sector was being considered by contemporary western actors. As a result, with this paper, my intention is to consider whether perceptions of appropriate third sector work divided along cultural and ethnic lines.

Based on my preliminary research (still ongoing), my sense is that in research funded by the Ford Foundation (and because of the way researchers sought to make the refugee situation in Hong

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<sup>2</sup> See Madokoro, L. (2015) “Surveying Hong Kong in the 1950s: Western humanitarians and the ‘problem’ of Chinese refugees,” *Modern Asian Studies* vol. 49, no.2, p. 493–524. Excerpts from this article have been reproduced in sections of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Sinn, E. (1989) *Power and Charity: The Early History of the Tung Wah Hospital*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Kong legible to western audiences) Chinese organizations were largely overlooked both in terms of their work. Proposed funding was also to be directed through western and colonial sources, suggesting that the imbalance in treatment that characterized the relationship between refugees in Europe and those in other parts of the world also carried over to local organizations involved in relief work. The situation in Hong Kong in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War with regard to which organizations were deemed priority in terms of humanitarian work foreshadows some of the tensions that appeared later in the twentieth century around local and international humanitarian work on behalf of refugees.<sup>4</sup>

### Researching Hong Kong

The Ford Foundation first became involved in researching refugees in Hong Kong at the behest of Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals (ARCI). ARCI was established in 1952 by Walter Judd, a former medical missionary who served in the US Congress as the representative from Minnesota for two decades beginning in 1943. Judd was a prominent member of the China Lobby - a loose coalition of pro-Guomindang, anti-Communist individuals, which wielded considerable influence on America's China policy after 1949.<sup>5</sup> 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, magazine and newspaper articles of Americans' desire to combat communism in China.<sup>6</sup> ARCI's 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.'<sup>7</sup> As Kenneth Yung Kai Chung notes, ARCI 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.'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> There is a longstanding concern in the field of refugee studies that research and solutions for refugees has been undertaken in the Global North with little regard for local insights and knowledge. Correcting this imbalance has been at the core of the Locally Engaged Refugee Research Network: <https://carleton.ca/lerrn>.

<sup>5</sup> Bachrach, S. (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. (c1990). *As I Saw It*, W.W. Norton, New York, p. 175.

<sup>6</sup> Koen, R. (1974). *China Lobby in American Politics*, Harper & Row, New York, p. 84 - 86.

<sup>7</sup> See correspondence in PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

<sup>8</sup> Cheung Y.K.K. (2007). 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.

Following on claims advanced by the Guomindang leadership that there were a million refugees in Hong Kong, one of ARCI's first concrete initiatives was a survey of the refugee population to determine how many intellectuals were in the colony, and how they might be assisted (all the while promoting America's interest in the plight of refugees from communist China). To conduct the survey, ARCI approached the British government for permission to proceed and asked the Ford Foundation for funding. In both instances, Congressman Judd attempted to make ARCI's work appear as modest and apolitical as possible. Judd told Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, and officials in Hong Kong that ARCI's work 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.' ARCI's initial ask 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 ARCI's poorly disguised political agenda even as they recognized the importance of assisting refugees as a way of fostering international peace and stability.<sup>9</sup> While the Trustees refused ARCI'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 was conducted over a few short weeks using questionnaires that were distributed to approximately 4,000 people. 1,207 were completed and returned. Based on this sampling as well as conversations with 'intellectual leaders', the ARCI team concluded that there were probably about 10,000 refugee intellectuals in need of assistance.<sup>10</sup> In reporting the final results of the survey, the organizers (Father Frederick A. McGuire, a missionary and ARCI Vice-Chairman and James Ivy, a member of the Committee for a Free Asia) conceded that they had not secured comprehensive or conclusive evidence.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the survey's final report declared that the refugee intellectuals' sole hope, lay 'in an effort on the part of *American philanthropy* (emphasis added) to save them for

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<sup>9</sup> Memo by John B. Howard, 'Chinese Refugees – Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals,' 28 January 1954, PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

lives of future usefulness.<sup>12</sup> The emphasis on American philanthropy is critical. This was a survey and a report designed to garner support in the United States.

