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Moving and staying: wartime escapes in three connected colonies in South China, 1937–1945

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This article analyses wartime escapes involving three ‘neutral’ colonial territories in South China during the Second World War in East Asia (1937–1945). The British colony of Hong Kong, the French leased territory of Guangzhouwan, and Portuguese-ruled Macau were territories of strategic importance during China’s war with Japan, avoiding formal occupation by Japanese forces until the early 1940s (Hong Kong), the last year of the conflict (Guangzhouwan) or the end of the war (Macau). This article argues that their nominal neutrality and different jurisdictions turned these territories into key stopovers and temporary destinations for a wide range of displaced persons fleeing occupied areas in China. Drawing on multilingual sources, this paper proposes a framework of different types of wartime escapes, illustrating these with case studies of women on the move. It also delves into the unexplored importance of specific urban spaces where a diverse range of people came to interact during their wartime stays in these territories, namely hotels.

KEYWORDS Second World War; Guangzhouwan; Hong Kong; Macau; hotels

The Second World War was a time of intense disruption and violence, yet also one of circulations and unexpected connectivity. Central to this story of wartime movement were three territories in South China that were under European colonial rule: Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhouwan. Their ambiguous neutral status turned them into major stopovers for those fleeing the conflict. This article explores connections between these territories by placing the movement of people – women in particular – who crossed at least two of these territories when escaping the

Japanese occupation at the centre of analysis. In so doing, it sheds new light on wartime links between and beyond these connected colonies as well as on gendered wartime mobilities.

The existing scholarship on these territories tends to analyse each of them in isolation but I posit that the significance of their second world war experiences needs to be understood through their connections rather than seeing them as isolated exceptions.¹ Some of those connections were predicated on European colonialism, but many others transcended it, made creative uses of some of its jurisdictional opportunities, and challenged it. Expanding on research focused on the Macau case that emphasised transnational connections, I argue that these territories' nominal neutrality and different jurisdictions turned them into key stopovers and destinations for a wide range of displaced persons fleeing occupied areas in China.² Drawing on multilingual sources, this article proposes an original framework of different types of wartime escapes, illustrating these with case studies of women on the move. It also delves into the importance of specific urban spaces where a diverse range of people came to interact during their temporary wartime stays in these territories, namely hotels. Hotels constituted a key space of fixed presence in experiences otherwise marked by movement. Altogether, the article demonstrates the importance of the South China colonial frontier to different Chinese actors during the conflict with Japan, reinscribes women into the hitherto male-dominated narratives of escapes, and offers new elements to recognise hotels as a key urban space in wartime China.

Japan's invasion of China, that had started in 1931 with the takeover of the Northeastern provinces, escalated into a permanent state of warfare in 1937. This generated an unprecedented refugee crisis, with some estimates pointing towards almost 100 million displaced persons.³ The escapees considered in this article were part of these figures: they fled the Japanese occupation to unoccupied areas, and their journeys included passages through Hong Kong, Macau, and Guangzhouwan.

In this period Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhouwan were all under foreign rule, administered as separate entities under the jurisdiction of the UK

¹ On Hong Kong: Philip Snow, *The Fall of Hong Kong: Britain, China and the Japanese Occupation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Chi Man Kwong, *Chongguang zhi lü: Rijü Xianggang yu tai-pingyang zhan* (Hong Kong: Cosmos, 2015). On Macau: Geoffrey C. Gunn, ed., *Wartime Macau: Under the Japanese Shadow* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016), Lin Faqin, *Aomen ren de kangzhan* (Macau: Aomen ligong xueyuan, 2018). On Guangzhouwan: Antoine Vannière, *Kouang-Tcheou-Wan, colonie clandestine: Un territoire à bail français en Chine du Sud, 1898–1946* (Paris: Les Indes savants, 2020), chapter 13; Bertrand Matot, Fort Bayard: *Quand la France vendait son opium* (Paris: Éditions François Bourin), chapter 7; Chuning Xie, 'China's Casablanca: Refugees, Outlaws, and Smugglers in France's Guangzhouwan Enclave', in Joseph W. Esherick and Matthew T. Combs (eds), *1943: China at the Crossroads* (Ithaca: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2015), 391–425.

² On Macau: Helena F.S. Lopes, *Neutrality and Collaboration in South China: Macau during the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

³ Two estimates include Rana Mitter's of more than 80 million and Lu Liu's of as many as 95 million: Rana Mitter, *China's War with Japan, 1937–1945: The Struggle for Survival* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 6; Lu Liu, 'A Whole Nation Walking: The "Great Retreat" in the War of Resistance, 1937–1945' (PhD Thesis, University of California, San Diego, 2002), 13.

(and later Japan), Portugal and France respectively.⁴ These colonial territories shared some characteristics: all three included a peninsula with land borders with Guangdong province and islands. They were connected to each other through maritime shipping links, which also connected them to other cities in China and in Southeast Asia. From 1938 onwards, significant parts of Guangdong province, including the capital Guangzhou and the areas around Macau and Hong Kong, were under occupation and administered by the collaborationist Reorganised National Government led by Wang Jingwei. These territories' different jurisdictions and their transport links with both occupied and unoccupied areas shaped opportunities for movement and were often used by refugees, evacuees, and escapees, as well as by businesspeople, smugglers, spies, and other agents of different belligerents, during and after China's War of Resistance.⁵

The experience of nominal neutrality in these territories had similarities with other foreign-ruled territories in China, such as Shanghai's International Settlement and French Concession, and the relative wartime boom fuelled by the arrival of refugees and the pursuit for escapist consumption had parallels with other cities in China – from the wartime capital Chongqing to occupied Suzhou.⁶ These southern colonies had, however, their own specific advantages. The first was their southern location: as the Japanese invasion progressed from north to south, they remained surrounded by other unoccupied areas for longer than Shanghai. Additionally, they were tightly connected to territories under European colonial rule in Southeast Asia where many Chinese lived and that were essential in supply routes for the Chinese resistance, especially Burma and Vietnam.

More than 90 per cent of the inhabitants of Guangzhouwan, Hong Kong and Macau were Chinese, and their economy, politics, and culture were profoundly connected to mainland China. During the war, the significance of those connections became more pronounced due to the arrival of displaced persons and to their role as essential supply routes to the Nationalist government's 'great rear area'.⁷ Connections between these territories were, thus, linked to their ambiguous experience of neutrality, which ended in Hong Kong when it was occupied by Japan from late 1941 onwards, and was officially terminated in Guangzhouwan when it was

⁴ Although Guangzhouwan was administered as part of French Indochina, French colonial authorities were aware that the territory was more strongly integrated into Chinese networks, especially those in Guangdong province, and linked to Guangzhou (Canton) to where the Chinese population of the leased territory looked as an 'intellectual and political capital': Report from the Chief Administrator of Guangzhouwan to the Governor General of Indochina, 9 February 1938, ANOM, Commission Guernut 33, 5.

⁵ On the post-war period: Helena F. S. Lopes, 'Smooth Transition? Dismantling and Accommodating Colonial Rule in Late 1940s South China', *Cold War History* (first view 2023), available at <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2023.2231855>> [accessed 22 August 2024].

⁶ Wen-hsin Yeh (ed), *Wartime Shanghai* (London: Routledge, 1998); Vincent K.L. Chang and Yong Zhou, 'Redefining Wartime Chongqing: International Capital of a Global Power in the Making, 1938–46', *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 3 (2017), 577–621; Wu Jen-shu, *Jie hou 'tiantang': Kangzhan lunxian hou de Suzhou chengshi shenghuo* (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2017).

