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by

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‘A Haven for Tortured Souls’:

Hong Kong in the Vietnam War

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**‘A Haven for Tortured Souls’:
Hong Kong in the Vietnam War**

by

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Report

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of the University of Texas at Austin
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To my parents,

Drs. James J. Hamilton and Linda Z. Hamilton.

A small token of my appreciation for their constant support and sacrifice.

**‘A Haven for Tortured Souls’:
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by

Peter Evan Hamilton, MA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

SUPERVISOR: Mark A. Lawrence

This essay details the profound economic and social impact of the Vietnam War on Hong Kong. The British colony provided essential strategic facilities to the U.S. war effort and ranked among the largest destinations for American servicemen on R&R. Between 1965 and 1970, Hong Kong annually hosted about 200,000 U.S. ground and naval personnel on holiday. This influx annually earned Hong Kong about US\$300-400 million (in 2009 dollars) and employed thousands of residents working in the colony’s service and entertainment industries. In addition, American servicemen and the local businesses catering to them became a contentious issue in local society. Servicemen excited widespread interest, but their misdeeds and their bar and brothel stomping grounds provoked intense anxiety. Hong Kong residents’ ensuing debates exercised the available civil channels and stimulated the colony’s emerging public sphere, from English- and Chinese-language newspaper battles to outspoken unions and neighborhood associations. In tandem with famed events such as the Star Ferry Riots of 1966 and the communist agitations of 1967, American R&R was an essential ingredient to the emergence of a distinctive Hong Kong identity and citizenry during this period. While residents’ objections failed to curb the GIs’ holidays, Vietnam tourism and its reverberating effects pressed new sectors of Hong Kong people to grasp and articulate their investment as citizens in the city’s future. Thus, the Vietnam War and its U.S. presence in Hong Kong were major factors in developing Hong Kong’s modern economy, civil society, and contemporary self-conception as a political, legal, and cultural ‘haven.’

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‘A Haven for Tortured Souls’: Hong Kong in the Vietnam War

Introduction

On March 14, 1966, the Essex-class aircraft carrier *U.S.S. Hancock* and four escorting U.S. Navy destroyers steamed into Hong Kong’s dazzling Victoria Harbour with nearly 5,000 servicemen aboard. Among them were two 19 year-old Marines, Roger Philips and Michael Martin. The squadron had come to the British colony for six days of “rest and recreation” (R&R) after executing patrol and aerial strike operations off Vietnam since December. After the *Hancock* anchored, ferries carried Philips, Martin, and thousands of other servicemen to Fenwick Pier on the doorstep of Wan Chai, a neon-lit district infamous for its wild nightlife. Like hundreds of thousands of American servicemen before them, Philips and Martin had to walk only a few steps to enter the legendary “World of Suzie Wong.” After rounds of drinks, the men ventured to the Choi Hung Apartments at 86 Johnston Road. There, they purchased sex with local women: Martin and another serviceman paid HKD\$15, while Philips paid HKD\$40 to one Lee Man. The GIs later discovered these differing prices, and Philips was enraged. They returned to the Choi Hung two evenings later to redress this perceived slight to Philips, who demanded a free evening with Lee Man. When she refused, the servicemen sought out the building’s proprietor, Lee Hing. Philips grabbed Lee’s neck, slammed his head onto a counter, and threatened him with a fruit knife to refund the HKD\$25 that he declared in court Lee Man “cheated him of.” Other residents restrained Philips before Hong Kong police arrived and arrested Philips and Martin.¹

¹ For the dates of U.S. naval ships’ visits to Hong Kong, see copies of the *South China Morning Post (SCMP)* at the Hong Kong Public Records Office (HKPRO), Kwun Tong, Hong Kong; for this *U.S.S. Hancock* visit, see:

As the trial in this case concluded on April 6 and 7, the streets of Hong Kong exploded in the Star Ferry Riots. At this time, the Star Ferry was the only public transportation linking Kowloon and Hong Kong Island. In March 1966, the colonial government approved a 10-cent fare increase for the ferry. Residents like So Sau-chung initiated hunger strikes and peaceful protests against the rise. Colonial authorities' draconian response quickly ignited a firestorm. After protests on April 5, thousands of Hong Kong residents took to the streets on the evening of April 6, looting shops and burning cars. Riot police and Gurkha troops used bayonets and tear gas to contain the crowds, killing one and arresting 1,465 people. This eruption emerged primarily from Hong Kong's miserable living conditions and its deficient administration. Since 1945, the city's population had increased sevenfold, stressing infrastructure and social services beyond any imaginable breaking point. Half of Hong Kong's population was under twenty-one, but only thirteen percent of teenagers attended secondary school. Hong Kong's manufacturing boom simply could not create enough jobs for all the refugees who had arrived since 1949. For those with jobs, wages remained scandalously low, hours were endless, and there was no social safety net. Ian Scott has described these conditions as "reminiscent of ...Dickensian England." And then

"Shipping in Port," *South China Morning Post, Trade and Transportation insert (SCMP T&T)* 15 March 1966, 8; **for Philips and Martin's case, see:** "Two American servicemen held," *China Mail* 18 March 1966, 1; "Marines on robbery charge," *South China Sunday Post-Herald (SCSPH)* 20 March 1966, 5; "U.S. Marines on robbery charge," *China Mail* 24 March 1966, 1; "Two U.S. Marines Accused Of \$15 Robbery," *SCMP* 5 April 1966, 8; "Woman's Claim: 'SAW U.S. MARINE ROB MAN,'" *SCMP* 6 April 1966, 13; "MARINES ON TRIAL: Too Many Questions Asked, Witness Says," *SCMP* 7 April 1966, 9; "U.S. Marine Says He Was Cheated," *SCMP* 8 April 1966, 14; "U.S. Marine Fined For Robbery," *SCMP* 16 April 1966, 8; **for the orientation booklets servicemen received at Fenwick Pier, see:** *A Serviceman's Guide to Hongkong, 1971* (Hong Kong: Serviceman's Guides Association, Serasia Ltd., 1971), Special Collections, Hong Kong University Libraries (HKUL); and *1979 Serviceman's Guide to Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Serviceman's Guides Association, Serasia Ltd., 1979), HKUL; **for the "World of Suzie Wong," see:** Richard Mason, *The World of Suzie Wong* (London: World Publishing Company, 1957); William Holden and Nancy Kwan, *The World of Suzie Wong* (Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 1960).

into this poor and precarious society stepped hundreds of thousands of young, pleasure-seeking American GIs like Philips and Martin serving in the Vietnam War.²

Scholars of the Vietnam War, the global U.S. empire, and Hong Kong history have overlooked the significance of these R&R visits. In the first place, R&R was the most important of several strategic services that Hong Kong provided to the U.S. war effort in Vietnam. Second, GI tourism was a huge business for an extremely poor city. With roughly 200,000 U.S. servicemen visiting each year during the late 1960s, the annual income to the colony in 2009 dollars was USD\$300-400 million. Thereby, Vietnam tourism was the colony's third most lucrative industry and a major pillar of the local economy. This infusion particularly stimulated sectors like retail, nightlife, taxicabs, hotels, and tailoring and transformed the districts of Wan Chai and Tsim Sha Tsui (TST). Thousands of struggling Hong Kong residents—the family, friends, and neighbors of those protestors who rose up in the Star Ferry Riots—found coveted work catering to the GIs. Finally, residents encountered both thrills and distressing problems from servicemen's recreations, including bar fights, late-night noise, drug-trafficking, arson, ferry hijackings, AWOLs, attempted suicides, and rampant solicitation. Incidents of R&R crime like Philips and Martin's case provide a new window into the opportunities, stresses, and challenges facing Hong Kong residents at this critical juncture in their history.

This essay argues that American GIs' dollars and crimes had a profound effect on Hong Kong by fueling the colony's economy and molding its socio-political development. The traditional narrative of Hong Kong's postwar history has focused on residents'

² Gary Ka-wai Cheung, *Hong Kong's Watershed*, 10-13; John M. Carroll, "A historical perspective: The 1967 riots and the strike boycott of 1925-1926," Robert Bickers and Ray Yep, eds., *May Days in Hong Kong: Riot and Emergency in 1967* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 75.

persistent demands for social progress and the violent explosions of this public discontent, most pre-eminently in the Star Ferry Riots of 1966 and the Cultural Revolution-inspired strikes and bombings of 1967. Scholars have analyzed how a colonial regime strapped by dwindling imperial resources and competing demands from London, Beijing, and Washington faced these crises and eventually implemented the remarkable reforms of the MacLehose era (1971-1982). Yet, historians have ignored the reality that everyday from 1965 through 1972 the colony's residents were swimming in a tidal wave of American servicemen on leave from the controversial Vietnam War. During just the three days of the Star Ferry Riots, there were eleven U.S. Navy ships anchored in Victoria Harbour and about 6,500 American servicemen on the colony's streets—or, more than a brigade. The R&R program aided the war effort in Vietnam and made Hong Kong a sanctioned U.S. refuge. American GIs like Philips and Martin were fighting in a confusing and traumatizing war and understandably saw the colony as a replenishing haven of drinking, shopping, and women. Hong Kong's residents, however, were ambivalent in how they viewed these military tourists. R&R dollars kept many local businesses and entrepreneurs afloat and the sight of huge U.S. Navy ships and foreign servicemen on the streets created general excitement. At the same time, GIs' nightlife and crimes provoked outrage and public debate over law and order and civic planning. Indeed, the program's worst incidents unnerved residents' perceptions of Hong Kong as their safe-haven from authoritarian communism. Residents' ensuing debates exercised the available civil channels and stimulated the colony's emerging public sphere, from English- and Chinese-language newspaper battles to outspoken unions, churches, and neighborhood committees. The issue of American servicemen helped to vitalize a physical territory of shared space into a community of common experience and

concern. While residents' protests failed to curb the GIs' holidays, Vietnam tourism and its reverberating effects pressed new sectors of Hong Kong society to grasp and articulate their investment as citizens in the colony's future. Thus, the Vietnam War and its U.S. presence in Hong Kong were major factors in developing both Hong Kong's economy and its contemporary civil society and civic self-conception as a political, legal, and cultural "haven."³

A Strategic Base

Hong Kong's experience of the Vietnam War combines grassroots social history with the heights of Cold War diplomacy. It is important to emphasize that Hong Kong was not just a pleasure den for the American military, but also a strategic—albeit surreptitious—base for the U.S. war effort in Vietnam. While historian Steve Tsang has pointed out that the Hong Kong government tried to ignore the Cold War and avoid "Great Power" conflicts, scholars like Nancy Bernkopf Tucker and Michael Share have shown that the colony nevertheless functioned as a vital Cold War listening station and espionage ground. More recently, historian Chi-kwan Mark has dissected the international negotiations that enabled the GIs' visits. While ships of the U.S. Seventh Fleet had been calling at the British colony since World War II, U.S. personnel stationed in Vietnam began R&R visits to Hong Kong in February 1963. As the Johnson administration escalated U.S. military involvement in South

³ "Shipping in Port," *SCMP T&T* 7-9 April 1966, 8; the ships in port with crews were: *U.S.S. Ticonderoga* (3,448), *U.S.S. Salisbury Sound* (684), *U.S.S. Worden* (400), *U.S.S. Henry W. Tucker* (367), *U.S.S. Basilone* (345), *U.S.S. Richard B. Anderson* (336), *U.S.S. Bausell* (336), *U.S.S. Morton* (233), *U.S.S. Bream* (60), *U.S.S. Widgeon* (40), and *U.S.S. Peacock* (39); estimates of U.S. naval ships crew complements come from www.navsource.org; **for the public sphere, see:** Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991); Agnes Shuk-mei Ku, "Revisiting the Notion of 'Public' in Habermas' Theory—Toward a Theory of Politics of Public Credibility," *Sociological Theory* 18.2 (July 2000), 216-240; also see: Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

Vietnam during 1965, the Navy's Headquarters Support Activity, Saigon (HSAS) arranged for skyrocketing numbers of American personnel to come to Hong Kong. While only 530 Marines on average were visiting Hong Kong each month during early 1965, in August their numbers quadrupled to 2,000 men—requiring two daily R&R flights back and forth to South Vietnam. As these holidays mushroomed, Hong Kong's R&R program became a serious concern for Westminster, the Pentagon, and Zhongnanhai; indeed, we can point to the particular incident that yanked each government's attention to the issue.⁴

On August 24, 1965, a U.S. Marine Corps C-130 Hercules transport plane took off from Hong Kong's Kai Tak airport. Returning 71 servicemen to South Vietnam after R&R, the Hercules climbed over Yau Tong Bay and banked toward Lei Yue Mun (Lyemun Pass), the eastern gate of Victoria Harbor. Within seconds, however, the plane suddenly veered sharply to the left. Its left wing dipped into the water and snapped off. The disabled aircraft plunged, bounced on the surface, and crashed again nose-first into the sea just meters from a Kwun Tong land reclamation site. More than 200 workmen at the site watched in horror as the plane crashed down and sank. Fuel gushed from the maimed fuselage and two explosions ignited the wreck and part of the bay into a blazing petrol fire. As thick smoke billowed a thousand feet into the air, reclamation workers rushed to help: diving into the bay, commandeering small boats, and even using bamboo poles and wooden planks to pull

⁴ See: Steve Tsang, "Strategy for Survival: The Cold War and Hong Kong's Policy towards Kuomintang and Chinese Communists Activities in the 1950s," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25.2 (1997), 317; Michael Share, *Where Empires Collided, Russian and Soviet Relations with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macao* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2007); Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, 1945-1992: Uncertain Friendships* (New York: Twayne, 1994); Chi-kwan Mark, "Vietnam War tourists: U.S. Naval visits to Hong Kong and British-American-Chinese relations, 1965-1968," *Cold War History* 10.1 (February 2010), 1-28; also see: Edward J. Marolda and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict, Volume II: From Military Assistance to Combat, 1959-1965* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy, 1986), 257.

survivors from the water. Their heroic efforts rescued just thirteen men, but over a year later, President Lyndon Johnson and White House advisor Walt Rostow wrote personal letters of commendation and thanks to 23 of these working-class Hong Kongers.⁵

The diplomatic fallout from the crash was swift. The Chinese government in Beijing quickly responded to the disaster by condemning the entire U.S. presence in Hong Kong. A week after the crash, Beijing's Foreign Ministry delivered a note of protest to the acting British chargé d'affaires. The People's Republic condemned the United States for drawing Hong Kong "into the whirlpool of the U.S. war of aggression" in Vietnam:

The Chinese Government has noted that in recent months as the Government of the United States frantically escalates its war of aggression in Vietnam, warships, planes and military personnel of the U.S. aggressor forces have increasingly frequented Hongkong and made extensive use of it as a base for their war preparations. In between combat operations in the war of aggression in Vietnam, U.S. aircraft carriers, submarines, landing craft and other vessels have constantly visited Hongkong for replenishment of supplies and for rest and recuperation of crews...Far from checking these frenzied activities of the U.S. aggressor forces in Hongkong, the British government has tried in many ways to shield and justify them in an attempt to evade its own responsibility.

The note further condemned GIs' "criminal activities" that "endangered" the safety of Hong Kong residents and the security of China. While U.S. and British officials denied the 'replenishment of supplies' comment and that Hong Kong was being used as a 'base,'

⁵ The 23 Hong Kong men who received letters of commendation were: Chan Kar, Chan Sung, Chau Yau, Cheung Chi-kan, Cheung Kwan, Cheung So, Choi Fat, Chow For-kan, Chow Ngau, Chow Shu-sum, Chui Hung, Kwok Kung-hei, Leung Muk-kai, Li Chow, Ng Kam-shing, Ng Kwong, Pang Chi-ming, Pang Loy, Siu Shing, So Luen-kwan, Wong Tin-ho, Yeung Chuen, and Yeung Sing, see: Lyndon Johnson and Walt Rostow to each man, Folders "PR1 8/15/66-10/15/66" and "PR1 11/1/66-1/1/67," Box 3, EX PR1 5/14/66, Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, LBJL; Arthur Sylvester to Leonard Mark, 14 September 1965, Folder "CO 112 Hong Kong," Box 37, GEN CO 94 7/16/68, LBJL; also, see: [Editorial] *SCMP* 17 November 1966, 6; **for coverage of the crash, see:** Eddie Wu, Michael Hahn, and Bill Lee, "58 FEARED KILLED, U.S. plane crashes in Kowloon: 13 rescued," *China Mail* 24 August 1965, 1; Peter Leung, "I saw men engulfed in flames swimming for shore," *China Mail* 24 August 1965, 1; "ELEVEN BODIES RECOVERED, Fifty-eight Lost In Crash Of U.S. Transport, THIRTEEN SURVIVORS," *SCMP* 25 August 1965, 1; "SCENE OF TRAGIC CRASH OFF KAI TAK," *SCMP* 25 August 1965, 9; "PLANE DISASTER INQUIRY OPENS," *China Mail* 25 August 1965, 1; "No indication Of Sabotage, Say Investigators," *SCMP* 1 September 1965, 6.

