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ARTICLE

The Impact of Refugees in Neutral Hong Kong and Macau, 1937–1945

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Abstract

This article investigates the complex entanglement of neutrality and displacement in Hong Kong and Macau with a focus on the impact of and responses to an unprecedented influx of refugees during the Second World War. Displaced persons were of central importance in shaping the ambiguous experience of neutrality before Hong Kong's occupation by Japan in late 1941 and until the end of the war in Macau. Building on Elizabeth Sinn's conceptualization of Hong Kong as an 'in-between place', this article considers these two foreign-ruled territories as 'in-between places' where multi-layered transborder flows developed in an 'in-between time' of neutrality. Highlighting similarities and connections between Hong Kong and Macau, it argues that neutrality was shaped by the movement of refugees and that refugees often experienced neutrality differently depending on perceptions of race, class, and nationality. The presence of diverse communities of refugees shaped multiple dimensions of urban life, with colonial concerns for spatial order and social control co-existing with humanitarian cooperation. The discourses and practices around refugees are an important precedent to understanding post-war refugeedom in these territories.

In June 1942, six months after Japanese forces invaded Hong Kong, Arthur Cheng, an Australian resident, pleaded to the comptroller general of customs in Canberra to be allowed to send funds to his sister-in-law Amy Cheng Li Suikee to provide support for his family who were refugees from Hong Kong residing in Macau. Cheng had attempted, unsuccessfully, to transfer funds from the Commonwealth Bank Head Office to the Macau's Banco Nacional Ultramarino (National Overseas Bank) via London. In support of his request, he mentioned that the British authorities had allowed his brother in Fiji to send funds to his wife in Macau.¹ Like Cheng, several Chinese in Australia

¹ Arthur Cheng to the comptroller general of customs, Australian Department of Trade and Customs, 22 June 1942, National Archives of Australia (NAA), series no. A1539, control symbol

attempting to send telegrams and remittances to relatives in Macau found themselves caught up in official bureaucracy on whether the Portuguese-administered enclave was regarded as 'enemy territory' and thus subject to the Trading with the Enemy Act 1939–40 and telegraph censorship.² Their cases are illustrative of the ambiguous 'in-betweenness' of neutral territories in the Second World War and of the diasporic and imperial networks that enabled the continuous circulation of information and money during the conflict. Precisely because their neutrality was framed by these overlapping networks, Hong Kong and Macau offered a relatively safe refuge to diasporic communities at a time when other connections were cut off.³ Although they functioned as bridges between occupied and unoccupied areas, their neutral status was fragile and could suddenly be terminated, as happened when Hong Kong was occupied in December 1941.

This article explores issues of wartime mobility, refugeedom, temporality, and place with a focus on the ambivalent relationship between neutrality and displacement in two colonial territories in South China during the Second World War: British-ruled Hong Kong and Portuguese-ruled Macau. Although many refugees came to Hong Kong and Macau to escape the Japanese occupation, neutrality did not mean complete isolation from the dynamics of the war being fought in China but a complex web of interactions with people, ideas, and things associated with the conflict. Displaced persons were central to these interactions.

Existing scholarship on the Second World War in Hong Kong and Macau has privileged military and diplomatic angles, in particular relations with Japan.⁴ Works on wartime social history have centred on experiences of internment in Hong Kong or on specific groups of refugees, namely the Hong Kong Portuguese.⁵ Historiographical attention to the domestic and international

1942/W/2712, National Security (Exchange Control) regulations – Trading with the Enemy Act 1939–40 – remittances to Portuguese Macao.

² NAA, series no. A1539, control symbol 1942/W/2712; NAA, series no. A989, control symbol 1943/651/4/2, overseas communications – wartime restrictions – communications with neutral territories – Macao.

³ On the case of Chinese Americans, see Charlotte Brooks, *American exodus: second-generation Chinese Americans in China, 1901–1949* (Oakland, CA, 2019), pp. 176–9, 184.

⁴ E.g. Philip Snow, *The fall of Hong Kong: Britain, China and the Japanese occupation* (New Haven, CT, 2003); Franco David Macri, *Clash of empires in South China: the Allied Nations' proxy war with Japan, 1935–1941* (Lawrence, KA, 2012); Geoffrey C. Gunn, ed., *Wartime Macau: under the Japanese shadow* (Hong Kong, 2016).

⁵ Bernice Archer, *The internment of western civilians under the Japanese, 1941–1945: a patchwork of internment* (London, 2004); Geoffrey Charles Emerson, *Hong Kong internment, 1942–1945: life in the Japanese civilian camp at Stanley* (Hong Kong, 2011); Felicia Yap, 'Prisoners of war and civilian internees of the Japanese in British Asia: the similarities and contrasts of experience', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 47 (2012), pp. 317–46; Alfredo Gomes Dias, 'Os refugiados de Hong Kong (1942)' (Refugees from Hong Kong (1942)), *Revista de Cultura* (Review of Culture), 34 (2010), pp. 117–28; Roy Eric Xavier, 'The Macanese at war: survival and identity among Portuguese Eurasians during World War II', in Gunn, ed., *Wartime Macau*, pp. 94–115; Stuart Braga, 'Nossa gente (our people): the Portuguese refugee community in wartime Macau', in Gunn, ed., *Wartime Macau*, pp. 116–40.

impact of refugees in Hong Kong has thus far focused overwhelmingly on the post-1949 period.⁶ Drawing on multilingual sources from different countries and taking a rare comparative and connected approach to Hong Kong and Macau, this article analyses these two colonial territories as linked ‘in-between places’ where multi-layered transborder connections were forged under the contingencies of neutrality. It argues that neutrality was shaped by the movement of refugees, and that refugees experienced neutrality differently. The presence of diverse communities of refugees engendered a peculiar wartime cosmopolitanism marked by contradictions. Colonial concerns for spatial order and social control co-existed with humanitarian co-operation in relief that operated at different but intersecting scales (local, national, imperial, transnational). The article will first delve into the similarities and differences in the colonial authorities’ responses to the evolving situation on the ground and their articulation with, and reliance on, non-state actors to manage refugees. Then, it will draw attention to discourses and practices connected to displaced persons and how the visible presence of refugees shaped urban spaces and different sectors of activity. Refugees’ experiences were not neutral, they depended on networks, and perceptions of race and class. They were also entangled with politics, with relief and resistance often overlapping.

Neutrality is frequently analysed in contexts of international alliances, but this article eschews a top-down legal focus on neutrality as a state policy. Instead, it concentrates on the lived experience of neutrality in two connected colonial territories: how a fragile state of ‘peace’ at a time of war shaped and was shaped by the movement of displaced persons. Placing refugees at the centre of analysis helps us to problematize what neutrality means in practice and how it is experienced differently depending on factors such as wealth or personal contacts. Pre-occupation Hong Kong and Macau were not technically at war but those who sheltered there were not indifferent to the conflict. In fact, their movement and actions are revealing of the ambivalent position of neutral territories under colonial rule. Emphasizing connections, this article addresses recent calls to analyse refugeedom without a focus on nation-state-centred experiences and to consider how ‘attempts to manage refugees developed within and beyond’ Eurocentric frameworks in colonized territories in Asia.⁷

British Hong Kong was neutral in the Sino-Japanese conflict from the outbreak of an all-out war in July 1937 until being occupied by Japanese forces in December 1941. The neighbouring Portuguese-administered enclave remained neutral for even longer, escaping occupation until the end of the war in 1945. Although Guangzhou (Canton) fell in October 1938, after months of air raids, military operations continued in parts of Guangdong after the occupation of the provincial capital, including in Shenzhen (bordering Hong Kong) and in

⁶ E.g. Chi-Kwan Mark, ‘The “problem of people”: British colonials, Cold War powers, and the Chinese refugees in Hong Kong, 1949–1962’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 41 (2007), pp. 1145–81; Meredith Oyen, ‘“Thunder without rain”: ARCI, the Far East refugee program, and the U.S. response to Hong Kong refugees’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 16 (2014), pp. 189–221; Laura Madokoro, *Elusive refuge: Chinese migrants in the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA, 2016).

⁷ Lauren Banko, Katarzyna Nowak, and Peter Gatrell, ‘What is refugee history, now?’, *Journal of Global History*, 17 (2021), pp. 2–3, 7–8.

Zhongshan county (bordering Macau), the latter only firmly occupied in 1940. Another 'in-between place' in the region, French-ruled Guangzhouwan was de facto occupied by Japan only in 1943 and remained nominally under French rule until early 1945. This South China colonial frontier bridged occupied and unoccupied China, with porous land and maritime borders through which people, information, and goods circulated. These neutral foreign-ruled territories – to which one must add the better-known cases of the International Settlement and the French Concession in Shanghai before they were taken over by Japan from late 1941 onwards – had a peculiar experience during the conflict. Even though each of these locales is often analysed as exceptional, they were not unique: they were similar to and connected with one another and with other cities in China and beyond. Those connections were strengthened by the flows of displaced persons during the war.

Elizabeth Sinn has famously conceptualized Hong Kong as an 'in-between place', meaning 'a transit point for migrants', and also 'a transit and intermediary place for migrant's things – letters, goods, information, remittances'.⁸ This view of Hong Kong as a place of mediation is easily applicable to Macau. In her study of transpacific crossings, Sinn argued that migrants returning from overseas' gold rushes were crucial to the making of modern Hong Kong, with the latter surpassing Macau's prior prominence.⁹ However, despite its relative decline after the rise of Hong Kong, Macau was not cut off from diasporic networks, and remained deeply connected to Hong Kong itself through some of these. Although both territories had been sites of global connections and refuge before the war, the latter generated new tensions and heightened old contradictions on an unprecedented scale. The wartime movement of displaced persons to neutral places in the Pearl River Delta was of utmost significance and had a long-lasting impact, being a forerunner of practices and discourses that would re-emerge with the Chinese civil war exodus in the late 1940s.

The population of Hong Kong almost doubled between 1937 and 1941, reaching around 1.6 million in 1941. In the first year of the conflict, it was estimated that 250,000 people moved to Hong Kong.¹⁰ The pre-1945 population reached around 1.8 million in 1940, the highest in its history until then. Although many refugees started to arrive in Hong Kong – as in Macau – during the battle of Shanghai (August–November 1937), the largest number of yearly arrivals, around half a million, was registered in 1938, when Guangzhou was occupied by Japanese forces.¹¹ Macau saw a similar rising

⁸ Elizabeth Sinn, 'Hong Kong as an in-between place in the Chinese diaspora, 1849–1949', in Donna R. Gabaccia and Dirk Hoerder, eds., *Connecting seas and connected ocean rims: Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans and China Seas migrations from the 1830s to the 1930s* (Leiden, 2011), p. 225.