⁷ Chan Lau Kit Ching, *China, Britain and Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1990), 265–7; Chen Guowei and He Jie, 'Kangzhan shiqi Guangzhouwan "guoji tongdao" tanxi', *Lingnan shifan xueyuan xuebao* (*Journal of Lingnan Normal University*) 39, no. 2 (2018), 104–114.

formally occupied in March 1945. The fall of France in 1940 placed Guangzhouwan under the control of the collaborationist Vichy regime, but despite its Axis alignment, Vichy was, in theory, 'neutral', and the Chinese central government maintained diplomatic relations with it until 1943, the year when Guangzhouwan came under *de facto* Japanese control.⁸

The Japanese occupation of Hong Kong in December 1941, accompanying the takeover of British, Dutch and American colonial territories in Southeast Asia, was a key milestone of the second world war. Nonetheless, Macau and Guangzhouwan remained nominally under European rule. Their flexible neutrality continued to offer opportunities to many Chinese and other nationals, with thousands of people from Hong Kong seeking refuge there and many then heading to unoccupied China. The Chinese Nationalist government recognised advantages in these territories' neutrality because they served as bases for the flow of goods, information and people. This explains why it did not break off relations with Portugal and why it postponed such a rupture with Vichy despite growing Japanese interference in Macau and Guangzhouwan.

Whilst all these territories had their own separate land and maritime borders, these were highly permeable. There were attempts to enforce stricter controls at specific points during the war; entry could be barred, and displaced persons compelled to 'return' to occupied China.⁹ Nevertheless, for the most part, a key practical effect of these territories' neutrality was their relative openness to those fleeing the war in China. That openness built on their status as free ports with regular maritime and overland routes to other Chinese cities and places further afield. Allowing the transit or relocation of displaced people was not a result of colonial 'benevolence' but rather of colonial fragility, as officials in Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhouwan did not have the ability to seal the territories' borders off completely to those escaping from occupied China. Different Chinese actors, from members of political parties such as the Chinese Communist Party, to individuals with no clear political allegiance crossed these colonial territories in search of safety.

In his book *Out of China*, Robert Bickers referred to 'the strangeness of the South China front' during the second world war.¹⁰ That 'strangeness' was linked to the fact that the region included neutral colonial remnants offering peculiar opportunities to a range of people, many fighting against imperialism, until the early-to-mid-1940s. This article emphasises that those opportunities sprang, in large measure, from these territories' connectivity and foregrounding wartime escapes illustrates this explicitly. In an influential essay, Elizabeth Sinn described 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,

⁸ Vannière, 537–8; Fabienne Mercier, *Vichy France face à Chiang Kai-shek: Histoire diplomatique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), 237.

⁹ On Hong Kong and Macau: Helena F.S. Lopes, 'The Impact of Refugees in Neutral Hong Kong and Macau', *The Historical Journal* 66, no. 1 (2023), 223–6.

¹⁰ Robert Bickers, *Out of China: How the Chinese Ended the Era of Western Domination* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), 227.

information, remittances [...].¹¹ That idea of ‘in-betweenness’ has also been applied directly or indirectly to Shanghai, by Sinn and other scholars, and has more recently been deployed to analyse Macau during the war.¹² That framework is also valuable in understanding Guangzhouwan. By seeing these territories as *connected* ‘in-between places’ during a period of mass displacement in China, this article unpacks what that ‘strangeness of the South China front’ entailed in practice. Territories under foreign rule in Asia had been important sites of refuge, mobilisation and global interactions long before the second world war¹³ but the conflict generated new tensions and new opportunities springing from what the neutral status of these territories meant in practice: not isolation from the dynamics of the war but a complex web of interactions with ideas, things, and people associated with the conflict. A period of relative wartime boom was concentrated in the late 1930s and early 1940s and saw the relocation of companies, schools, and services, as well as the establishment of new ones.¹⁴ After the occupation of Hong Kong in late 1941, the situation changed somewhat, but Macau and Guangzhouwan remained sites of opportunity, including as layovers with access to unoccupied areas under Chinese rule.

The arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees in Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhouwan transformed the urban life of these territories, all of which experienced an unprecedented rise in their population. Macau’s population had a three-fold increase during the war, reaching around half a million people, the highest population density of the three. Guangzhouwan saw its population rise two-fold reaching 600,000, and Hong Kong’s population almost doubled between 1937 and 1941, peaking at 1.8 million in 1940. The number and diversity of refugees that moved to these territories are essential in understanding their ambivalent experiences of cosmopolitan ‘in-betweenness’ during the war. Exact figures on how many people passed through these territories are, however, impossible to collect, in part because many entered incognito (as we shall see when analysing clandestine evasions) or entered and left multiple times.

Women who moved

As Lu Liu observed for North China, one pattern of wartime flight saw men escaping occupied areas and leaving behind their family members, especially women, children, and the elderly.¹⁵ This trend was powerfully conveyed in the post-war film *Yi jiang chunshui xiangdong liu/Spring River Flows East* (1947) directed by Cai Chusheng and Zheng Junli. Many women also fled to unoccupied areas, especially amongst middle and upper classes, and several left first-person accounts or

¹¹ 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: Brill, 2011), 225–47.

¹² Lopes, ‘The Impact of Refugees’.

¹³ Tim Harper, *Underground Asia: Global Revolutionaries and the Assault on Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2021).

¹⁴ Chen and He, ‘Kangzhan shiqi Guangzhouwan’; Lopes, ‘The Impact of Refugees’.

¹⁵ Liu, 30.

traces of their movement in other records. The examples covered in this article reflect that class bias in the available sources, yet, even with these limitations, they constitute valuable cases of gendered wartime mobilities. A focus on escapes, rather than on the more studied cases of internment or military captivity, offers insight into subjective experiences shaped by circulation and dislocation rather than confinement.

Among those who moved to, or passed through, Hong Kong, Guangzhouwan and Macau during the war were many professional women who, due to wartime contingencies, found new opportunities, including in positions hitherto predominantly or exclusively male-dominated. To some extent this mirrored the complex opportunities open to women in both occupied and unoccupied China – and elsewhere in the world – in the second world war observed by other scholars.¹⁶ Shedding light on these unintended opportunities in no way detracts from the fact that women in China suffered a range of extremely violent experiences, including in these territories. Considering wartime escapes allow us to grasp the nuances of some of these experiences, where great danger and unintended opportunities sometimes overlapped.

Barred from military service,¹⁷ Chinese women on the move found in wartime relief activities a prime arena to contribute actively to Chinese anti-imperialist resistance against Japan. Precisely because of their connections to occupied and unoccupied China, to foreign countries, and links between them, nominally neutral colonial territories in South China were spaces where pro-resistance activities could take place and reach a wide range of potential supporters, including refugees, diasporic networks, and foreign representatives. In other words, women who moved there also moved others to support the Chinese resistance.

