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INTELLIGENCE STUDY

THE KWANGTUNG EXODUS OF 1962

One of a Series of Studies on Dissidence
And Control in Communist China

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE
Office of Current Intelligence

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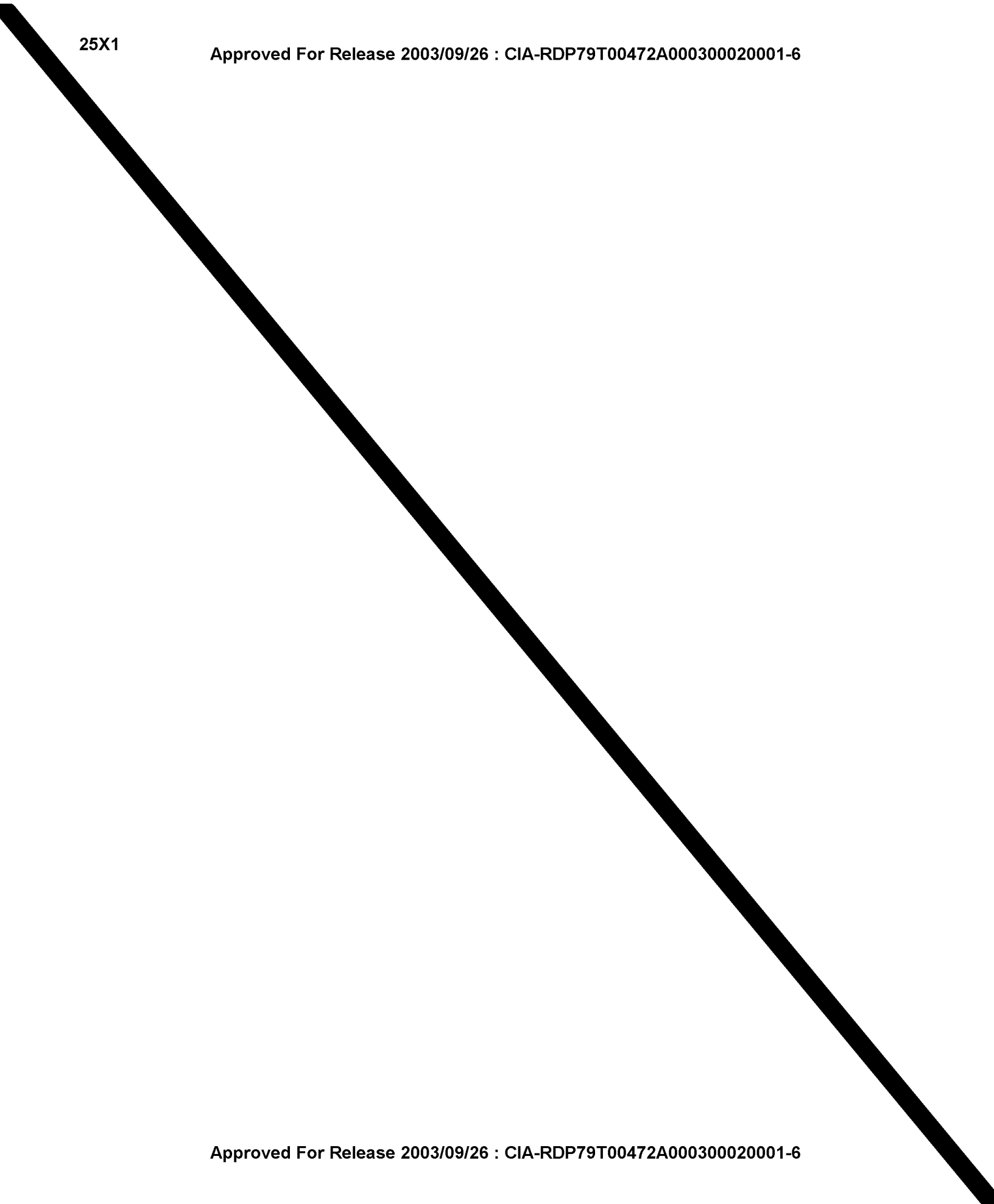

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The massive exodus from Kwangtung Province to Hong Kong in May 1962 (see map) stands out as indisputable evidence that dissident sentiment in that populous area of South China was both widespread and easily surfaced. The dissidence is traceable mainly to the grim economic conditions that existed in Kwangtung, but the exodus itself was brought on by one of the few instances in which tight controls were deliberately lifted. That the exodus grew to the proportions it did is due to the comparatively loose supervision Peiping was exercising over local authorities at the time.