⁹ Elizabeth Sinn, *Pacific crossing: California gold, Chinese migration, and the making of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, 2015).

¹⁰ Excerpt of Hansard report of Legislative Council (LegCo) session on 28 July 1938, sent by Geoffrey Northcote, governor of Hong Kong to Malcolm MacDonald, secretary of state for the colonies, 9 Aug. 1938, The National Archives, United Kingdom (TNA), FO 371/22154. The full minutes of that LegCo session can be read at legco.gov.hk/1938/h380728.pdf.

¹¹ Saw Swee-Hock and Chiu Wing Kin, 'Population growth and redistribution in Hong Kong, 1841–1975', *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, 4 (1975), p. 126.

trend in population figures that, like in Hong Kong, were the highest it had ever registered. The enclave saw a tripling of its population during the war, reaching around half a million people.¹² The population of Hong Kong decreased exponentially during the Japanese occupation and Macau absorbed some of those who left. Starting from early 1942, when maritime travel between the two colonies was resumed, thousands of people from Hong Kong headed for Macau. Many were Portuguese Eurasians capitalizing on their local family connections, but they were joined by refugees of many other nationalities including Chinese, Filipinos, Indians, as well as stateless persons such as Russians or Jewish refugees.¹³ Pre-existing connections had also framed the arrival of many refugees in Hong Kong before the occupation. British authorities were aware of this, and appeared to regard Cantonese refugees' claims of refuge in Hong Kong as more difficult to reject than others, being mindful of negative perceptions among authorities in Guangdong: 'Very many Cantonese had property, relations, friends at Hongkong and to prevent their entry would cause great ill feeling', observed the consul in Guangzhou. He noted, however, that refugees from elsewhere, such as Fujian, Hankou, or North China, were deemed to 'have no historic claim on hospitality' in the colony.¹⁴ Despite not being perceived or treated the same, the newcomers had a profound impact on these neutral territories. Hong Kong and Macau turned into true refugee cities, where the number of new residents – most of whom had come to flee the conflict – matched or surpassed the number of pre-war inhabitants.

'Refugee' remains a complex category. Attempts to reach a commonly recognized definition gained traction in the twentieth century, starting with the League of Nations and, later, with the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. These, however, tended to overlook refugees in East Asia during the Second World War despite the fact that, on the ground, the presence and impact of refugees was acknowledged. Though they crossed different legal jurisdictions, refugees (難民 in Chinese, *refugiados* in Portuguese), as they are commonly referred to in sources of the period, arriving in Hong Kong and Macau may also be seen as internally displaced persons, but a nation-state-centred framework fails to capture the complexity of their experiences. They moved into

¹² 'Declarações do sr. governador de Macau à imprensa' (Words of the governor of Macau to the press), *Boletim Geral das Colónias* (General Bulletin of the Colonies), 22 (1946), p. 7; Manuel Teixeira, 'Macau durante a guerra: doce visão de paz!' (Macau during the war: sweet vision of peace!), *Boletim Eclesiástico da Diocese de Macau* (Macau Diocese Ecclesiastic Bulletin), 76 (1978), p. 498; Iok Lan Fu Barreto, ed., *Macau during the Sino-Japanese War / Kangzhan shiqi de Aomen / Macau durante a guerra Sino-Japonesa* (Macau, 2002), pp. 30–1.

¹³ Although there is a dearth of studies on Russian and Jewish refugees in Macau, a few works of fiction based on true stories shed some light on their experiences in the enclave. See Robert Shaplen, *A corner of the world* (London, 1950), pp. 184–262; Rodrigo Leal de Carvalho, *Requiem por Irina Ostrakoff* (Requiem for Irina Ostrakoff) (Macau, 1993); Rodrigo Leal de Carvalho, *A mãe* (The mother) (Macau, 2001); Paul French, *Strangers on the praia: a tale of refugees and resistance in wartime Macao* (Hong Kong, 2020).

¹⁴ A. P. Blunt, British consul in Guangzhou to British embassy in Shanghai, 24 June 1938, TNA, FO 371/22154.

what were, simultaneously, foreign and Chinese places. Those who came to these neutral territories also challenged still common misunderstandings of refugees as inexorably destitute. Some were very wealthy indeed, a telling case being that of the Hong Kong tycoon Sir Robert Ho Tung who, together with some of his family members, sought refuge in Macau in the 1940s and contributed financially to a variety of local charities that supported poorer refugees.¹⁵

The decision to move to a neutral territory to escape the violence and constraints of warfare was often an ad hoc decision imposed by the shifting temporalities of war. For neutral places like Hong Kong and Macau, this was a period of uncertainty, of crisis, and opportunity. Being neutral was being in an 'in-between time', neither at war nor really at peace. This was a fragile time that could end at any moment, something often mentioned in different contemporary testimonies and memoirs.¹⁶ There was no guarantee that these territories would stay neutral. After 1939, Britain became involved in the war in Europe, and later in the 1940s, the possibility of Portugal entering the war was deemed likely, especially after the country ceded aerial bases to Britain and the United States in 1943. Living through neutrality meant living on edge, perennially disturbed by the possibility that safety may not last for long. An end of neutrality – as happened in Hong Kong – had multiple repercussions, including on the ability to move elsewhere.

This 'in-between time' of neutrality in Hong Kong and Macau was always conditioned by the *wartime* of its surrounding Chinese lands and waters. Wartime manoeuvres on the mainland had immediate repercussions on the Southern colonial territories. In February 1938, Zhongshan was bombed by Japanese aircraft and warships, leading to the flight of many refugees to Macau by road.¹⁷ Clashes on Lappa island, to the west side of Macau, also 'precipitated an influx of refugees' in May 1938.¹⁸ The following month, one hundred refugees arrived on a raft from Sanzaodao after weeks in the mountains.¹⁹ The island had been the site of a massacre after Japanese forces landed there in February. By early November, shortly after the fall of Guangzhou, a news report noted that 'terrified refugees' from Guangdong province were seeking refuge in Macau 'at an average of 10,000 a day', with about half continuing their journey to neighbouring Hong Kong.²⁰ When Japanese forces attacked Shenzhen in February 1939, around 3,000 refugees entered Hong Kong, some

¹⁵ E.g. 'Sir Robert Ho Tung', *A Voz de Macau (VM)*, 17 Aug. 1942, p. 3; D. Barrote, *Ao grande benemérito e amigo dos Portugueses Sir Robert Ho Tung* (To the great benefactor and friend of the Portuguese Sir Robert Ho Tung) (Coimbra, 1949), National Library of Australia (NLA), BRA 5302.

¹⁶ E.g. Agnete N. Yansen to Mr and Mrs MacDiarmid, 1 Oct. 1939, Presbyterian Research Centre (Archives) of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, Canton Villages Mission – staff files, Miss A. N. Yansen (1922–53), AA11/2; Eddie Gosano, *Hong Kong Farewell*, p. 33, Imperial War Museum, London (IWM), LB5 K.00/965.

¹⁷ 'Modern town destroyed', *China Press (CP)*, 8 Feb. 1938, p. 1.

¹⁸ 'Clash near Macao', *North China Herald (NCH)*, 11 May 1938, p. 226.

¹⁹ 'Big refugee group arrives in Macao from Sancho Island', *CP*, 4 June 1938, p. 10.

²⁰ 'Frightened refugees pour into Macao from Kwangtung, but city stays unperturbed', *CP*, 1 Nov. 1938, p. 3.

of whom were wounded. This incident laid bare the vulnerabilities of neutrality, with refugees on the British side of the border being targeted.²¹ The actual occupation of Shenzhen in August resulted in the arrival of 5,000 refugees in Hong Kong.²² In October 1939, Japanese forces entered Zhongshan again, and ‘masses of refugees’ sought to reach Macau via the Macau–Shiqi road, with 2,000 then leaving for Hong Kong from there.²³ Thousands of refugees entered Hong Kong in June 1940 fleeing Japanese military operations near the Shenzhen border that again targeted civilians, with police and military units directing around 5,000 to camps.²⁴ In early 1942, an exodus out of Hong Kong followed the Japanese takeover, with Macau and Guangzhouwan as key destinations. A few months after the fall of the British colony, more than 1,500 refugees were coming to Guangzhouwan’s capital Fort Bayard per week.²⁵ Some French nationals (including Chinese) left Hong Kong for Macau and were taken from there to Indochina (yet another complex neutral colonial territory) stopping at Guangzhouwan.²⁶ As these examples show, ‘in-between places’ remained connected in periods of intense warfare and those connections enabled the flight of many refugees of different nationalities across borders that remained porous.

The movement of refugees was conditioned by the elusiveness of neutrality as an unstable government policy that could be over-run militarily or eroded under Japanese pressure. Because of their reliance on supplies from mainland China, and of the limited capacity of their colonial rulers to defend them against the Japanese forces, these territories were vulnerable to military operations such as naval blockades or disruption of the Canton–Kowloon railway. These led to scarcity of foodstuffs and other materials that aggravated living conditions in Macau and Hong Kong.²⁷ Several people and institutions who sought refuge in these neutral territories could and did move elsewhere when circumstances changed. Painter George Smirnoff had come to Hong Kong fleeing the occupation of Harbin via Qingdao, and moved to Macau during the occupation of the British colony.²⁸ Lingnan University relocated from Guangzhou to Hong Kong – where its classes were held at the University of Hong Kong – but after Hong Kong was occupied some of its activities and students moved to parts of unoccupied Guangdong.²⁹ Furthermore, moving to a

²¹ ‘Air raid near Hong-Kong’, *Times*, 22 Feb. 1939, clipping in TNA, CO 129/579/12; ‘Planes over bonder [sic]’, *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, 22 Feb. 1939, p. 15.

²² Northcote to MacDonald, 17 Aug. 1939, TNA, CO 129/578/11.

²³ ‘Japanese occupy Chungshan’, *NCH*, 11 Oct. 1939, p. 53.

²⁴ ‘Refugees pour into Hongkong’, *NCH*, 26 June 1940, p. 488.

²⁵ Bertrand Matot, *Fort Bayard: quand la France vendait son opium* (Fort Bayard: when France sold its opium) (Paris, 2013), p. 201.