Women in transit or in temporary refuge in these three territories included artists and performers who operated in a context of a wartime cultural boom prior to the occupation of Hong Kong and largely fuelled by the arrival of refugees from Shanghai and Guangzhou in the late 1930s.¹⁸ They also included educators who led the relocation of their schools from occupied China and guided their students in their place of temporary exile. As has been noted for Macau, schools were important urban spaces where relief and resistance activities often overlapped and women

¹⁶ Diana Lary, *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 97–9; Nicole Elizabeth Barnes, *Intimate Communities: Wartime Healthcare and the Birth of Modern China, 1937–1945* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018); Nicole Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity: Shanghai Literature and Popular Culture in the 1940s* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

¹⁷ There were, nevertheless, some women who received military training as part of women-only units, as photographic evidence attests: Li Yunhan and Liu Weikai (ed), *Zhongguo minguo kangRi zhanzheng tulu* (Taipei: Jindai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1984), 137–8; Zhang Xianwen and Yang Tianshi (eds), *Meiguo guojia dang'an guan guancang Zhongguo kangshan lishi yingxiang quanji/The Pictures of Anti-Japanese War in the National Archive of the USA*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Huaxue gongye chubanshe and Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2016), 142–3, 147.

¹⁸ Luís Andrade de Sá, *A História na Bagagem: Crónicas dos Velhos Hotéis de Macau* (Macau: Instituto Cultural de Macau, 1989), 86–8; Xie, 408–16; 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: Harvard University Press, 2019), 261–2.

were prominently involved in these.¹⁹ Schools were also spaces of refuge for people escaping the occupation, especially children who were sent to school in neutral and/or unoccupied areas, enrolling in either pre-existing institutions or relocated ones.²⁰

In the religious sector, wartime constraints also generated surprising opportunities. Florence Tim Oi Li (Li Tian'ai) was one such example. Born and raised in Hong Kong, she first witnessed the violence of the Japanese invasion in Guangzhou and was later dispatched to Macau to take charge of the Anglican parish, holding services for the Anglican community – greatly enlarged by the arrival of refugees – during the conflict and vouching for Hong Kong refugees at the British consulate when they arrived in Macau.²¹ Not only was she the first Chinese woman to be ordained deacon, but later she became the first woman ordained as an Anglican priest in the world.²²

Some elite women were at the forefront of transnational relief activities to support Chinese resistance. Sun Yat-sen's widow Song Qingling, who moved to Hong Kong in the late 1930s, had a leading role in the China Defence League (*Baowei Zhongguo tongmeng*), an umbrella organisation initially based in Hong Kong, that coordinated fundraising contributions from around the world and other material support for resistance and relief activities.²³ Song Qingling was also linked to other institutions such as the Hong Kong–Macau Chinese Relief Association set up by the central government's National Relief Commission.²⁴ Indeed, several Chinese women's associations were active in Hong Kong, Macau, and Guangzhouwan during the war, making use of these territories' wartime neutrality to harness international support for China, provide assistance to victims of the war (such as refugees and orphaned children) and fundraise to support the Chinese war effort. These organisations included the Hong Kong Branch of the National Association for the Care of Orphans and the Macau and Guangzhouwan branches of the Chinese Women Support Association (*Zhongguo funü weilao*hui), amongst a number of others.²⁵

¹⁹ On Macau: Helena F.S. Lopes, 'Wartime Education at the Crossroads of Empires: The Relocation of Schools to Macao During the Second World War, 1937–1945', *Twentieth-Century China* 46, 2 (2021), 130–52.

²⁰ See, for example, the case of Monto Ho, the son of Chinese diplomat He Fengshan (Ho Feng-shan). After leaving his post in Vienna, he travelled to the US and then to Hong Kong. His son attended school in the British colony before it was occupied and afterwards moved with his teachers and classmates to unoccupied Guangdong prior to moving to Chongqing: Feng-shan Ho, *My Forty Years as a Diplomat* (Pittsburgh: Dorrance Publishing Co., 2010), 56–7.

²¹ Florence Tim Oi Li and Ted Harrison, *Much Beloved Daughter* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 28–52.

²² Philip L. Wickeri and Ruiwen Chen, *Thy Kingdom Come: A Photographic History of Anglicanism in Hong Kong, Macau, and Mainland China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2019), 96.

²³ *China Defence League Report 1939–40* (Hong Kong: China Defence League Central Committee, 1940).

²⁴ 'Relief Association – New Body Formed in Hongkong Yesterday – For Colony and Macao', *South China Morning Post*, 16 June 1940, 14.

²⁵ 'Hongkong Plays Important Role in China's Resistance', *China Weekly Review*, 28 January 1939, 273; 'Mme Chiang Helps Formation of Hongkong Committee for Wounded', *China Weekly Review*, 13 April 1940, 233; 'Aomen fuyun', *Yuandong*, 8 (1939), 21; Chen Chong, 'Lun Guangzhouwan zai kangzhan zhong de diwei yu zuoyong', *Lingnan shifan xueyuan bao* (*Journal of Lingnan Normal University*) 39, no. 1 (2018), 123. On women's associations and mobilisation for relief during the war: Harriet Zurndorfer, 'Wartime Refugee Relief in Chinese Cities and Women's Political Activism, 1937–1940' in *New Narratives of Urban Space in Republican Chinese Cities: Emerging Social, Legal and Governance Orders*, ed. Billy K. L. So and Madeleine Zelin (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 65–91.

There are also a few cases of women's engagement with non-Chinese Allied resistance that challenged standard practices in these highly masculine circles. One example is Joy Wilson, a Hong Kong refugee in Macau who was the British Army Aid Group representative in the territory until she escaped, with her two sons, in a multinational party that headed for India *via* unoccupied China.²⁶

Types of escapes

The study of civilian escapes is arguably more associated with narratives of Cold War defection than with second world war flight.²⁷ Regarding China, some of these allow us to see how 1930s and 1940s routes were re-enacted during the Mao years. For example, one of the most influential escape memoirs, Robert Loh's *Escape from Red China* (1962), noted how the author crossed overland from Guangzhou to Macau and from there to Hong Kong.²⁸ Cold War escapes were understood in a context of ideological competition (communism versus anti-communism), and the publication of first-person accounts at the time often served propaganda goals. In the second world war, the testimonies of escapees were collected by government agents when they crossed into unoccupied areas, as they could validate information known through other channels and provide additional intelligence. While there were personal narratives of escapes distributed more widely during the second world war, most detailed accounts were only made public after the conflict, sometimes many decades later, when their protagonists were no longer active in wartime service or vulnerable to expulsion from their places of exile (or, indeed, no longer alive).

In spite of more academic attention paid to cold war narratives, second world war escapes across enemy (border)lines feature prominently in wartime memoirs and popular culture, especially those centred in the European theatre of the war.²⁹ Even the pages of English-language newspapers in pre-occupation Hong Kong were more likely to feature news of escapes in Europe than in China, prioritising escapes of Britons or their allies in a context of war in Europe.³⁰ Histories of second world war evasions in Asia have received far less attention and there is also a relative

²⁶ Edwin Ride, *BAAG Hong Kong Resistance 1942–1945* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1981), 211; Private Papers of Mrs Fletcher, Imperial War Museum, London, 97/40/1.

²⁷ Erik R Scott, *Defectors: How the Illicit Flight of Soviet Citizens Built the Borders of the Cold War World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

²⁸ Robert Loh and Humphrey Evans, *Escape from Red China* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1962), 342–53. For a critical analysis of Loh's book and its uses: Adam Cathcart, 'Flawed Reflections: Robert Loh, Mao Zedong, and the Socialist Transformation Campaign in Shanghai, 1955–1956', *The PRC History Review* 8, no. 3 (2023), 1–11.

²⁹ On Europe: Barbara A. Bond, *Great Escapes: The Story of MI9's Second World War Escape and Evasion Maps* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2015).