Beijing's observations were accurate. The U.S. presence was skyrocketing and creating dangerous 'criminal activities,' as well as plane crashes in the middle of one of the world's densest cities. Anglo-American officials prevaricated over the question of 'supplies,' quibbling that the U.S. was not buying munitions in Hong Kong. The Pentagon was, however, purchasing huge amounts of PX supplies, uniforms, electronics and small naval craft in the colony.⁶

As Chi-kwan Mark has shown, the diplomatic spat that played out over the coming weeks was a taste of many similar incidents to come over the next few years. The Anglophilic *China Mail* condemned Beijing's protest as "meaningless." When former Vice-President Richard Nixon passed through Hong Kong a few days later, he labeled Beijing's accusations "false" and "shockingly detrimental to the Chinese who live here." He threatened that if U.S. servicemen were "forced out" of Hong Kong, "they will go to Sydney, Manila or Tokyo. Thus the Chinese people of Hongkong would be the only ones to get hurt in that hundreds of millions of dollars would be spent elsewhere." By May 1966, the Foreign Office, the State Department, and Seventh Fleet commanders had set up new R&R guidelines: only 650 Marines would visit Hong Kong each month, while the U.S. Navy would coordinate to prevent crowding in port. China still repeatedly protested over the next few years, particularly when nuclear-powered ships like the *U.S.S. Enterprise* called. Beijing's protests delayed several visits and directly increased the U.S. use of Manila, Bangkok, and Taiwan for R&R. Nevertheless, while Beijing's outbursts received extensive local press,

⁶ "China Protests to Britain: Warning Over U.S. Forces Using Hongkong, ACTIVITIES MUST STOP," *SCMP* 2 September 1965, 1; "Flights To Resume; U.S. Troops Ban Temporary," *SCMP* 7 September 1965, 1.

officials like Governor David Trench (1964-1971) assured the public that China's protests were a "propaganda exercise."⁷

Anglo-American officials were being disingenuous. They knew very well that Hong Kong was fulfilling several strategic functions of a U.S. 'base.' First, the CIA used Hong Kong for black market currency exchanges to fund its regional operations and maintained a listening station in the colony. Second, Hong Kong hosted a contentiously oversized U.S. consulate and USIS offices. Third, local resources aided U.S. search and rescue operations. When the *U.S.S. Frank Knox* ran aground in late July 1965 on reefs southeast of Hong Kong, the amphibious assault carrier *U.S.S. Iwo Jima* diverted from Hong Kong to the rescue and then brought the crew back to Hong Kong's facilities for recovery. A week after the

⁷ "Distortion," *China Mail* 3 September 1965, 1; "Detrimental to H.K.: Nixon Condemns Peking Protest," *SCMP* 3 September 1965, 1; "H.K. Banned To Vietnam Troops; U.S. Suspends Rest and Recreation Visits; Not Requested Here," *SCMP* 6 September 1965, 1; "U.S. visits suspended to 'ease China pressure,'" *The China Mail* 6 September 1965, 3; "Flights To Resume; U.S. Troops Ban Temporary," *SCMP* 7 September 1965, 1; "Expected Resumption Of Visits To H.K. Welcomed," *SCMP* 9 September 1965, 1; "U.S. Recreation Flights To H.K. Resume," *SCMP* 16 September 1965, 1; **see also:** Chi-kwan Mark, "Vietnam War tourists," 11, 13, 21; Ming K. Chan, "New Twist On Gunboat Diplomacy: Sino-British-American Discord Over US Naval Presence in mid-1960s Hong Kong" (Paper presented at the International Symposium on Maritime Defense of China, 6-8 June 2002); **for press coverage of Beijing's protests, see:** "Chou Alleges H.K. Offered To U.S. As War Base," *SCMP* 28 October 1965, 1; "Taiwan As U.S. Rest Centre," *SCMP* 5 November 1965, 1; "American Troops Holiday in P.I.," *SCMP* 4 January 1966, 16; "U.S. carrier in Hongkong under Peking scrutiny," *China Mail* 28 January 1966, 10; "Protest By China Over Carrier," *SCMP* 29 January 1966, 1; "Mighty U.S. Carrier Anchored Off Green Island," *SCMP* 29 January 1966, 10; "Peking condemns carrier's visit," *South China Sunday Post-Herald*, 30 January 1966, 1; "Peking: Hongkong turning into base," *China Mail* 31 January 1966, 3; "China Protests To Britain; Alleged Use Of H.K. By U.S. As War Base; 'GRAVE CONSEQUENCES,'" *SCMP* 2 February 1966, 1; "Not Asked To Reduce Visits To H.K.," *SCMP* 18 February 1966, 1; "H.K. As Base For 7th Fleet Termed 'Nonsense,'" *SCMP* 24 February 1966, 22; "No big changes in HK as rest centre," *China Mail* 17 May 1966, 1; "Colony 'A U.S. Base' Says Peking," *SCMP* 12 August 1966, 17; "No Change In H.K. As Naval Base," *SCMP* 28 September 1966, 7; "No agreement to use HK," *China Mail* 23 November 1966, 1; "Peking charges HK used as U.S. war base," *China Mail* 30 December 1966, 3; "Hanoi Says U.S. Using Hongkong As Military Base," *China Mail* 5 January 1967, 3; "Russian paper says U.S. taking control of Hongkong," *China Mail* 23 February 1967, 3; "U.S. carrier's HK visit off," *China Mail* 28 July 1967, 2; "CHINA BLAST OVER U.S. SHIPS IN HK," *China Mail* 28 September 1967, 5; "Government refutes China's war base charges," *SCMP* 16 May 1968, 8; "Get those warships out—China," *China Mail* 28 May 1968, 1; **for British correspondence on U.S. naval visits, see:** "Chinese reaction to US naval visit to Hong Kong," FO 371/175905, 1964, The National Archive (BNA); "Facilities for US armed forces in Hong Kong," CO 1030/1557, 1965, BNA; "Reactions to US naval visits to Hong Kong," FO371/180973, 1965, BNA; "U.S. attitude to Hong Kong trading policy," FO371/183479, 1965, BNA; "Parliamentary Question: Chinese interest in US ships in Hong Kong," CO 1030/1738, 1966, BNA; "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (USA). Visits of US naval vessels to Hong Kong: Chinese protests," PREM 13/1253, 1966, BNA.

Hercules crash, a U.S. C-123 Provider went missing mid-flight between Nha Trang and Taiwan; two U.S. and two RAF planes conducted the search out of Kai Tak. In October 1965, a crippled U.S. C-47 barely averted a disaster during an emergency landing at Kai Tak. Two Hongkong Auxiliary Air Force helicopters mobilized for search and rescue and escorted the C-47 in for landing. There were limits to this assistance, as when the *U.S.S. Forrestal* suffered a terrible fire on July 29, 1967. Although Hong Kong was the closest port, repairing a carrier would have provoked Beijing. The *Forrestal* instead went to the U.S. base at Subic Bay. Thus, although Anglo-American officials consistently denied Beijing's accusations and made accommodations, Hong Kong was not just a holiday center.⁸

The U.S. military was also purchasing important supplies in Hong Kong. Historian Stephen Dorril has reported that MI6 clandestinely shipped napalm and bombs from Hong Kong to Vietnam. When the crippled C-47 landed at Kai Tak in October 1965, it was “on a mission to pick up PX supplies in Hongkong.” While not munitions, things like candy bars, beer, shaving cream, aftershave, soap, and cigarettes improved troops' morale and gave millions of dollars to Hong Kong retailers. A year later, another C-47 left Hong Kong for Da Nang with 3,700 pounds of “radio and recording equipment for a new services club.” The day before the Hercules crash, the *SCMP* reported that two garment factories in Kowloon had received orders from the U.S. military for more than 30,000 winter uniforms for Vietnam servicemen. In March 1966, “certain agents” of the Pentagon also contracted

⁸ **For CIA, consulate, and U.S.I.S., see:** Michael Share, *Where Empires Collided, Russian and Soviet Relations with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macao* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2007), 143-144; Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, 1945-1992: Uncertain Friendships* (New York: Twayne, 1994), 206; Chikwan Mark, *Hong Kong and the Cold War: Anglo-American Relations, 1949-1957* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 34, **for search and rescue, see:** “U.S. Warship Aground Near H.K.,” *SCMP* 3 August 1965, 8; “Fate of stranded U.S. warship a mystery,” *SCSP-H* 22 August 1965, 1; “U.S. Military Aircraft Missing,” *SCMP* 2 September 1965, 1; “RAF Shackleton takes off from Kai Tak; search for plane resumes,” *China Mail* 2 September 1965, 1; “Crippled plane lands safely,” *China Mail* 7 October 1965, 1.

local shipyards to build “as many barges as Hongkong yards could build” for use on Vietnam’s rivers and in Saigon’s congested port. Moreover, the military’s rush ordering allowed the shipyards to reap “big profits” of HKD\$100,000-200,000 per vessel. Three months later, the U.S. Consulate-General inquired about ordering 76 more patrol boats for the Vietnamese National Police Force, provoking a flurry of correspondence between Hong Kong and Westminster. The colony’s total trade with South Vietnam increased by almost 80 percent in 1965 and the primary exports to Vietnam read like a servicemen’s shopping list: “tinned foods, metal wares, garments, shoes and socks, air conditioners, transistor radios, building materials, and optical goods.” Finally, in May 1966, U.S. officials investigated whether all this military purchasing in Hong Kong contravened Washington’s embargo on Beijing. Chairman of the Federal Maritime Commission John Harllee blurted out that U.S. “war supplies” were shipping through Hong Kong. While the U.S. Consulate scrambled to insist that only non-strategic goods like cement and candy bars passed through the port, the damage was done. Alaska Senator Ernest Gruening charged the U.S. Navy procurement office in Hong Kong with making “substantial purchases of electronic or other equipment from two firms...affiliated with China” and launched an investigation. As Beijing alleged and Gruening feared, Hong Kong was providing very convenient supplies and services to the U.S. war effort.⁹

⁹ Stephen Dorril, *MI6: Fifty Years of Special Operations* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), 719-720; for U.S. purchasing, see: “Crippled plane lands safely,” *China Mail* 7 October 1965, 1; “Crippled American plane makes safe emergency landing at Kai Tak,” *SCSP-H* 25 September 1966, 1; “U.S. Uniforms Ordered Here,” *SCMP* 23 August 1965, 1; “H.K. Yards Get Orders For Many Barges,” *SCMP* 11 March 1966, 1; “Big Increase In H.K.’s Trade With South Vietnam,” *SCMP* 22 February 1966, 13; “ROW OVER NAVY’S HONGKONG BARGES,” *SCMP* 25 February 1967, 18; “U.S. complaint at barges built in HK,” *China Mail* 25 February 1967, 1; “HK NOT WAR SUPPLY PORT: U.S. officials embarrassed at report,” *China Mail* 5 May 1966, 1; “U.S. War Goods Go Direct To Vietnam,” *SCMP* 6 May 1966, 6; “U.S. NAVY BUYS GOODS FROM PEKING-OWNED FIRMS IN HONGKONG?” *SCMP* 20 May 1966, 1; **for patrol boat correspondence, see:**

While Washington denied the implications of supply purchasing and search and rescue operations, U.S. strategists still designated Hong Kong as one of three “safehavens” for regional personnel. In February 1965 amidst the coup against General Nguyen Khanh, President Johnson ordered more than 1,800 dependents in South Vietnam to evacuate to Hong Kong, Manila and Bangkok. The first group of fifty arrived in Hong Kong from Da Nang and Hue on February 9. By March 10, many women had announced their intention to stay and began renting apartments. This pattern of using Hong Kong as a semi-official American ‘haven’ continued throughout the war. In January 1966 the *Cleveland Press* and the Mandarin Oriental hotel sponsored a contest that provided complimentary trips for four Vietnam servicemen and their families to reunite in the colony. In April 1966 U.S. authorities “manhandled” six pacifists of the Committee for Non-Violent Action attempting to demonstrate outside the U.S. Embassy Saigon onto a Pan Am flight for Hong Kong. In November 1967 and January 1968, American pacifist Dr. Earle Reynolds stocked his yacht, the *Phoenix*, with medical supplies in Hong Kong and sailed to South Vietnam. When the South Vietnamese government expelled *Newsweek*’s Saigon bureau chief Everett Martin on January 2, 1968, he too fled to Hong Kong and continued to denounce the war. Perhaps most significantly, during 1968’s Tet Offensive, U.S. officials visiting South Vietnam like Utah Senator Frank Moss evacuated to Hong Kong. From outspoken pacifists and journalists to dependents and officials at risk, the British colony operated as a consistently useful outlet for U.S. military planners—to say nothing of the strategic value of such a convenient R&R destination for maintaining troops’ morale. GIs’ holidays were Hong

“Proposed U.S. purchase of defence equipment (patrol boats for South Vietnamese Police) from Hong Kong: implications for relations with North Vietnam and China,” CO 1030/1739, 1966, BNA.

Kong's principal experience of the war, but residents could not have seen everything happening behind the scenes: intensive high-level diplomacy, surreptitious espionage and military purchasing, and a stream of U.S. planes and ships using the city's facilities.¹⁰

The Vietnam Boom

As useful as Hong Kong's location, facilities, and services proved to be for the U.S. military, most Hong Kong people experienced the war in a very practical way: in dollars and cents. Scholars have noted that the Korean War powerfully affected Hong Kong's economy, as the American embargo of China drastically reduced the colony's entrepôt trade and stimulated industrial development. While other scholars have pointed out the financial burden that Vietnamese boat people later brought to the colony, few have underscored that the Vietnam War itself was an enormous stimulus to the Hong Kong economy. While the U.S. military's purchasing was important, by far the largest benefit came from the servicemen's R&R visits.¹¹

On August 18, 1967, the *SCMP* reported the five-day visit of the aircraft carrier *U.S.S. Hornet* and its four-destroyer escort. The article's headline gleefully summarized what each GI influx meant: "4,000 with \$1,140 each..." When the *Hercules* crashed in August

¹⁰ See: State to Amembassy Saigon, Bangkok, Hong Kong and Manila, Feb. 7, 1965, NSFCF Vietnam, Box 13, "Vol. XXVII, Vietnam Memos, 2/1-8/65, [1 o 2]," LBJL; "Dependents May Come To H.K.," *SCMP* 9 February 1965, 1; "Women and Children Arrive From Vietnam," *SCMP* 10 February 1965, 1; "Social Gathering For Vietnam Evacuees," *SCMP* 5 March 1965, 5; "Vietnam Evacuees Meet For Lunch," *SCMP* 11 March 1965, 5; "Up from Saigon: JOYOUS REUNIONS AT KAI TAK," 4 January 1966, 7; "Mrs Cabot Lodge Here For Short Stay," 21 April 1966, 7; "Ejected American Pacifists Arrive In Hong Kong," *SCMP* 22 April 1966, 1; [Picture and caption of the *Phoenix*], *SCMP* 15 November 1967, 1; "Expelled U.S. correspondent says Vietnam war is growing bigger," *SCMP* 13 January 1968, 1; "Maryann is off to the war," *China Mail* 23 January 1968, 3; "Phoenix Leaves Again For Haiphong," *SCMP* 24 January 1968, 7; "Viet Cong wanted a psychological victory—U.S. Senator," *SCMP* 2 February 1968, 7.

