The Policies of the Hong Kong Government towards the Chinese Refugee Problem, 1945-1962

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Abstract

Hong Kong faced serious refugee problems at the end of the 1940s. A large number of poor Chinese escaped to Hong Kong, then a British colony, because of social instability in Mainland China. Hong Kong became a haven for these people from China. However, the influx of refugees brought about social and economic problems in areas such as housing, medical care, and public security, thus increasing the burden on Hong Kong which was already facing the challenge of reconstruction after the Second World War. During this Cold War period, the refugee problem became an issue in international political dispute, aggravating the conflict between Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party in Hong Kong, and causing political problems in Hong Kong that yearned for a neutral position. How to properly handle the refugee problem became an important challenge to the Hong Kong government in the post-war period.

This thesis focuses on the evolution of the policies of the Hong Kong government towards the refugee problem, that is, its move from a passive attitude, to seeking help, and finally to the active integration of the refugees in Hong Kong society. This thesis stresses the influence of internal and external factors on the refugee policies of the Hong Kong government, including the pressure from both Beijing and Taiwan, the policy of the British government, and problems of Hong Kong society. It discusses how the Hong Kong government dealt with the complicated, changing situation and implemented the colonial rule in the “borrowed time and borrowed place.” Finally, this thesis emphasizes that the refugee crisis impacted the feature of rule for the Hong Kong government, forcing it to review its previous administrative ways, and to gradually discard its policy of passive and indirect rule, until it more actively participated in local affairs, and made changes to its colonial rule in the post-war period.
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