³⁰ 'Thrilling Escape – How British Pilot Fooled Nazis', *The Hongkong Telegraph*, 28 May 1940, 7; 'Fleeing Italian Rabble – Escape of Shattered Alpini Troops Viewed As Excellent Greek Propaganda', *The China Mail*, 13 November 1940, 16; 'Dramatic Escape of George of Hellenes in Crete Invasion', *The Hongkong Telegraph*, 26 May 1941, 1.

gender imbalance regarding the escapes that were written about.³¹ Some of the existing publications covering Hong Kong focus heavily on male escapees, including arguably the most extensive study of a wartime escape from the British colony, Tim Luard's reconstruction of Admiral Chan Chak's flight in late 1941.³² A rare exception is Edward Rhoads' exquisite family history that reconstructs his parents' flight across wartime China and beyond, including the experience of his mother who, like his father, was a member of staff at Lingnan University.³³

Despite a few exceptions, women are rarely the focus of histories of wartime escapes from China. Yet, many escaped occupied areas in the country (as well as Hong Kong, Guangzhouwan, and Macau in particular), often travelling alongside men whose narratives are better known. For example, the escape group of journalist Israel Epstein who fled Stanley internment camp in Hong Kong *via* Macau was a multinational one that included Elsie Fairfax-Cholmeley, whom Epstein would later marry in 1944.³⁴ The prominent Chinese diplomat Fu Bingchang (who was appointed ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1942) had sought refuge in Hong Kong in the late 1930s and left for Chongqing in 1939, but his wife and son stayed in Macau, escaping later through Guangzhouwan.³⁵

Drawing on a range of different sources that mention escapes with different levels of detail (including archival records, memoirs, and newspapers), I have devised a typology of wartime escapes that involved Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhouwan: personal flight; professional relocation; official evacuation; and clandestine evasion (e.g. the aforementioned case of Joy Wilson). Each different type of escape had its salient characteristics. There was also some overlap between them in some cases, although I would posit that a person's escape would fit *primarily* into one of these types. These different types of escapes are also applicable to men, but rather than using male escapees as the standard examples, I will illustrate each of these types with case studies of women on the move in order to render visible the plurality of female civilian mobilities during the war, the connections between these colonial territories, and their connections to occupied and unoccupied China. On the one hand, women's experience of escaping was similar to men's and, indeed, many shared their journeys with male counterparts: they used the same means of transport, stayed in similar accommodations, and ate the same food. Nevertheless, their experience was, in many cases, also different. For women

³¹ For a published memoir centred on China: James D. McBrayer, *Escape! Memoir of a World War II Marine Who Broke Out of a Japanese POW Camp and Linked Up with Chinese Communist Guerrillas* (Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company, 1995).

³² Tim Luard, *Escape from Hong Kong: Admiral Chan Chak's Christmas Day Dash, 1941* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012). For a first-person escape account: David Bosanquet: *Escape Through China: Survival After the Fall of Hong Kong* (London: Robert Hale, 1983).

³³ Edward J.M. Rhoads, *War and Revolution in South China: The Story of a Transnational Biracial Family, 1936–1951* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2021). The book includes a map depicting some of the major escape routes out of Hong Kong (Ibid., 80).

³⁴ On Epstein's journey from Hong Kong to Free China via Macau: Israel Epstein, *My China Eye: Memoirs of a Jew and a Journalist* (San Francisco: Long River Press, 2005), chapter 14.

³⁵ Huang Zhenwei, *Fu Bingchang zhuan: cong Xianggang daxue dao Mosike Zhongguo dashiguan* (Hong Kong: Zhonghua, 2018), 240, 246.

travelling without accompanying family members, this could also be liberating, even if not necessarily described as such.³⁶ There were also heightened risks: the danger of sexual abuse was more frequent for women and some travelled disguised as men to avoid it.³⁷ There was also sexual trafficking of girls and women, especially between Macau and Guangzhouwan.³⁸

The first type of wartime escape, personal flight, refers to people who left occupied areas through means considered ‘legal’, doing so in a personal capacity, often in the company of family members. It was the case, for example, of Chen Xiangmei, now better known in English as Anna Chennault, who went on to become a key intermediary figure in Sino–American relations after marrying aviator Claire Chennault. In 1942, she left Hong Kong, where she had sought refuge earlier in the war, and, alongside some of her relatives, she travelled to unoccupied China. She went first to Macau and while there, she sold some jewellery to get the funds for ‘passage permits’ to reach Guangzhouwan.³⁹ Reducing the population of Hong Kong (whom they were unable to feed) had been a key concern of Japanese occupation forces who issued leaving permits to Chinese wanting to depart for their ‘hometowns’. After issued with these, people had three days to leave on the threat of punishment for non-compliance.⁴⁰ Many used those exit permits to leave for Free China *via* Guangzhouwan.⁴¹ A less high-profile, but more detailed, personal flight account that also involved the three territories was written by Wu Ling Peixing, then a schoolgirl who had found herself stranded when Japanese forces occupied Hong Kong. She escaped to Free China in 1942, *via* Macau and Guangzhouwan. Like those of other refugees, her journey involved a number of trips *via* land and water, through different means of transportation, including a vessel used for transporting livestock.⁴² The help of family, colleagues and acquaintances was crucial at different points in the journey. This is noted in several accounts of escapes, including that of Chen Liuqiu, the daughter of historian Chen Yinke, who mentioned the role of family friends in assisting their multiple flight journeys, first from Beijing to Hong Kong (*via* Tianjin, Zhengzhou, and Guanxi province) in 1937, and then from Hong Kong to Guangzhouwan and from there through the

³⁶ Lary, 6, 97–8.

³⁷ Knowledge and fear of sexual abuse is noted in accounts of wartime flight: Zheng Ruimen, ‘Xianggang tuoxian ji’ in Zheng Ruimen and Song Jiaxiu, *Gang Hu tuoxian ji* (Yong’an: Shengli chubanshe Fujian fenshe, 1942), 13–14; Chen Liuqiu, ‘Huiyi wo jia taonan qianhou: Ji xian fu Chen Yinke jiaoshou kangzhan qianhou jiaoshu shengya’, *Xuewen jizhuan* 68, no. 5 (1996), 33; Wu Ling Peixin, *Liulang jiu nian/Unintended Journey Across China: The Story of a Refugee* (2020), 79–80.

³⁸ He Xiaoting, Qian Yuanchu, and Chen Zhen (eds), ‘Yi zhi “li mai nü qi” de luanli – Liang Yulian yi Aomen taonan’ in *Koushu Guangzhouwan: Jindai zuijiedi lishi de duoyuan xushi*, ed. Wu Ziqi (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2023), 376.

³⁹ Anna Chennault, *A Thousand Springs: The Biography of a Marriage* (New York, 1970), 93–4.

⁴⁰ Zheng, 18.