¹¹ **For the Korean War and Hong Kong, see:** Ray Yep, "The 1967 riots in Hong Kong: The domestic and diplomatic fronts of the governor," in Bickers and Yep, eds., *May Days in Hong Kong*, 26; **for the Vietnamese boat people, see:** Leonard Davis, *Hong Kong and the Asylum-Seekers from Vietnam* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1991); Joyce S.H. Chang, Brenda Ku, Lum Bik, and Betty Anna Maheu, *They Sojourned in Our Land: The Vietnamese in Hong Kong, 1975-2000* (Hong Kong: Social Work Services Division, Caritas-HK, 2002).

1965, the Hongkong Tourism Association estimated that each serviceman spent USD\$80 on an R&R visit. By 1967, however, the Association more than doubled that figure to USD\$200 (HKD\$1,140). Indeed, only a month before the *Horne's* visit, Cultural Revolution riots forced the aircraft carrier *U.S.S. Constellation* to cancel its impending visit. The *China Mail* lamented this development with the bolded text: “**Its crew was expected to spend more than HK\$5 million here.**” Thus, a weekend visit from a carrier like the *Constellation* or the *Horne's* group could bring USD\$800,000-1 million (HKD\$5-5.5 million). At nearly 200,000 servicemen's visits a year, Hong Kong was earning at least USD\$40 million (HKD\$228 million) a year off servicemen. In 1968, cease-fire rumors provoked the *SCMP* to put the figure as high as USD\$63 million (HKD\$360 million). *Time* also cited USD\$60 million. In 2009 dollars, the annual figure would be USD\$300-400 million.¹²

This income is extraordinary unto itself, but even more so in the context of Hong Kong's economic history. Despite intense poverty and overcrowding, by 1967 Hong Kong's economy was highly industrialized and export-driven. The textile industry was the colony's largest, accounting for exports valued at HKD\$2,317 million. The second largest industry was plastics, exporting HKD\$833 million. Even with the lowest estimate of annual earnings of HKD\$228 million, servicemen's holidays surpassed the third and fourth largest industries, small electronics and wigs with HKD\$210 million and HKD\$197 million, respectively. While not strictly an “industry,” Vietnam tourism was nonetheless a major pillar of the local economy. Its overall impact is difficult to measure, however, as GIs spent their dollars

¹² “4,000 with \$1,140 each...,” *SCMP* 18 August 1967, 6; “U.S. carrier's HK visit off,” *China Mail* 28 July 1967, 2; “Hong Kong: Cheer in the Year of the Rooster,” 28 February 1969; in the late 1960s USD\$1 purchased HKD\$5.5-5.7. All historical currency conversions calculated through www.measuringworth.com.

between hotels, restaurants, bars, taxis, tailors, and stores. Even more difficult to calculate is the sums servicemen spent on illicit ventures like prostitution and drugs.¹³

While further research is required to explore these issues, for now eyewitness testimony confirms that R&R dollars concentrated primarily into Hong Kong's entertainment and service industries. In describing the program, *Time* labeled each holiday a "Recreation: Five-Day Bonanza." Indian author and journalist T.J.S. George wrote a 1968 article on Hong Kong's R&R business for Mumbai's *Economic and Political Weekly* entitled "Oh, What a Lovely War!" He described how "we have been seeing these arrivals in planeloads and shiploads." When "an aircraft carrier ties up in the harbour...that one boat is enough to fill Wanchai and Tsimshatsui, the sprawling bar districts of this Colony." Andrew Coe points out in his history of Hong Kong's American Club (as does Richard Mason in *The World of Suzie Wong*), "bar girls knew when a warship was due to arrive well before the local Navy attaché." Visits to tailor shops were also *de rigueur*, as described by Second Lieutenant in the 101st Airborne and future General Manager of the American Club, Doug Holtz:

"My first stops were to check in at the old President Hotel and find a tailor shop...Twelve shirts, three sport coats, a mohair topcoat and eight or ten pairs of slacks were the basic load for most visiting officers. If you were really smart, you also picked up a solid gold Rolex watch for US\$50. Then it was off to Wanchai and a visit to the wonderful world of Suzie Wong."

In 1984, the Royal Navy's China Fleet Club produced a fiftieth anniversary history of their Wan Chai social club; the volume titled the late 1960s and early 1970s as "Vietnam – The Boom Years."¹⁴

¹³ *Hong Kong, Report for the Year 1967* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Government Press, 1968), 46-51.

¹⁴ "Recreation: Five-Day Bonanza," *Time* 22 December 1967; T.J.S. George, "Oh, What a Lovely War!" *Economic and Political Weekly* 16 November 1968, 1752; Andrew Coe, *Eagles and Dragons: A History of Americans in China and the Origins of the American Club Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Twin Age Limited, 1997), 168, 184; Richard

In addition to the hospitality, tailoring, and entertainment industries, many residents struggling at the bottom of Hong Kong's socio-economic pyramid found innovative ways to make a living off R&R. One notable example is the local legend "Mary Soo" and her crew. In the mid-1960s, Hong Kong's population included over 100,000 Tanka and Hoklo people living aboard fishing junks. Born into this "floating population" around 1910, "Soo Mei" and friends began cleaning British and visiting U.S. warships in the 1930s in return for the right to remove garbage. They sorted what they collected: leftover mess hall food for refugees, garbage was sold to farmers for livestock, and valuables like rope or wire were re-sold for cash. By the 1960s, it was an "unwritten rule of the Seventh Fleet that only Mary Soo's girls may come aboard a United States Navy ship in Hong Kong." Moreover, Soo employed only young women from the floating population. She paid them a decent wage and by 1966 the *SCMP* reported that Soo had seven sampans and more than 40 girls in her employ. In 1968, the *New York Times* claimed that the U.S. Navy's new cash deals with Soo had enabled her to hire a dozen men who undertook the "more demanding work." While Soo built a good working relationship with U.S. officers, she also encountered ugly incidents and tension while aboard those warships. When asked what she thought of newspapers dubbing her the "Queen of Garbage," she responded in Chinese: "You must be joking. I barely make a living out of this job." Moreover, when a GI joked that her employees were really "yum-yum girls from the dance halls," Soo "slammed down her cup of coffee," called the man a liar, and said in English: "My girls no yum-yum girls. They good work-work girls." Soo's entrepreneurship testifies to the opportunities that many poor residents made

Mason, *The World of Suzie Wong*; Brigid Snow, ed., *China Fleet Club, Royal Navy, Hong Kong, Golden Jubilee, 1934-1984* (Hong Kong: PPA Design Limited, 1984), The University of Hong Kong Special Collections.

from these Vietnam holidays. At the same time, Soo honed sharp cultural and business acumen and rose to defend her employees. While her business pre-dated U.S. operations in Vietnam, there is no doubt that when U.S. naval visits dwindled, so did her business.¹⁵

Soo lived an exceptional life, yet her encounter with the Vietnam War testifies to the extraordinary economic stimulus the war brought to Hong Kongers of all walks of life. Even the colonial elite marveled at Soo's success. In May 1968, the *SCMP*'s social column featured a report from a recent party at the Commodore's House where "the conversation inevitably drifted round to those girls who clean and paint Her Majesty's ships (and LBJ's too) in exchange for the kitchen scraps and any old materials." GIs' dollars became critical to a range of local entrepreneurs and profiting from the holidays was a matter of widespread public interest and excitement. The local press often featured stories comparing Hong Kong's R&R business to similar destinations like Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan, and Australia. In February 1966 the *SCMP* reported rumors that servicemen's spending was damaging South Vietnam's economy and that U.S. officials hoped to divert GIs' dollars to destinations like Hong Kong. The paper noted that servicemen had spent more on R&R in Hong Kong in 1965 than the entire governmental budget of South Vietnam.¹⁶

¹⁵ "Fascinating World Of Mary Soo: 'QUEEN OF GARBAGE' IN 23rd YEAR OF REIGN," *SCMP* 28 December 1966, 6; Art Buchwald, "Mary Soo, Queen of Garbage," *Los Angeles Times* 26 May 1960, B5; Art Buchwald, "Hers Are Work-Work Girls: The Garbage Queen of the Orient," *The Washington Post* 31 July 1960, E5; Robert M. Blanchard, "COOLIES PAINT SHIP: Labor for Garbage Deal Angers Senator," *Los Angeles Times* 30 April 1965, 3; "Mary Soo, to Sailors' Delight, Does Ship Chores in Hong Kong," *New York Times* 1 December 1968.

¹⁶ "Oh, by the way: Side parties," *SCMP* 25 May 1968, 10; "U.S. Servicemen May Spend More in H.K.," *SCMP* 26 February 1966, 7; **for other Vietnam tourism booms, see:** "U.S. Purchases In Singapore Brings Minor Boom," *SCMP* 31 December 1965, 13; "Noisy Demonstrations In Penang Against U.S. Troops On Leave," *SCMP* 25 June 1966, 1; "VIETNAM WAR LIFTS JAPAN OUT OF TRADE RECESSION," *SCMP* 11 October 1965, 15; "Qualms Over U.S. Servicemen's Visits Produce Quick Defense [Sydney]," *SCMP* 7 June 1967, 19; Stuart Griffin, "PEACE IN VIETNAM MAY AFFECT JAPAN'S ECONOMY," *SCMP* 18 July 1967, 13; "Rest Centre For U.S. Troops," *SCMP* 18 August 1967, 20.

Profiting from pleasure-seeking servicemen was, in fact, such a tantalizing opportunity that some Hong Kongers committed their own crimes in order to take advantage. These crimes were generally financially motivated. On New Years' Day 1965, Wong Man, 24, stole HKD\$30 from Howard Fuller, Jr., of the *U.S.S. Ranger*. In June 1965, the courts convicted Wong Kai, 27, and an unnamed fifteen year-old girl of stealing HKD\$130 from a sailor's breast pocket. Wong's five previous convictions compounded his sentence to 18 months, while the court remanded the girl to seven days' jail and probation. More commonly, Hong Kong courts convicted residents of vending pornography to American servicemen. In March 1965 a policeman saw Lee Kam-ting, 20, in an alley off Lockhart Road offering "incident literature and pictures" for sale to a sailor. The court fined him HKD\$50. The next day, police arrested Chan Kwok-kin, 29, for "exposing 32 pictures of an indecent nature" and offering them to American sailors outside 58 Gloucester Road. He was fined HKD\$250. Two months later police again arrested Chan and fined him HKD\$300. On November 9, 1967 police arrested Yuen Kwai-wah, 38, after he approached American sailors shouting: "Hey, you want dirty books!" Judge Garcia fined him HKD\$250. The pornography issue was prolific: during 1967 the Hong Kong government conducted multiple raids on pornography storehouses and arrested 135 people. That December, Director of Social Welfare Alistair Todd proposed to the Urban Council that the government criminalize the possession and vending of obscene matter.¹⁷

¹⁷ "Stole from U.S. Sailor," *SCMP* 8 January 1965, 11; "Man Jailed For Stealing From Sailor," *SCMP* 10 June 1965, 8; "Indecent Literature," *SCMP* 18 March 1965, 8; "Fined For Exposing Indecent Pictures," *SCMP* 19 March 1965, 8; "Indecent Pictures For Sale," *SCMP* 1 June 1965, 8; "Indecent Photos," *China Mail* 23 December 1965, 1; "Tempted Sailors With Dirty Books," *SCMP* 11 November 1967, 8; "PORNOGRAPHY: GOVT WILL HIT AT PEDDLERS," *China Mail* 21 December 1967, 3; "Urban Council: ACTION BEING TAKEN ON PORNOGRAPHY," *SCMP* 22 December 1967, 7.

The full extent of R&R's economic imprint emerges most clearly from Wan Chai and Tsim Sha Tsui's post-Vietnam hangover. When U.S. troops withdrew from South Vietnam and major combat ended in January 1973, Hong Kong experienced a "sharp drop" in servicemen's visits. While the late 1960s witnessed nearly 200,000 visitors a year, by 1972 they numbered 110,000. In 1973 total visits dropped again to 70,000. The impact on servicemen's former haunts was severe. Leung Kang of the Cave Bar reported business had "dropped by more than 50 per cent since the U.S. pull-out from South Vietnam." The Christmas 1973 visit of the *U.S.S. Okinawa* brought HKD\$3 million in relief for "hundreds of...hard pressed...bar hostesses, bar and restaurant operators, tailor shops and novelty stores." During the Paracels Islands crisis of late January 1974, papers relished the "bonus for HK" with three carrier visits in two weeks from the *U.S.S. Oriskany*, *Midway*, and *Ranger*. In November 1974, the *U.S.S. Enterprise* and its escorts arrived with more than 6,500 "free-spending American sailors." Under the giant headline "SUZIE WONG'S GHOST COMES TO LIFE," the tabloid *The Star* used the American Consulate's wild overestimate that each sailor "could easily spend \$500 a day" to calculate a gigantic weekend receipt of HKD\$23 million. Wan Chai's bars were reportedly "packed out," restaurants were reporting "a roaring trade," and "tailors were working overtime." Small businessmen told the *Star* that it would be "the most profitable week in about two years" and "a very much need [sic] shot in the arm for a dwindling trade." *Star* reporter William Cheung wrote: "Bar operators and tailors in Wanchai were putting on a happier face with the arrival of the American sailors." Bar-owner Albert Lo stated: "We hope the arrival of *Enterprise* will mean more American warships docking here."¹⁸

¹⁸ "Sharp drop in U.S. servicemen visiting Colony," *SCMP* 20 December 1973; "Wanchai smiles as Americans

GIs' dollars were thus a fraught blessing, bringing needed dollars but also creating dependence, social tensions, and crises of principle. Disparities of power and privilege defined residents and servicemen's interactions, as both Mary Soo and Lee Man discovered. Chan Kwok-kin too received harsh punishment for catering to GIs' pornography cravings. Other residents abstained on principle from participating in the war and refused to profit from violence. When the Pentagon rush-ordered barges from local shipyards, the press reported: "certain local shipyards have refused to accept orders because they did not want to be involved in anything political." This refusal stemmed from both principle and shrewd calculation: accepting Washington's orders fostered dependence and exposed small businesses to political backlash. Even when they did profit from the war, Hong Kong firms had to stay ahead of the curve. In February 1966, Washington blacklisted two Hong Kong-registered freighters for trading with North Vietnam and threatened further action. The press reported that the business community was unfazed, however, because local ship-owners had done "what they could to avoid being involved in any dispute such as this" and "had restricted their activity to North Vietnam since the Americans started 'talking' about possible blacklisting." Americans' dollars brought welcome business but also manufactured contentious new concerns. The political implications of GIs' dollars were just the beginning. Servicemen's own crimes and excesses inconvenienced, distressed, and insulted residents across Hong Kong society.¹⁹

return," *SCMP* 27 December 1973; "Paracels crisis a bonus for HK," *SCMP* 19 February 1974; "Suzie Wong days are back..." *The Hongkong Star* 17 November 1974; "Yankee doodle dandy," *The Hongkong Star* 19 November 1974; "SUZIE WONG'S GHOST COMES TO LIFE," *The Hongkong Star* 20 November 1974; "U.S. Navy on a spree," *SCMP* 6 December 1974; "A \$10mil shot in the arm for Wanchai," *The Hongkong Star* 6 June 1975; all in: "G.I.S. Press: U.S. Servicemen in Hong Kong," HKRS 70-7-598, HKPRO.

¹⁹ "H.K. Yards Get Orders For Many Barges," *SCMP* 11 March 1966, 1; "U.S. Blacklisting Little Effect on H.K. Shipping," *SCMP* 15 February 1966, 13.