Beginning in late April, the controlled movement of approved emigrants from a particularly overcrowded section of urban and rural Kwangtung became a surge of more than 100,000 people toward Hong Kong after border controls were lifted on the Communist side. In spite of barriers thrown up by Hong Kong police, more than 50,000 people managed to get through by the end of May, when effective controls were reimposed by the Communists.

The decision by Kwangtung officials to risk an uncontrolled exodus was taken shortly after receiving Peiping's order to reduce urban population in the province by some 30 percent--without resorting to force. Officials tried to meet this insoluble problem in part by encouraging further emigration, mainly of unemployed relatives of Overseas Chinese. A jam-up developed at the border after unexpectedly large numbers of exit permits had been issued, whereupon controls were dropped entirely. Almost immediately, people that the regime presumably wanted to retain, such as young industrial and farm workers, began to take advantage of the lapsed border controls and soon made up most of the emigrant group. Kwangtung officials had badly underestimated the amount of popular disaffection among young people. Nevertheless, several weeks elapsed before controls were reimposed.

There was no resultant purge of responsible regional and local officials. Subsequent national policy decisions, however, indicated that the Kwangtung exodus had helped to show Peiping the nature and extent of popular dissidence in China and the deterioration in the over-all control mechanism that had occurred since the collapse of the Leap Forward.

I. THE SETTING

A. The Pattern of Migration from Communist China to Hong Kong

Normally, both Communist China and the overcrowded British colony of Hong Kong have recognized a mutual interest in controlling the flow of "refugees" from the mainland into Hong Kong, and long ago both governments worked out a set of informal rules covering this delicate issue. Except for the extraordinary month of May 1962, Peiping has followed these rules in practice.

The existence of a flow of legal and illegal immigrants to Hong Kong does not necessarily mean that Communist China is substantially more lax than other police states. With few exceptions, exit permits are given only to unemployable people having relatives in Hong Kong and other Overseas Chinese communities. The steady flow of illegal escapees, leaving mostly in hired fishing junks, would be extremely difficult to stop, short of shutting down the South China fishing industry. Effective guarding of the land border usually keeps the illegal flow overland down to a trickle.

The Hong Kong Government's willingness to accept immigrants from China goes back to the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, but the pressure of refugees from Communist rule in 1950-51 caused the British to restrict the legal flow to 50 Chinese per day. These have usually entered Hong Kong across the land border by train. This numerical restriction is easily circumvented, however, for the Chinese Communists have only to make the exit permits valid for Macao. From this nearby Portuguese colony long-established smugglers will take the Chinese emigrants to Hong Kong by devious water routes. Their minimum fee in early 1962 was reportedly some HK $150 (US $25).

The policy of the Macao Government has continued to be one of allowing free access to Chinese having no more than adequate identification papers. Those illegal immigrants who make their way successfully into Hong Kong, or are apprehended on one of the

water routes, are generally allowed to remain in the British colony. They are, in fact, encouraged to integrate by simple registration procedures and to become self-sustaining through regular employment.

The flow of illegal immigrants to Hong Kong increased steadily beginning in mid-1961, as the Chinese Communists issued exit permits somewhat more freely, and the official Communist China Travel Service facilitated the emigrants' contact with smuggling rings in Macao. The resultant total of some 40,000 to 50,000 illegal immigrants for the year 1961 probably exceeded substantially the flow of previous years. These additional people traveled mostly by water, since the land border remained under close Communist guard. In line with the relatively lenient policies being followed throughout China in 1961 and early 1962, however, those caught trying to escape over the land border in those years were given less severe penalties than earlier, with some being merely warned against another attempt and sent back to their homes. As a result, the number trying to escape by land rose, and by early 1962 Hong Kong police were arresting several hundred illegal entrants per month, as compared with a pre-1961 monthly average well below 100.

B. National Policies in Early 1962

The spring of 1962 marked a low point in the Communist regime's confidence in its domestic policies. Natural disasters had strung out over three years, the collapse of the Great Leap Forward had brought large-scale unemployment, popular disaffection was widespread, and the prestige of the party had dropped alarmingly, even among rank-and-file party members.