⁴¹ Stanley S.K. Kwan [Guan Shiguang], *The Dragon and the Crown: Hong Kong Memoirs* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 38–41. Kwan, a banker who later created the Hang Seng Index, left Hong Kong to Free China in the company of a ‘very sharp and resourceful’ female student who has a family acquaintance. The Hang Seng bank relocated to Macau after the fall of Hong Kong, operating under the name Wing Wah Yin hao: *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴² Wu Ling, 106–21.

unoccupied Southwest in the spring of 1942.⁴³ The importance of personal connections helped in acquiring necessary paperwork and supplies and in finding safe places along the route. They could also prove crucial for knowing when to leave: renowned modernist writer and painter Ling Shuhua, a friend of Virginia Woolf who relocated to London after the war, managed to get boat tickets to Guangzhouwan from Hong Kong in early December due to personal connections.⁴⁴ This was crucial because escape journeys took at least several days (and often weeks or even months) and could pose significant danger, such as Japanese patrols attempting to stop people, including by shooting at them, or being robbed by outlaws.⁴⁵

The second escape type, professional relocation, involved people who left occupied China in the context of their work. It was, for example, the case of Liao Fengling, principal of the Union Normal School for Women in Guangzhou, who led her students to temporary refuge in Macau, where she also led a branch of the Guangzhou YWCA.⁴⁶ In her case personal relations mattered too. (At least one of her sisters was also an educator in Macau). Florence Li's relocation from Hong Kong to Macau mentioned earlier is another case in point when thinking about escapes in the context of work, although her secret trip to the occupied New Territories to bring her father to Macau was an example of a different type of escape to be addressed below, clandestine evasion.⁴⁷ A further case was that of some members of the Maryknoll Sisters, an American-founded Catholic community, who moved from Hong Kong to Macau and Guangzhouwan after the occupation of Hong Kong.⁴⁸

Official evacuations – the third type of this article's escapes typology – could have varying degrees of scale, and be organised by state representatives such as consulates, colonial authorities or relief organisations. The case of exit permits addressed previously could, in fact, overlap with certain official evacuations. For example, in occupied Hong Kong, there were also evacuations by ship coordinated between the occupation authorities and local Chinese associations, or between the former and the Portuguese authorities in Macau.⁴⁹ The detailed escape memoir by journalist Zheng Ruimei published during the war noted the rushed situation in Hong Kong Island and Kowloon at the beginning of the Japanese invasion, with people seeking to flee the British colony through different means, with

⁴³ Chen, 'Huiyi wo jia taonan qianhou'.

⁴⁴ Chen Lie, *Shuang jia lou wangshi: shidai fengyun Zhong de Chen Xiying yu Ling Shuhua* (Hong Kong, Chung Hwa Book Co, 2021), 146–7.

⁴⁵ Xie, 417–9.

⁴⁶ 'Principal's Report 1937–1941', September 1941, Archives Research Centre of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, AA11/6, Union Normal & Middle School Canton (1937–1948), Missions Committee-Subject Files; Wai Yin Christina Wong, 'Shifting Memories: An Oral Study of the Canton Young Women's Christian Association in the 1940s', *Social Sciences and Missions* 33, no. 1–2 (2020), 157–89.

⁴⁷ Li and Harrison, 32–3.

⁴⁸ Thomas F. Ryan, *Jesuits under Fire in the Siege of Hong Kong 1941* (London, 1944), 180–2; Cindy Yik-yi Chu, *The Maryknoll Sisters in Hong Kong, 1921–1969: In Love with the Chinese* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 51–9.

⁴⁹ On the latter: Lopes, *Neutrality and Collaboration in South China*, 198–9.

transportation crowded or unavailable, food in scarce supply, and rare opportunities to move taken on despite the fear and danger.⁵⁰ Conditions to leave Hong Kong improved from late January 1942, when travel and banking services resumed operations, yet they remained dangerous and Zheng and his group, disguised as workers, left overland *via* the New Territories into Shenzhen as part of an evacuation group.⁵¹

The civilian exchanges organised in 1942 and 1943 between the US and Japan and that took place in territories under Portuguese colonial rule (Mozambique and Goa) constitute a particularly prominent example of the official evacuation type. Travelling in one of these was American journalist Emily Hahn, who earlier had also engaged in personal flight, by leaving Shanghai to Hong Kong.⁵² Official evacuations are arguably the type of escape most different from the dominant cold war image of escapes as defection challenging state controls and surveillance. Yet, for the people who managed to leave occupied areas (including internment camps) through these officially-sanctioned arrangements, their exit was very much regarded as an *escape* from an ordeal towards relative 'freedom'.

Finally, clandestine evasions were those undertaken in secret, seemingly undetected by occupation forces or their collaborators. These underground escapes often involved the three territories at the centre of this article and were almost invariably supported by agents of the resistance. Song Qingling was taken out of Hong Kong and to Chongqing by plane with support from government agents.⁵³ A related case, but carried out with Communist support, was the flight of the renowned feminist and revolutionary He Xiangning, wife of Kuomintang luminary Liao Zhongkai and mother of the prominent CCP agent Liao Chengzhi, who, like Song Qingling, had been at the forefront of relief institutions in Hong Kong. Like other leftist intellectuals such as the playwright Xia Yan, He escaped from Hong Kong to Free China *via* Guangzhouwan. (Xia Yan stopped in Macau, but He appears to have gone directly by boat to the French leased territory).⁵⁴ He Xiangning's escape was part of a much larger cohort of Communist-backed escapes through Hong Kong in the early 1940s, of which her son and Zhou Enlai were key architects.⁵⁵

An illustrative first-person account of a clandestine evasion involving the three territories is that of Phyllis Harrop, whose memoir, *Hong Kong Incident*, was published shortly after her escape and with the war still ongoing. Harrop was British

⁵⁰ Zheng, 1–31.

⁵¹ Zheng, 25–6.

⁵² On her relocation from Shanghai to Hong Kong: Emily Hahn, *China to Me: A Partial Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Blakiston Company, 1944), 105; on her escape from Hong Kong to the US: Emily Hahn, *Hong Kong Holiday* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1946), 275–305.

⁵³ Zheng, 4.

⁵⁴ On Xia Yan's escapes via Guangzhouwan and Macau in the 1930s and 1940s: 'Guangzhouwan tongxun' (1939) and 'Zhouxian ji' (1942) in *Xia Yan zai wen suibiji* (Beijing: Sanlian shidian, 1980), 181–3, 189–202. On He Xiangning's escape: Liao Mengxing, *Wo de muqin He Xiangning* (Hong Kong: Xianggang zhaoyang chubanshe, 1973), 35–6.

⁵⁵ Christine Loh, *Underground Front: The Chinese Communist Party in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 61.

and had served as the assistant secretary to the Secretary of Chinese Affairs in the Hong Kong government before the occupation. Making use of a German passport she had acquired when she had married her former husband and working with Chinese agents and acquaintances of different nationalities, she prepared her escape to Macau. She bypassed security checks on arrival thanks to a sympathetic Portuguese naval officer who, according to her, registered her as a Portuguese subject. Harrop's account suggests how flexible entry into Macau could be, at least for some, and there is a clear gendered dimension in her narrative of relatively easy border crossing. In Macau, Harrop met the British consul, the colonial governor and a number of other personalities. She also got hold of a 'spare neutral passport' (country unstated). After being given letters to the French resident superior (i.e. governor) at Fort Bayard, Guangzhouwan's capital, by a Chinese government official, she left Macau with a friend on a steamer chartered by the Portuguese authorities to bring supplies from Guangzhouwan. From there, she went by overland to Chongqing.⁵⁶ Harrop's and other accounts demonstrate how escapes to and through neutral or unoccupied territories were only made possible through Chinese intermediaries, and also reveal something about the logistics of clandestine escapes, including the importance of cargo shipping for people travelling in hiding.⁵⁷ As will be addressed later, Harrop's escape also intersected with hotel spaces before and after leaving Hong Kong. Harrop's escape account was important enough to be made public (with omitted information about the identity of some individuals) by the British government during the war.