It is noteworthy that the problems stemming from R&R parallel the experiences of other locations around the world that have hosted the U.S. military. Maria Höhn has shown that postwar U.S. military bases in West Germany stimulated a huge entertainment boom of *Ami-Bars* and *Animierdamen* in the Rhineland-Palatinate towns of Baumholder and Kaiserslautern. This influx provoked intense sexual and racialized anxieties and a local conservative backlash against Americanization. Höhn argues that these U.S. garrisons powerfully affected 1950s West Germany, importing everything from stylish consumerism to Jim Crow. Brenda Stoltzfus and Sandra Sturdevant have recovered in great detail the human toll that U.S. military bases have exacted on women in towns like Angeles and Olongapo in the Philippines, Uijongbu and Tong Du Chon [Uijeongbu and Dongducheon] in South Korea, and Kin in Okinawa. Katharine H. S. Moon has further explored the social and foreign policy implications of over one million South Korean women serving as government-sponsored “sex providers” to the U.S. military since the 1950s. Finally, Cynthia Enloe has analyzed the “global gender structure” that continues to surround international military bases, including the constellation of U.S. bases from Great Britain to the Philippines.²⁰

Vietnam tourism in Hong Kong enriches and complicates these international studies. Hong Kong was a much bigger city than all these communities and not hosting a permanent garrison. This difference in length of stay simultaneously constrained and intensified GIs’ experiences in the colony: there were fewer opportunities to build meaningful relationships,

²⁰ Maria Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 109-126; Sandra Pollock Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus, *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U.S. Military in Asia* (New York: The New Press, 1992); Katharine H. S. Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 1; Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 65-92.

but also powerful incentives to make the most of those days. Indeed, the colony hosted U.S. troops at their wealthiest and most wild: on R&R, everyday was payday and every week brought new batches of servicemen. “The World of Suzie Wong” came to signify Wan Chai and TST’s ever-increasing numbers of “honky tonk” bars and their legions of female workers, called “bar girls” (吧女) or “yum-yum girls.” The U.S. military hardly brought prostitution to Hong Kong or even to Wan Chai. Spring Garden Lane and Swatow Street housed brothels from the colony’s founding. Moreover, Philippa Levine has shown British servicemen’s encounters with prostitution and venereal disease in Hong Kong were of long-standing concern to imperial authorities in London. Yet, American R&R was so massive as to transform these old patterns and profoundly affect the society of this host community, just as U.S. Cold War garrisons did in West Germany, the Philippines, South Korea, and Okinawa.²¹

Servicemen’s Release and Public Attention

In September 1965, a month after the Hercules crash, local businessman Victor Mamak spoke out against the threat he perceived debauched servicemen were bringing to the Hong Kong community. Speaking before the Lions Club of Kowloon, Mamak declared: “Hongkong should not be regarded as the world of Suzie Wong, a shopping paradise or a place where one could get drunk at a cheap price, but as a haven for many tortured souls from China.” Mamak sought to define Hong Kong by the millions who fled there from Mao. He ascribed a moral tenor to the city’s status as a political and economic refuge and

²¹ Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003); **for images of pre-war Wan Chai’s brothels, see:** Tong Cheuk Man, David P. M. Toong, Alan S. K. Cheung, and Mo Yu Kai, *A Selective Collection of Hong Kong Historic Postcards* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (H.K.) Co., Ltd., 1993).

rejected a competing vision of the city that he found distasteful and unnerving: the Hong Kong of American servicemen's fantasies. Yet, Mamak's statement inadvertently acknowledges this visible presence all around him. He did not realize that his description of Hong Kong as 'a haven for many tortured souls' beautifully encapsulated the role the city was also playing for hundreds of thousands of American GIs serving in Vietnam.²²

By virtue of both their appearance and their behavior, American servicemen were a conspicuous presence in Hong Kong. If a carrier group was in port, the whole city knew. In the 1960s every resident who commuted back and forth between Kowloon and Hong Kong Island had to take the Star Ferry, cruising past massive U.S. warships at anchor. These warships alone provoked both fascination and social tension. On June 24, 1966, resident Leslie Dennis wrote a letter to the editor of the *China Mail* entitled "U.S. Pollution." Crossing recently on the ferry, Dennis "could hardly believe [his] eyes to see great loads of garbage being dumped into the harbour at the stern of one of the American destroyers anchored near Star Ferry crossing." Dennis wrote furiously: "privileged parties can pollute the harbour at will and evidently with blessing [sic] of Marine Department." Even without disembarking their ships—and even with Mary Soo's crew reducing their trash—visiting U.S. servicemen and their detritus exemplified privilege, even to a European resident like Dennis who was himself very privileged. But disembark servicemen did. When uniformed, they were a distinct part of Hong Kong's daily streetscape. A 1967 political cartoon from the series "As Others See Us" by French Hong Kong resident "Zabo" testifies to that experience (fig. 1). Entitled "Cosmopolitan Nathan Road," Zabo presents a frenetic if caricatured picture of Hong Kong society as displayed on Kowloon's largest thoroughfare. We see elderly Chinese

²² "Haven For Tortured Souls," *SCMP* 25 September 1965, 6.

hawkers, Japanese and American tourists, Indian residents, shouting Red Guards, a kilted Scotsman, and even an alien. There are also several American GIs. In the right foreground a uniformed serviceman towers over passers-by and holds a Chinese girlfriend's hand. Behind the Red Guards stand two more GIs, looking puzzled. Even on good behavior, servicemen stuck out on the colony's busy streets. And if U.S. ships and garbage left a disheartening social wake (as well as environmental toll), then liberated, spendthrift servicemen had even greater potential to shock, distress, and anger residents.²³

It is perfectly understandable that servicemen were not the calmest visitors. R&R holidays were primarily about release: whether fighting in this traumatizing war, confined onboard a naval ship for months at a time, or simply far from home, these very young men looked forward to a few days' liberation in Hong Kong. *Time* called them "five carefree days, single-mindedly devoted to the pursuit of pleasure." Combat psychiatrist Douglas Bey describes R&R trips as moments of "luxury and overindulgence." At the same time, when GIs confronted the "reality of 'the world'" during their holiday, many became "anxious" about returning to combat and became "unable to function." Thus, in addition to shopping and sightseeing like any other tourist, servicemen were often drunk, loud, and in pursuit of forbidden comforts. Bey reports that a prevalent nickname for R&R was "I&I, or intoxication and intercourse." Most U.S. servicemen did not commit crimes in Hong Kong and often engaged in local athletic competitions and charity work while in the colony; however, many GIs did overindulge in alcohol and narcotics and some holidays unraveled into violence and destruction. There are far too many cases to discuss here, but a sampling

²³ Zabo, "As Others See Us: Cosmopolitan Nathan Road," *SCSP-H* 20 August 1967, 19; also see: Zabo, *Hong Kong: Sweet and Sour, Dollars Billets Doux* (Kowloon: Lorraine Langridge, 1967); Leslie C. Dennis, "Dear Sir: U.S. Pollution," *China Mail* 24 June 1966, 10.

of striking and very public incidents will illuminate the way many Hong Kongers experienced this war.²⁴

For some servicemen, Hong Kong appeared as a very literal haven and they went AWOL upon reaching the colony. On November 28, 1965, Apprentice Seaman Edwin Armstrong, 17, disappeared. He disembarked from a U.S. warship in civilian clothes. Hours later, he was “last seen in the Wanchai area...in the company of two Chinese men.” The police conducted a vigorous search while the government managed daily inquiries from all the major English and Chinese newspapers. Armstrong re-appeared on December 10 at the Lo Wu boundary with China. He claimed to have wandered “by mistake” into the PRC and “spent nine days as an uninvited guest.” Mainland authorities released him “after he admitted his ‘error.’” How and why Armstrong went to China remains puzzling, but it is difficult to imagine his adventure was unintentional. When the *U.S.S. Kitty Hawk* visited Hong Kong in February 1966, three servicemen took the opportunity to jump ship. One reported to authorities two days later, but K. C. Hickman and J. J. Carney remained at large. In the same

²⁴ “Recreation: Five-Day Bonanza,” *Time* 22 December 1967; Douglas Bey, *Wizard 6: A Combat Psychiatrist in Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006), 156-157, 173; **for servicemen’s charity, see:** “U.S. Sailors Give Blood,” *SCMP* 17 March, 1965, 9; “Children Visit U.S. Carrier,” *SCMP* 2 December 1965, 7; “U.S. Sailors Assist Children,” *SCMP* 8 April 1966, 10; “U.S. Ambulances For Hongkong Hospitals,” *SCMP* 28 May 1966, 9; “U.S. sailors work at HK orphanage,” *China Mail* 29 July 1966, 10; “U.S. Sailors Give Blood,” *SCMP* 15 September 1966, 5; “Sailors Pay For Schooling,” *SCMP* 5 November 1966, 1; “Round Table Members Tour Wanchai Area On Fund-Raising Drive,” *SCMP* 22 December 1966, 11; “U.S. Sailor Rescues Boys,” *SCMP* 8 May 1967, 1; “Fun On Board An American Warship,” *SCMP* 22 September 1967, 1; “TREAT FOR CHILDREN FROM WALLED CITY ON U.S. WARSHIP,” *SCMP* 22 September 1967, 8; “SAILORS RESCUED JUST IN TIME,” *China Mail* 8 November 1967, 2; “Doubleheader Shared With U.S. Sailors: Yesterday’s Big Softball Matches,” *SCMP* 11 December 1967, 2; “U.S. Sailor’s Good Fortune While Here,” *SCMP* 14 December 1967, 11; “Out of the war comes a lasting friendship,” *China Mail* 26 March 1968, 6; “Wants to join band of U.S. warship,” *SCMP* 27 March 1968, 1; “Handicapped children had a treat at sea,” *SCMP* 29 March 1968, 6.

few days, another serviceman who went missing in January turned up in the Philippines. In January 1967 three American servicemen were still at large in Hong Kong.²⁵

An AWOL case that gained considerable attention in the Chinese and English press was the two-and-a-half-month absence of William Polinroi, 24. Missing from duty since October 4, 1966, a policeman found Polinroi “aimlessly” wandering on Mount Kellett Road near the Peak on December 21. The *SCMP* and *China Mail* were tight-lipped about Polinroi’s case, but *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei Po* relished the embarrassing details. Under the sarcastic headline “Better As Wild Men, Unsuitable For Cannon-Fodder” (寧作野人 不當炮灰), *Wen Wei Po* commented that Polinroi was desperate to avoid “being sent back to his death in Vietnam.” U.S. military police had scoured the colony for weeks, but had no leads until Peak residents began reporting break-ins and stolen food. Police searched the Peak’s dense forests and as *Wen Wei Po* dryly questioned, “Who knew that in the process of searching the mountain, they would discover a U.S. soldier who should be missing for over two months, going to the lengths of hiding in the middle of the forest?” Polinroi further extended his stay by committing himself to Castle Peak Mental Hospital for “voluntary medical observation” and remained until February 15, 1967.²⁶

²⁵ “Joint Search: H.K. Police Looking For U.S. Sailor,” *SCMP* 6 December 1965, 1; “No Trace Of Missing Men,” *SCMP* 10 December 1965, 7; “U.S. Sailor Returns From ‘Uninvited’ Visit To China,” *SCMP* 11 December 1965, 9; “U.S. sailors missing in H.K.,” *China Mail* 16 February 1966, 1. “Missing U.S. Sailor In Custody,” *SCMP* 18 February 1966, 6; “Missing U.S. Sailor Found In P.I.,” *SCMP* 17 February 1966, 14; “3 U.S. sailors still missing,” *China Mail* 27 January 1967, 1; **for press questions to the government, see:** “G.I.S. Press: U.S. Servicemen in H.K.,” HKRS 70-3-764, HKPRO; also see: Robert Edward Mitchell, “How Hong Kong Newspapers Have Responded to 15 Years of Rapid Social Change,” *Asian Survey* 9.9 (Sept. 1969), 669-681.

²⁶ “Missing Man Found,” *SCMP* 22 December 1966, 11; “Wandering sailor sent to hospital,” *China Mail* 22 December 1966, 1; “寧作野人 不當炮灰, 美軍官匿山頂叢林, 西貢來港 失蹤兩月作被搜獲,” *Wen Wei Po* 文匯報 22 December 1966; “不願去南越送死, 山頂發美逃兵, 警員 見 [鬼]可能就是他,” *Ta Kung Pao* 大公報 22 December 1966; Government Information Services to *The Hongkong Star*, 9 March 1967, “G.I.S. Press: U.S. Servicemen in H.K.,” HKRS 70-3-764, HKPRO.

While Polinroi was determined to remain in the colony, Private William Clark was desperate to get to the haven of Hong Kong. On February 9, 1968, Clark snuck aboard a Pan Am flight carrying 83 troops from Da Nang to Hong Kong. The private stormed the cockpit, pointed a pistol at the pilot, and shouted: "Take me to Hongkong!" The pilot ordered the other passengers off the plane before radioing for assistance. As military police threw tear gas onto the plane, the pilots successfully wrestled the gun away from Clark. While his attempted hi-jacking was extreme, Clark's demand is telling. Even if he had never been to Hong Kong, the name and the prospect of refuge there were clearly tantalizing.²⁷

In a more tragic case, at least one American serviceman went further and attempted to commit suicide while on R&R. On August 2, 1966, the *SCMP* reported that a U.S. Marine had been found the previous evening "with wrist wounds in a room in a hotel in Kowloon...The police said no foul play was suspected." In the afternoon, the *China Mail* identified the Marine as Harold Smith, 19, and pithily confirmed that Smith "was found with cut wounds on his wrist." Smith's unfortunate case is nonetheless intriguing. As with Polinroi and cases to be discussed, Hong Kong's English press avoided reporting more than the bare details. While the United Kingdom was not engaged in Vietnam, its affiliates in Hong Kong generally supported the war-effort and danced around embarrassing information. Why Smith chose his course of action in Hong Kong is beyond this essay, but his relative liberty and freedom of action while on holiday likely contributed to his decisions.²⁸

²⁷ "U.S. MARINE'S BID TO HI-JACK H.K.-BOUND PLANE," *SCMP* 10 February 1968, 1.

²⁸ "U.S. Marine Found Injured," *SCMP* 2 August 1966, 7; "Marine found injured," *China Mail* 2 August 1966, 10.

Far more American servicemen were simply eager to enjoy their limited time in this exciting place, but many such adventures collided with the law. In some cases, their transgressions were consciously done—if not premeditated—and garnered huge and embarrassing press stories. The press widely credited American GIs with bringing the first significant quantities of marijuana into Hong Kong. In 1967 and 1968, several faced prosecution and jail-time for drug trafficking. In the case of Russell McHenry, 40, of the *U.S.S Hollister*, the GI took a tin of petrol to the second floor of 125 Lockhart Road on May 7, 1968, and attempted to burn down the building. A month later, four more American sailors broke into a flat at 66 Lockhart Road and began hurling objects. Three of the servicemen eventually agreed to leave, but the fourth refused and police had to tear gas the building in order to drag him out. The next morning, the front page of the *SCMP* featured a huge photograph of the shirtless, intoxicated sailor in handcuffs as British officers escorted him away. A spate of violent, headline making brawls between U.S. and British servicemen occurred in the colony. In the vast majority of criminal cases, however, servicemen's misdeeds appear to have stemmed from poor decisions of the moment. They tended to involve substance abuse and end in violent confrontation with Chinese residents. From the sheer volume of cases in the English press, as well as periodic condemnations in the Chinese papers, an inordinate number of servicemen became involved in taxicab altercations.²⁹

²⁹ **For marijuana, see:** "BIG H.K. MARKET FOR MARIJUANA," *SCSP-H* 24 December 1967, 1; "[Editorial] Stop this traffic," *SCSP-H* 24 December 1967, 12; "MARIJUANA SEIZED FROM GIs," *SCSP-H* 28 January 1968, 1; "MARINE ON HEMP IMPORT CHARGE," *SCSP-H* 3 March 1968, 1; "Marine had marijuana," *China Mail* 7 March 1968, 1; "TWO SOLDIERS HELD IN DRUG RAID," *SCMP* 26 July 1968, 6; "SERVICEMAN ACCUSED OF HAVING DRUGS," *SCMP* 27 July 1968, 6; "Soldier had marijuana cigarettes," *SCMP* 9 August 1968, 7; **for McHenry, see:** "ATTEMPTED TO SET FIRE TO BUILDING," *SCMP* 10 May 1968, 7; "NAVAL OFFICER JAILED ON HIS BIRTHDAY," *SCMP* 11 May 1968, 1; **for tear-gassed sailor:** "Tear-gas used to subdue sailor," *SCMP* 3 June 1968, 1; **for U.S.-British brawls, see:** "2 SOLDIERS JAILED FOR ROBBERY; Judge: Court will deal with teenage hooligans," *China Mail* 22 November 1966, 1; "Soldiers' Behaviour In Robbery Case Deplored By Judge," *SCMP* 23 November 1966, 8;

Often drunk, lost, and speaking no Cantonese, many servicemen confronted and attacked Hong Kong's taxi drivers. This complaint featured prominently in *Wen Wei Po's* editorial paragraph of January 24, 1965, headlined "Ugly American Sailors." The article reported that two Hong Kong labor unions had complained to authorities that American sailors were victimizing their members. In the previous month, U.S. servicemen twice had robbed taxi drivers and twice abused hotels' staff. Five months later on May 15, Gerald Jones, 19, and Charles Bates, 19, of the *U.S.S. Canberra* hailed the taxi of Lo Tak, 52, in Queen's Road. After Lo drove them to Wan Chai to buy liquor, Jones and Bates hijacked the taxi on its way to the Peak. Lo escaped but the men crashed the car, stealing what they could and causing HKD\$2,745 damage. Judge Pickering sentenced them to nine months' imprisonment. Around 4 AM on January 11, 1966, serviceman Chris Vanerau, 20, boarded the taxi of Lee King-hei in TST. After several journeys, Vanerau disputed the fare and then "the American drew out a pistol and struck the driver on the head and fled after taking some money." Vanerau pleaded guilty and the court sentenced him to two years and nine months. Without minimizing their violence, these taxicab incidents do not seem pre-meditated. Instead, they seem to be the result of confusion, inebriation, and potentially post-traumatic stress. Nonetheless, each serviceman's resort to violence is striking.³⁰

“今晨尖沙咀北京道，英美水兵毆鬥，十餘名被帶返警署去，” *Sing Tao* 星島 14 December 1966; “Brawl Outside Nightclub,” *SCMP* 15 December 1966, 6; “Servicemen fight,” *SCMP* 25 March 1968, 20; “No charge against servicemen,” *SCMP* 26 March 1968, 8; Frank Chuan, “R and R ‘peace’ move: Uniform by order,” *China Mail* 26 March 1974.