²⁶ ‘Ressortissants français à Hong Kong (1942)’ (French nationals in Hong Kong (1942)), Archives nationales d’outre-mer (National Overseas Archives, Aix-en-Provence), GGI CM 606.

²⁷ E.g. ‘Blockade of Macao hits Hongkong’, *NCH*, 10 Apr. 1940, p. 48; various files in Arquivo Nacional Torre to Tombo, Arquivo Oliveira Salazar (Portuguese National Archives, Oliveira Salazar Archive) (ANTT, AOS), UL-10A1, cx. 767 and NE-10A2, cx. 768.

²⁸ Geoffrey C. Gunn, ‘Introduction’, in Gunn, ed., *Wartime Macau*, p. 17.

²⁹ Lee Sui-ming, *A phoenix in South China: the story of Lingnan (University) College, Sun Yat-sen University* (Hong Kong, 2005), pp. 80–4.

neutral territory did not mean that people stayed put: many continued to circulate between neutral Hong Kong and Macau and occupied and unoccupied areas in China, and outside the country. Although border controls existed, and were reinforced in specific periods (for example, during cholera outbreaks), permeable land and maritime boundaries offered opportunities aplenty to evade official oversight. Even before the fall of Guangzhou, authorities in Hong Kong were aware of a 'fluid class of refugees en route to other ports', and, as will be addressed later, colonial authorities were also keen to encourage some refugees to depart for other places.³⁰

In Hong Kong, the 'in-between time' of neutrality ended with formal occupation by Japan in December 1941. But for thousands of people, it continued in Macau, where many in Hong Kong relocated to, moving to a different neutrality time zone. Macau's experience of neutrality after the occupation of Hong Kong was also different as the flows between the two colonies were disrupted by the new realities of British defeat and Japanese domination. How the uncertainties of the period were experienced varied depending on refugees' circumstances. For some, it could be a time of joy and of spectacular profits. More often, it was a painful period of limbo, marked by waiting: for news of family and friends, for an opportunity to escape to unoccupied China, or for the end of the war.

The presence of diverse communities of refugees was essential to these territories' experience of 'in-betweenness' during and after the war. That diversity was apparent from the onset. Among the first ships to leave Shanghai full of refugees in 1937 were vessels of various nationalities bringing aboard Chinese, British, Americans, French, Danes, Germans, Portuguese, Swedes, and others.³¹ Hong Kong was a key destination, though some people headed to Macau from there. Macau attracted a considerable number of Portuguese residents of Shanghai because of support schemes from the local colonial authorities, but many others also sought refuge in the small enclave, travelling overland via Zhongshan county or by boat. In the subsequent years, refugees coming to Hong Kong and Macau came not only from Shanghai but from various other cities in mainland China, Taiwan, and even from Japan. Both Hong Kong and Macau had been fairly cosmopolitan societies before the war but the shared experiences of displacement and solidarity around opposition to Japanese aggression forged new transnational connections during the conflict.

I

The arrival of a large number of refugees in Hong Kong and Macau brought forth colonial anxieties around the ability to control the movement of people and their activities on a scale unseen since the 1920s strikes, especially as the war with Japan also had a clear political dimension of anti-imperialist resistance. There were a few differences in the approach taken by British and Portuguese colonial authorities. The Macau government was less proactive

³⁰ Northcote to MacDonald, 18 July 1938, TNA, CO 129/570/3.

³¹ 'First refugee groups leave Shanghai', *NCH*, 25 Aug. 1937, p. 302.

in limiting arrivals (for lack of means) and regarded projects for managing refugees as opportunities to expand their influence or even rule over territories they did not control outside of Macau's borders. Given the large number of Portuguese refugees involved, the Macau government was also more explicit in welcoming *some* of the new arrivals, especially after the fall of Hong Kong. It facilitated the relocation of Hong Kong Portuguese in early 1942, publishing appeals in the local newspapers for those who could host refugees in their houses or provide them with food to sign up at the Central Division of the Civil Administration Services.³² The Portuguese from Shanghai and Hong Kong were prioritized over any other refugees, being offered accommodation in several locations, including hotels, clubs, schools, a theatre, and the canidrome.³³ This approach resulted from different factors, including grassroots activism from other Macanese who wanted to assist fellow members of the community as well as opportunism on the part of the Portuguese authorities. These saw assistance to refugees as a way to project Portugal's national prestige on members of the Macanese community, considered by some as excessively anglicized.

In contrast, the Hong Kong authorities were keener, though far from completely able, to control arrivals and to send destitute refugees out of Hong Kong or, at least, far from the main urban areas. In December 1937, the governor of Hong Kong, Geoffry Northcote, proposed to implement emergency regulations 'to prohibit immigration of persons of all races except under permit' as 'considerations of food supply and public health require prevention of excessive influx' of refugees despite his willingness to 'afford shelter to as many genuine refugees as the interests of the Colony would permit'.³⁴ Presumably, the colonial state would be the arbiter of who was a 'genuine refugee'. Policy-makers in London agreed that the Hong Kong government 'should be authorised to take powers which will enable them to control the entry of Chinese refugees into the colony'.³⁵ In 1938, considering that Hong Kong's 'capacity for accommodating refugees from Kwangtung [Guangdong] Province is now exhausted', authorities sought to implement restrictions, including to limit the arrival of Chinese refugees coming from Macau.³⁶ In 1940, the Hong Kong government imposed legal restrictions to the entry and maintenance of Chinese people in the colony through the Immigration Control Ordinance 1940, a significant break with prior practices that allowed Chinese 'to enter and stay in the colony without restrictions', even though the legal changes were 'not effectively enforced' in practice.³⁷

³² 'Repertição Central de Administração Civil - aviso' (Central Division of the Civil Administration Services - notice), VM, 21 Jan. 1942, p. 2.

³³ Teixeira, 'Macau durante a guerra', p. 501.

³⁴ Northcote to William Ormsby-Gore, secretary of state for the colonies, 11 Dec. 1937, TNA, CO 129/563/12.

³⁵ Charles William Orde, Foreign Office to under-secretary of state, Colonial Office, 18 Dec. 1937, TNA, CO 129/563/12.

³⁶ Northcote to MacDonald, 21 Nov. 1938, and Northcote to Artur Tamagnini de Sousa Barbosa, governor of Macau, 23 Dec. 1938, TNA, CO 129/570/3.

³⁷ Albert H. Y. Chen, 'The development of immigration law and policy: the Hong Kong experience', *McGill Law Journal*, 33 (1988), p. 637.

Despite the differences in scale and slightly diverging positions regarding openness to refugees, the response by both colonial administrations was marked by striking similarities. The treatment of refugees varied according to class or nationality. Poorer Chinese were the most 'unwanted', and initiatives for their welfare, although not totally disregarded, were largely propelled by non-state actors such as charitable organizations or religious groups. Elite refugees or those connected to businesses, schools, and cultural institutions were relatively more welcome as they were perceived as potentially beneficial to the development of these colonial territories. The distinction is made clear in correspondence on the July 1941 immigration ordinance that sought to reduce the number of people coming to Hong Kong. It was deemed that the measures reduced 'the risk of undesirable persons entering the colony' while exceptions could be made by British consuls in China who could 'grant visas to reputable Chinese at their discretion'.³⁸ As with other attempts to implement restrictions, Chinese Nationalist authorities criticized the move to bar Chinese from coming freely to Hong Kong. The Chinese embassy in London sent a memorandum asking for the 1941 regulations not to be put into effect, reminding how the 'Chinese constitute an overwhelming portion of the resident as well as the travelling population of Hongkong and have contributed no small part to the prosperity of that port'.³⁹

While Chinese authorities also monitored potential problems with the exercise of Portuguese neutrality, records from the period note their approval on the openness of Macau to Chinese refugees.⁴⁰ That openness had interesting repercussions in Hong Kong. Even at periods of heightened restrictions, Macau remained a key location from where refugees arrived in Hong Kong.⁴¹ Refugees who were not destitute came from Macau and 'mingled with the resident population' in Hong Kong, making an accurate headcount impossible.⁴² Indeed, by 1939–40, the main route from where people arrived in Hong Kong was by steamer from Macau, while the Hong Kong government also sent back 'a large number of refugees via Macau'.⁴³ Despite the arrivals from Macau being seen as problematic by the British, these were wary of restricting the influx of people from Macau due to its potential impact on matters of food supply and also because 'Hong Kong may be dependent on this route to get rid of large numbers of its population in grave emergency'.⁴⁴ This observation,

³⁸ R. M. Broadmead, British embassy in Shanghai, to Anthony Eden, foreign secretary, 18 Feb. 1941, TNA, CO 129/590/3.

³⁹ Memorandum from the Chinese embassy to the Foreign Office, 6 Jan. 1941, TNA, CO 129/590/3.

⁴⁰ Gabriel Maurício Teixeira, governor of Macau to Ministry of the Colonies, 28 Dec. 1940, ANTI, UL-10A1, cx. 767; Tang Liu to T. V. Soong, minister of foreign affairs, 24 Aug. 1944. Guoshiguan (Academia Historica, Taiwan), Waijiaobu (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 020000023906A, Putaoya za juan (Portugal – miscellaneous).

⁴¹ E.g. Foreign Office to Chinese ambassador (Guo Taiqi) (draft), Jan. 1941, TNA, CO 129/590/3.

⁴² 'Refugees return', *SCMP*, 7 July 1938, p. 18.

⁴³ Extract from Hansard report of LegCo session on 14 Sept. 1939, p. 128, TNA, CO 129/578/11; Claude Bramall Burgess on behalf of the colonial secretary to Hermann Derek Bryan, British consul at Macau, 20 July 1940, TNA, FO 676/432.

⁴⁴ Burgess to Bryan.

that attests to the uncertainty of neutrality as an 'in-between time', was rather prescient, given the later exodus from Hong Kong during the Japanese occupation. The circulation of people between the two neutral territories remained stable except for a short period of disruption during the Japanese invasion of the British colony in late 1941. In February 1942, boats full of refugees began to arrive in Macau from occupied Hong Kong and people kept coming from there until the end of the conflict.⁴⁵ Thus, the two territories remained connected, those connections shaped by colonialism and by neutrality.