The Japanese occupation of Hong Kong in late 1941 and its increased military presence in Guangzhouwan from 1943 contracted the once regular maritime connections between these three territories but did not stop them completely. In fact, Japanese forces, too, were interested in exploiting these territories' transport links for smuggling.⁵⁸ Sample data from the Macau Harbour Authority on the number of ships passing through Macau clearly illustrates enduring maritime connections. In November 1941, a number of ships of various nationalities, including British and American, coming to and from French Indochina, Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Guangzhouwan, passed through Macau.⁵⁹ In February 1942 most of the ships entering *via* the Portuguese-ruled territory were Japanese, with one exception, a French ship.⁶⁰ In September 1942 the number of ships had decreased again, and only Japanese and Portuguese registered vessels that entered or left Macau were

⁵⁶ Phyllis Harrop, *Hong Kong Incident* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1943), 130–52.

⁵⁷ Cargo ships were also used by Chinese refugees moving between Macau and Guangzhouwan who were not travelling in hiding: testimony of Liang Yulian in He, Qian, and Chen (eds), 'Yi zhi "li mai nü qi"', 373.

⁵⁸ Qi Chunfang, 'Kangzhan shiqi Riben zai GangAoWan diqu de zousi huodong', *Zhongguo bianjiang shi di yanjiu* (*China's Borderland History and Geography Studies*) 13, no. 3 (2003), 82–9; Chen and He, 'Kangzhan shiqi Guangzhouwan', 111.

⁵⁹ 'Movimento da Navegação dos Portos, Relativo ao Mês de Novembro de 1941', *Boletim Oficial de Macau*, no. 2, 24 January 1942, 67.

⁶⁰ 'Movimento da Navegação dos Portos, Relativo ao Mês de Fevereiro de 1942', *Boletim Oficial de Macau*, no. 12, 6 June 1942, 240.

counted.⁶¹ By October 1943, only three Japanese ships plying between Macau, Guangzhouwan and Hong Kong were listed.⁶² A short note saying that the list was ‘incomplete due to the present state of war in the Far East’ suggests that many of the maritime journeys between Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhouwan were not being counted – and those circulations are often mentioned in accounts of escapes. As some of the cases considered earlier note, at least one leg of the journeys between Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhouwan was done by boat.⁶³ Escapes also included segments by land, including across these territories’ land borders and into unoccupied China. From Guangzhouwan, this included weeks-long journeys through Guangxi province, that for those with enough means were undertaken by sedan chair.⁶⁴ Those leaving *via* Guangzhouwan often described the act of crossing on foot into Nationalist-controlled territory with a sense of relief and elation.⁶⁵

In sum, escapes were undertaken by boat and by land, and were enabled – before, during and after – by local helpers. These could be family members, acquaintances, or smugglers, the latter often linked to Chinese guerrillas (Communist, Nationalist, or neither) involved in resistance. Although not constituting official evacuations *per se*, the Chinese Nationalist government did set up institutions to assist Chinese refugees escaping occupied areas, especially after the Japanese takeover of Southeast Asia in late 1941–early 1942 displaced many overseas Chinese. Government-backed agencies in the colonial territories considered here and in others like Vietnam provided monetary relief and accommodation, including in government-run hotels.⁶⁶

Escapes could involve a small number of people or larger parties. A key feature of these escapes is the diversity of those who found themselves travelling together: people of different nationalities, occupations, genders, classes, and who spoke different languages. Their paths crossed in unlikely encounters because of wartime contingencies and in those crossings they blurred class, racial, and gender divisions, even if momentarily.

Temporary stays: hotels as ‘meeting places’

While many escapees ended up in unoccupied China and journeys often unfolded outside of urban centres after leaving these colonial territories, if we place pre-occupation Hong Kong, Guangzhouwan, and Macau at the centre, the story of

⁶¹ ‘Movimento da Navegação dos Portos, Relativo ao Mês de Setembro de 1942’, *Boletim Oficial de Macau*, no. 4, 13 February 1943, 150.

⁶² ‘Movimento da Navegação dos Portos, Relativo ao Mês de Outubro de 1943’, *Boletim Oficial de Macau*, no. 1, 1 January 1944, 13.

⁶³ A vivid description of an escape that included different boat journeys via Macau and Hong Kong can be read in: ‘Hazardous Journey – Lady Missionary’s Trip from Yeung Kong – Through War Zones’, *South China Morning Post*, 17 January 1939, 14.

⁶⁴ Ling Shuhua, ‘You Guangzhouwan dao Liuzhou ji’, *Funi xinyun* 4, no. 8 (1942), 67–73.

⁶⁵ Wu Ling, 120; Ryan, 182.

⁶⁶ Chen Guowei, ‘Taipingyang zhanzheng baofaqian minguo zhengfu Guangdong nanlu jiaoqiao tanxi’, *Wuyi daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban) (Journal of Wuyi University (Social Sciences Edition))* 17, no. 4 (2015), 10.

wartime mobilities is firmly an urban one, even though one with important rural connections.⁶⁷ A particular type of urban space in these colonial territories – the hotel – was often linked with experiences of flight, relief and resistance activities, and also with collaboration.

Scholars such as Robbie Moore and Molly Berger have studied hotels in the United States and Europe as quintessentially ‘modern’ spaces.⁶⁸ Surprisingly, hotels seem to have eluded most scholarship on urban modernity in China, even in studies of Shanghai that have privileged ‘modern spaces’ such as department stores, coffee-houses or movie theatres.⁶⁹ Exceptions are few and none is solely focused on hotels. In her history of tourism in Republican China, Yajun Mo mentions several hotels as spaces of a new travel culture, although this is not the main focus of the monograph. It does, however, mention the doubling of hotels patronised by Chinese refugees in French-ruled Haiphong in Vietnam during the second world war, a similar case to the territories considered in this article.⁷⁰ In his *Policing Shanghai*, Frederick Wakeman Jr. recognises hotels as a key feature of urban life and social change in Shanghai. He notes the connection of hotel rooms with practices such as dancing, gambling and prostitution, placing them in larger context of vice.⁷¹ The same can certainly be applied to Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhouwan.

In these territories, hotels were arguably the urban spaces that best represented the ambiguities of neutrality. Within their bounded spaces, multiple interactions and activities unfolded. Meeting places *par excellence*, hotels were used to house refugees and to conduct wartime businesses; they hosted meetings by those engaged in anti-Japanese resistance and those engaged in collaboration with Japan; they were ideal places to spy on the enemy but also places of leisure. Major hotels in these territories were not merely places to spend the night; they were prime entertainment venues. They housed restaurants, casinos (in Macau and Guangzhouwan), dance halls, etc. They employed refugees who needed to earn a living (for example, musicians and dancers) and they offered a temporary escape from the hardships of displacement to wealthier refugees with funds to spend. Adapting the concept of ‘scenes’ from Daniel Silver, Terry Nichols Clark, and Clemente Jesus Navarro Yanes, defined as ‘settings structuring shared cultural

⁶⁷ For example, the activities of guerrillas operating in rural areas, such as the East River Column in the New Territories. On their activities: Gordon Y.M. Chan, ‘Hong Kong and Communist Guerrilla Resistance in South China, 1937–1945’, *Twentieth-Century China* 29, no. 1 (2003), 47; Chan Sui-Jeung, *East River Column: Hong Kong Guerrillas in the Second World War and After* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

⁶⁸ Robbie Moore, *Hotel Modernity: Corporate Space in Literature and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021); Molly W. Berger, *Hotel Dreams: Luxury Technology & Urban Ambitions in America, 1829–1929* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

⁶⁹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Emily Yueh-yu Yeh (ed.), *Early Film Culture in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Republican China: Kaleidoscopic Histories* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

⁷⁰ Yajun Mo, *Touring China: A History of Travel Culture, 1912–1949* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 150–1.