In emphasizing the role for American philanthropy, the ARCI team disregarded almost entirely the significant local efforts including clan and community associations. Susan Milaveny distinguished between two categories of organizations operating in Hong Kong in this period: the “t’ung Hsiang hui or regional association – ‘association of people from the same countryside’. The second, the shih tsugh ch’en hui, is a clan association – ‘association of relatives from the clan.’”<sup>13</sup> Moreover, As historian Chi-Kwan Mark has observed, for new arrivals in the colony, the expectation was that they would “look to their relatives, *Kaifong* welfare associations or international voluntary agencies for help.”<sup>14</sup> *Kaifongs* had been part of Hong Kong society since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century but they became more critical after the Second World War when they adapted to meet the needs of new arrivals.<sup>15</sup> The British colonial government, with limited resources and confronted with the task of postwar rebuilding, also relied more obviously on the work of local associations to assist with arriving refugees. The first modern *kaifong* was designated in 1949 and by the mid-1950s there were thirty different associations operating in the colony.<sup>16</sup>

ARCI ignored much of this work since supporting local organizations would have done little to support its larger political objectives, namely engaging Americans with anti-communist efforts in Asia. Funds were to be given to ARCI not local actors. As a result, ARCI’s survey 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, ARCI 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

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Preliminary Report’, Ford Foundation Archives.

<sup>13</sup> Milaveny, S. (1975) The Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED116987>, p. 56-57.

<sup>14</sup> Mark, C-K, 1149. See also Sinn E, ‘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.

<sup>15</sup> Wong, A. (1971) Chinese Voluntary Associations in Southeast Asian Cities and the Kaifongs in Hong Kong. *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 1, p. 67.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

survey party came to Hong Kong to gather factual information concerning the intellectual refugees has aroused hope in the hearts of these people.<sup>17</sup> This language seemed to imply that no one else cared, which was palpably untrue given the significant work undertaken by local associations in this period; work that was recognized by the colonial government in Hong Kong but which other international actors largely disregarded.<sup>18</sup>

Even more worrying in terms of recognizing and integrating local efforts, McGuire and Ivy suggested a program 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.’<sup>19</sup> 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 ARCI to further its fundraising appeals, raise awareness about the refugee situation in 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 ARCI problematized the refugee situation in Hong Kong and the solutions it proposed erased any sense of local Chinese relief work.

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 ARCI 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.<sup>20</sup> It also provided the framework for the Ford Foundation’s discussions of the refugee situation in Hong Kong generally. Staff and trustees consistently repeated ARCI’s

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> On church-state relations, including the work of the World Council of Churches, see Leung B, Chan S-H. (2003). *Changing Church and State Relations in Hong Kong, 1950-2000*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003. Historian Glen Peterson observes “The World Council of Churches adopted a leading role in coordinating the efforts of various international agencies, while neighbourhood welfare associations known as kaifong (街坊福利会) played a critical role in administering relief and organizing education and training programmes at the local level.” See Peterson, G. (2012). The Uneven Development of the International Refugee Regime in Postwar Asia: Evidence from China, Hong Kong and Indonesia. *Journal of Refugee Studies* vol. 25, no. 3, p. 333.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> See correspondence in PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

unsubstantiated figure, borrowed from the Guomindang leadership, about the presence of ‘more than a million refugees’ in Hong Kong. The Ford Foundation also accepted ARCI’s 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.’<sup>21</sup> The fact that the refugees were intellectuals, and that they were anti-Communist had a profound influence on the Ford Foundation’s view of the situation.

ARCI’s requests, and later that of the UNHCR, arrived at the Ford Foundation at a time when the organization was undertaking a significant re-evaluation of its mission and programming including about the extent to which it should be engaging with issues in Asia. ARCI’s 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 UNHCR’s subsequent request would be received in a similar vein. From 1952 to 1954, ARCI requested over two million dollars from the Ford Foundation for various projects including the refugee resettlement program, a Free China Literary Institute, a New Asia College and a China Institute.<sup>22</sup> These latter projects were a mix of educational and promotional initiatives. The plan for the Free China Literary Institute, for instance, involved the translation of pro-Western materials for distribution amongst various Chinese audiences.