Confronted with widespread apathy and popular resentment in 1961 and early 1962, the regime ordered a general relaxation of policies. It reduced penalties for petty crime, eased travel restrictions, fragmented the communes into collective units of 20 to 30 households called production teams, restored private farm plots and permitted some free market activity in food and other consumer goods, and encouraged emigration of unemployed relatives of Overseas Chinese.

One of the most pressing tasks of the period was to reduce to manageable proportions the approximately 30 million unemployed people in the cities, who had been brought in from the countryside since 1957 for industrial employment. Efforts to persuade them to return home proved to be largely ineffective. Rural conditions were worse than in the cities and villagers were reluctant to spread their already tight rations. Many urban residents refused to leave, or returned to the cities after going to the countryside.

The problem of reducing urban population was still being dealt with only half-heartedly at the end of 1961. Then, in April 1962, Premier Chou En-lai frankly told the National People's Congress that the Great Leap was dead, and that he did not expect early economic recovery. He called for further industrial retrenchment, and told the congress that transfer of redundant urban workers back to their villages to augment the agricultural labor force had become the nation's foremost task. The problems of insufficient food and of urban unemployment had combined to raise the potential seriousness of the security situation in urban areas. The regime's previous concern over dissidence in rural areas had been increased by the open resistance, which had developed in Honan and other parts of central and eastern China from 1960 to 1961.

C. The Situation in Kwangtung

The people who left Kwangtung in May 1962 had good reason to be discontented with conditions there. In both quantity and quality, food supplies in Kwangtung were approaching seriously low levels in the spring of 1962. Several months' drought, which was broken only toward the end of May 1962 (and then by floods), had erased the prospect of much if any improvement in the food situation for another year. Rations in Canton were better than in rural Kwangtung, but they were still insufficient to provide energy for normal work and to maintain health. Cholera had taken thousands of lives in Kwangtung the previous summer, and it was expected to recur in 1962.

Reduced job and educational opportunities contributed to the grim situation in and around Canton. As in the rest of China, Canton had shut down many factories and was operating others at reduced rates. Many lower level schools had closed in 1961, and by early 1962 it was clear in Canton that the closing of many higher schools would soon increase the number of unemployed.

It was also clear to the authorities that the 1961 plan to reduce Canton's population by only 200,000 people was inadequate. A new target of 600,000 was adopted (the population of Canton was 2.5 million); but, as elsewhere in China, enforcement of the policy was difficult and there was continued reluctance to use force on noncooperative urban residents.

In Canton, police stations and street committees made certain that those people registered in the city after 1958 fully understood the retrenchment regulations. Given one month to leave Canton for their native villages, many chose to remain and, forfeiting their urban ration cards, became "drifters" living off relatives or fending for themselves. Many became involved in black market activities. Regular employment was of course denied them.

Many who were willing to leave Canton had difficulty getting accepted back in their villages. Endlessly stalled off when applying for new registration certificates and ration cards, they returned to Canton. There, the returnees entered a limbo in which urban officials shunned responsibility for their presence.

Under these circumstances, Peiping's decision in April 1962 to relax emigration rules further was welcomed by both urban and rural officials, who lost little time in taking favorable action on past applications for exit permits and even invited new ones. Relaxing controls is not the same thing as dropping them, however, and the dramatic change in May was still apparently unanticipated by the Chinese officials concerned.

II. THE EXODUS

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The abrupt dropping of border controls and the subsequent surge of more than 100,000 Chinese in Kwangtung Province toward Hong Kong during May 1962 baffled outside observers at the time, but [redacted] confident statements about the events themselves and the causal factors at work.

In April 1962 Kwangtung officials received permission from Peiping to increase further the flow of emigration to Hong Kong, as part of the urban retrenchment effort. Detailed planning and execution were left in the hands of the Kwangtung authorities on the assumption that they would guard against the development of a serious security situation.

Many new exit permits were quickly issued, far in excess of Hong Kong's quota of 50 per day, and a transportation problem soon developed. The permit holders had been at first shunted to Macao, but the smuggling rings that would normally take them were unable to handle the increased flow, especially since Hong Kong water police were becoming more vigilant. Many would-be emigrants became discouraged and returned to Canton.

At this point, about 1 May 1962, Kwangtung officials made the decision to lift controls along the land border with Hong Kong, apparently to relieve congestion on the Macao route and in Canton itself. Further opening of the valve controlling emigration flow from Kwangtung had been predictable, but not the complete waiving of any requirement for an exit permit to leave the Kwangtung side.