⁷¹ Frederick Wakeman Jr., *Policing Shanghai 1927–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 106–7.

consumptions' that 'provide ways of social belonging',⁷² it is possible to place hotels as essential elements in the 'scenes' of temporary refuge in these neutral territories. By their very nature, hotels were sites of permanence – even if only for brief periods – in journeys of escape that were essentially of movement. Hotels tend to be associated with studies of tourism and leisure, but not so much to exile and forced migration, although they often feature in personal narratives of second world war escapes. I would posit that the association of hotels with escapes can even be stretched to the more conventional association of hotels to tourism, being seen as places of escapism from one's regular accommodation elsewhere.

Hotels were themselves a reflection of other wartime opportunities, some being set up during the conflict or reaching their 'golden era' then, and others playing pre-eminent roles in key wartime events. One such hotel was the world-famous Peninsula in Kowloon, opened in 1928 which still stands. In 1937, it housed refugees who fled Shanghai to Hong Kong and later hosted charity events to support refugees.⁷³ More significantly, in December 1941 one of its rooms was the site where Governor Mark Young signed the British surrender to Japan.⁷⁴ The Peninsula – like other urban sites in Hong Kong – was renamed during the Japanese occupation: it became the Tōa Hotel, or East Asia Hotel.⁷⁵ During the occupation, it housed the Japanese military headquarters and was, like the Hong Kong Hotel and the Gloucester Hotel, a meeting place in which occupation officials sought to co-opt local Chinese elites.⁷⁶ Some of these hotels also housed figures who refused to collaborate and eventually escaped to Free China, including Phyllis Harrop, who wrote a vivid diary during the early days of the occupation from the Gloucester Hotel, where she was in contact with Nationalist agents.⁷⁷

Hotels like the Gloucester or the Peninsula were not simply meeting sites for military and political elites. They were spaces of refuge and of leisure for wealthier refugees, as vividly conveyed in the autobiographical fiction of Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing). The Repulse Bay Hotel, the Gloucester Hotel and others were sites of key scenes in her wartime novella 'Love in a Fallen City' and her posthumously published novel *Little Reunions*.⁷⁸ Hotels were also spaces of work. In numerous ads

⁷² Daniel Silver, Terry Nichols Clark, and Clemente Jesus Navarro Yanez, 'Scenes: Social Context in an Age of Contingency', *Social Forces* 88, no. 5 (2010), 2295.

⁷³ 'Crowds Prepare for First Restful Night', *South China Morning Post*, 20 August 1937, 14; 'Packed Ship Arrives', *South China Morning Post*, 28 August 1937, 14; 'Charity Function', *South China Morning Post*, 29 November 1939, 2.

⁷⁴ Snow, 131–2.

⁷⁵ Snow, 159. The same happened to the Repulse Bay Hotel, that was repurposed as a military hospital by the Japanese forces and then reopened in 1943 under a Japanese name, Midorigahama Hoteru (Green Shore Hotel): Shuk-wah Poon, *Power and Politics at the Colonial Seaside: Leisure in British Hong Kong* (London and New York: Routledge, 2023), 104.

⁷⁶ Zheng, 16; Snow, 72, 101, 105, 107, 117.

⁷⁷ 'Extracts from diary written by Phyllis Harrop from Hongkong', TNA CO 129/590/23.

⁷⁸ Zhang Ailing [Eileen Chang], 'Qingcheng zhi lian' [Love in a Fallen City] in *Zhang Ailing xiaoshuo ji* (Taipei: Huangguan chubanshe, 1989), 203–50; Eileen Chang, *Little Reunions*, trans. Jane Weizhen Pan and Martin Merz (New York, 2009), chapters 1–2. Both works draw on Chang's experience as a relocated student from Shanghai living in Hong Kong between 1939 and 1942. On the importance of Repulse Bay and its eponymous hotel as a site of seaside tourism since the 1920s: Poon, 90–115.

in the *Hong Kong News*, an English-language pro-Japanese newspaper published during the occupation, we find details of professionals such as doctors and fortune-tellers. One of the most frequently printed was an ad for Gloria Lys, a clairvoyant from Canada, who gave psychic readings in room 424 of the Peninsula.⁷⁹ She survived the war and later went to Australia and Canada. The case of a woman fortune-teller working in a major hotel under the Japanese occupation is one far removed from the dominant narratives of wartime internment or flight. Without additional elements, it is difficult to assess what other activities Gloria Lys could have undertaken (such as spying), though the fortune-telling alone is indicative of continued practices of everydayness in a time of disruption.

Hotels were important sites of female wartime mobility as they constituted essential places of stopover for women who moved between cities. One such woman who operated in hotels in South China, and who would fit the archetype of the 'seductress-spy' analysed elsewhere through other cases by Amanda Zhang,⁸⁰ was Rosaline Wong (Wang/Huang Meilin), an interpreter and informer for the Japanese gendarmerie, who operated across South China, including in Hong Kong and Macau.⁸¹ Certain women on the move did arouse suspicion, as the case of the travel companion of Hong Kong businessman E.J.M. Churn (Zhang Gongyong) attested. According to his account of escaping Hong Kong to Free China *via* Macau, it was because Nationalist authorities were concerned that a woman he was travelling with ('Miss Chow') was an agent for the Japanese that they were detained and tried in a months-long ordeal before being freed.⁸²

If Hong Kong hotels such as Peninsula are internationally renowned, less celebrated establishments in Macau and Guangzhouwan are equally interesting as meeting spaces for different agents of the belligerents and different communities of refugees escaping occupied China. These hotels illustrate the central role played by Chinese businessmen and, in the case of Macau, constitute the foundations of present-day casino-capitalism in the enclave. Indeed, casinos – at the time mainly located in hotels – were prime sites for these interactions, bringing together newcomers of various nationalities, not only refugees but also local and foreign officials and military officers, as well as, in the words of a contemporaneous report on Macau 'ragged beggars and fat merchants [...] standing side by side'.⁸³

In Macau, three major sites during the war were the Hotel Central, the Grand Hotel Kuoc Chai, and the Hotel Riviera, all of which employed refugee musicians

⁷⁹ 'Classified Advertisements', *The Hong Kong News*, 2 July 1943, 4.

⁸⁰ The concept is discussed in Amanda Zhang, 'Beauty is the Troubled Water that Brings Disasters: The Making of the Seductress-Spy in Republican China (1911–1949)', *Intelligence and National Security* 35, no. 6 (2020), 840–51.

⁸¹ From Farrell and Gray to Indiv for Smith, 31 Oct. 1945 (and other files), NARA, OSS Archives, RG 226, E140, Box 55.

⁸² 'A brief report on the conditions existing at Hong Kong between the dates 25.12.41 and 11.5.42. submitted by E.J.M. Churn', Chongqing, 19 Oct. 1942, TNA CO 129/590/24.