Given the considered and profound program evaluation that was taking place at the Ford Foundation at the time, staff were 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 programs have been carefully planned or that ARCI has demonstrated satisfactory administrative competence.’<sup>23</sup> This impression came from staff contacts with the organization as well as communications with the UNHCR representative in Hong Kong, James Read.<sup>24</sup> It was also the result of discussions with other organizations with which the Ford Foundation had long-standing relations. For instance, the Ford Foundation was a major contributor to the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organization dedicated to relieving suffering

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Preliminary Report,’ Ford Foundation Archives.

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Gladieux to H. Rowan Gaither, ‘Problems of China Area,’ 25 June 1953, PA 52-90 Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

<sup>23</sup> Gladieux to Joseph M. McDaniel, Jr., 29 December 1952, PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Report to the High Commissioner on Trip to South East Asia,’ James M. Read, in PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

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 recommended against making funds directly available to the ARCI 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 wanted their 'motives for helping these unfortunate people to be misunderstood by people on both sides of the bitter controversy in that area.'<sup>25</sup> In part because of the risk inherent in supporting private outfits such as ARCI, whose activities were motivated in 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.<sup>26</sup> This view once again erased the role being played by Chinese organizations, most notably the *kaifongs*, and curtailed the possibility of expanding this work further.

Even though ARCI was the 'only organization in the field' working on the refugee issue in Hong Kong, Ford Trustees delayed a decision on funding in anticipation of what the new Eisenhower administration would establish as its so-called 'Asia policy'.<sup>27</sup> 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 US government gave ARCI \$250,000 in February 1953 to aid with a refugee resettlement program. Most of the refugees were intended for Taiwan though some were also admitted to the United States, further eroding the longstanding barriers on migration from Asia.<sup>28</sup> 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 program to Hong Kong. The 1953 Act allowed for 209,000 'non-quota' immigrant visas to be issued up to 31 December 1956 and included room for up to 3,000 Asian

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<sup>25</sup> Lewis Hoskins to Arnold, 12 May 1952, PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

<sup>26</sup> 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 1954 that the United States government had contributed significant sums to ARCI. They were reluctant to use the Foundation's funds to support ARCI's work since the amount of money involved suggested that ARCI's work 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.

<sup>27</sup> Gladieux to Joseph M. McDaniel, Jr., 29 December 1952, PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Hsu, M. (2012). The Disappearance of America's Cold War Chinese Refugees, 1948-1966, *Journal of American Ethnic History* vol.31, no.4, p. 12-33.

refugees in the Far East and 2,000 visas specifically for Chinese refugees.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, the Escapee Program, 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 ARCI \$200,000 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 ARCI's politicized approach.

It was in this granting climate that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Gerrit Jan van Heuven Goedhart approached the Ford Foundation for financial support to undertake another refugee survey, this one under the auspices of the United Nations. 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 such as those advanced by ARCI. It was an outlook that was very much in keeping with the changing understanding of refugee issues as imagined by staff at the Ford Foundation and one that ultimately recognized the significant role of international and Chinese organizations in the provision of relief to the refugee community. The final report however still privileged international engagement over local relief efforts.

### **The Hambro Mission**

Parallel to the discussions at the Ford Foundation about who should bear responsibility for the refugees in Hong Kong, conversations meetings of the High Commissioner's Advisory Committee were revolving around the same question. In 1953, the Guomindang 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

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<sup>29</sup> '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.'

Guomindang government) 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 from the UNHCR. From Bangkok, UNHCR representative Aami Ali wrote the High Commissioner and reported on the harsh criticism he was hearing. According to Ali, it appeared that the UNHCR was ‘soft pedaling’ 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.’<sup>30</sup>

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.<sup>31</sup> This research required financing and the United Nations, 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.<sup>32</sup> Ford Foundation staff saw his focus on a ‘program of action’ that would engage government actors and took it as a welcome shift from the legal debate that had plagued many of the discussions about refugee protection in Hong Kong and the politicized approach pursued by ARCI.<sup>33</sup>

The High Commissioner’s appeal came at an opportune moment as the staff of the Ford Foundation were in the process of determining the direction of their overseas activities. While the Trustees had rejected a comprehensive program 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.<sup>34</sup> The Foundation’s way of “reading” the world, and possible projects and partnerships, was to think about organizations with which it could partner. In the case of refugees in Europe and Asia, the Ford

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<sup>30</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> I.H. Harris to Mr. Sidebotham, 19 October 1953, CO 1023/117 Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong (1952), National Archives of the United Kingdom.