Though unannounced by Communist officials, word of these policy changes was surely expected to spread. There were still factors implicit in the situation, however, that might have been expected to keep the flow of people within safe bounds. Communist border guards remained at their posts, though few of them made any effort to hinder the crossers. Some of the guards even showed people the best routes,

but the rugged hills posed a formidable barrier. In addition, Hong Kong Government efforts to stop illegal immigrants at the land border and on the water could have been expected to increase with the flow of people. Finally, there was the general atmosphere of control that Communist officials had sought to develop throughout China--one in which people would be reluctant to get out of line and head for the border without first trying to get a permit.

It was soon clear, however, that Peiping and Kwangtung officials had grossly underestimated the number of people who would seize this opportunity to leave.

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[redacted] news that the border is open." had spread by word of mouth throughout eastern Kwangtung within days. By mid-May, what had been intended as a controlled movement of a limited number of approved emigrants had become an uncontrolled exodus made up largely of able-bodied young industrial and farm workers.

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[redacted]

Continued increase in the flow of people across the border in this third week of May still brought no reimposition of Communist controls at the border. On 21 May, however, regular Chinese troops replaced some border guards, and there were indications of travel restriction farther inland. Rumors spread that the border would close within a few days. On 24-25 May heavy rains accompanied the effective reimposition of controls on the Chinese side of the land border with Hong Kong. The mainstream of emigrant flow was successfully shunted back through

Macao, and it quickly returned in size to a level that posed no serious security threat in Kwangtung. The make-up of the emigrant group was controlled again by the requirement of exit permits.

In mid-July Hong Kong authorities warned that the colony still faced a major crisis in this continuing flow of illegal immigrants over water routes emanating from Macao. The successful penetration of water patrols by some 20,000 people in the two months after the closing of the land border caused the Hong Kong Government to form a special joint force of augmented sea and land forces to patrol the colony's waters and shores. A new temporary police policy of firing on fleeing junks and destroying those captured brought rapid increase in smugglers' fees and caused some to lie low. Finally, in September, the flow of illegal immigrants fell off sharply as a result of tightening controls in China.

By the end of 1962 Hong Kong's statistics on registration of new residents revealed that more than 50,000 people had entered the colony illegally via the land route in May. It is probable that at least an equal number reached the border, but failed to get through the augmented Hong Kong border guards, or turned back en route upon hearing discouraging rumors prior to the border's closing. Adding to these figures the continuing flow of perhaps 3,000 emigrants over the water route during the period of the exodus, it may be concluded that more than 100,000 residents of Kwangtung showed their disaffection by heading for the border in May 1962.

III. THE NATURE OF THE DISSIDENCE

There are some inconsistencies in the exodus story. For many who turned their backs on home and family, the trek to Hong Kong was a rigorous one; yet, they were submissive when turned back across the border and ultimately sent back whence they came. Also, the massiveness of the exodus and the rapidity of its build-up stand in sharp contrast to the collapse of the movement upon the reimposition of controls. But a closer look at the nature of the dissidence expressed in the exodus makes it clear that these inconsistencies are only apparent.

Popular discontent with the grim economic and social conditions in Kwangtung was undoubtedly heightened somewhat by the obvious contrast with Hong Kong, but the positive attraction of the already overcrowded colony was limited. Employment prospects in Hong Kong were falling off in the spring of 1962. The projected loss of "imperial preference" with Britain's anticipated entry into the Common Market and the cutback in production for the United States market had cast a dark shadow over the colony's industry and led to a layoff of thousands of workers in early 1962.

By the end of 1961 some 440,000 squatters had been resettled in government-built housing, but 520,000 others had taken their places in the hillside shacks and rooftop tenements of the colony. Medical facilities, which proved capable of preventing the threatened cholera epidemic of 1961, were strained to capacity. The Hong Kong Government's goal of universal primary education had come within reach by 1961, but of the 90,000 children entering primary school only one fifth would find places in secondary schools. Of those only one twentieth could look forward to some kind of post-secondary education. Hong Kong's relative freedom of thought and action for the individual was a recognizable goal for the people of Kwangtung but a vague one.

Due to the constant large-scale movement of Hong Kong residents to and from Kwangtung, and the large amount of letter writing back and forth, these conditions in Hong Kong were probably well-known in general terms to the people in Kwangtung. The discontent of many had deepened into disaffection strong enough to make them leave Kwangtung in May. They were not desperate, however, and the attraction of Hong Kong was not sufficient to make them resist being sent back to Kwangtung. Their disaffection found its expression in noncooperation with local Kwangtung authorities, but even this form of passive resistance was exercised mainly when it appeared that the authorities could be overwhelmed by the sheer number of those failing to cooperate.