The reception of refugees in Hong Kong and Macau had obvious parallels to what was happening elsewhere in China. It mirrored the complex situation in Shanghai's foreign concessions, where an influx of refugees brought forth both colonial anxieties over order and hygiene at the same time as it generated an energetic cross-social and transnational co-operation for relief activities anchored on the combined efforts of state and non-state actors.⁴⁶

Authorities in Hong Kong and Macau delegated a significant part of the responsibility for refugee relief on civil society. In Hong Kong, the Emergency Refugee Council emerged largely due to the efforts of the Anglican bishop, Ronald Hall. In Macau, two major organizations overseeing refugee relief were the Refugee Relief Commission (*Comissão de Assistência aos Refugiados/Nanmin jiuji weiyuanhui*) and the Charity and Relief Commission (*Comissão de Assistência e Beneficência/Cishan jiuji weiyuanhui*) that, like the Emergency Refugee Council, were founded in 1938. The Charity and Relief Commission co-ordinated the allocation of funds to a variety of Portuguese and Chinese charitable institutions and groups of refugees and urban poor, with a significant share of funds reserved for Portuguese refugees from Shanghai and Hong Kong, illustrating the colonial authorities' priorities for relief.⁴⁷ Another refugee-related commission that attests to the tight connections between Hong Kong and Macau during the war was the Relief Commission (*Comissão de Socorros*) founded in the former. Hong Kong Portuguese were determinant to its establishment, drawing inspiration from similar committees being set up in Hong Kong and using the premises of a prominent local Portuguese club, Club Lusitano, as headquarters, as well as drawing support from other community associations.⁴⁸ Having been created

⁴⁵ Teixeira to Ministry of the Colonies, 6 Feb. 1942, ANTT, AOS, UL-10A1, cx. 767.

⁴⁶ E.g. Nara Dillon, 'The politics of philanthropy: social networks and refugee relief in Shanghai, 1932–1949', in Nara Dillon and Jean C. Oi, eds., *At the crossroads of empires: middlemen, social networks, and state-building in republican Shanghai* (Stanford, CA, 2008), pp. 179–205; Nara Dillon, 'Middlemen in the Chinese welfare state: the role of philanthropists in refugee relief in wartime Shanghai', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 46 (2011), pp. 22–45.

⁴⁷ See, for example, the balance sheets for the Charity and Relief Commission activities in 1943 and 1944 in Arquivo de Macau/Aomen dang'an guan (Archives of Macao) (AM), MO/AH/AC/SA/01/25738, Correspondência recebida da Comissão de Assistência e Beneficência de Macau (Correspondence received from the Macau Charity and Relief Commission).

⁴⁸ 'Refugiados Portugueses de Shanghai: relatório do consul de Portugal em Hong Kong Alvaro Brilhante Laborinho' (Portuguese refugees from Shanghai: report from Alvaro Brilhante Laborinho, Portugal's consul in Hong Kong), Nov. 1937, pp. 9–23, Arquivo Histórico Diplomático (Archives of Portugal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs) (AHD), 2P, A48, M175.

to assist refugees from Shanghai who had moved to Hong Kong and Macau, the commission set a precedent for what became the Executive Commission for Refugees (*Comissão Executiva de Refugiados*), a body that co-ordinated relief for Hong Kong refugees in Macau from 1942.⁴⁹ A plethora of local and transnational institutions of civic and/or religious character, such as the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, the Catholic Action, or the YWCA, were also involved in refugee relief, including in the setting up of soup kitchens that distributed food to destitute people either for free or at very low prices.⁵⁰ In Hong Kong, the Tung Wah Hospital played a key role in caring for 'homeless and friendless refugees' and was also involved in managing relief activities in Shenzhen.⁵¹ In Macau, an analogous institution, the Kiang Wu Hospital, took on similar responsibilities, alongside new and pre-existing charities.

Elite figures were active in philanthropy for refugees in both colonies, often at the same time as they engaged in lucrative wartime businesses. Among these were not only pre-existing local businessmen but also several that had themselves sought refuge in these neutral territories such as Ho Yin (He Xian). Ho relocated from occupied Guangdong to Hong Kong and came to Macau when the British colony was occupied; he went on to be a leading figure in the territory during and, especially, after the war.⁵² Both the Anglican bishop of Hong Kong and the Catholic bishop of Macau were involved in transnational relief efforts in and out of the colonies' borders. To some extent, the role of these non-state actors built on experiences that had predated the war years. However, they were not operating in isolation but in tandem with agents of different states, especially colonial authorities and the Chinese government for whom both refugees and neutral territories assumed unprecedented relevance during the conflict with Japan.

If there were instances in which, as R. Keith Schoppa noted in his study of refugees in Zhejiang, locals 'met refugees with mistrust, fear, and hostility and saw their presence as a source of potential social unrest',⁵³ the situation in Hong Kong and Macau was more complex and grassroots solidarity often trumped opposition. This was in large part because for many Cantonese and Portuguese refugees, Hong Kong and Macau were not wholly unfamiliar places: they often had relatives or acquaintances in these territories. Authorities in Hong Kong praised the 'immediate response on the part of all classes of the

⁴⁹ E.g. John Pownall Reeves, *The lone flag: memoir of the British consul in Macao during World War II*, ed. Colin Day and Richard Garrett (Hong Kong, 2014), pp. 49–50.

⁵⁰ E.g. 'Hongkong crowded with refugees', *NCH*, 22 June 1938, p. 493; 'New hostel needed', *SCMP*, 14 Mar. 1939, p. 5; Barreto, ed., *Macau during the Sino-Japanese War*, p. 110.

⁵¹ *Annual report on the social and economic progress of the people of Hong Kong, 1938* (London, 1939), p. 539, in R. L. Jarman, ed., *Hong Kong annual administration reports, 1841–1941*, vol. V: 1931–1939 (Oxford, 1996); 'Refugee relief', *SCMP*, 4 Jan. 1939, p. 17.

⁵² 'He Xian', in *Gang'ao dabaike quanshu* (Encyclopedia of Hong Kong and Macao) (Guangzhou, 1993), p. 804.

⁵³ R. Keith Schoppa, *In a sea of bitterness: refugees during the Sino-Japanese War* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), p. 36.

community to appeals for help for the refugees'.⁵⁴ In Macau, too, it was noted that '[a]ll Macao seems to have rallied to the assistance' of refugees.⁵⁵

Perceptions of refugees were, thus, contradictory. They motivated forms of transnational solidarity but they were also regarded as a 'problem', especially though not exclusively, by colonial authorities. Fear was mostly reserved for the most destitute Chinese refugees, a combination of anxieties around class with anxieties around race. Archival files and newspapers from the 1930s and early 1940s reveal a widespread discourse on refugees as a 'problem', an obvious precedent to the dominant tone in discussions of Chinese refugees in Hong Kong after 1949.⁵⁶ Refugees were seen as a 'problem' at different levels: they were blamed for housing shortages and rising prices, they were considered a nuisance and feared as a health hazard, their numbers and the misery of several of them were seen as disruptive and threatening.⁵⁷ This discourse was almost invariably associated with the arrival of Chinese refugees. The *North China Herald*, the Shanghai newspaper that was a mouthpiece for the British-dominated Shanghailanders, ran a piece in 1939 covering what they deemed to be the 'refugee problem' in Hong Kong and potential measures to 'check the continuous creation of new hordes of refugees':

The refugee question is becoming a more acute problem in Hongkong and there is an increasing demand that, if charity cannot be abolished, it should be made constructive.

This demand has been strengthened with the persistent influx of helpless Chinese refugees which is causing the authorities more than a little anxiety in the contemplation of the state of affairs if the war is prolonged.

Opinion seems to be unanimous that there is a limit to available funds and that merely to feed, shelter and entertain refugees is a shortsighted policy inviting an eventual collapse of the whole effort.⁵⁸

The alarmist tone reproduced tropes that had been applied to the Hong Kong refugees since the first year of the war and has echoes in some present-day 'anti-refugee discourse' that, as Dan Stone has noted, has many similarities with those in the past.⁵⁹ Chinese refugees were singled-out as a threat to social order, their collective experience homogenized, and Chinese agency – of

⁵⁴ *Annual report on the social and economic progress*, p. 542, in Jarman, ed., *Hong Kong annual administration reports*.

⁵⁵ 'Refugees' plight', *SCMP*, 9 Mar. 1940, p. 13. For reports in the Macau press, see, for example: 'Uma extraordinária obra de assistência' (An extraordinary work of assistance), *VM*, 24 Apr. 1943, p. 2; 'Luso-Chinesa dance' (Portuguese-Chinese dance), *Macau Tribune*, 7 Nov. 1943, p. 3.

⁵⁶ E.g. Madokoro, *Elusive refuge*, p. 53.

⁵⁷ E.g. 'Hongkong crowded with refugees', *NCH*, 6 July 1938, p. 12; 'Refugees', *SCMP*, 1 June 1938, p. 12; 'Hongkong and refugees', *NCH*, 10 Aug. 1938, p. 227; 'A carestia de vida' (Livelihood scarcity), *VM*, 19 July 1940, p. 1.

⁵⁸ 'Refugee problem in Hongkong', *NCH*, 14 June 1939, p. 452.

⁵⁹ 'Refugee problem', *Hong Kong Telegraph (HKT)*, 8 Oct. 1937, p. 6; Dan Stone, 'Refugees then and now: memory, history and politics in the long twentieth century: an introduction', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 52 (2018), p. 105.

refugees and of relief providers – left largely unrecognized. The constant coverage of Hong Kong refugee issues in the Shanghai English-language press attests to the deep connections between the two metropolises but a similar rhetoric was also used in Macau. Already in the first year of the war, the governor of Macau regarded the arrival of so many refugees as a potential ‘problem without solution’.⁶⁰

The great number of refugees was perceived by both colonial authorities and some local residents as having a negative impact on living conditions. By August 1937, the month the war began in Shanghai, news about refugees’ arrival in Hong Kong and Macau became a common occurrence. Some reports, based on fact or speculation, associated potential housing pressures at the destination with fears relating to public health. The *China Mail*, published in Hong Kong, ran a story based on a rumour that ‘the harbour would soon become the centre of a series of floating hotels’ to accommodate Shanghai refugees followed by a note on growing cholera cases in the colony.⁶¹ Associating cholera with refugees continued to be expressed in the Hong Kong print media, including a report about Macau that stated categorically: ‘Refugees from China have brought cholera to Macao.’⁶² Linking a swollen population with hygiene fears also featured in the Macau press.⁶³ The governor of Hong Kong noted that housing accommodation for refugees in Hong Kong had ‘reached the state of saturation point’ as early as 1938.⁶⁴ In 1940, with a peak of refugees living in Hong Kong, it was estimated that rents had risen from 50 per cent to 300 per cent since the war started.⁶⁵ Reflecting on the housing crisis, the author of a piece in a Macau newspaper expressed the conviction that he ‘live[d] in the city with the highest population density in the world’.⁶⁶

Due to their large numbers, refugees were impossible to ignore and colonial authorities in Hong Kong and Macau had to devise, more promptly or more begrudgingly, relief schemes to manage them. In these, co-operation with non-state actors was nothing short of essential, and support from the Chinese government was also sought on different occasions. The need to be seen as treating Chinese refugees well (at least not mistreating them) was an important consideration, as assistance to refugees could be cited to support claims that colonial rule was somewhat ‘beneficial’ to China at a time of extreme need. The authorities of Hong Kong and Macau were directly involved in allocating public funds for refugee relief, designating areas to house refugees or to provide medical services to the poor, such as vaccination. There are some

⁶⁰ Barbosa to Francisco José Vieira Machado, minister of colonies, sent from the latter to Portugal’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 Oct. 1937, AHD, 2P, A48, M175.