<sup>32</sup> Goedhart to Ford Foundation, 7 May 1953, PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

<sup>33</sup> At the United Nations, 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.

<sup>34</sup> Goedhart to Ford Foundation, 7 May 1953, PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

Foundation had compiled a list of thirteen potential partners including: the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the National Catholic Welfare Conference (War Relief Services), Hebrew Sheltering & Immigrant Aid Society, Church World Service, United Service for New Americans, Foster Parents' Plan for War Children, American ORT Federation, American Friends Service Committee, Lutheran Resettlement Service, International Rescue Committee, Brethren Service Commission, United Ukrainian American Relief Committee and the Tolstoy Foundation.<sup>35</sup>

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.' It could make the "problem" legible but given the way that the Ford Foundation already viewed the world of refugee relief (as demonstrated by the thirteen organizations identified above), it risked from the outset ignoring the significance of local, Chinese-led, relief efforts. Nevertheless, 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 support for the 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.<sup>36</sup>

Like Goedhart, Read believed an 'adequate survey' was necessary because he mistrusted ARCI's advertised figure of 1,200,000 refugees.<sup>37</sup> Read relayed the UNHCR's recent experience in requesting evidence from ARCI about the high-skilled clientele on behalf of whom they were advocating. Upon receiving a sample of twenty-eight case files from ARCI's 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:

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<sup>35</sup> "David Freeman to Bernard L. Gladieux," 28 December 1952, Reel 1156, General Correspondence, Refugees – 1952, Ford Foundation Archives.

<sup>36</sup> 'Report to the High Commissioner on Trip to South East Asia,' James M. Read, in PA 52-90, Reel 645, Ford Foundation Archives.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

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).<sup>38</sup>

Interested in having more scientific evidence as it considered how to shape its own funding program and somewhat troubled by ARCI's 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 strong anti-colonial bias.'<sup>39</sup> They hoped for 'someone colourless and business-like.'<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> They eventually got their candidate: Edward 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 of International Court at The Hague and was pursuing research at Cambridge University at the time of his appointment.<sup>42</sup> The British Foreign Office accepted his nomination but later remarked that he was 'surprisingly ignorant of Far Eastern Affairs.'<sup>43</sup> The rest of the survey team consisted of an economic consultant and social consultant and investigators with backgrounds in social casework. An Employment Classification Analyst and Occupational Analysis Officer were also attached to the survey.

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<sup>38</sup> Read, J. *International Conciliation* 5 (1961–63), <http://heinonline.org>, [accessed 23 May 2022].

<sup>39</sup> 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.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> 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.

<sup>42</sup> Foreign Office to Geneva, 2 April 1954, CO 1030/381 Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong (1954-1956), National Archives of the United Kingdom.

<sup>43</sup> 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.

The Governor of Hong Kong was ‘lukewarm’ about the work of the Hambro mission.<sup>44</sup> As with the ARCI 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 program would result and as one American authority indicated, it would probably result in an extension of the High Commissioner’s mandate.<sup>45</sup> 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.’<sup>46</sup> In many ways, it was also unnecessary to import relief machinery given the long-standing presence of Chinese associations in the colony, and the growth of these associations in the postwar period.

From the outset, Edward Hambro and his team took a broad view of the scope of their work. They deemed the definition of a refugee according to the 1951 Convention 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.’<sup>47</sup> 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.’<sup>48</sup> 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.’<sup>49</sup>

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. Based on the

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<sup>44</sup> Harris to MacIntosh, 26 April 1955, CO 1030 / 382 Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong (1954-1956), National Archives of the United Kingdom.

<sup>45</sup> 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.

<sup>46</sup> 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.

