

## Elusive Refuge: Chinese Migrants in the Cold War, by Laura Madokoro

Jamie Monson

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ancestral homelands continue to neglect? And why, for God's sake, are we supposed to focus on our own? Immigrants are as cosmopolitan as the next person. We need to study diasporas' involvement in global issues as well.

In the meantime, however, we can use *Diasporas Reimagined* as a springboard and inspiration for debating the diversity of immigrant communities and reimagining the migration scholars' and the general public's views of who

we, the members—both the enthusiastic and the reluctant ones—of the diaspora really are.

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*Elżbieta M. Goździak is a research professor at the Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown University. The author may be contacted at emg27@georgetown.edu.*

### *Elusive Refuge: Chinese Migrants in the Cold War*



Laura Madokoro

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016, pp. 331

In the aftermath of the Chinese civil war and the 1949 Chinese communist revolution, millions of Chinese from the People's Republic of China crossed over the border into Hong Kong. Once they arrived there, they became caught up in the politics of the Cold War and the contradictions of post-Second World War humanitarianism. Laura Madokoro's timely book on the history of Chinese migrants within this global context provides a well-documented study that will be an important contribution to our understanding of global migration, cold war politics in Asia, humanitarianism, and racial exclusion. The location of Hong Kong as the site of this study provides an especially useful lens for understanding these themes, as this space was characterized by local ambiguities that reflected larger global contradictions and ambivalences towards Asian migrants. Much like a recent book by Rachel Bright on an earlier group of Chinese migrants to the South African gold mines (*Chinese Labour in South Africa, 1902–10*, Palgrave Macmillan 2013), these accounts of Chinese migrants in white settler colonies (and their post-colonies) throw into relief the boundary struggles over nation, race, and class that their presence provoked. The story Madokoro tells also has resonance for contemporary tensions over the entry of mainland Chinese into Hong Kong since its handing over to the PRC in 1997.

Madokoro situates her work primarily in the literatures on refugees, migrants, and humanitarianism. She outlines the history of the category of "refugee," reminding us of its changing meaning over time as nineteenth-century nation states and national borders created the category of a "stateless person," and after 1951 defined the refugee as a persecuted individual in need of protection. For the migrant Chinese in Cold War Hong Kong, these nuances were critically important. Chinese migrants were viewed (and constructed) by humanitarian organizations as refugees from hardship and persecution, an argument that was embraced by the anti-communist

regime in Taiwan but questioned by British colonial officials. The United States and other white settler colonies countered that migrants from the People's Republic of China were "rice refugees" or economic rather than politically persecuted migrants. The specific geopolitical position of Hong Kong made these arguments both specific to the East Asian region and emblematic of global Cold War politics: Hong Kong was a British colony whose governing authorities favoured neutrality in order to maintain relations with the PRC; the colony was historically situated at the edge of mainland China while looking outwards to the West; thus Hong Kong represented a "middle ground" in the competing Cold War claims of the PRC and Taiwan, and this played a key role in these debates.

Not only is this story of migration situated at a critical moment in the history of identity and belonging for East Asia itself, but it is also entangled in the longer historical arc of Chinese exclusion in the white settler colonies. Migrants from Eastern Europe fleeing communism after the war were resettled in the United States and elsewhere in white settler colonies like Canada and Australia, while migrants from Asia generally faced more stringent barriers: "The long history of Chinese exclusion in the West defined the politics around humanitarian assistance and settlement programs for the people from "Red China" (2). European migrants were more likely to be accepted as political refugees, while Asians were not. Madokoro thus spends considerable time outlining the history of Asian exclusion globally and argues that the Chinese migrant experience in Hong Kong must be viewed through this lens.

Madokoro first traces this arc of historical Asian exclusion backward in time from 1950s Hong Kong, then takes us forward into the 1970s with a chapter on refugees from conflict in Indochina. In this case, she argues, the United States and other white settler societies used resettlement of Indochinese refugees to demonstrate their "humanitarian identity" and compassion, while obscuring their histories of

racial discrimination. This chapter in the book moves from the Hong Kong material to take up Indochinese refugees and resettlement globally, arguing that the mythologizing narratives that instrumentalized generosity among white settler societies came to dominate popular understanding of these events. During this process, Hong Kong was a critical intermediary as a country of first asylum for peoples of Southeast Asia and helped to shape the global response to Southeast Asian refugees through screening, repatriation, and resettlement. Once again, decisions were made based on definitions of what constituted a “real refugee” as opposed to a less deserving migrant, decisions that ultimately played a gatekeeping role that restricted migration according to classification.

Laura Madokoro’s book has used the history of Chinese migrants in Hong Kong to demonstrate the complexities

as well as the continuities of movements of East Asian and South Asian peoples in the twentieth century. Starting with the Cold War contradictions of humanitarian construction of the “refugee” in post-1949 Hong Kong, and moving through the history of Asian exclusion and the ambivalent resettlement policies of white settler colonies through the 1970s, she is able to simultaneously tell a local and a global story. This monograph will have relevance for scholars and students of global refugees and migration, not only in historical perspective but also today.

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*Jamie Monson is professor of history and director of the African Studies Center at Michigan State University. The author can be reached at monsonj@isp.msu.edu.*

### *Protection amid Chaos: The Creation of Property Rights in Palestinian Refugee Camps*



Nadya Hajj

New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, pp. 214

**B**ased on extensive fieldwork and interviews, this book outlines the complex nature of property rights in Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon. Particular attention is devoted to issues that have arisen in the reconstruction of Nahr al-Barid refugee camp, following the 2007 conflict there between the Lebanese Army and the Fateh al-Islam armed group. Hajj offers considerable insight into social and economic dynamics within Palestinian camps. She also makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of how informal institutions, local configurations of social and political power, and formal law and regulation interact to shape property ownership. Her study is particularly relevant to protracted refugee situations, but its value extends well beyond.

Most Palestinian refugees in Jordan are Jordanian citizens, with full legal rights. Hajj’s analysis shows that a gradual synthesis has occurred between the initial post-1948 community-based system whereby property rights were recognized and enforced in the camps, and the formal Jordanian legal system. Since the Jordanian civil war (1970–1), the government has sought to expand state control and authority. The author might have more fully addressed the original ownership of refugee camp land: some camps were built on state land, while others stand on land that is nominally rented from Jordanian landowners. Some original landowners feel they have lost effective control over their former properties and have threatened to use the legal system to regain it. The Jordanian government has discouraged court challenges in

order to maintain political stability, but it has sometimes suggested if the refugee issue was resolved, such claims of (re)ownership would indeed go forward.

In Lebanon, matters are more complex. Most Palestinian refugees are stateless, and Lebanese law prohibits refugees from owning property. The rise of Fateh and other Palestinian armed factions in the camps from the late 1960s created a new dynamic of local power, one that largely displaced any limited authority exerted by the already weak Lebanese state. Customary systems were also increasingly supplanted by the quasi-hegemonic role of Fateh, and the growing role of formal camp committees. In many cases, later changes in local power structures then forced modification or renegotiation of these practices. In Nahr al-Barid, for example, Hajj shows how the Lebanese government pressed for greater control and authority as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) undertook camp reconstruction.

As the author points out, very little has been written on the lived practices of refugee camp property rights in Palestine. In the late 1990s and 2000s the World Bank and the Palestinian Authority partially examined how informal property rights in Palestinian refugee camps might affect redevelopment, repatriation, and reparations in a Middle East peace agreement. It is hardly surprising that the author does not appear to be aware of this, since (in view of its potential political sensitivity) none of their work was ever