⁶¹ ‘Floating hotels for harbour’, *China Mail* (CM), 19 Aug. 1937, p. 1.

⁶² ‘Macau outbreak – steps taken to prevent the spread of cholera’, *SCMP*, 25 June 1938, p. 4.

⁶³ E.g. ‘Cortar o mal pela Raiz’ (Tackling evil by its root), *VM*, 21 Sept. 1940, p. 7; ‘Higiene e salubridade da cidade’ (The city’s hygiene and healthiness), *VM*, 23 Apr. 1942, p. 4; ‘A limpeza de Macau’ (Macau’s cleanliness), *VM*, 11 May 1942, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Northcote to MacDonal, 30 May 1938, TNA, CO 129/570/2.

⁶⁵ Dorothy Borg, ‘European war brings important changes to Hongkong’, *Far Eastern Survey*, 9 (1940), p. 154.

⁶⁶ ‘A crise de habitações’ (The housing crisis), *Renascimento*, 2 Mar. 1945, p. 2.

parallels between measures taken in Macau and Hong Kong and significant Chinese state-led efforts in other cities, and also direct connections to some of those.⁶⁷

Despite the unintentional levelling effects brought by the disruption of warfare, discrimination by class and race influenced the reception of refugees in neutral Hong Kong and Macau. Both colonial administrations took steps to isolate poorer refugees in camps away from the main city areas to better control and contain them, as well as to encourage the return of refugees to mainland China. Such containment measures disproportionately targeted poor Chinese people. The segregation of poorer refugees was both considered and implemented in both territories. Attempts to 'segregate the various classes' of refugees in Hong Kong date back to the first year of the conflict.⁶⁸ Hong Kong authorities were initially reluctant to allow refugee camps to be formed inside the colony but they were eventually pressured by 'Medical and Ecclesiastical Authorities' – especially by the director of medical services Dr Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke and by Bishop Hall – to start building them.⁶⁹ In his memoir, Selwyn-Clarke explicitly links the presence of homeless refugees in Hong Kong with 'a potential menace to the whole population from cholera, typhoid and a long list of other diseases', and explains how he convinced the governor of the need to set up refugee camps by taking Northcote to walk with him on the streets at night where he 'had to step over the sleeping forms of women and children'.⁷⁰ To the Hong Kong public, camps were portrayed as a temporary solution to maintain order and avoid disturbing other residents, with the *South China Morning Post* ensuring that 'occupants of the camps will be constantly under check to ascertain when they can be repatriated'. Attempting to think through the contradictions of neutrality, humanitarian assistance was presented as a way of giving back for the prosperity that Hong Kong had been enjoying during the conflict.⁷¹ In six weeks, huts were built in Hong Kong, Kowloon, and the New Territories to house refugees. Refugees were active in the running of the camps, taking care of cooking, cleaning, and washing clothes and bedding. Welfare workers were recruited to supervise the camps and Selwyn-Clarke highlights the good work of three Chinese supervisors, but also registers that in one specific camp he found 'it necessary to have Europeans in control', hiring as superintendent 'an Englishman with experience in managing Chinese and Indian labour on rubber-estates in Malaya' with a White Russian refugee from Shanghai as his assistant.⁷² As

⁶⁷ E.g. Christian Henriot, 'Rice, power and people: the politics of food supply in wartime Shanghai (1937–1945)', *Twentieth-Century China*, 26 (2000), pp. 41–84; Rana Mitter, 'Classifying citizens in Nationalist China during World War II, 1937–1941', *Modern Asian Studies*, 45 (2011), pp. 243–75.

⁶⁸ 'Sh'ai refugees "adopt" Hongkong hosts', *NCH*, 8 Sept. 1937, p. 368.

⁶⁹ Northcote to H. Russell Cowell, Colonial Office, 4 June 1938, TNA, CO 129/570/3.

⁷⁰ Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke, *Footprints: the memoirs of Sir Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke* (Hong Kong, 1975), p. 59.

⁷¹ 'Refugee camp sites – reasons for choice explained by medical director', *SCMP*, 2 Aug. 1938, p. 8.

⁷² Selwyn-Clarke, *Footprints*, pp. 59–60.

this example illustrates, the management of refugee camps by colonial authorities drew on repertoires of colonial practices elsewhere, including racialized hierarchies. By 1939, there were around 30,000–40,000 refugees in the New Territories alone, with between 10,000 and 12,000 housed and fed by the government and others ‘camping in the open’ and subsisting on donations from soup kitchens.⁷³ Civil society played a crucial role in ensuring humanitarian assistance where the colonial state could not, or did not want to, reach.

More elaborate plans for resettling refugees in the New Territories were devised in 1941, with large camps planned for Tayushan and Lantao island. These were to have hospitals, factories, and agricultural projects to employ refugees in food production, ensuring that a significant number of refugees would be removed from central areas in Hong Kong Island and Kowloon.⁷⁴ Removing poor refugees from the city centre was also a concern of authorities in Macau. For example, immediately after the British surrender in Hong Kong, the Macau government decided to intern ‘beggars’ in a designated place on Coloane island stating that it was ‘not convenient’ that an increasing number of ‘beggars’ filled the city’s streets.⁷⁵ There were several camps for the urban poor – from whom many refugees became indistinguishable – in Macau during the war. A few vivid descriptions of conditions there paint a horrific picture of misery and violence.⁷⁶ Although Chinese authorities in mainland China also sought ways to confine and control the urban poor, in Macau the only people that colonial officials sent to the so-called ‘beggar camps’ were Chinese.⁷⁷ Even in regular refugee camps ran by the Macau government, a 1942 report based on conversations with refugees noted the effects of a general lack of occupation and encouragement, observing that ‘the refugees have a strong feeling that they are being treated as outcasts’.⁷⁸ The report called for refugees to be ‘entirely self-governing’ and suggested that they could be employed in nursing at a local hospital, in the police and in administrative tasks, making use of their skills.⁷⁹

Very colonial forms of discrimination were also evident in efforts to ‘send back’ some refugees. In Macau, the only refugees that the authorities sought to send away were Chinese. They organized repatriation drives at certain points on the pretext of alleviating the population pressure on the small enclave.⁸⁰

⁷³ Northcote to MacDonald, 29 Nov. 1938, TNA, CO 129/570/3.

⁷⁴ ‘Hongkong plans refugee settlements’, NCH, 26 Mar. 1941, p. 479.

⁷⁵ ‘Nota oficiosa’, VM, 26 Dec. 1941, p. 3.

⁷⁶ ‘Some preliminary observations on the Macao refugee camps’, 26 Oct. 1945, NLA, Braga Collection, MS 4300, box 169, series 8.1/27; António de Andrade e Silva, *Eu estive em Macau durante a guerra* (I was in Macau during the war) (Macau, 1991), pp. 87–91.

⁷⁷ E.g. Janet Y. Chen, *Guilty of indigence: the urban poor in China, 1900–1953* (Princeton, NJ, 2012); Christian Henriot, ‘Slums, squats, or hutments? Constructing and deconstructing an in-between space in modern Shanghai (1926–1965)’, *Frontiers of History in China*, 7 (2012), pp. 499–528.

⁷⁸ Copy of anonymous report (likely written by José Maria (Jack) Braga), 1 June 1942, pp. 1, 4, NLA, Braga Collection, MS 4300, box 169, series 8.1/28.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ E.g. Mário Horácio Gracias, vice-consul at Guangzhou to João de Lebre e Lima, minister to China, 16 Apr. 1942, AHD, 2P, A48, M221.

For example, in May 1940, even while admitting that thousands of refugees were being maintained by the local Chinese population, the governor informed Lisbon that he was trying to reduce both the number of refugees and the government funds spent on them.⁸¹ Hong Kong authorities also attempted to repatriate refugees, and liaised with Japanese authorities to ensure a 'safe passage' to the mainland for Chinese who had sought shelter in Hong Kong.⁸² Thousands of Chinese refugees were sent from Hong Kong to Guangzhou aboard Japanese, Chinese, and Portuguese vessels, with the municipal authorities of the collaborator Reorganized National Government also involved in the process.⁸³ However, the inter-relation between refugee arrivals and wartime conditions on the mainland often disrupted these repatriation efforts. In the early months of 1939, refugees held at the Gills Cutting Camp, the San Ok Ling Camp, and the Fanling Railway Camps in Hong Kong were sent away with the closure of the camps, but these eventually reopened with more refugees entering than being repatriated.⁸⁴ Non-state actors were called to assist with sending refugees elsewhere. For example, the Tung Wah Committee organized the relocation of refugees to China coast ports or to Haiphong (then in French Indochina) on behalf of the Medical Department and with the assistance of the police and Railway Department.⁸⁵ Selwyn-Clarke of the Medical Department assured his superiors that 'every effort is being made to get rid of the refugees', including the cutting off of funds for food, although he also admitted that 'the refugees have done the colony some good too'.⁸⁶

Racialized hierarchies were also evident in British discussions on who among Hong Kong refugees in Macau in the 1940s should receive government support. Chinese claiming relief from the British consulate in Macau had, at least in theory, to fulfil a stricter set of criteria and were encouraged to move on to unoccupied China.⁸⁷ Even though most Hong Kong refugees were pro-Allies, racial discrimination in relief practices was exploited by Japanese propaganda.⁸⁸ Discrimination and even aggression were also part of the responses to the refugee crisis, complicating the idea that neutrality is necessarily free from violence and that the colonial authorities' response to the influx of refugees was a straightforwardly humanitarian one.