³⁰ “短評：醜惡的美國兵，” *Wen Wei Po* 文匯報 24 January 1965; “Two U.S. Sailors Admit Robbing Taxi Driver,” *SCMP* 18 June 1965, 8; “Two U.S. Sailors Jailed For Robbing Taxi Driver,” *SCMP* 29 June 1965, 13; “U.S. serviceman attacks taxi-driver,” *China Mail* 11 January 1966, 1; “U.S. Sailor Charged,” *SCMP* 12 January 1966, 9; “Another Charge Against U.S. Serviceman,” *SCMP* 15 January 1966, 8; “U.S. sailor gets two years’ jail for armed robbery,” *China Mail* 7 February 1966, 1; also see: “Sailor Fined For Traffic Offences,” *SCMP* 24 December 1964, 8; “Negroes Rob Taxi Driver,” *SCMP* 28 January 1966, 18.

While taxi confrontations were common, incidents onboard the Star Ferry itself provoked the broadest public outrage. Servicemen repeatedly delayed the crowded ferry, whether by throwing life buoys overboard or jumping into the harbor. An incident at the end of November 1966 proved to be a particular flashpoint. Clifford Green, 18, and Paul Philips, 19, of the *U.S.S. Kearsage* mistakenly boarded the wrong ferry at Wan Chai. When the GIs realized their mistake they “began asking questions from the passengers.” Upon discovering that “no one could give them an answer,” Green and Philips went to the ferry’s second level, overpowered the coxswain, and stopped the engine, leaving the ship adrift just as it approached the pier. Luckily, no one was injured. Judge Garcia reprimanded them for “endanger[ing] the lives of many people,” before fining each HKD\$275 and ordering them to pay HKD\$250 in compensation. *Wen Wei Po* compared the U.S. “troublemakers” to the Chinese god of plagues (瘟神). *Cheng Wu Pao* used the incident to make a broader point. Its editorial claimed these dangerous incidents showed the real price of hosting servicemen: from a “severe” impact on real estate development to “robbing taxi drivers,” “beating up bar girls,” and even “invading residences.” They “acted however they wanted” and treated “human life like grass.” The editorial declared that Hong Kongers opposed such “illegal and immoral behavior” and could not tolerate it from guests. The paper called on the government “hereafter to earnestly put a stop to U.S. sailors’ wild escapades, and earnestly take up its responsibilities to protect the lives of residents and their property’s security.” While language barriers certainly aggravated this case, Green and Philips did endanger hundreds of lives. Moreover, the public scrutiny of their misbehavior underscores that servicemen easily became conspicuous. Their mistakes—whether big or small, naive or

malicious—easily made lasting impressions. As *Cheng Wu Pao* declared, servicemen affected a broader range of social concerns and audiences in the colony than they realized.³¹

As evident in this paper's opening anecdote, servicemen's cravings for attention and release also commonly led to visits with local prostitutes. Although the act of prostitution was legal, solicitation, organized brothels, public indecency, and living off a prostitute's earnings were illegal. Tremendous numbers of servicemen visited Wan Chai and TST for sex, but the papers usually listed the arrests as "for exposure." On December 5, 1965 an inspector checked the staircase at 58 Gloucester Road and arrested Wesley Preston, 20, of the *U.S.S. Annapolis* for "indecently exposing himself in a public place." A "Chinese woman nearby escaped arrest" and Judge Garcia fined Preston HKD\$75. In April 1966, an inspector arrested Lionel Burns, 19, of the *U.S.S. Higbee* for "indecent exposure" and Leung Hing, 42, for "aiding and abetting Burns." Garcia fined both parties HKD\$75. On July 25, 1966, Judge Lau fined Donald Muir, 29, of the *U.S.S. Constellation* only HKD\$20 for "indecently exposing himself" but fined Tso Lee, 42, HKD\$40 for "aiding and abetting Muir." While Tso's higher fine appears unfair, all three of these cases shared a common location: numbers 58 and 60 Gloucester Road. These buildings sat at the corner of Gloucester and Luard Roads, which in the 1960s was the heart of Wan Chai's waterfront. These buildings were mere feet from Fenwick Pier where servicemen officially disembarked. Most U.S. warships in port anchored

³¹ "Sailors accused of assaulting ferry coxswain," *China Mail* 28 November 1966, 1; "U.S. Sailors Took Wrong Ferry For Their Ship," *SCMP* 29 November 1966, 8; "輪上胡鬧 毆辱船主, 美水兵遭千人喝打, '瘟神'原是紙老虎亂竄難逃終被擒," *Wen Wei Po* 文匯報 27 November 1966; "美兵失鬧渡輪事件," *Cheng Wu Pao* 29 November 1966; for other ferry incidents, see: "U.S. Marine On Nuisance Charge," *SCMP* 14 January 1965, 8; also see: "Two U.S. Sailors Charged," *SCMP* 13 January 1965, 12, "Threw Lifebuoys From Ferry," *SCMP* 18 March 1965, 8.

directly in front of these buildings. Like Philips and Martin, servicemen stepped off their ships into a neighborhood full of bars, cheap hotels, and sex workers.³²

While these cases ended only in fines, many others turned violent or even deadly. In the early hours of December 29, 1964, Wan Chai resident Yuen Luk was walking home from her shift at the Waltzing Matilda Restaurant. As she turned onto a lane behind Gloucester and Luard Roads, Yuen stumbled upon the corpse of Jerry Van Volkemberg, 21, of the *U.S.S. Chipola*. The inquiry by Dr. Lee Fook-kay confirmed that a significant “quantity of alcohol was present in the deceased’s blood and urine.” Local resident Bolington Chan Kwong-keung testified “the roofs in the area were fair commonly used by prostitutes whose customers were mostly servicemen.” The inquiry concluded that Van Volkemberg drunkenly fell from a height of 30-50 feet and fractured his skull. While no one was charged, the investigation tacitly acknowledged a common understanding: servicemen visited Wan Chai’s bars, rooftops, and staircases for commercial, interracial sex. These assumptions were also visible on March 15, 1970, when a resident found “the body of a Negro” in a different Wan Chai back alley. Before the deceased was identified, Hong Kong Police informed the press there was “a strong possibility that the deceased was a sailor from a visiting American warship.” He was later identified as a 21 year-old crewmember of the *U.S.S. Coral Sea*.³³

Whether to prevent similar accidents or incidents like Philips and Martin’s arrest, in late 1966 U.S. officials set up a Navy Shore Patrol to remove GIs from embarrassing incidents. As Chi-kwan Mark has noted, the Patrol aimed to prevent incidents that might

³² “Sailored Fined For Exposure,” *SCMP* 7 December 1965, 13; “Indecent Exposure,” *SCMP* 28 April 1966, 8; “Sailor fined,” *China Mail* 25 July 1966, 10.

³³ “Body Of American Sailor Found,” *SCMP* 30 December 1964, 6; “Open Verdict Returned At Inquest on American Sailor,” *SCMP* 20 February 1965, 12; “Police Report No. 3,” Government Information Services 15 March 1970, “G.I.S. Press: U.S. Servicemen in H.K.,” HKRS 70-3-764, HKPRO.

“lead to unwanted publicity and open trial in the local courts.” *Cheng Wu Pao* covered the development in far more explicit detail. The leftist paper stated that everyone knew Wan Chai’s waterfront “specializes in accommodating the American sailors’ brothels, many located in squatters’ roof huts, sheltering evil people and countenancing wicked practices.” The proliferation of brothels encouraged “an unbearable filth and disorder” and provoked ever more “prostitute-related brawls.” With “scandals piling up,” now U.S. officers would stand guard outside Wan Chai’s notable “low-end brothels.” When “disputes and conflicts erupt inside,” the officers would swoop in, “interrogate witnesses, order the disturbance-making sailors back to their ships, and warn the brothel not to report the case to journalists or officials.” As a result, “big incidents will be minimized, small incidents will be covered up, and scandals will go unreported.” While the U.S. Shore Patrol certainly prevented or obscured many incidents, in reality it was insufficient to control all the American servicemen. In fact, in January 1969, the U.S. military legally empowered any British servicemen in Hong Kong “to arrest any visiting American military personnel who is alleged to be guilty of an offence.”³⁴

In creating the Shore Patrol, the U.S. military simultaneously acknowledged servicemen’s abuses and sought to obscure them from the Hong Kong public by reviving U.S. extraterritoriality in China. Scholars such as Eileen Scully have demonstrated that Americans’ extraterritoriality in prewar China simultaneously abused Chinese people and sheltered Washington’s interests from damage by its own citizens. Now, in the service of its

³⁴ Chi-kwan Mark, “Vietnam war tourists,” 5; “本報特訊,” *Cheung Wu Pao* 14 September 1966; “美軍站崗私寨前,” *Cheng Wu Pao* 14 September 1966, both in “G.I.S. Press: U.S. Servicemen in Hong Kong,” HKRS 70-7-598, HKPRO; “MILITARY ARREST POWERS,” *SCMP* 18 January 1969, in “G.I.S. Press: U.S. Servicemen in Hong Kong,” HKRS 70-3-764, HKPRO.

war agenda, U.S. military officers informally condoned these illegal brothels, while bullying their managers and denying Hong Kong residents' right to scrutiny. Privileged by virtue of their gender, citizenship, and comparative wealth, U.S. servicemen now stood outside of standard criminal justice as supra-authorized representatives of the world's leading power. Servicemen's extraterritoriality could not fail to incubate public resentment against entitled, unaccountable foreigners. Moreover, the Navy Shore Patrol also set up a new, local class conflict. When incidents occurred, the owners and managers of bars, clubs, and underground brothels had a clear financial interest to cooperate with the Patrol and preserve servicemen's future business; however, their staff members now had few options but to accept the insult or injury. To seek outside justice would likely imperil their job and employment was in short supply.³⁵

While servicemen's excesses were not the spark for the unrest of 1966-67, their incidents rippled through a dense society, validated a prevailing sense of disempowerment, and aggravated an existing public confidence crisis. Servicemen's free-flowing dollars remained an attractive and often necessary source of revenue, but their exuberant and destructive quests for release often morphed into a public spectacle. The insults and injuries that servicemen brought to Hong Kong's neighborhoods forced residents to weigh their individual and collective financial interests against the obnoxious side effects that GIs' holidays brought to their community. This on-going calculation and its public debates were a vital ingredient in this era's development of Hong Kong's modern civic consciousness and identity.

³⁵ Gary Ka-wai Cheung, *Hong Kong's Watershed: The 1967 Riots* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009); Eileen Scully, *Bargaining With the State From Afar: American Citizenship in Treaty Port China, 1844-1942* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

Hong Kong's Public Sphere

Scholars of Hong Kong history gradually have revised the old narrative that the 1966 Star Ferry Riots and 1967 communist agitations precipitated the social reforms of the MacLehose years (1971-1982). Lawrence Cheuk-yin Wong has pointed out that after the violence subsided, the Hong Kong government “appeared to slide back into its customary complacency.” Wong rejects the idea that the agitations were a “legitimacy crisis” that provoked reform; instead, he identifies the decisive push toward change to be that “in the wider society, both the masses and the elites began to advocate reforms.” Moreover, Alan Smart and Tai-lok Lui have argued that while the events of 1967 were “clearly a catalyst for political transformations,” it was previous conditions and “incidents of civil unrest” that had “conditioned the government for these changes.”³⁶

Concomitant with these revisions have been new looks at the origins of a distinctive Hong Kong identity. Scholars such as Agnes Shuk-mei Ku have re-examined the “social and cultural processes that brought about the transition from a refugee identity to a locally rooted Hong Kong identity,” including the MacLehose reforms, new immigration policies, and pop culture. Yet, like other scholars, Ku ignores the Vietnam War. She characterizes Hong Kong society through the 1970s by its “absence of citizenship,” as “de-politicized,” and as governed through top-down efforts at “social consensus.” The final section of this essay aims to bridge the gaps between these scholars’ analyses. The sustained, grassroots response to American servicemen’s dollars and crimes is critical context that ‘conditioned’

³⁶ Lawrence Cheuk-yin Wong, “The 1967 riots: A legitimacy crisis?” in Bickers and Yep, eds., *May Days in Hong Kong*, 44-46; Alan Smart and Tai-lok Lui, “Learning from civil unrest: State/society relations in Hong Kong before and after the 1967 disturbances,” in Bickers and Yep, eds., *May Days in Hong Kong*, 149.

socio-governmental reforms and affirms that Hong Kong people were becoming a coherent and politicized citizenry by the mid-1960s.³⁷

Drawing on Ku's insightful re-workings of Habermas's original theory, this section conceives of the public sphere as a common social imaginary among a "community of citizens." The public sphere is separate from both state and economic institutions and serves as a civic forum to exercise "cultural politics." In Ku's words, it is the imagined "central stage for open struggles among actors who target or are required to seek the allegiance of the general citizens." In the specific case of Hong Kong in the Vietnam War, American servicemen's mere presence, their misdeeds, and the surfeit of business catering to them provoked Hong Kong's nascent civil society of unions, newspapers, churches, and neighborhood associations. This issue stimulated Hong Kong people's political consciousness and encouraged increasingly assertive local institutions to claim the public sphere and speak on behalf of the imagined Hong Kong "we."³⁸

Many of Hong Kong's labor unions and professional organizations vocally opposed the war and its footprints in the colony. On May 20, 1965, twenty-four Hong Kong sailors walked off their freighter the *S.S. Shirley Christine* in Yokohama. A Japanese company chartered the vessel to carry coal from Vietnam to Japan and the sailors refused "for fear of possible involvement in the Vietnam War." A month later, 33 Hong Kong sailors on the American-chartered *S.S. Ninella* "refused to carry oil to Vietnam" and walked off at Singapore. These first walk-offs appear to have been unplanned initiatives, but the left-wing

³⁷ Agnes Shuk-mei Ku, "Immigration Policies, Discourses, and the Politics of Local Belonging in Hong Kong (1950-1980)," *Modern China* 30.3 (July 2004), 326-328; Agnes Shuk-mei Ku, "Contradictions in the Development of Citizenship in Hong Kong: Governance without Democracy," *Asian Survey* 49.3 (June 2009), 510-511.

³⁸ Agnes Shuk-mei Ku, "Revisiting the Notion of 'Public' in Habermas' Theory," *Sociological Theory* 18.2 (July 2000), 217, 227-228.

