

Chinese Refugees Tell Story of Hardship, Despair

(Editor's note: During the past month, a curious social drama was portrayed on the frontier of Communist China. For a few days, the Red Chinese seemingly threw open the usually tightly controlled border to Hong Kong. An estimated 60,000 persons eagerly streamed into the British-administered enclave. For economic and political reasons, most of them were sent back.

A few of the refugees evaded deportation. UPI correspondent Arthur Dommen interviewed three such recent arrivals from the China Mainland. He reports on the reasons which compelled them to forsake their homeland for what they believe will be a better life in Hong Kong's teeming slums.

By ARTHUR J. DOMMEN
United Press International
Hong Kong—UPI—The three young men sat opposite this correspondent in a bare room. One was a carpenter, one an unemployed factory worker and the third an 18-year-old student from a rural village. They had one thing in common: they had fled from Communist China a fortnight ago.

It would be misleading to assume that the stories these men told me were representative of the 35 million inhabitants of Kwangtung province which borders Hong Kong in South China. Generalizations applicable to the whole of China would be even less justified.

Each of the three young men appeared physically able. Certainly, none was starving although there are persistent reports of widespread famine and starvation in China. But each told a story of hardship and despair under the Red Chinese "great leap forward."

All three crossed the border in the floodtide of 60,000 would-be refugees. All three had somehow evaded deportation by the Hong Kong police—one by jumping from a rolling police truck as it was carrying him back to the border.

Their reasons for deciding to leave their homes and try to find a haven in Hong Kong were simple. They had had three long years of scarce food, when a balanced meal was unheard of, when getting rice and vegetables meant buying ration cards at black market rates, when meat was available in two-ounce por-



REACH FOR FOOD—For a few days last month, the Communist Chinese relaxed their usually firm grip on the border between Red China and Hong Kong. An estimated 60,000 persons eagerly streamed across the frontier into the British-administered en-

clave. But, for economic and political reasons, most of them were sent back. Here, eager hands reach for food parcels thrown by residents of Hong Kong as a truck carries refugees back to the border. (UPI)

tions only once a year—at New Year's.

They were tired of inventing ingenious devices to extend their clothing rations. They were jealous of watching regular army soldiers eat more than they.

Upset Pattern of Lives

They were angry at seeing Northerners running the country, gradually ruining their formerly rich Kwangtung agriculture with flat directives from Peking and upsetting the pattern of their lives with constant reorganizations and "campaigns."

The carpenter and factory workers from Canton were angry at being displaced to the countryside to work; the farm lad was angry at seeing the rice fields invaded by unemployed urban workers.

In short, they were fed up. When the word went around that the cadres were no longer preventing mass escapes into Hong Kong, they went.

Take the case of Lee Ying-Sun, 24. He was ordered in March, 1956, to return to his parent's farm village of Golsan. He fled back to Canton that August as a hawker. There were more arrests and more trips to the country.

"But it was better eating in Canton than in the country," he said. "At least in Canton you had the black market."

After May 1 this year, people in Canton began talking openly of the fact that guards were no longer preventing people from going to Hong Kong, even without officially issued exit permits.

Lee bought a train ticket to Ping Wu, the nearest stop to the border. All the people in the train were going to make the crossing into Hong Kong.

From Ping Wu station it was a four-hour walk to the next town, Shumchun. There, Lee and his friends rested until dark, when they made

their way to the border.

They met one guard. He asked them where they were coming from and where they were going. They said, "Canton, going to Hong Kong."

The guard said to them: "Not this way. That way, over there."

They crossed the border on the night of May 7. About 10 persons pushed down the frail wire fence on the British side.

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Lee was arrested by Hong Kong police. On the ride back to the border for deportation he jumped from a truck and ran, losing himself in the crowd.

Chou Shin-Fun, a student at Sai Wu Middle school in Wai Chow, a town of 18,000 about 60 miles from the border, reached safe haven four days earlier.

"Village by village around the town people were deserting the countryside to journey to Hong Kong," he recalled. The cadres made no effort to stop them. But officially the travelers never received any sanction for the exodus.

The word in town was that the Hong Kong police were sending everyone back. Still, they went.

Chou, who was alone, dug a hole under the British fence. He hid in some bushes for three days. Then he hid in a farmhouse for three days. When the farmer refused to harbor him any longer for fear of trouble with the police, Chou hid in a country school for another three days.

Smuggled Into City

Then he met a group of students, who smuggled him into the city.

As a student, Chou was receiving 15 catties (14 pounds) of rice per month. He took some rice ration cards from his pocket and showed them to this correspondent. He also

ate some vegetables and meat only once a year.

Soldiers stationed in Wai Chow had a ration of 45 catties (45 pounds) of rice per month, as well as receiving four ounces of precious oil, which the Chinese use for cooking.

Chou said he often saw soldiers buying potatoes on the black market. Wai Chow is well-known for its potatoes.

Wong Ying, 30, described himself as an "occasional factory worker," meaning he was mostly unemployed.

A friend bought a railway ticket for him on May 18. On May 19 he took the 9:30 a.m. train from Canton station to Ping Wu. When he reached Shumchun on foot it was almost dark.

He hid in the bushes for some time.

Then walking along the border looking for an opening, Wong saw about 20 regular communist soldiers on guard. They asked no questions, however.

"If you were going to Hong

Kong they would not ask any questions," Wong said. "But if you were returning from Hong Kong they would search your pockets and question you."

Wong slept in a clump of bushes for three days in the hills on the British side of the border while police combed the area with searchlights and armed patrols.

He reached the town of Sheung Shui, near Hong Kong at 9 p.m. on May 22, and was there taken in hand by some students who smuggled him to the city past police roadblocks.

Worse Than Before

Conditions in Canton were now worse than before "liberation" in 1949. "Everything is limited," he said.

People in Canton broke shop windows in order to obtain food, especially in 1960.

Wong said 1960 and 1961 were bad years.

"While I was eating in a restaurant once someone grabbed my bowl of noodles and ran away with it to eat. I've heard of similar things happening to other people."

Lee, Chou and Wong had never met before they reached Hong Kong. Yet, they had this in common: they belonged to the small minority of the 60,000 who crossed the border who managed to remain here.

After a suitable period they

will apply for a Hong Kong identity card. If they get it, they will just become three

more additions to the swarming masses of Hong Kong's tenement dwellers.

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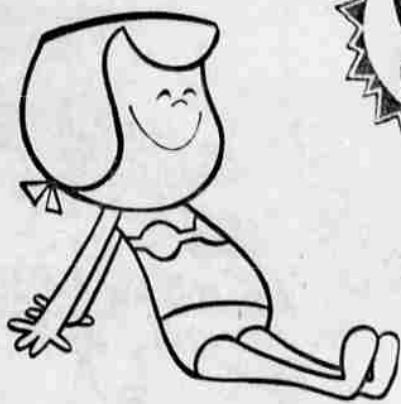
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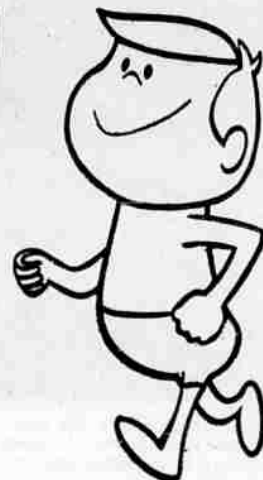
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