<sup>47</sup> Hambro, E. (1955). *The Problem of Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong*, A.W. Sijthoff, Leyden, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> Summary Record of the 1st Staff meeting, 3 May 1954, Fonds 23, Box 1, Summary records of staff meetings, UNHCR Archives.

<sup>49</sup> Hambro, *Problem of Chinese Refugees*, 4.

results of the survey, the mission determined three 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 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, automatically deferring to international coordination as opposed to locally based initiatives. 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.’<sup>50</sup> 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*.<sup>51</sup>

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.<sup>52</sup> Although Edward Hambro recognized that “People inside and outside the Colony are engaged in finding means to solve the problems facing the refugees,” beyond the question of integration (which he viewed in economic terms) there was little sense that Chinese organizations could play an independent, critical role in work on behalf of refugees.<sup>53</sup> The Hambro mission viewed their work entirely through the lens of the colonial government’s relationship with Chinese organizations. In the final survey report, Hambro acknowledged the Social Welfare Office of the Hong Kong government and noted that it worked with *kaiifongs*, largely in terms of the “promotion of social community development”.<sup>54</sup> Hambro also underscored the “very valuable and commendable activities undertaken in Hong Kong by the large number (between 80 and 100) of voluntary organizations both local (Chinese and European) and foreign or international.”<sup>55</sup> Instead of an “exhaustive picture” however, the mission’s strategy was to emphasize the important coordinating

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>51</sup> Hambro, *Problem of Chinese Refugees*, 128.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>53</sup> Hambro, E. Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong. *The Phylon Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1957), pp. 69-8179.

<sup>54</sup> Hambro, *Problem of Chinese Refugees*, 120.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 122.

role of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, the work of the colonial government and the importance of funding from the American government under the United States Escapee Program.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, perhaps for political reasons, Hambro was especially attentive about recognizing the efforts of the local colonial government. Summarizing the findings of his report for a general public, Hambro declared:

It should be emphasized again that gloomy as the picture is, housing problems, shortage of community facilities, under and unemployment, are by no means unique in this part of the world. It is to Hong Kong's authorities' credit that the refugee problem has not gotten out of hand and that so much has been done to alleviate housing, health, and educational shortages for the refugee and permanent residents.<sup>57</sup>

Yet, instead of suggesting an enhanced role for Chinese voluntary associations or 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.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the report consistently celebrated western humanitarians over their Chinese counterparts. The report's conclusions note, "the unselfish and tireless hours of the welfare workers – particularly, perhaps, amongst the missionaries – and the great and meritorious efforts made by the different voluntary societies working amongst the poor and homeless, are one of the most heartening signs in Hong Kong."<sup>59</sup> Voluntary societies is a vague term but it is significant that no effort was made to highlight Chinese associations in particular.

The Hambro mission seemed to think that western organizations had the requisite coordinating functions noting that "while it is felt that the voluntary societies working in favour of refugees should be enabled by international assistance to extend their efforts as to emergency relief, it is also felt that a particular effort can be made only in favour of a small number of cases, selected according to very stringent criteria."<sup>60</sup> According to the Hambro mission, the need for coordination in this regard, as well as for scholarships for schoolchildren, was great and it was most comfortable designating western

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 120-122.

<sup>57</sup> Hambro, E. Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong. *The Phylon Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1957), pp. 69-8179.

<sup>58</sup> The International Social Service was established in 1924 with the objective of assisting migrants moving across international borders. In the postwar period it became deeply involved with family reunification issues in Europe and in facilitating international adoptions through the documentation individual cases.

<sup>59</sup> Hambro, *Problem of Chinese Refugees*, 133.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 122.

organizations for this role.<sup>61</sup> Critically, the list did not consider the work of Chinese clan and village associations or long-standing benefactors such as the Tung Wah hospital. 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 currently available to them. The inference seemed to be that the international community had a role to play in producing the estimated 35 million (HK\$) required to care for the refugee population in Hong Kong on an annual basis.<sup>62</sup> The Governor of Hong Kong disliked such interventionist solutions and remained cool to the work of the survey.<sup>63</sup> 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 colony.<sup>64</sup> However, they enjoyed only limited success in using the survey to their advantage.<sup>65</sup> The solutions that the Hambro survey proposed were beyond what the scope of what most governments envisioned in the field of refugee relief. More than that, they failed to consider the critical work taking place on the ground with Chinese-led organizations in Hong Kong.