II

The presence of an unprecedented number of people in neutral Hong Kong and Macau changed the way these cities were seen and described, with 'crowded'

⁸¹ Barbosa to Ministry of the Colonies, 17 Mar. 1940, ANTT, AOS, UL-10A1, cx. 767.

⁸² 'Relieving refugee problem', CM, 27 June 1940, p. 1.

⁸³ 'Refugiados chineses chegam a Cantão idos de Hongkong' (Chinese refugees arrive in Canton from Hong Kong), VM, 4 July 1940, p. 6.

⁸⁴ 'Notes on the refugee question, 1939', TNA, CO 129/578/11.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Extract from Hansard report, pp. 128–30.

⁸⁷ Helena F. S. Lopes, 'Questioning neutrality: Sino-Portuguese relations during the war and the post-war periods, 1937–1949' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 2018), pp. 235–7.

⁸⁸ 'British refugees in Macau cruelly treated', *Hongkong News*, 1 June 1943, p. 2.

being a ubiquitous classifier.⁸⁹ A 1937 report in the *Hong Kong Telegraph* speculated on 'whether the problem of overcrowding is becoming menacing', blaming it on 'the Chinese refugee'.⁹⁰ The following year, British officials noted how Hong Kong was 'over-crowded with refugees'.⁹¹ In Macau, too, the term was often used. The 1939 *Macau Year Book* captioned a photograph with an aerial view over the city centre as 'crowded' and a report from 1940 likewise described it as being 'crowded with refugees'.⁹² Looking back on the war years, a booklet on Hong Kong and Macau connections observed that to the Portuguese-administered enclave had 'crowded unending numbers of refugees of all nationalities'.⁹³ Refugees were highly visible in different facets of urban life, and their presence offered an image of contradictions, with great wealth co-existing with great misery.

The challenge of the sudden arrival of thousands of refugees led to a repurposing of modern spaces to host many of those that had been displaced by modern warfare (including aerial bombings and chemical weapons), echoing similar experiences in China.⁹⁴ Hotels, schools, social clubs, a former prison, railway carriages, and an aerodrome were allocated to house refugees. In Hong Kong, this included the stands of the Happy Valley race club, the Repulse Bay Lido, the Central British School in Kowloon, the Lai Chi Kok Gaol, and the Pat Heung aerodrome, near the Shek Kong airfield in the New Territories.⁹⁵ When the latter filled up ahead of schedule, plans were made to house 2,900 homeless people in 'empty railway waggons'.⁹⁶ Arrangements for refugees in Shenzhen, in which Hong Kong actors were involved, also included accommodation at the Shumchun (Shenzhen) Casino and Hotel.⁹⁷ In Macau, one of the main hotels in the city, the Bela Vista, was used to house Portuguese refugees from Shanghai and North China in the late 1930s, and from Hong Kong from 1942 to 1945.⁹⁸ Other Macau locations used to house refugees included clubs, schools, and houses, such as Vila Leitão, Club de Macau, Caixa Escolar, Clube Recreativo 1° de Junho, and the Portuguese

⁸⁹ E.g. 'Hongkong crowded with refugees', *NCH*, 6 July 1938, p. 12; 'Hongkong and refugees', *NCH*, 10 Aug. 1938, p. 227; 'Refugee problem - visitor speaks on crowding in Hongkong', *SCMP*, 27 Apr. 1939, p. 7.

⁹⁰ 'Refugee problem', *HKT*, 8 Oct. 1937, p. 6.

⁹¹ Minutes 53838/2/B/38, TNA CO 129/570/3.

⁹² *Anuário de Macau / Aomen nianjian* (Macau yearbook) (Macau, 1939); 'Chinese assist Japanese', *NCH*, 20 Mar. 1940, p. 444.

⁹³ J. M. Braga, *Hong Kong and Macao* (Hong Kong, 1960), p. 123.

⁹⁴ As Patricia Stranahan notes, in the early stages of the war in Shanghai, 'refugees were housed in hotels, banks, temples, theatres, schools, and factories' (Patricia Stranahan, 'Radicalization of refugees: Communist Party activity in wartime Shanghai's displaced persons camps', *Modern China*, 26 (2000), p. 171).

⁹⁵ 'Refugee quarters', *SCMP*, 19 Aug. 1937, p. 9; W. J. Carrie, chairman of the Shanghai Refugees Committee, interim report, 4 Sept. 1937, TNA, CO 129/563/12; 'Sh'ai refugees "adopt" Hongkong hosts', *NCH*, 8 Sept. 1937 p. 368; 'Colony sends Shanghai folk to gaol', *NCH*, 15 Sept. 1937, p. 403; Northcote to MacDonald, 26 Nov. and 29 Nov. 1938, TNA FO 371/22154.

⁹⁶ Northcote to MacDonald, 26 Nov. 1938, TNA, CO 129/570/3.

⁹⁷ Northcote to MacDonald, 17 Jan. 1939, TNA, CO 129/578/11.

⁹⁸ Manuel Teixeira, *Bela Vista Hotel* (Macau, 1978), p. 9.

Chinese Municipal School.⁹⁹ With the arrival of refugees, many sites of urban leisure became sites of everyday survival.

Even when the colonial government stepped in to build designated spaces for refugees, Chinese state and non-state actors were crucial to the endeavour. The erection of refugee camps in Hong Kong was dependent on local Chinese contractors, who built huts and ensured the supply of water. The construction of the refugee camps in North Point, King's Park, and Ma Tau Chung was undertaken by Cheong Hing Co., and Yee Lee & Co.¹⁰⁰ The Emergency Refugee Council funded the building of huts for welfare work. The Ma Tau Chung camp initially included a fenced section for interned Chinese soldiers.¹⁰¹ Later, plans were devised to move them to a new camp at the Mental Hospital site in Argyle Street so destitute women and children could move into the Ma Tau Chung refugee camp. To support the relocation of these interned soldiers, the Chinese government's National Relief Commission donated funds to the government of Hong Kong, which covered most of the camp's cost, with the rest to be covered by colonial funds.¹⁰² This is one of several cases that attest to the inter-state co-operation between Chinese and colonial authorities.

Personal connections could be crucial to finding local accommodation¹⁰³ and those who already owned properties locally were able to make their own arrangements. For example, Sir Robert Ho Tung moved to a house he owned in Macau, but that had not been his main residence before the occupation of Hong Kong.¹⁰⁴ His relocation can be seen as an iteration of the repurposing of leisure spaces mentioned earlier, and its legacies. After the war, he returned to Hong Kong and left his wartime residence to the Macau government to be turned into a public library.

Many refugees patronized shops, entertainment venues, restaurants, and hotels, contributing to a vibrant cultural scene in the neutral territories. The presence of refugees motivated a variety of social gatherings and events that brought together middle- and upper-class Chinese and members of foreign communities.¹⁰⁵ The autobiographical short stories of the Macanese writer Henrique de Senna Fernandes, who lived through the war years in Macau, having relocating from Guangzhou in the late 1930s, note the impact of refugees on urban culture in that 'in-between time' of contradictions:

⁹⁹ Carlos da Silva Carvalho, Administrative Commission president, Leal Senado (Municipal Council) to the manager of the Electric Lighting Company, 18 July 1942, AM, AH/LS/184.

¹⁰⁰ 'Appendix Q. Report of the director of public works for the year 1938', pp. 38–9, in *Administration reports for the year 1938*, available at: <https://digitalrepository.lib.hku.hk/catalog/df661k216>.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁰² Northcote to MacDonald, 12 July 1939, TNA, CO 129/578/11.

¹⁰³ An example of this can be found in the undated account of I. Callender, who moved with his mother and sister from Shanghai to Hong Kong in 1937 (IWM, private papers of I. Callender, box no. 94/41/1).

¹⁰⁴ Jean Gittins, *Stanley: behind barbed wire* (Hong Kong, 1982), p. 37.

¹⁰⁵ E.g. 'Acknowledgements', SCMP, 1 July 1938, p. 9; 'To assist refugees', SCMP, 24 Aug. 1938, p. 9; 'Socorros aos estudantes Chineses refugiados' (Assistance to the Chinese refugee students), VM, 24 Apr. 1940, p. 5; 'Charity function', SCMP, 25 Nov. 1940, p. 9; 'Festa da caridade' (Charity fête), VM, 7 Aug. 1944, p. 4.

The war years in Macao were terrible, but it's strange, I've never had such happy times either. Every night there were parties. Parties with no food, no smart clothes to wear, just dancing and having fun. Things were so uncertain. We wanted to forget all the gloom because we never knew what tomorrow might bring. Macao had never known such wonderful orchestras, which had come across from Hong Kong from the cabarets and night-clubs there.¹⁰⁶

Fernandes's testimony alludes to the arrival in Macau of refugee musicians who had worked in the treaty ports before the war and found employment in the city's hotels during the war. A 1943 ad for the 'Grand Central' ballroom at the Hotel Central promoted the performance of its orchestra under the direction of C. Amper, 'ex-conductor or the best orchestra of Shanghai', and of the 'Capitol' ballroom in Hong Kong, now in Macau playing 'every night from 21h to 2[am]'.¹⁰⁷ Another refugee musician was Art Carneiro, a Shanghai-born Portuguese, who had performed at the Cathay Hotel and, after moving to the southern enclave, played afternoons and nights at the Hotel Riviera, and occasionally at charitable events for refugees.¹⁰⁸ In a clear example of the wider repercussions of wartime mobility, Carneiro eventually became a major jazz pioneer in Portugal where he co-founded what remains the most important jazz club in the country.¹⁰⁹ Macau's neutrality also came to see a golden era of Cantonese opera. May Bo Ching noted that 'almost all Cantonese opera troupes that had previously been active in Canton and Hong Kong moved to Macau' after the fall of Hong Kong, and that their intense competition, given Macau's small size, led them to write 'thousands of new scripts'.¹¹⁰ Refugees were active forgers of the new 'wartime everydayness' of these neutral territories, a term by Hans van de Ven that captures the 'new normals' that people came to develop in China amidst the disruption and devastation of the war.¹¹¹ Neutral Hong Kong and Macau saw the rise of new social spaces and cultural events carved by or for refugees.

Refugees were central to the expansion of Hong Kong's film industry before the Japanese occupation. This was due to the arrival of many film professionals from Shanghai allied to a massive rise in the number of spectators. In turn, this fuelled the multiplication of movie theatres in the colony and strengthened

¹⁰⁶ Jill McGivering, *Macao remembers* (Hong Kong, 1999), p. 96.