Hong Kong Seamen's Union began urging its members to boycott ships headed for the war zone. With 23,000 members, the union was Hong Kong's largest and its boycott quickly achieved results. Despite a profitable and rapidly growing trade between the colony and South Vietnam, union members stopped 26 freighters by the end of 1965. At the union's annual dinner in May 1966, Chairman Ng Li-kwong reported that in one year over 1,000 Hong Kong seamen had refused to carry "American war supplies to South Vietnam" and delayed or stopped 40 ships. The Seamen's Union was not alone. When the *U.S.S. Enterprise* visited in January 1966, Chairman of the Hongkong and Kowloon Federation of Trade Unions Chan Yiu-choi labeled the ship "a serious threat to the security" of residents. Ko Chok-hung, Chairman of the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce commented: "This carrier has participated in the war of aggression in Vietnam and we do not welcome her here." Thus, although Governor Trench dismissed Beijing's protests as 'propaganda,' many residents opposed and felt genuinely unnerved by the nearby war and its possible effects on Hong Kong.³⁹

While unions and community leaders took public stands, most residents absorbed years of daily headlines about both the war and servicemen's visits from the colony's vibrant literary public sphere. In the late 1960s, there were at least seventeen daily Chinese and English papers; unsurprisingly, the leftist papers issued the most acerbic anti-GI

³⁹ "H.K. Seamen Walk Off Ship," *SCMP* 20 May 1965, 24; "H.K. Seamen Refuse To Go To Vietnam," *SCMP* 19 June 1965, 1; "Seamen Refuse To Sail Ship To Saigon," *SCMP* 17 July 1965, 1; "Refused To Sail For S. Vietnam," *SCMP* 2 September 1965, 7; "Reply On War Cargo Dispute; 'American Shipping Insufficient,'" *SCMP* 2 October 1965, 1; "H.K. Crews Refuse To Sail To Vietnam," *SCMP* 25 October 1965, 6; "Agents deny Chinese crew 'voluntarily' refused to sail; 'Blame Union, Not Seamen; London Craftsman: no war weapons,'" *China Mail* 25 October 1965, 1; "Colony crews boycott Vietnam," *China Mail* 8 February 1966, 10; "Another crew won't sail for Saigon," *China Mail* 10 February 1966, 1; "Crew Refuse To Sail To Vietnam," *SCMP* 11 February 1966, 7; "Crew trouble for three more Saigon-bound ships," *China Mail* 16 February 1966, 10; "Refuse To Sail To N. Vietnam; Greek Crew Of Ship In Hong Kong," *SCMP* 26 April 1966, 1; "1,000 HK seamen boycotted S. Vietnam bound ships," *China Mail* 16 May 1966, 1; "HK seamen won't sail," *China Mail* 22 August 1966, 1; see also: "Left-wing groups hit visit of U.S. N-ship," *China Mail* 29 January 1966, 1.

condemnations. We have discussed many examples, such as *Cheng Wu Pao's* January 1965 criticism of sailors' abuses under the simple headline "Ugly American Sailors." Or when Green and Philips hijacked the Star Ferry in November 1966, the papers' vitriol was equally intense. *Cheng Wu Pao's* passionate editorial blared "U.S. Sailors Row Ferry Incident," while *Wen Wei Po* screamed "U.S. Sailors' Incident, A Thousand People Shout and Fight, Running Wild on the Ferry, the Shipmaster is Beaten and Humiliated." That paper demanded the government "Put A Stop to the U.S. Sailors' Disturbances," while *Ta Kung Pao's* headline declared in reference to their appearance in court: "In Front of the Masses' Wrath They Seem Pitiful Worms." *The New Evening Post* succinctly connected the two ideas: "American Sailors and Public Anger." This coverage was inspired by the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution, but hardly limited to the worst criminal incidents. News stories about the war's events or the visits of U.S. ships to Hong Kong expounded similar outrage. When the controversial *U.S.S. Enterprise* visited in January 1967, *Wen Wei Po's* headline described the carrier as "stained with fresh Vietnamese blood," as proof that the U.S. military was using Hong Kong as a base, and as evidence that Britain would push Hong Kong "into the vortex of the Vietnam invasion." *Ta Kung Pao's* coverage struck a similar tone. In April 1967, *Wen Wei Po* linked the R&R incidents with Chiang Kai-shek's supposed espionage against the Cultural Revolution under the front-page headline: "Why do Hong Kong's U.S.-Chiangist elements dare to act so savagely?"⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The seventeen newspapers include: *Cheng Wu Pao* (正午報), *China Mail, Express* (快報), *Hong Kong Commercial Daily* (香港商報), *Hong Kong Tiger Standard*, *Hong Kong Times* (香港時報), *Kong Seung Yat Po* (工商日報), *Ming Pao* (明報), *Oriental Daily News* (東方日報), *Sing Pao Daily* (成報), *Sing Tao* (星島), *South China Morning Post*, *The Star*, *Ta Kung Po* (大公報), *Tin Tin Yat Po* (天天日報), *Wah Kiu Yat Po* (華僑日報), and *Wen Wei Po* (文匯報); **for these headlines, see:** "醜惡的美國兵," *Cheng Wu Pao* 24 January 1965; "美兵大鬧渡輪事件" *Cheng Wu Pao* 29 November 1966; "美水兵遭千人喝打, 輪上胡鬧 毆辱船主," *Wen Wei Po* 27 November 1966; "制止

Although these leftist papers exaggerated and editorialized, their articles constantly reiterated a rational perspective that each of these incidents was inseparable from the larger issue of U.S. servicemen's visits. In part, the papers underscored this message through simple vocabulary. In one example, article after article described servicemen as "tyrannizing and domineering" (橫行霸道); today, this four-character phrase is the Chinese translation for the popular video game *Grand Theft Auto*. More commonly, with each new incident, the leftist papers simply reminded their readers of the crimes that had transpired already. In the early hours of December 26, 1965, an 18 year-old bargirl was raped at the Hong Kong Hilton. Several eyewitnesses testified that the culprit was an American sailor who fled. Both *Wen Wei Po* and *Ta Kung Pao* issued editorials decrying this incident as symptomatic of servicemen's flouting of local law. Under the headline "The U.S. Military in Hong Kong Acts Carelessly and Audaciously," *Ta Kung Pao* argued this tragedy was the result of the "never-ending stream" of U.S. military "ships and planes" coming to Hong Kong, "enormously endangering the public's safety and arousing the people's anger." Its editorial declared "the U.S. military's acts of violence in Hong Kong are too numerous to record," but cited the most common types of incidents, from "drinking their sorrows and committing violence," to "taking liberties with women," "beating up and robbing taxi drivers," and even "dragging girls into lavatories." These "flagrant acts are known to all" and concluded "it is up to all of Hong Kong's good and honest residents to throw down the gauntlet." Under the headline "The Thug Must Be Punished," *Wen Wei Po* also listed the servicemen's "very many

美水兵搗亂," *Wen Wei Po* 27 November 1966; "兩美水兵今將提堂; 大鬧小輪危及安全; 在憤怒的人群面前變成可憐蟲," *Ta Kung Pao* 28 November 1966; "美兵與公憤," *New Evening Post* 27 November 1966; "加緊作侵越基地; 美軍艦集港海; 沾滿越南人民鮮血美母艦賴着不走; 英國將香港推入侵越漩渦必無好果," *Wen Wei Po* 14 January 1967, 4; "美艦加緊利用香港; 作为侵略军事基地," *Ta Kung Pao* 14 January 1967, 4; "香港美蔣分子為什麼敢如此猖狂," *Wen Wei Po* 12 April 1967, 1.

acts of violence.” Its article concluded that this situation was a threat to the community’s safety and, “if allowed to continue very long, the loss and suffering will be immense, and the terrible results difficult to imagine!” When the Public Prosecutor ruled in January 1966 that there was insufficient evidence to file charges, *The New Evening Post* published an extensive interview with the victim “Young Sister Chan,” and its headline described U.S. military officers as “beasts in human clothing.”⁴¹

The colony’s leftist papers had deployed this severe rhetoric for years, particularly when discussing the U.S. intervention in Korea or Chiang Kai-shek. Now, however, the papers were describing tangible, emotional events within a colony convulsed by social crisis. With a daily circulation of more than 400,000 or about a quarter of Hong Kong’s readers, these leftist papers were not just criticizing U.S. imperialism or government policy, but also urging Hong Kong residents to re-imagine themselves as part of a wronged community—a community under attack. Their consistent portrayal of U.S. servicemen as symbols of violence and as the perpetrators of local transgressions fueled a critical discourse in the public sphere that highlighted outrages against residents and championed them in order to claim a sense of communal risk and shared concern. Hindsight might tempt us to dismiss these leftist papers as hyperbolic, but the colonial government for one took seriously these papers’ coverage of servicemen’s incidents: Government Information Services carefully collected, translated, and filed most of these stories.⁴²

⁴¹ “美軍在港胡作妄為,” *Ta Kung Pao* 27 December 1965; “暴徒必須懲治,” *Wen Wei Po* 27 December 1965; “No Police Prosecution,” *SCMP* 8 January 1966; “衣冠禽獸的美軍少校, 請聽吧女訴述悲慘遭遇,” *The New Evening Post* 16 January 1966.

⁴² **For circulation figures, see:** Ray Yep, “The 1967 riots in Hong Kong: the domestic and diplomatic fronts of the governor,” in Robert Bickers and Ray Yep, eds., *May Days in Hong Kong: Riot and Emergency in 1967* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 29.

The English-language press was less sensational, but the war also pushed readers of the *SCMP* and *China Mail* to reflect on Hong Kong's identity and future. A particularly lively debate on Vietnam raged in the *SCMP* at the end of August 1967. On August 18, "Ex-New Yorker" wrote a letter to the editor regarding the upcoming elections in South Vietnam. The letter stated: "most of Hongkong's inhabitants, like most citizens of the Free World... hope that the South Vietnamese will soon have a stable constitutional government." To that end, the author championed strong U.S. oversight and even manipulation of the elections. On August 21, Victor Wong wrote a lengthy reply. Wong stated that he was "amused" by Ex-New Yorker's claim to speak for 'most of Hongkong's inhabitants' and argued that residents' opinions on U.S. policy in Vietnam were ambiguous. Instead, Wong declared that Hong Kong people believed in non-interference with "other countries' internal affairs." Ex-New Yorker's response insisted that Hong Kong residents believed in democracy because "a pro-democratic Government of South Vietnam means the pro-democratic Hongkongites... will have a dependable ally in facing Red terror, aggression, and tyranny." Several others wrote in, but the letter from "Observer" on August 28 is telling. After declaring the democratic process to be supreme, Observer criticized Ex-New Yorker's "short-sighted" decision "to address his views to the people of Hongkong" because they "are here today as a consequence not only of the Communists but also of the Kuomintang. Of all people they are the ones who can best testify that political excesses remain unpalatable no matter in what name they are practised."⁴³

⁴³ "An Ex-New Yorker," "Letters To The Editor: S. Vietnam Elections," *SCMP* 18 August 1967; Victor Wong, "Letters To The Editor: Elections in Vietnam," *SCMP* 21 August 1967, 16; Ex-New Yorker, "Letters To The Editor: U.S. Policy in Vietnam," *SCMP* 23 August 1967, 15; B. Chang, "Letter to the Editor: U.S. POLICY IN VIETNAM," *SCMP* 25 August 1967, 15; "Letters to the Editor: Challenge," *SCMP* 28 August 1967, 10.

This newspaper exchange is fascinating unto itself and even more so within the context of its surrounding events. Like Philips and Green’s trial coinciding with the Star Ferry Riots, the week these residents were debating U.S. policy in Vietnam was seminal in Hong Kong’s history: it was the climax of the city’s tumultuous experience of the Cultural Revolution. That summer, increasingly violent communist protests, strikes, bombings, and bombing threats had rocked the colony. Gary Ka-wai Cheung has argued that the August 20 North Point bombing that killed two children and the August 23 *auto de fé* of radio host and leftist critic Lam Bun “condemned the left wing” in the Hong Kong public’s eyes. Cheung and scholars like Matthew Turner and Nelson Chow Wing-sun have pointed to these days as a “watershed” moment for the city’s identity. In their words, the 1967 riots “aroused the ‘Hong Kong consciousness’” and “Hong Kong people began to treasure the colony—a ‘refugee society’ that served as a haven for those fleeing from political upheavals in the mainland—as their ‘genuine home.’” Mass opinion indeed came to reject political violence and re-defined Hong Kong—but not *just* in opposition to the mainland’s tumult. Both the example of the war raging nearby and its potential spillover were clearly present in many minds. This exchange’s timing underscores a potent mental link between the carnage in Vietnam and the disorder convulsing the city’s streets. While *Wen Wei Po* warned its readers that R&R visits might drag the city into the war, these residents writing in English used the war variously to identify Hong Kong with ‘the Free World,’ as ‘pro-democracy,’ or simply as united against ‘political excesses’ of any kind. Hong Kong residents coalesced around their city remaining a peaceful haven—free of ‘terror, aggression, and tyranny’ and the ideological excesses that had engulfed both China and Vietnam. Mass opinion constructed Hong Kong’s new identity around political moderation, principled non-interference, and above all

order and stability. Any forces that risked destroying this refuge were unwelcome, whether communist agitators or drunken American troops. But this new communal identity did not emerge in a day or in a few weeks; like anywhere it was a process that took years. Just as a coherent “American identity” did not emerge simply from the Boston Massacre (1770) or Tea Party (1773), a Hong Kong identity was not just the product of 1966-67 disturbances. If the late 1960s were indeed a ‘watershed,’ the Vietnam War and its prolonged Hong Kong footprints must figure into that crisis of public confidence and how Hong Kong people re-defined their city as both ‘haven’ and ‘home.’⁴⁴

Whatever residents thought of the war and its representatives in their midst, it was how Vietnam affected one of their city’s neighborhoods that most mobilized them. Tsim Sha Tsui (TST) sits at the tip of Kowloon and has long been a commercial crossroads and nightlife area, but the war and its flood of servicemen’s dollars transformed the district. In writer Liam Fitzpatrick’s words, the area became “the ultimate playground”—or more colorfully, “a sleepless hell of old whores and old drunks” whose “simmering mayhem” was “the closest thing to paradise that the mind of any 15-year-old boy is capable of conceiving.” R&R’s proliferation of new bars was the origin of many notorious establishments, including the club “Bottoms Up” on Hankow Road. Bottoms Up opened in 1971 as Hong Kong’s first topless bar and featured an illuminated sign of naked women’s rear-ends; the club appeared in both the 1974 James Bond film *The Man with the Golden Gun* and 1994’s *Chungking Express*. The point is that Bottoms Up was not somehow a solitary phenomenon; it is an iconic example of this era’s profusion. By the fall of 1966, TST’s less than a square mile had 165 liquor-serving establishments, including 74 bars. Wan Chai had only 48. This

⁴⁴ Gary Ka-wai Cheung, *Hong Kong’s Watershed*, 4-6, 89, 118-119, 124-125.

nightlife explosion employed thousands of people, but also grieved many residents and rallied them to seize back control of their neighborhood.⁴⁵

Since 1961, the elite Kowloon Residents' Association (KRA) had petitioned Hong Kong's Board of Licensing Justices (BLJ) to curtail TST's ever-increasing nightlife. In September 1966, three prospective TST bars filed liquor license applications with the BLJ and the association took its campaign into high gear. In the *SCMP*, KRA president Fred Clemo declared new licenses would be "an offence to residents." Citing TST's rampant prostitution, he declared: "We want no more bars. They are a curse to the Colony." Like fellow KRA board member Hari Harilela, Clemo was a prominent resident. He had led Hongkong and China Gas, Hong Kong Tours and Travel Services, and sat on the board of the Hongkong Tourism Association. Clemo led the KRA to mount a prolific correspondence with the Colonial Secretariat on this issue and recruited powerful voices to join the cause. As the BLJ prepared to meet in December, the police department broke ranks and joined the KRA in condemning new liquor licenses. The *China Mail* also published an editorial against further bars. While new businesses would "benefit the public coffer" the editorial reasoned, their "immoral" toll on this "once...most respectable residential area" had become excessive. These leading objections gave pause to the entwined ranks of the colonial elite; a few leaders such as H.M.G. Forsgate were both KRA and BLJ members. The Secretary for Chinese Affairs David Ronald Holmes was also the Chairman of the BLJ and he took the issue to the Urban Council's December 22 meeting. Both the BLJ and Urban Council expressed "a good deal of sympathy" with the KRA's objections. The BLJ

