7 Public Opinion: Rejection or Humanitarian Concern?

The overwhelming thrust of local public opinion has been in favour of returning the Vietnamese men, women and children to their own country by the swiftest possible means. Anti-Vietnamese feeling grew noticeably from early 1988, with further new levels of frustration arising in late 1989 and 1990 from the inability of the Hong Kong and British Governments to continue with forced repatriation.

In the following selection of letters – predominantly from the Chinese community, but with expatriate opinions being expressed with equal force, perhaps for different reasons – the UNHCR is scorned; comparisons are made with illegal immigrants from China; comment is made on the financial burden to the Hong Kong Government; Y. K. Ting points to the ingratitude of the Vietnamese asylum-seekers; two New Territories residents, Alice Chung Yuen-wah and Luk Tak-ching, complain that the refugees are too demanding; Ken Loh suggests that any Vietnamese caught ‘within Hong Kong’s territorial waters’ should be sent to labour camps and given the status of ‘slaves’ in order ‘to relieve the current labour shortage’; and So Chi-chui is particularly critical of the behaviour of those refugees who disturbed local residents in the Tuen Mun area. In an earlier letter on 11 November 1988, So suggested: ‘Even if Vietnamese refugees do deserve help, we should not show blind benevolence . . .’.

One letter, from Lindsay Bennet, calls for support for Mrs Thatcher’s stance on sending the Vietnamese boat people back; another anonymous writer says, among other issues, that they may find it ‘virtually impossible’ to adapt to the ‘relatively cold climate’ in Britain; and J. Handley takes the position that ‘the most humane action’ is to ensure the safe return of the boat people to Vietnam.

Kind or unkind China can’t win
(The Hongkong Standard, 29 May 1989)

Right on, Mr Ji Zhaoxiang, I concur wholeheartedly with your protestation: ‘Once these boat people insisted on continuing their journey to
Hong Kong, there was nothing China could do to stop them. To say that [such a] move, which is based on humanitarian grounds, is support for them to sail to Hong Kong is very irresponsible and unfair.’

Would you retain highly disgruntled-dissatisfied, and uninvited ‘guests’? You could be accused of forcible detention – depriving them of their liberty.

So, China should not be slammed for helping the Vietnamese come – China is being democratic and humanitarian.

Hong Kong and the West can provide more and better freebies, so why not let the VPRs (Vietnamese Pseudo Refugees) have the chance of a good life. Sadly China can never win – kind or unkind China gets ‘slammed’.

Unfortunately for Hong Kong but very fortuitously for the VPRs, Lord MacLehose is no longer governor. He favours and recommends forcible repatriation of VPRs. Even he – a ‘founder-proclaimer’ of Hong Kong as the first asylum for VPRs – realises now that the VPR status is in fact as illegal immigrants.

The majority of VPR supporters (UNHCR, the bleeding hearts; do-gooders; and do-what-I-say-but-not-what-I-do brigade) consists of students, the affluent class, and the non-Chinese.

The students can afford to be ‘idealistic’ – their parents pay the bills. It’s easy for foreigners (always the Caucasians) to create muck in others’ backyards as long as it’s not in theirs. The UNHCR, a Westerners’ concept, educates the VPRs on how to be discerning and demanding. There are millions of other refugees elsewhere, but I have not seen or heard of as many demands and threats (fastings and riots) as I’ve heard from the VPRs in Hong Kong.

The UNHCR, or any other ‘saint’, please name me another group of refugees which was more pampered than the Vietnamese boat people.

As I’ve said before, to prove that you are not indulging in lip-service and hypocrisy take in a Vietnamese family. Verbal charities, even written ones, are cheap and meaningless.

Incidentally, there was a piece of good news recently for the Hong Kong people: Macau is granting citizenship for five-year-plus residents.

It’s much cheaper and nearer to ‘invest’ in Macau. An ingenious way to enhance Macau’s economy. Maybe then Macau could attract a few more VPRs.

John Yeo
Aberdeen

Treat illegals all the same
(The Hongkong Standard, 10 November 1989)
In less than a year, I’ve read about the death of three Chinese illegals trying to run away from the Hong Kong and Macau police.

Don’t Hong Kong authorities realise that the territory should never have become a port of first asylum? Tens of thousands of Chinese, many with families and friends here, are summarily repatriated to China every year. They do not get a screening, even after the recent Tiananmen massacre. Those caught working here illegally get hefty gaol sentences as well.