¹⁰⁷ Hotel Central ad, VM, 27 Apr. 1943, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Luís Andrade de Sá, *A história na bagagem: crónicas dos velhos hotéis de Macau* (History in the luggage: chronicles of Macau's old hotels) (Macao, 1989), p. 116; 'Festa de Caridade' (Charity fête), VM, 9 Dec. 1942, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ 'Art Carneiro: um pioneiro do jazz em Portugal, nascido e criado em Xangai' (Art Carneiro: a jazz pioneer in Portugal, born and bred in Shanghai), *SAPO Mag* (9 Sept. 2013): <https://mag.sapo.pt/lugusa/artigos/art-carneiro-um-pioneiro-do-jazz-em-portugal-nascido-e-criado-em-xangai>.

¹¹⁰ May Bo Ching, 'Itinerant singers: triangulating the Canton-Hong Kong-Macau soundscape', in Eric Tagliacozzo, Helen F. Siu, and Peter C. Perdue, eds., *Asia inside out: itinerant people* (Cambridge, MA, 2019), p. 261.

¹¹¹ Hans van de Ven, 'Wartime everydayness: beyond the battlefield in China's Second World War', *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, 13 (2019), p. 3.

Hong Kong's position as a distribution centre for Chinese (both Cantonese- and Mandarin-speaking) and foreign films.¹¹² Cinema in neutral Hong Kong was an arena for political and regional competition to support Chinese resistance, which generated some tensions though also new opportunities that were directly linked to Hong Kong's experience as an 'in-between place'.¹¹³

In Macau, refugees revitalized commercial and financial services (including pawnshop businesses), industries (notably fishing and match manufacturing), healthcare, culture and entertainment (including art exhibitions and music), and education.¹¹⁴ Indeed, many schools relocated from Guangdong to Hong Kong and Macau, a movement that would be re-enacted from 1948 to 1951, as Bernard Hung-kay Luk observed.¹¹⁵ Educational institutions were sites where refugees engaged both as receivers and providers of support, with displaced teachers employed in refugee camps, funded by donations from local schools.¹¹⁶ The presence of refugee students was regarded as potentially beneficial to the development of these two colonial territories. For example, when Lingnan University sought the approval to build a middle school in the New Territories, the governor of Hong Kong expressed his support, deeming it desirable 'both from the educational point of view and also from that of the development of the New Territories, since the school's curriculum contains a considerable amount of agricultural work'.¹¹⁷

With many affluent, educated, and highly skilled displaced persons seeking refuge in foreign-ruled neutral territories, alongside an even greater number of working-class refugees whose labour sustained old and new industries, the economies of Hong Kong and Macau underwent a period of boom, especially in the late 1930s. Urban infrastructures enabled the flow of people and materials associated with the war in mainland China, and those increased flows led to developments in different sectors. The two neutral colonies were hubs for the production and transshipment of materials necessary for sustaining the Chinese war effort, including weapons, ammunition, and fuel, amongst other goods.¹¹⁸ Hong Kong also saw the founding of new industries of military equipment, including the production of gas masks and helmets.¹¹⁹

As Steve Tsang observed for Hong Kong, 'the refugee- and war-driven boom created a strange situation and atmosphere' that had a certain 'surreal nature'.¹²⁰ Alongside this 'boom', destitute refugees also shaped urban spaces

¹¹² Poshek Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: the politics of Chinese cinemas* (Stanford, CA, 2003), pp. 60–1.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

¹¹⁴ 'Macao said thriving as war goes on', *CP*, 4 Oct. 1938, p. 13; 'Chinese doctors', *SCMP*, 13 Feb. 1949, p. 5.

¹¹⁵ Bernard Hung-kay Luk, 'War, schools, China, Hong Kong: 1937–1949', in James Flath and Norman Smith, eds., *Beyond suffering: recounting war in modern China* (Vancouver, 2011), p. 52.

¹¹⁶ 'Refugee schools', *SCMP*, 17 May 1939, p. 16; 'Refugee children', *SCMP*, 1 Feb. 1941, p. 14.

¹¹⁷ Northcote to MacDonald, 28 July 1939, TNA, CO 129/582/14.

¹¹⁸ 'Hongkong plays important role in China's resistance', *CWR*, 28 Jan. 1939, p. 272; Barreto, ed., *Macau during the Sino-Japanese War*, pp. 31–2.

¹¹⁹ Steve Tsang, *A modern history of Hong Kong* (London, 2004), p. 114.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

with their visible presence. In the summer of 1938, around 30,000 people were estimated to be sleeping in the streets of Hong Kong, of whom 3,000 were considered refugees.¹²¹ Photographs from the period in both Hong Kong and Macau highlighted the case of homeless children.¹²² Journalist Lim Keng Hor of the *Malaya Tribune* – whose target audience included many English-speaking Chinese in Southeast Asia – observed that Macau had become ‘a haven of refuge for thousands of unfortunate Chinese refugees’, mostly coming from Zhongshan’s capital, Shiqi, by road. Lim noted the similarities between destitute refugees in Macau and in Hong Kong: ‘Just like in Hongkong, these unfortunates make of the pavements their homes, the sky their roofs, and the dustbins their kitchens...Poverty stalks the sidewalks and streets.’¹²³ Those who were not put in camps filled the streets of these neutral territories, subsisting on charitable donations or on whatever nourishment they could find and suffering heavy mortality by hunger or disease.

Beyond colonial authorities, some tensions between pre-war residents and refugees were also discernible. Those tensions were evident in the discourse on refugees as a ‘problem’ in printed media noted earlier, that linked refugees to a rise in living costs or disease.¹²⁴ Regarding the Macanese community, refugees from Hong Kong and Shanghai embodied communal tensions predating the war, with anglophone relatives returning to the small Macau their ancestors had left behind on a position of destitution that reversed their pre-war higher economic status and who were made to endure petty humiliations such as the imposition of strict dress codes for church attendance.¹²⁵

Both Hong Kong and Macau were described as sites of contradictions, where extremes of wealth and poverty were visible, and where nationalistic fervour to support the war effort co-existed with more individualistic concerns for pleasure and profit or simply indifference.¹²⁶ A 1939 *Shenbao* report on Macau concluded that it was a place of ‘infinite happiness and infinite sadness at the same time’ (‘you wuxian de gaoxing tongshi ye jue de wuxian de beishang’), a description easily applicable to neutral Hong Kong as well.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Excerpt of Hansard report, TNA, FO 371/22154.

¹²² E.g. photographs of poor refugee children in the streets of Macau in ‘Zhongshan chong li hao-jie’ (Zhongshan suffers heavy calamity), *Dongfang huakan* (The Eastern Pictorial), 3 (1940), p. 6; or of refugee children in Hong Kong in Freda Utey, *China at War* (London, 1939), next to p. 16.

¹²³ ‘Tribune representative nearly arrested while in Portuguese colony – Macao and its relations to the Sino-Jap War’, *Malaya Tribune*, 23 Nov. 1938, p. 18.

¹²⁴ Food scarcity was largely due to Japanese blockades and other wartime-related restrictions on supplies, but some authors also link it to the number of refugees. For a perspective that downplays the role of Japanese blockades and credit colonial authorities with taking effective measures to ameliorate the livelihood of the local population, see Venus Viana and Kyung Yeob Kim, ‘Rice scarcity in World War II Macao: the local experience revisited’, *Urban History*, 46 (2019), pp. 518–41.

¹²⁵ For some of these tensions, see, for example, Braga, ‘Nossa gente’, pp. 123–4.

¹²⁶ E.g. Utey, *China at War*, pp. 1–21; Barreto, ed., *Macau during the Sino-Japanese War*, pp. 52–5.

¹²⁷ Luo Xia, ‘Aomen jiyou’ (Record of journey to Macau), *Shenbao* (SB), 6 Jan. 1939.

III

Neutral ‘in-between places’ were crucial to transborder relief and resistance efforts that were often entangled and in which religious figures and women played prominent roles. Working together with Chinese representatives and colonial authorities, figures connected to religious faiths played an important role in devising plans for refugee safety zones. In Hong Kong, Bishop Hall was instrumental. He organized the shipping of food, clothing, and medical supplies to Guangzhou and was a leading figure in the establishment of three refugee camps in Shiqi, Cuiheng, and Yinkeng.¹²⁸ In October 1938, plans for a refugee zone in Shenzhen were devised and Hall was again key to this project.¹²⁹ Joining forces with an Irish Jesuit priest, he appealed for contributions from Hong Kong residents and set up the Hong Kong Emergency Refugee Council, the forerunner of the Hong Kong Social Welfare Council.¹³⁰ Although the plan did not materialize, a refugee safety zone project was also envisioned for Macau, or more precisely, for an area outside the enclave’s borders in Qianshan, in late 1938 and 1939. The Macau Catholic bishop was a noteworthy participant in the preparatory committee that comprised Portuguese, Chinese, and British members.¹³¹

Although most scholarly attention rests on the cases of Shanghai and Nanjing, in fact, projects for refugee safety zones occurred in several cities in China in the late 1930s.¹³² In Hong Kong and Macau, these emerged almost simultaneously and attest to collaboration between state and non-state actors. The experience of different safety zones influenced the projects for the others. For example, Guangdong provincial authorities were initially not keen on a ‘demilitarised area’ near Hong Kong because of the precedent from Nanjing where the safety zone did not completely shield civilians from the violence perpetrated by Japanese troops.¹³³

Neutrality allowed the emergence of close interactions between the Chinese state and colonial authorities in humanitarian activities. The Nationalist government provided funds for refugees and kept informed on how British and Portuguese authorities were treating them. For example, in his capacity as chairman of the Board of the Bank of China, T. V. Soong (Song Ziwen), Chiang Kai-shek’s brother-in-law, who would become minister of foreign affairs in 1942, gave funds to Bishop Hall to be used in refugee zones in Guangzhou, and promised to secure additional monetary support.¹³⁴ The National Relief Commission, a Nationalist central government body that

¹²⁸ Moira M. W. Chan-Yeung, *The practical prophet: Bishop Ronald O. Hall of Hong Kong and his legacies* (Hong Kong, 2015), p. 61.

¹²⁹ ‘Refugee zone for South China’, *NCH*, 26 Oct. 1938, p. 137.

¹³⁰ Chan-Yeung, *The practical prophet*, p. 63.

¹³¹ Lopes, ‘Questioning neutrality’, pp. 140–3.