## Conclusions

The health of the third sector in Hong Kong became of considerable interest to policymakers and scholars in the 1970s. The arrival of thousands of “boat people” fleeing Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos encouraged people to consider the nature of the colony’s official response as well as the work of the charitable sector. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, scholars found this work wanting and were dismayed about the state of charitable efforts in the colony.<sup>66</sup> To some extent, these critiques are fair.

However, in revisiting the work of western organizations, including the Ford Foundation and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, on behalf of refugees in the colony in the early 1950s, it is striking the extent to which local efforts by Chinese-led associations were minimized, made subservient to western directives, or erased entirely from the broad solutions proposed that were

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>63</sup> It was a view shared by senior colonial administrators as well as authorities responsible for security in the colony. See Annual Report. Hong Kong Police. 1951-52. Chapter XV, ‘Special Problems,’ 46.

<sup>64</sup> 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.

<sup>65</sup> 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).

<sup>66</sup> Diller, J.M. (1988). In Search of Asylum: The Vietnamese Boat People in Hong Kong, Indochina Resource Action, Center; Hughes, K.M. (1985). *Closed Camps: Vietnamese Refugee Policy in Hong Kong*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

directed first and foremost at engaging western governments and authorities. With both the ARCI survey and the Hambro Mission, the Ford Foundation supported research and a starting premise that foregrounded a role for western humanitarians, largely disregarding the work of Chinese associations already active in Hong Kong. In many ways, the research supported by the Ford Foundation actually made the work of Chinese associations illegible to western audiences who were disadvantaged even as funding into the colony for refugees increased. The World Council of Churches coordinated many of the international efforts in Hong Kong, however these largely operated distinct from the work of the *kaijong* and other Chinese associations. International discussions of the refugee situation in Hong Kong emphasized the notion of “problem” and “crisis” to propel some kind of international intervention. Chinese actors were largely ignored in the process.<sup>67</sup>

In revisiting the discussions around the refugee surveys funded by the Ford Foundation, it becomes clear that staff at the foundation didn’t have the knowledge or capacity to read the situation differently. The people who approached the foundation for funding emphasized an international (read western) role and downplayed the significant work of the local associations. If the work of the *kaijong* or others was recognized at all, it was nevertheless seen as inadequate or subservient to colonial interests. This perception persisted even though, in many ways, Chinese associations were better placed to address the needs of the mobile populace for they had an implicit understanding of the conditions and communities that had prompted people to move and the relationships that sustained them in place. Much more work needs to be done on this question, and the “Records of the Hong Kong Refugees Survey Mission” preserved at the UNHCR Archives, as well as the archives of the World Council of Churches, in Geneva may shed further light on the negotiations that took place around formulating potential solutions. For now, I would like to suggest that no story about the “refugee problem” or “refugee crisis” in Hong Kong or the reception, treatment, and internationalization of the refugee situation can be complete without full consideration of the work that Chinese organizations were doing. Attending to the work of local associations will shed considerable light on the extent to which the idea of a refugee crisis or problem was manufactured for western audiences to advance western cold war concerns. At this point in my research, I still don’t know if the *kaijongs* and other associations shared a sense of crisis. Further research on this subject

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<sup>67</sup> This was not the case in Taiwan however, where the Free China Relief Association was very prominent in negotiations with western actors over relief efforts. The difference might stem in part from the ongoing British colonial presence in Hong Kong however this will need to be researched further.

will require a deeper exploration of how western third sector actors understood their engagement with, and the possibilities of work undertaken by, Chinese associations. Most critically though, we need to better understand what motivated the work of community associations, how they perceived the refugee population and how they engaged, if at all, with the surveys and recommendations being made by western actors in Hong Kong. We also need to understand whether the discourse of a “refugee problem” or “crisis” resonated with them at all. If not, then we will need to do considerable work around the question of a refugee crisis for whom?