Those people who started for the border without holding exit permits did so in the expectation that many others would do the same, or in the knowledge that many others were already on the move. No planning of a mass movement took place and there was little, if any, organization among groups of people prior to their meeting on the road. Word-of-mouth communication was sufficient to instill the people with confidence that the authorities in their uncertain state would find it difficult to take action at least for a while, in the face of tens of thousands of people moving toward a common objective, at the same time, within a confined space.

The exercise of passive resistance in this way has a long history of effective use in China, because of the great number of people and the weak state of central authority in the past. It is important, however, to stress the passive and essentially opportunistic nature of this resistance.

There was a general lack of public disturbance during the otherwise turbulent month of May, when so many thousands of people were on the move in a confined part of Kwangtung Province. A few small incidents were reported during the third week of May, but none during the week immediately following the closing of the land border. On 1 June there occurred the only demonstration of any size against authority. Some 1,000 people in a queue at Canton's Eastern Railroad Station were angered

by refusal of transportation to the Hong Kong border area and reacted to the explanation given by Public Security Bureau officials. Stones were thrown, vehicles overturned, and shots fired by police and public security troops. Onlookers swelled the crowd to many thousands and troop reinforcements were called to the scene. Some blood was shed and several hundred people were jailed, but order was restored without great difficulty. To maintain security, the station was placed under heavy guard, ticket sales were transferred temporarily to another part of the city, and passengers were allowed to enter the station only at train time.

These security measures and additional street patrols by public security forces in Canton continued for at least a week, and the show of potential force was sizable. The only significant incident reported after that was the rushing of the Lowu bridge at the Hong Kong land border by some 100 people on 12 June. The ability of Communist authorities to control all the incidents with little difficulty points to the conclusion that in no instance during the spring of 1962 did open resistance really "catch on" and spread beyond the initial group having cause for action.

Communist efforts to date to overwhelm the people with a show of clear resolve and firm authority have generally been successful. The Kwangtung exodus is a good example of the people's ability to take advantage of a lapse in the regime's control effort. When authority finally reasserted itself, however, the effectiveness and speed of word-of-mouth communications, and the people's tendency toward unorganized but coordinated mass action worked in favor of the regime.

IV: ANALYSIS OF CONTROL MEASURES

The Communist regime's efforts to control the expression of dissidence in Kwangtung passed through three distinct but related phases. (1) The relaxation of normal emigration procedures in late April brought an increase in the urban population pressure in Canton rather than an expected decrease. (2) Dropping the requirement of normal exit procedures at the beginning of May in order to relieve this pressure brought an unexpectedly great increase in the flow of people toward the border from rural as well as urban areas. (3) Then, late in May the exodus was brought under control by an effective combination of force and increased opportunity for approved people in and around Canton to head for Hong Kong via water routes.

The decision in late April to increase substantially the issuance of exit permits put a burden of responsibility upon the cadres concerned that they failed to bear. These party and government cadres had borne the brunt of criticism from above and below since the failure of the Leap Forward. Articles and editorials in Red Flag and the People's Daily during March and April, on the need for cadres to get closer to the masses and report accurately on local conditions, had served to warn that further faltering in the urban depopulation program might also be blamed on the cadres. The continued presence of so many displaced persons in Canton and their freedom to participate in black market activities meant that the charge of corruption might also be leveled at the cadres concerned.

Understandably, during the first phase of the exodus, reporting by cadres on their use of emigration as a depopulation device was probably less than accurate and punctual. The situation clearly moved faster than was realized by higher authorities, and the cadres processing exit permit applications in their respective rural commune or urban public security bureaus could not have been expected to look to the mushrooming effect of rapidly issuing many permits. Even had they foreseen the combined effects of their actions, it is doubtful that the lower level

cadres would have stood up better than they did to the mounting pressure of people wanting permits to leave Kwangtung. This defensive attitude of both party and government cadres stands out as a serious weakness in the control mechanism. People came to apply for exit permits, during this first phase of the exodus, with little of their previous concern for the possible consequences of investigation and refusal.

