Abstract

In 1949, the world witnessed a tidal wave of involuntary migration out of China when the Chinese Communists came to power. Among this vast sea of human misery were tens of thousands of exiled Nationalist supporters in Hong Kong — common soldiers, low-ranking civil servants, and their families. In June 1950, a minor clash occurred between the Nationalist refugees and the pro-ccp elements in the colony. To prevent further political upheaval, the British authorities transported the former to a remote location called “Rennie’s Mill” or Tiu Keng Leng and built a temporary internment camp to house them. The initial plan was to gather the Nationalist supporters in the colony and shipped them to Taiwan as soon as possible. Yet Chiang Kai-shek’s government was reluctant to receive these people for both economic and security reasons. As the repatriation process dragged on, the Nationalists used the refugee camp as an international showcase in their propaganda war against the People’s Republic of China (prc) much to the chagrin of the British. Consequently, a considerable number of the Nationalist refugees were stranded in Hong Kong. They became victims of their own government under the pretense of humanitarian assistance. This paper examines the early history of Rennie’s Mill community with an emphasis on the interplay between humanitarian relief, propaganda war, and international politics. It sheds light on the actual lived experiences of Rennie’s Mill refugees against the conflicting ideological constructions and humanitarian discourse surrounding them.