¹³² Marcia R. Ristaino, *The Jacquinet safety zone: wartime refugees in Shanghai* (Stanford, CA, 2008); Zhang Kaiyuan, ed., *Eyewitnesses to the massacre: American missionaries bear witness to Japanese atrocities in Nanjing* (New York, NY, 2001); Timothy Brook, ed., *Documents on the rape of Nanking* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1999). For projects of international safety zones in other Chinese cities, see, for example, TNA, FO 371/22057.

¹³³ Northcote to H. Russell Cowell, Colonial Office, 4 June 1938, TNA, CO 129/570/3.

¹³⁴ ‘Refugee zone for South China’, *NCH*, 26 Oct. 1938, p. 137.

oversaw millions of refugees, remitted funds to a refugee camp in Kam Tin, in the New Territories, to help refugee students, and also sent a representative to investigate conditions of refugees in Hong Kong in 1939.¹³⁵ The following year, the commission funded the establishment of the Hong Kong-Macau Chinese Relief Association to 'carry out relief work among the Chinese civilian refugees in the two colonies'.¹³⁶ The committee in charge of the association and the board of advisers included important Nationalist figures from Guangdong, such as Wu Tiesheng or Admiral Chan Chak (Chen Ce), and Hong Kong elite figures such as Robert Ho Tung and Robert Kotewall, as well as Bishop Hall and Song Qingling (Sun Yat-sen's widow, then residing in Hong Kong). The inauguration ceremony included a speech acknowledging the support that both the Hong Kong government and 'local relief organisations and leaders' had been giving Chinese refugees.¹³⁷ Tellingly, this association for refugee relief associated with the Chinese central government operated in Hong Kong and Macau with support from colonial authorities and local non-state actors. Hong Kong was likewise germane to the Chinese state-led relief efforts on the mainland.¹³⁸ Chinese authorities also provided support to displaced persons who arrived in unoccupied China from Hong Kong and Macau even after the occupation of the British colony. By June 1943, almost a million people had registered with the Urgent Relief Commission for Overseas Chinese in Hong Kong and Macau.¹³⁹

Rather than being merely local or regional, intersecting experiences of relief and resistance had a much wider reach. Hong Kong and Macau played a prominent role in linking transborder activities that supported the Chinese resistance effort with humanitarian assistance to victims of the conflict. By 1938, Hong Kong was connected to different institutions involved in fundraising for refugee relief, providing financial support for medical units, sending hospital supplies to the front lines, or knitting clothes for refugees and soldiers, the last a task mainly performed by women. Among others, there were Hong Kong branches of the National Women's Relief Association Committee and of the Northwest Partisan Relief Committee of Hankou. Medical supplies and clothing shipped by the Canadian League for Peace and Democracy were sent to China via Hong Kong, whereas the Hong Kong Women's Relief Committee transhipped bags with old clothing sent by Chinese in Southeast Asia to the Shanghai International Red Cross.¹⁴⁰ In

¹³⁵ 'Kam Tin refugees', *SCMP*, 31 Oct. 1938, p. 17; 'Refugee students', *SCMP*, 6 Jan. 1939, p. 15; 'Hongkong plays important role in China's resistance', *CWR*, 28 Jan. 1939, p. 273.

¹³⁶ 'Relief Association – new body formed in Hongkong yesterday – for colony and Macao', *SCMP*, 16 June 1940, p. 14.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Nara Dillon observed that 'state funding, funneled through Hong Kong intermediaries... ensured the survival of Shanghai's refugee relief programmes' (Dillon, 'Middlemen in the Chinese welfare state', p. 32).

¹³⁹ China Information Committee Daily Bulletin, 'Wartime relief for overseas Chinese', 1142, 13 Aug. 1945, TNA, FO 371/46224.

¹⁴⁰ 'N. W. Partisan Relief Committee open Hong Kong office', *China Weekly Review* (30 Apr. 1938), p. 258; Bodleian Libraries, *Report of the Shanghai International Red Cross, October, 1937 – March 31, 1939* (Shanghai, 1939), p. 13.

addition to the Hong Kong branch of the National Women's Relief Association Committee, which was headed by Chen Shuying, wife of Sun Yat-sen's son Sun Fo (Sun Ke), other women's organizations playing a conspicuous role in refugee relief activities in Hong Kong included the Chinese Women's Soldiers Relief Association, the Hong Kong branch of the New Life Movement Women's Auxiliary, the Chinese Women's Club, and the Hong Kong Chinese Women's Thrift Movement Association, the last two having established a handicraft workshop that employed women refugees.¹⁴¹ The Macau Chinese Women's Support Association was also active in wartime activities, including in the making of clothes and first-aid supplies for Chinese soldiers, and it distributed more than one million soups in Macau between 1941 and 1945.¹⁴² Some fundraising activities, such as sports events, joined Hong Kong and Macau women's associations.¹⁴³ This intense mobilization of women was aligned with activities in mainland China, where women played a crucial role in refugee relief.¹⁴⁴

As elite-led and grassroots organizations multiplied in Hong Kong and Macau, combining fundraising for the resistance with refugee relief, large umbrella organizations were established to better co-ordinate their activities. The Alliance of All-Hong Kong Relief Organizations for South China Refugees was set up in Hong Kong with He Xiangning as chairperson.¹⁴⁵ In Macau, two major umbrella organizations were the Four Circles Disaster Relief Association (the four were academic, musical, theatrical, and sports) – close to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – and the Macau All Circles Disaster Relief Organization. The last involved the Macau Chinese Commercial Association (i.e. chamber of commerce), the Kiang Wu Hospital, the Tung Sin Tong Charitable Society, and the Macau Chinese Education Association.¹⁴⁶

The China Defence League (CDL) is a prime example of how neutral territories functioned as enablers of global connections in wartime China. An umbrella organization founded in Hong Kong, the CDL co-ordinated fundraising contributions from all over the world and other material support for Chinese resistance and relief activities, including overseeing activities of other relief groups

¹⁴¹ 'Hongkong plays important role in China's resistance', *CWR*, 28 Jan. 1939, p. 273; 'Aid to Chinese people', *SCMP*, 29 Nov. 1946, p. 3.

¹⁴² 'Aomen fuyun' (Macao women's movement), *Yuandong*, 8 (1939), p. 21; Barreto, ed., *Macau during the Sino-Japanese War*, pp. 106–9; *Boletim Oficial da Colónia de Macau* (Official Bulletin of the Colony of Macau), 13 Oct. 1945, p. 361.

¹⁴³ E.g. 'Xiaoqiu lunhui yisai – Ao daibiaodui chansheng' (Small ball benefit matches – Macau delegation formed), *SB*, 18 Oct. 1938.

¹⁴⁴ E.g. Harriet Zurndorfer, 'Wartime refugee relief in Chinese cities and women's political activism, 1937–1940', in Billy K. L. So and Madeleine Zelin, eds., *New narratives of urban space in republican Chinese cities: emerging social, legal and governance orders* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 65–91.

¹⁴⁵ Lu Yan, 'Together with the Homeland: civic nationalism in British Hong Kong', *Modern China*, 40 (2014), p. 653. A renowned revolutionary and feminist who had been a close collaborator of Sun Yat-sen, He Xiangning was the mother of Liao Chengzhi, a leading CCP figure in South China.

¹⁴⁶ Lou Shenghua, 'Acerca das características do corporativismo de Macau' (On the characteristics of Macau's corporatism), *Administração* (Administration), 17 (2004), pp. 800–1. On the Four Circles Disaster Relief Association, see, for example, Deng Kaisong, *Aomen lishi (1840–1949 nian)* (History of Macau (1840–1949)) (Macau, 1995), pp. 90–6.

that operated in the colony. When it was set up, the CDL committee was headed by Song Qingling, T. V. Soong, B. Borcic of the League of Nations Health Section, Dr Robert Kho Seng Lim of the Chinese Red Cross, and He Xiangning.¹⁴⁷ As these names suggest, the CDL crossed political and national divides: it incorporated figures close to the Kuomintang and to the CCP, overseas Chinese support (Lim was born in Singapore), and transnational connections. The CDL organized fundraising events in Hong Kong, such as performances by Chinese opera stars, an art exhibition, and film screenings. These brought together members of different communities, even attracting the governor of Hong Kong.¹⁴⁸ The CDL was primarily moved by Chinese nationalistic goals, but it was also deemed an example of international co-operation, particularly ‘Sino-British co-operation’.¹⁴⁹ This and other organizations demonstrate how many of those engaged in relief activities – including other refugees – took a clear stance in support of the Chinese resistance. They operated in neutral territories but they were far from neutral.

IV

The entanglements of relief and resistance that had brought together people, institutions, and states with often diverging interests largely dissolved when the contingencies of the ‘in-between time’ of neutrality (that in Hong Kong was followed by occupation time) gave way to less flexible post-war positions. The fact that many of those coming to Hong Kong and Macau during the conflict left these territories after either the occupation of Hong Kong or the end of the war, adds strength to the idea of wartime ‘in-betweenness’, that ended when neutrality ended. Theirs was a bounded experience with a clear end, whose temporality had been dictated by wartime events. But the after effects of neutrality were long-lasting: it was partly because of the complexities around the presence of numerous refugees in neutral Hong Kong and Macau that these ‘escaped’ the processes of post-war decolonization that occurred in other foreign-ruled territories in China in the 1940s, with the advantages of neutrality for relief and mobilization again becoming apparent with the southern advance of the Chinese civil war.

Refugee experiences and the overlap of different interests and actors in the management and relief of displaced persons during the Second World War set a precedent for post-1949 practices and discourses in Hong Kong and Macau.¹⁵⁰ In both similar and different ways, these territories continued to be ‘in-between places’ of opportunity, refuge, and connections for many decades,

¹⁴⁷ ‘China Defense League coordinates donations to relief organizations’, *CP*, 30 Apr. 1938, p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ ‘Report on the work of the Central Committee’, *China Defence League Report 1939–1940* (Hong Kong, 1940), p. 9; Lu ‘Together with the Homeland’, p. 660.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Aid to Chinese people’, *SCMP*, 29 Nov. 1946, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ On the important role of refugees from Shanghai in post-1949 Hong Kong see, for example, Peter E. Hamilton, *Made in Hong Kong: transpacific networks and a new history of globalization* (New York, NY, 2021); on Macau, see Alfredo Gomes Dias, *Refugiados de Xangai. Macau (1937–1964)* (Refugees from Shanghai. Macau (1937–1964)) (Macau, 2015).

and we can say that, despite all that has changed since the 1940s, they remain so today.

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