⁸³ 'Frightened Refugees Pour Into Macao From Kwangtung, But City Stays Unperturbed', *The China Press*, 1 November 1938, 3.

from Shanghai and Hong Kong.⁸⁴ The Central was renovated and reopened in 1937, with an ‘American bar’, restaurant and a new cabaret on the sixth floor.⁸⁵ It belonged to the company who controlled the gambling monopoly concession in Macau, Tai Xing, whose leading figures were Gao Kening (Ko Ho Neng) and Fu Deyin (Fu Tak Iam). Both well-known tycoons in Macau, they were connected to a range of businesses, including currency exchange and pawnshops, that boomed during the war.⁸⁶ The Grand Hotel was hailed the ‘tallest building in the Portuguese empire’⁸⁷ when it opened in 1940, right next to the outer harbour – these promotional epithets hint at the relative wartime boom generated by neutrality in these territories. Hotels like these served patrons of opposing sides offering opportunities for relative relaxation, as neutral territories were largely (though not totally) spared the disruption brought by military operations like air raids. The British consul in Macau John Reeves recalled fondly in his memoir the dancing and the waiters serving cool drinks during the summer at the Grand Hotel.⁸⁸ Yet, the man considered by contemporaries as the number one collaborator in Macau, Huang Gongjie also operated some of his criminal activities from a room at the Grand, and American intelligence files note that this hotel was ‘the most popular’ amongst Japanese agents in the enclave.⁸⁹ During her stay in Macau, Harrop stayed at the Riviera, in a room surrounded by others housing Japanese residents.⁹⁰ Hotels were connected to resistance activities in other ways besides serving as temporary accommodation; they were places where performances to fundraise for refugee relief and the Chinese war effort were held.

Macau’s major hotels were relatively close to harbours (the Inner Harbour and the Outer Harbour) and to major thoroughfares leading there. In wartime Guangzhouwan, hotels were concentrated in two main places, Chikan, a commercial town with land access outwards, and Xiyang, opening to the port in the then capital Fort Bayard.⁹¹ As in Macau, these were Chinese-owned and managed, including the Nanhua Hotel that opened in 1939. The Nanhua was owned by the most prominent local tycoon, Chen Xuetao, who, like Gao and Fu in Macau, was also connected to gambling and opium and interacted closely with representatives of different sides.⁹² Most hotels in Guangzhouwan were managed by the local chamber of commerce which also played a key role in refugee relief.⁹³

⁸⁴ John Pownall Reeves, *The Lone Flag: Memoir of the British Consul in Macao during World War II* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014), 72.

⁸⁵ Sá, 85.

⁸⁶ Lopes, *Neutrality and Collaboration*, 190.

⁸⁷ Sá, 121.

⁸⁸ Reeves, 46.

⁸⁹ Sá, 126; ‘Macao – General Intelligence’, Kunming, 24 August 1945, NARA OSS X-2 Branch Report, 5.

⁹⁰ Harrop, 137–8. Indicative of the ephemeral nature of Macau’s wartime boom, the Riviera closed shortly after the end of the conflict.

⁹¹ Qiu Biguan and Cai Jinguang (eds), *Guangzhouwan (Faguo zujiedi shiliao zhuanji)* (Zhanjiang: Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Zhanjiang shi weiyuanhui, 1990), 130.

⁹² Xie, 403–7, 412. On Chen’s wartime activities: Steven Pieragastini, ‘State and Smuggling in Modern China: The Case of Guangzhouwan/Zhanjiang’, *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, 25 (2017), 117–8; Wan Xiaoxun, ‘Kangzhan shiqi Chen Xuetao de cishan xingdong’, *Taidu* (12 Ago. 2018): <<https://reado1.com/oe2angE.html#.Yc4BphPPo2B>> [accessed 16 January 2025].

⁹³ Qiu and Cai (eds), 132.

The influx of refugees into Guangzhouwan saw a significant increase in the number of hotels and guesthouses, with associated shops and restaurants springing nearby to cater to new customers.⁹⁴ The high demand is reflected in the recollections of some of their guests, that portrayed them as crowded places of temporary refuge, bustling with activity. See, for example, the reference to a ‘noisy and crowded hotel’ (*caoza yongji de liuguan*) mentioned in the escape recollection of Chen Liuqiu, who fled with her family from Hong Kong to Free China *via* Guangzhouwan in 1942.⁹⁵

Guangzhouwan likewise had its share of cosmopolitan spies operating in the world of hotels. One of them was reputedly a woman named Betty Pak (Bai Mansi), a Chinese dance hall proprietor in Guangzhouwan who was fluent in Cantonese, English, Japanese, and Portuguese and spied for the Japanese in the leased territory and in Macau.⁹⁶

These cases demonstrate the ways in which the liminal worlds of hotels and dance halls intersected with refugee flight, fundraising activities, and intelligence networks, but these vignettes also suggest something of the opportunities open to some women with particular connections or language skills, and their ability to move between these connected colonial territories.

Conclusion

In August 2023, one of the main hotels of wartime Macau, the Grand Hotel Kuoc Chai, reopened after decades of abandonment under the ownership of three sisters, Vivian, Jessica and Veronica Lu, intent on drawing in travellers ‘interested in the historical side of Macau’.⁹⁷ Like the Grand Hotel, some of the major wartime hotels in Hong Kong and Guangzhouwan remain standing, though not necessarily associated with their 1930s and 1940s experience. Yet, because the key functions of hotels remain relatively unchanged, there is a noticeable continuity in the use of hotels as places of refugee, sites of business, and meeting places between people of different backgrounds. This article’s insights on hotels in these connected colonies can be applicable to hotels elsewhere during the second world war and beyond.

This article has considered human circulations to or through three ‘neutral’ colonial territories during China’s second world war, highlighting the importance of movement and transnational/transimperial connections to understanding the entangled wartime experiences of relief, resistance and collaboration in neutral Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhouwan. The case studies of female mobility are attempts to engage with ideas of ‘recovery history’. Drawing on relatively fragmented pieces of information, the article seeks to recover the experiences of women who moved

⁹⁴ For a comprehensive list of hotels: Qiu and Cai (eds), 131.

⁹⁵ Chen Liuqiu, ‘Huiyi wo jia taonan qianhou’, 33.

⁹⁶ ‘Interview with Misses Colombia Garcia and Pu Man-Lien’, 23 September 1945, NARA, OSS Archives, RG 226, A140, Box 57, Folder ‘Canton-Intelligence Report “Akron”’.

⁹⁷ Renato Marques, ‘Grande Hotel (Kuok Chai) Reopens Today after 27 long Years’, *Macau Daily Times*, 18 August 2023, <<https://macaudailytimes.com.mo/grande-hotel-kuok-chai-reopens-today-after-27-long-years.html>> [accessed 22 August 2024].

between and beyond these connected colonies, their involvement in a range of urban activities that took place there during the war – from relief organisations to artistic performances, from espionage to political mobilisation – not as isolated individual experiences but as part of a broader picture of multinational mobility involving people who would mostly have led quite separate existences in pre-war China, but who came to interact in these territories due to the contingencies of the conflict.

Escapees moved across space, but their movement had moments of pause. Hotels are essential sites to consider when analysing temporary stasis in wartime escapes. Hotels in neutral territories were particularly important because they were open to people from all sides. That was the case in southern China as it was in other parts of the world.

Each individual escape was different, yet it is possible to recognise common features and distinguish dominant patterns. These allow us to understand experiences of second world war escape as shared ones, even if dependent on one's particular circumstances. It was precisely because the characteristics of the types of escapes considered here were common to many people that they were effective (and vice-versa).

Whilst one should be cautious when deploying disparate individual cases to illustrate broader trends, the constellation of examples of wartime mobility – and female mobility in particular – across Hong Kong, Guangzhouwan and Macau deepens our understanding of the relationships between neutrality and colonialism, gender and displacement, wartime constraints and opportunities, as well as the spaces – as large as territorial units or as small as hotel rooms – where these played out.

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