⁴⁵ Liam Fitzpatrick, "Night School," *TIME* 26 July 2004: <http://www.time.com/time/asia/2004/journey/hk.html>; "Tsimshatsui Has Too Many Bars," *SCMP* 13 September 1966, 9.

concluded it should “make a public statement” warning prospective bar owners to “not continue to assume that licenses will be granted automatically.” The Board then approved the three new applications.⁴⁶

Despite losing this first round, the KRA strove harder to assert public oversight and began urging administrative reform. On January 4, Holmes wrote to Clemo and explained the BLJ’s logic: a sudden reversal of policy would penalize unfairly entrepreneurs who had invested in new bars. On January 13, Clemo pointed out that the Board had assured him that the issue of sunk costs “would in no way influence the Board’s findings.” Clemo praised issuing a public notice “without delay” but warned that his “Association is watching the position very carefully.” Four days later, on January 17, KRA Secretary K. C. Thornton fired off his own letter to Colonial Secretary Michael Gass decrying the bars’ “irreparable harm” and questioning the Board’s very competency. He concluded with the bold suggestion that “this matter should be entrusted to a more representative body” and recommended the half-elected Urban Council. Finally, on January 28, BLJ Secretary Samuel Chen issued a public notice in several English and Chinese papers warning prospective bar owners that liquor license applications “will be examined more critically” because “it has been suggested that the number of bars has reached a saturation point.” Secretary Holmes repeated this message in a radio broadcast and consulted with Secretary Gass to prepare the government’s future course of action. Together, an elite community organization and the police had introduced a

⁴⁶ *The Kowloon Residents’ Association, Annual Report, 1960-1961* (Hong Kong: Local Printing Press, Ltd., 1961), Special Collections, HKUL; “Tsimshatsui Has Too Many Bars,” *SCMP* 13 September 1966, 9; “Comment of the Day: Liquor licences in Tsimshatsui,” *China Mail* 23 December 1966, 1; **also see:** Kowloon Residents’ Association Files, “Colonial Secretariat No. 1/561/54,” HKRS 41-1-8102, HKPRO; **on Clemo, see:** Vaudine England, *The Quest of Noel Croucher: Hong Kong’s Quiet Philanthropist* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998), 173; Charles Turner, “Boom in Pacific Tourism,” *New York Times* 22 January 1961, 27; “Tsimshatsui’s Bars Outstrip Old Rivals,” *SCMP* 30 January 1967, 6.

measure of public oversight into civic planning and demanded accountability from the colonial government. Holmes predicted to Gass that the BLJ “will from now on be reluctant to issue new bar licences.”⁴⁷

Under the KRA’s leadership, the bar issue gained widespread social traction and mobilized new sectors of Hong Kong society to believe they could effect positive change. Indeed, a general consensus appeared to coalesce against new bars. Leftist paper *Kong Seung Yat Po* (工商日報) decried new licenses and the *China Mail* renewed its objections. The *SCMP* urged the government to balance “the legitimate needs of residents” with those “of tourists and visiting and locally-stationed servicemen.” The *SCMP* also called on Wan Chai residents to speak up if they faced similar issues, as their complaints had been “few and far between.” Two days later, a “Lockhart Road Resident” replied: Wan Chai residents had been “pessimists and resigned to any establishment that is...instituted according to Government policy.” Wan Chai’s own metastasizing bars seemed “blessed by the authorities” and its residents presumed they were “destined to suffer.” Now, however, the implication was that this resident was no longer ‘resigned to any establishment’ and had reconsidered if he or she was ‘destined to suffer.’ On January 30, Chairman of the Wanchai Welfare Kaifong Association Lee Wan-yuen joined the fray by declaring in the *SCMP* that Wan Chai’s bars had indeed reached the ‘saturation point.’ While urging caution because many residents “depend on bars for their livelihood,” Lee reiterated the many complaints he had heard about the bars’ noise and “bad influence.” Lee’s interview concluded with more residents

⁴⁷ D. R. Holmes to Fred Clemo, 4 January 1967; Clemo to Holmes, 13 January 1967; K. C. Thornton to Colonial Secretary, 17 January 1967; “Notice,” *SCMP* and *Hongkong Standard*, 28 January 1967; Secretary for Chinese Affairs to Colonial Secretary, “Bars in Tsimshatsui Area,” 28 January 1967; all in Kowloon Residents’ Association Files, “Colonial Secretariat No. 1/561/54,” HKRS 41-1-8102, HKPRO; also see: “Comment of the Day: Liquor licences,” *China Mail* 25 January 1967, 1.

complaining on the record that their children “could not sleep before 2 am,” that teenage girls took circuitous routes to avoid “being accosted by drunken servicemen,” and that “obscene language” filled Wan Chai’s apartments into the early hours. Residents objected to “the loud shouting at night by drunken servicemen, who frequently banged lift doors, vomited inside lifts and threw wine and beer bottles.” Next to the article appeared a photograph of uniformed U.S. sailors outside the bars on Lockhart. That same day, “Wanchai Inhabitant” wrote a letter to the editor and declared that previously he/she feared that “if they protested they might be persecuted, prosecuted and punished.” But, the resident confessed: “if you did not express your surprise at the strangely few complaints I would not have written this letter.” The American servicemen had been a widespread source of festering social resentment—yet many residents like ‘Lockhart Road Resident’ and ‘Wanchai Inhabitant’ had felt powerless. With the KRA, the police, and the press spearheading this issue, a civic groundswell began to emerge and demand greater control of TST and Wan Chai.⁴⁸

The colonial government was ill disposed to act on these demands from the public sphere. As with the Star Ferry Riots and the ‘watershed’ communist protests to come that summer, the regime hesitated to address obvious social problems. Two internal government documents bear this out. On February 22, Colonial Secretary Gass wrote in an internal memo to Secretary for Chinese Affairs Holmes that “the question of a possible transfer of responsibility for liquor licensing from Hon. S.C.A. to the Urban Council is under

⁴⁸ “九龍居民社會極力反對，尖沙咀區再開酒吧，指出該區現已有酒吧七十四間，” *Kong Seung Yat Po* 工商日報 25 January 1967, 4; “Comment of the Day: Liquor licences,” *China Mail* 25 January 1967, 1; [Editorial] “A Call To The Bars,” *SCMP* 26 January 1967, 12; “Correspondence: Lockhart Road Bars,” *SCMP* 28 January 1967, 12; “NO MORE BAR LICENCES FOR WANCHAI URGED,” *SCMP* 30 January, 1967, 6; “Tsimshatsui’s Bars Outstrip Old Rivals,” *SCMP* 30 January 1967, 6; “Correspondence: Wanchai Bars,” *SCMP* 30 January 1967, 12.

consideration” but “has scarcely moved nor does it seem likely to do so quickly” because “it is bound up with the general question of ‘local Government authorities’ statutory responsibilities.” Two weeks later, on March 7, as the BLJ prepared to meet, the new Commissioner of Police Edward Eates reversed his department’s public objections. In a letter to Gass and Holmes, Eates carefully analyzed TST’s “honky tonk” situation. The police counted 171 licensed liquor establishments in the district including 84 that were exclusively bars. In the year 1966, police recorded 58 “incidents emanating from these premises,” of which 54 were “disputes between U.S. Service personnel and girls over the payment of money for ‘services rendered.’” In all 54 cases, the police determined “there was insufficient evidence to support court action.” In addition to these near-weekly disputes between U.S. servicemen and TST bar girls and sex workers, Eates also reported on the myriad other offences emanating from the district’s bars during 1966: five noise citations, 38 for soliciting, 11 for obstruction by touts, and 429 for obstruction by rickshaw pullers. He even provided a map with every known TST honky tonk marked. Yet, despite this simmering situation in TST—541 bar or bar-related incidents in 1966, more than ten per week, and more than six for every bar within this single square mile—Eates withdrew his department’s formal opposition: “On reflection, however, I do not feel that I should object to the issuance of new liquor licences...the Police function should be to inform the Board” and “enable the Board to adequately assess the situation...This is the policy I intend to pursue.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Commissioner of Police to Colonial Secretary and Secretary for Chinese Affairs, “Bars in Tsim Sha Tsui Area” 7 March 1967; Colonial Secretary to Secretary for Chinese Affairs, “Re: Memo of 7.3.67 from Commissioner of Police,” 13 March 1967; all in Kowloon Residents’ Association Files, “Colonial Secretariat No. 1/561/54,” HKRS 41-1-8102, HKPRO.

Community leaders were proposing modest reforms and the police had confirmed a criminal situation, but the highest levels of Hong Kong's colonial government had political priorities that dictated inaction. Gass assured Holmes that the Colonial Secretariat would not transfer liquor licenses to the half-elected Urban Council because it was 'bound up' with concerns over 'local Government' and 'responsibilities.' Gass meant questions of imperial authority. The KRA and the press could champion public oversight all they liked, but the colonial regime saw unnerving political and diplomatic consequences lurking behind such a transfer, from harming Anglo-American relations to igniting further calls for reform. No official expressed concern that every single one of the 54 cases involving servicemen had been dismissed. In follow-up correspondence with Holmes, Gass commented "Clearly Police H.Q. feels that the representative at the December meeting of the [BLJ] overstepped the mark in supporting the K.R.A.'s view...It would seem that the passive role is resumed with effect from today."⁵⁰

The colonial administration considered this issue settled, but the citizenry of Wan Chai and TST did not return to 'the passive role.' The KRA continued to petition the Colonial Secretariat but did not receive any replies for over a year—a pronounced attempt to freeze them out. The public battle continued. In fall 1967, KRA Secretary Thornton wrote to Colonial Secretary Gass decrying TST's now more than 200 bars of "doubtful reputation" and insisted the BLJ was "out of touch with the position in Kowloon." He urged the matter "be handled entirely by the Urban Council" because it could provide "constant supervision" and thus "more comfort...to our residents." Clemo took to the papers to denounce the bars'

⁵⁰ Commissioner of Police to Colonial Secretary and Secretary for Chinese Affairs, "Bars in Tsim Sha Tsui Area" 7 March 1967; Colonial Secretary to Secretary for Chinese Affairs, "Re: Memo of 7.3.67 from Commissioner of Police," 13 March 1967: in Kowloon Residents' Association Files, "Colonial Secretariat No. 1/561/54," HKRS 41-1-8102, HKPRO.

“bad moral effect” and insisted the KRA was “trying to protect the residents of Tsimshatsui.” Anonymous police officers chimed in to complain about the district’s “disorderly conduct, prostitution, robbery and assault by teddy boys.” The *SCMP* called for a “moratorium” on new licenses, while the *China Mail* proclaimed it a “War in the ‘Juke Box Jungle.” Yet on December 21, 1967, the BLJ renewed 49 and approved two new license applications.⁵¹

The colonial regime was stonewalling calls for reform, but their preference for the laissez-faire status quo suited many constituents’ conceptions of Hong Kong’s values and liberties. On New Year’s Eve 1967, the *SCMP* published Alan Daniels’ undercover investigation of “the controversial case of the People versus the bars of Tsimshatsui.” Daniels also interviewed Paul Tsui, the Acting Secretary for Chinese Affairs and thus the new Chairman of the BLJ. Tsui urged residents to consider their fellow residents’ economic rights: “We cannot refuse licences purely because there are a large number of bars already ... We cannot interfere in the freedom of the individual to earn a lawful living ... We have no power to act ... as town planners or keepers of the public morals.” Consciously or not, Tsui appealed directly to residents with a financial stake in the bars and to those residents whose ideals had pushed them to flee communism. In December 1968, the government reiterated this argument when it again refused to transfer licensing to the Urban Council (against the recommendation of the Solicitor-General). While “Urban Councillors, civic groups and

⁵¹ K. C. Thornton to Colonial Secretary, 28 November 1967; K. C. Thornton to Colonial Secretary, 20 February 1968; in Kowloon Residents’ Association Files, “Colonial Secretariat No. 1/561/54,” HKRS 41-1-8102, HKPRO; **for the press, see:** “Bid to block club licences,” *China Mail* 6 December 1967, 2; “STRONG OBJECTIONS TO GRANTING OF LIQUOR LICENCES,” *SCMP* 12 December 1967, 7; “[Editorial] Bars and Immorality,” *SCMP* 14 December 1967, 12; “Letter To The Editor: PREVALENCE OF BARS IN TSIMSHATSUI,” *SCMP* 16 December 1967, 12; “Liquor Licences Renewed,” *SCMP* 22 December 1967, 10; “War in the ‘Juke Box Jungle,” *China Mail* 22 December 1967, 2.

individual members of the public” have “claimed, not without some truth, that the issue of so many licences in Tsim Sha Tsui has lowered the tone of the neighbourhood,” it had been a “matter of deliberate policy” for the BLJ not “to refuse the right of a free man to engage in lawful business.”⁵²

The public debates over servicemen and local bars held mass appeal, but in true democratic form, far from everyone agreed. In June 1968 a new round of license applications came due and many residents began voicing opposition to the KRA’s coalition in the *SCMP*. On June 13, “Let’s Play Fair” wrote: “Just because we poor folks are earning a small salary and living in a place which is a third-class area, these so-called gentleman could not care less.” The next day “Tsimshatsui Trader” wrote: “like thousands of other traders and residents in this district, we most certainly do not support the objections.” Trader reminded readers that Hong Kong “depends on tourism for its livelihood” and along “with the bars, come tailoring shops, watch shops, gift centres, travel agents and a hundred other businesses.” The small-time merchants of TST were “too busy trying to make a living to...join the residents association and are certainly not represented by [them].” On Saturday, “Wanchai Resident” wrote in to say “it is about time the ‘first-class’ residents should have a taste of what we, the ‘third-class’ residents, are experiencing in Wanchai,” but insisted refusing new licenses was “not the solution.” C.I. Chan wrote in to insist that the district’s residents should democratically decide the issue. Like many residents’ letters we have discussed, these citizens used the issue of R&R to exorcize smoldering class tensions—unsurprising perhaps, given the riots of 1966-67. Yet, unlike those moments of explosive

⁵² “ILLEGAL ‘BARS.’ U.S. servicemen swindled,” *SCSP-H* 31 December 1967, 1; “They thought I was drunk,” *SCSP-H* 31 December 1967, 3; also see: Colonial Secretary to Secretary for Chinese Affairs, “Liquor Licensing Policy” 3 December 1968, in Kowloon Residents’ Association Files, “Colonial Secretariat No. 1/561/54,” HKRS 41-1-8102, HKPRO.

urban violence, this grassroots hostility to ‘so-called gentlemen’ and ‘first-class’ residents’ found civil outlets. Everyday residents appreciated their individual financial stakes in this debate and spoke up to articulate a notable ‘we, the third-class residents’ identity. While colonial officials retrenched, their position still served the interests of residents who defined their city by unabashed capitalism and freedom of enterprise—and this vision carried the day.⁵³

While the KRA’s campaign stalled, their efforts fomented rippling civic results: the debate they launched over servicemen’s haunts spurred new social action, new campaigns, and new investigations. In December 1967, in an effort to improve their collective image, TST’s maligned bar-owners formed their own representative association, the Bar Owners’ Association of Kowloon (BOAK). The association’s new secretary John Doyle declared that BOAK would prove that illegal speakeasies were TST’s real troublemakers. Six months later, in June 1968, the Rev. Jocelyn Michell of St. Andrew’s Church on Nathan Road lodged his own protest with the BLJ on behalf of “his parishioners.” Michell declared that he “was not protesting on moral grounds but on compassionate grounds and as a citizen of Hongkong.” A few weeks later in July, representatives of TST’s police department met with 70 of the district’s bar managers in order to coordinate on controlling street touts; in the previous month, police had arrested 140 people in TST for touting and soliciting. Thus, from the KRA and the Wanchai Kaifong Association, to the colony’s police, the English and Chinese press, the local clergy, and both the newly established City District Officers and the BOAK, a wide swath of public sphere institutions engaged in a community-wide conversation over

⁵³ “Letters To The Editor: KOWLOON BAR NUISANCE,” *SCMP* 13 June 1968, 10; “Letters To The Editor: BARS ARE NEEDED IN KOWLOON,” *SCMP* 14 June 1968, 10; “Letters To The Editor: BARS, EDUCATED GIRLS” *SCMP* 15 June 1968, 13; “CROSSTALK,” *SCSP-H* 16 June 1968, 5; “Letters To The Editor: Tsimshatsui Bars,” *SCMP* 17 June 1968, 19.

the Vietnam War tourists. In April 1969, Clemo refused an invitation to the BLJ's next meeting because he complained they had long "disparaged our requests and turned our objections into a mockery." Yet, Clemo could not see that the KRA had succeeded in setting a civic example and in kindling a colony-wide interrogation of official policy. While the KRA consistently labeled this issue as "non-political," the debate's effects were very political. A great many Hong Kong residents began to behave not simply as residents, but as Rev. Michell declared, as citizens.⁵⁴

This public sphere debate cultivated further reformist campaigns and encouraged other organizations to tackle TST's manifold social ills. In one example, the KRA often supported its petitions by arguing that honky tonks encouraged child prostitution. The *China Mail* did an October 1967 exposé on the issue that described the police as locked in a "guerilla battle" over this bar-related problem. The article also featured huge photographs of U.S. sailors trailing teenage girls into brothels. In October 1969, Peter Cook wrote an explosive article in the *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)* about local child prostitution. Cook reported an estimate that 4,000 girls were living off prostitution in TST alone due to its U.S. servicemen-centered nightlife. Cook's article shocked Hilton Cheong-Leen, the Chairman of the Hongkong Civic Association, a member of the Urban Council, and years later to become the first elected member of Legislative Council. The day after *FEER* hit newsstands, Cheong-Leen wrote and demanded answers from the Director of Social Welfare, the Commissioner of Police, and the Secretary for Home Affairs. Cheong-Leen

⁵⁴ **For the BOAK, see:** "U.S. servicemen swindled: ILLEGAL 'BARS'" *SCSP-H* 31 December 1967, 1; **for Michell, see:** "BIBLE QUOTED AT LICENSING BOARD MEETING," *SCMP* 11 June 1968, 1; **for police talks, see:** "BAR MANAGERS AND POLICE HOLD TALKS," *SCMP* 2 July 1968, 5; F. C. Clemo to Woo Man-yiu, 14 April 1969 and Thornton to Colonial Secretary, 1 August 1968, both in Kowloon Residents' Association Files, "Colonial Secretariat No. 1/561/54," HKRS 41-1-8102, HKPRO.

caught all three officials off guard and they scrambled to reply. The Hongkong Civic Association pursued this issue for years, demanding information, regulation, and better sex education in schools. Local churches like St. Andrew's, the Hong Kong Christian Emmanuel Church, and the Rosary Church also tracked this issue with studies and policy papers.⁵⁵

While the KRA did not claim responsibility for these developments, they gathered that something was changing. The association's previous annual reports simply listed its various activities and repeatedly struck a defeated tone on the bar issue: "Again and again the Committee has placed objections" over the bars, but still "the work of the Association is not generally known." Yet, in 1969-1970, the annual report suddenly switched gears. It proclaimed the KRA's "high name in constantly taking a close observation and good care of the needs and problems of the residents' interest in Kowloon." The report claimed that the colony's profound socio-economic crises had made "an increase, year after year in the needs and problems for the obligation of the K.R.A. to look after and to persuade the Authorities concerned for solution." And while they had not curbed the bars, the report noted that "very many bars have been lately forced to close down due to high rising shop rents" and because "the number of American Service personnel on R. & R. leave visit to Hong Kong greatly decreased."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Peter Cook, "Kids on the Game," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 16 October 1969, 205-206; Hilton Cheong-Leen to G. T. Rowe (Director of Social Welfare), C. P. Sutcliffe (Commissioner of Police), and D. R. Holmes (Secretary for Home Affairs), 17 October 1969; See Ying-yin (President of Hong Kong Christian Emmanuel Church) to Legislative Council, 20 January 1971; Press Release of Hongkong Civic Association, 12 February 1971; Elsie Leung (Vice-Chairman of Hongkong Civic Association Women's Group) to Colonial Secretary, 12 February 1971: all in Records of the Home Affairs Department, "Prostitutes," HKRS41-10-41, HKPRO.

⁵⁶ *The Kowloon Residents' Association, Annual Report, 1968-1969 and 1969-1970* (Hong Kong: Local Printing Press, Ltd., 1969/1970), Special Collections, HKUL.

Conclusion

The Vietnam War affected every level of Hong Kong society, from elite community leaders like Victor Mamak, Fred Clemo, and Hilton Cheong-Leen, to disadvantaged residents like Mary Soo, sex worker Lee Man, taxi drivers Lo Tak and Lee King-hei, and the workers who rescued GIs from the burning Hercules. The presence of hundreds of thousands of American servicemen on R&R seized the attention of colonial government officials, community organizations, and countless residents contending to improve their economic lot. While the convenience of R&R provided a strategic service to the American war effort, U.S. servicemen brought dollars, excitement, and crimes to Hong Kong's streets. In the process, they inadvertently transformed Wan Chai and TST and precipitated a communal debate. Alongside Hong Kong's pressing socio-economic challenges and dramatic bursts of the Cultural Revolution, the Vietnam War and its R&R program must figure into historians' narratives of contemporary Hong Kong's economic and socio-political development.

This essay has presented servicemen's commercial imprint and public impression as inseparable parts of the same issue: the more servicemen that arrived, the more dollars they spent, the more bars and brothels that catered to them, and the more criminal incidents that ensued—until U.S. participation in the Vietnam War declined. This confluence often placed Hong Kong people's material interests and social values into conflict. To profit from the troops seemed to entail civic pollution, occasional confrontation, and financial dependence. To boot, these visitors were supra-authorized representatives of a controversial war and of the United States itself. In a poor, overcrowded colony-in-crisis, these Vietnam tourists excited widespread interest and ignited divergent opinions. As this paper's sources confirm,

Hong Kong's vibrant Chinese- and English-language public sphere covered the American servicemen in detail, celebrating their financial largesse and charity work and deploring their misdeeds. From newspaper editorials and letters to the editor, to union leaders, neighborhood associations, churches, and even the police, diverse segments of Hong Kong society weighed in and contributed to an increasingly inclusive social discourse of community and citizenship. Concerned, assertive Hong Kong residents began to re-define themselves and their expectations of their government, as evidenced both by the contemporaneous 1966-67 disturbances and the attending reforms introduced by an administration newly conscious of its precarious popular legitimacy. These reforms included a maximum working hours bill (1967), the City District Officer scheme (1968), free primary education (1972), massive new public housing schemes (1973), the introduction of residential mutual aid committees (1973), and a nine-year compulsory education system (1978).⁵⁷

Vietnam servicemen neither directly provoked these reforms nor the formation of Hong Kong's modern civic identity—the historical reality is messier, but no less essential. R&R tourism and its social footprint were an ever-present, low-simmer event that deliberately shied from documentation. As a result, its causal effects are hazy and historians would be pressed to draw straight lines from R&R to any succeeding events. Instead, this important chapter in Hong Kong's history is an enriching and provocative subtext—an overlooked foil that brings new texture to the colony's on-going social problems, as well as its remarkable economic and cultural evolution. American GIs remind us that Hong Kong's society was never neatly divided between British colonizers and colonized Chinese. Like

⁵⁷ Gary Ka-wai Cheung, *Hong Kong's Watershed*, 3-5; Michael Degolyer and Janet Lee Scott have lighted the importance of residential mutual aid committees as crucial to “developing a sense of community awareness and public service,” see: Michael E. Degolyer and Janet Lee Scott, “The Myth of Political Apathy in Hong Kong,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 547 (Sept. 1996), 68-78.

other world cities, Hong Kong's social history envelops essential global elements without which the story is incomplete. Moreover, on this specific issue, there were foreign residents on both sides, just as there were Chinese residents on both sides. Class was an equally imperfect determinant on this issue: privileged administrators disagreed with prominent residents, while middle- and lower-class residents could loathe or depend on the servicemen. The unifying element was this issue's broad pull.

In addition to this topic's social diffusion, two other factors have obscured Hong Kong's participation in the Vietnam War. The first is TST's extensive post-Vietnam redevelopment. Since the mid-1970s, the 'Juke Box Jungle' largely has disappeared from the district. While it still exists in Wan Chai, it has shrunk dramatically. In TST, the 'honky tonks' have been replaced by high-end stores, commercial offices, as well as modern Hong Kong's most important cultural institutions: the Hong Kong Museum of History (founded in 1975 and opened in 1998), the Hong Kong Museum of Art (founded in 1975 and opened in 1991), the Hong Kong Science Museum (founded in 1976 and opened in 1991), the Hong Kong Space Museum (founded 1977 and opened in 1980), the Hong Kong Cultural Centre (founded in 1984 and opened in 1989), and the Avenue of Stars (2004). As a result, few residents now think about the servicemen's haunts that overflowed TST well into the late 1970s. Second, Hong Kong's public memory of the Vietnam War has focused instead on the prolonged crisis that surrounded the arrival of over 200,000 Vietnamese "boat people" between 1975 and the early 1990s. Without detracting from that seminal chapter, this essay has shown that the boat people were in fact Hong Kong's second major experience of the Vietnam War.

Two poignant images from the days of R&R serve to conclude this essay. They encapsulate how this messy story has been distilled and even eviscerated from Hong Kong's official narrative. The first is a second cartoon by the French Hong Kong resident Zabo (fig. 2). Appearing in the *SCMP* in June 1968, we see two ships sitting side-by-side in Victoria Harbour. On the left side is a Chinese junk bearing the title "Forever King" (永王) and four Chinese men resembling Mao, including one who is ready to re-enact Mao's famous 1966 swim across the Yangzi. To the right lies a massive U.S. warship with five shocked servicemen staring down. The cartoon's juxtaposition beautifully emphasizes that Cold War enemies were encountering each other in this highly strategic and globalized meeting ground. Yet, the cartoon is also deceptive: neither side stayed on neatly separated boats. Hundreds of thousands of American servicemen tied to the Vietnam War disembarked and interacted with Chinese residents of all professions, classes, and political persuasions. Resident-servicemen interactions were often commercial and fleeting, but their diversity and their sheer volume etched meaningful, lasting impressions into Hong Kong society.

The second image further testifies to the ahistorical purification of Hong Kong's Vietnam War (fig. 3). Entitled "American sailor and bar girl, 1970," we see a smiling American sailor draping his right arm over the shoulders of a shorter, smiling Chinese female. A camera hangs around his neck, while she holds both his waist and his fingers. Shot *in studio* by Frank Fischbeck for a book entitled *The Face of Hong Kong*, the image provokes more questions than it answers. Did these two know each other beforehand? How was this girl chosen from among the thousands of available bar attendants? Why is she not in her bar uniform? Since servicemen only visited Hong Kong for a few days at a time, was this man chosen at random? Could he be just a resident dressed up to look the part? Without further

information, it is difficult to say anything with certainty; yet, therein lays its analytic value. The image's existence and the book's title testify to the undeniable GI presence in Hong Kong during the Vietnam War. The plain background, clear focus, and framing emphasize this pair as an affable, harmonious couple and renders them as symbols of a recognizable but understudied socio-economic relationship. At the same time, this image puts a happy face on a relationship that was far more fraught and dissolute in reality. Whether financially-interested bar girls, tailors, or taxi drivers, image-conscious U.S. officials, or weary servicemen, it was in few people's interests to dwell on the negative realities inherent to this arrangement. Since the 1970s, Hong Kong's rapid redevelopment and pragmatic, business-first public consensus have papered over this rich international history and denied its significance. While American officials used the British colony as a strategic refuge alongside a horrific war, American servicemen's visits to Hong Kong produced a maelstrom of dollars, debauchery, and debates that stimulated residents' civic consciousness and urged them to become citizens of their haven.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ "CROSSTALK," *SCSP-H* 16 June 1968, 5; also see: Zabo, *Hong Kong: Sweet and Sour, Dollars Billets Doux* (Kowloon: Lorraine Langridge, 1967); **for the photograph, see:** "American sailor and bar girl, 1970," Call No. 08-05-014, HKPRO; or see: Linda Martin with Richard Hughes and Frank Fischbeck, *The Face of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Libra Brooks, 1970).

Fig. 1



Fig. 2

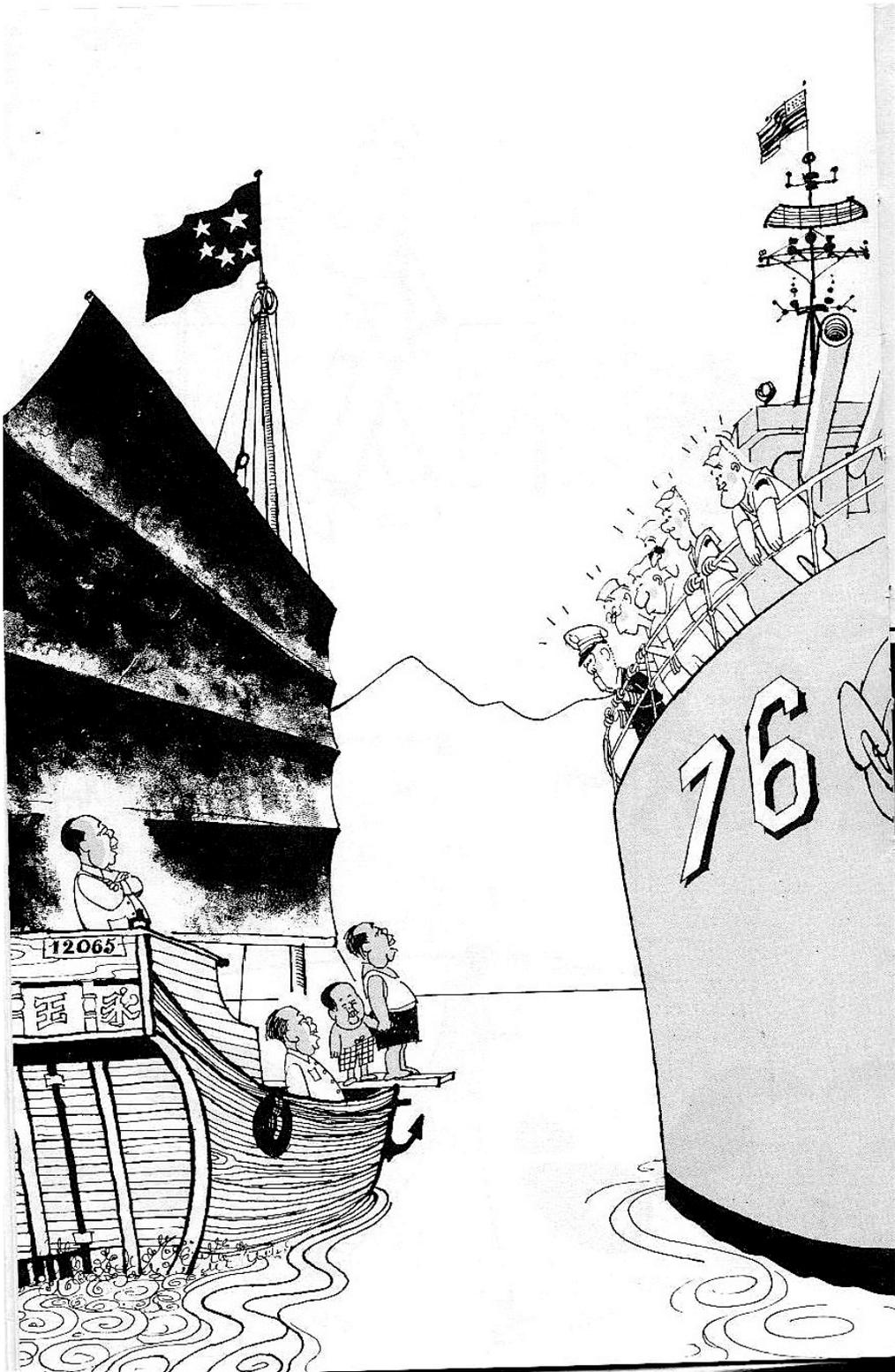


Fig. 3



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