Unclear guidance from Peiping appears to have lain behind the lifting of all border controls in the second phase of the exodus. Such action probably had the tacit approval of Peiping, but the regime's leaders were preoccupied with many problems: the continuing economic decline, general deterioration in the elan of both government and party cadres, reviving non-Communist tendencies among the masses, the split with Moscow, and the rapid build-up of tactical offensive capability on Taiwan. Party officials of the Central South Regional Bureau probably followed the developing exodus closely, but the situation continued to be handled in this second phase essentially as a provincial problem.

Other evidence of indecision in Peiping over security problems was its handling of a coincidental large-scale exodus from Sinkiang to the USSR. A separate study will review the details of the security situation in Sinkiang, but it is known that similarities in the two events included relaxed controls on the Chinese side and a delay of a few weeks after the exodus started before a decision was taken to stop it.

In deciding to lift all border controls, Kwangtung authorities acted according to their appraisal of the actual and potential dissidence among the people concerned and the actual and potential effectiveness of the control mechanism in Kwangtung. They correctly assessed their ability to stop the situation from getting beyond control, but they badly underestimated the amount of popular disaffection. The officials also apparently deluded themselves as to the effectiveness of the atmosphere of control existing in Kwangtung at the time. Many people simply did not hesitate in hitting the road

for the border, when they knew or sensed that a great many others were doing the same.

Phase three began with the decision, probably made by T'ao Chu, first secretary of the party's Central South Regional Bureau, to close the land border and return to the normal pattern of emigration. Departure from Kwangtung by water was greatly facilitated for those having permits, and Kwangtung authorities made it clear that overwhelming force was available to prevent departure en masse and that they were willing to use it.

Peiping's apparent detachment from the events in Kwangtung, and the lack of any subsequent purge of the local and regional officials involved* has tended to obscure the important relationship which is now believed to have existed between the dissidence and control lessons of the Kwangtung exodus and subsequent policy decisions made by the regime.

The rapid development of the exodus must have shocked the officials concerned, first at the provincial level and later in Peiping, when the full weight of the statistics was borne in upon them. The event apparently contributed a final amount of evidence needed to convince the regime that overhaul of the control mechanism and renewed emphasis upon general socialist education could be postponed no longer. The decision to move ahead on these fronts was formally revealed at the 10th plenum of the party central committee which followed in September 1962.

The uncertain pace of the party rectification that followed in 1963, and the wide scope of the regime's present effort to regain lost ground through general socialist education, make it difficult to assess the effectiveness of these corrective measures. The causes of the dissidence that found expression in the Kwangtung exodus of

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May 1962 are not confined to that province, however, and they are not likely to be eliminated in the foreseeable future. The exodus suggests, moreover, that even in the best devised control system lapses of judgment can open gaps that may persist for a considerable length of time. The exodus stands as one period in which the people of Kwangtung could, and did, give overt expression to their dissident sentiments.

ANNEX A

PERSONNEL CHANGES IN KWANGTUNG PROVINCE IN 1962

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1. [redacted] indicates that no great change occurred in Kwangtung Province in positions of major responsibility during the latter half of 1962 as a result of the exodus of 1962.

2. As the tabulation below suggests, administrative changes in Kwangtung did take place in late 1962, but they were few and conformed to normal patterns.

3. About 60 percent of all identified personnel in Kwangtung in major positions have been in office since at least January 1962.

4. During the period from July to December 1962, 33 individuals were newly identified in major positions in Kwangtung.

5. Since August 1962 a total of 40 individuals have not been identified in major positions which they had previously held in Kwangtung.

6. Although 79 individuals have not been identified since January 1961 in major positions in Kwangtung, this does not necessarily mean that these individuals no longer hold their respective positions. In recent months several individuals were reidentified in positions in Kwangtung after an absence of over five years.

	Kwangtung Provincial Government	Kwangtung CCP Provincial Committee	Canton Municipal Government	Canton CCP Municipal Committee	TOTALS
New Identifications					
July-Dec 62	12	5	11	5	33
Jan-Dec 63	34	9	29	3	75
Jan-July 64	16	4	2	4	26
Changes since August 1962					
Removals	7	0	2	2	11
Transfers	2	1	1	1	5
No Information since January 1961	20	12	0	7	39
No Information since August 1962	23	7	7	3	40
Number of Individuals in Office					
since January 1960	34	13	8	8	63
since January 1961	18	4	5	2	30
since January 1962	22	8	16	3	49
since August 1962	7	5	11	5	28
since January 1963	12	6	12	3	33

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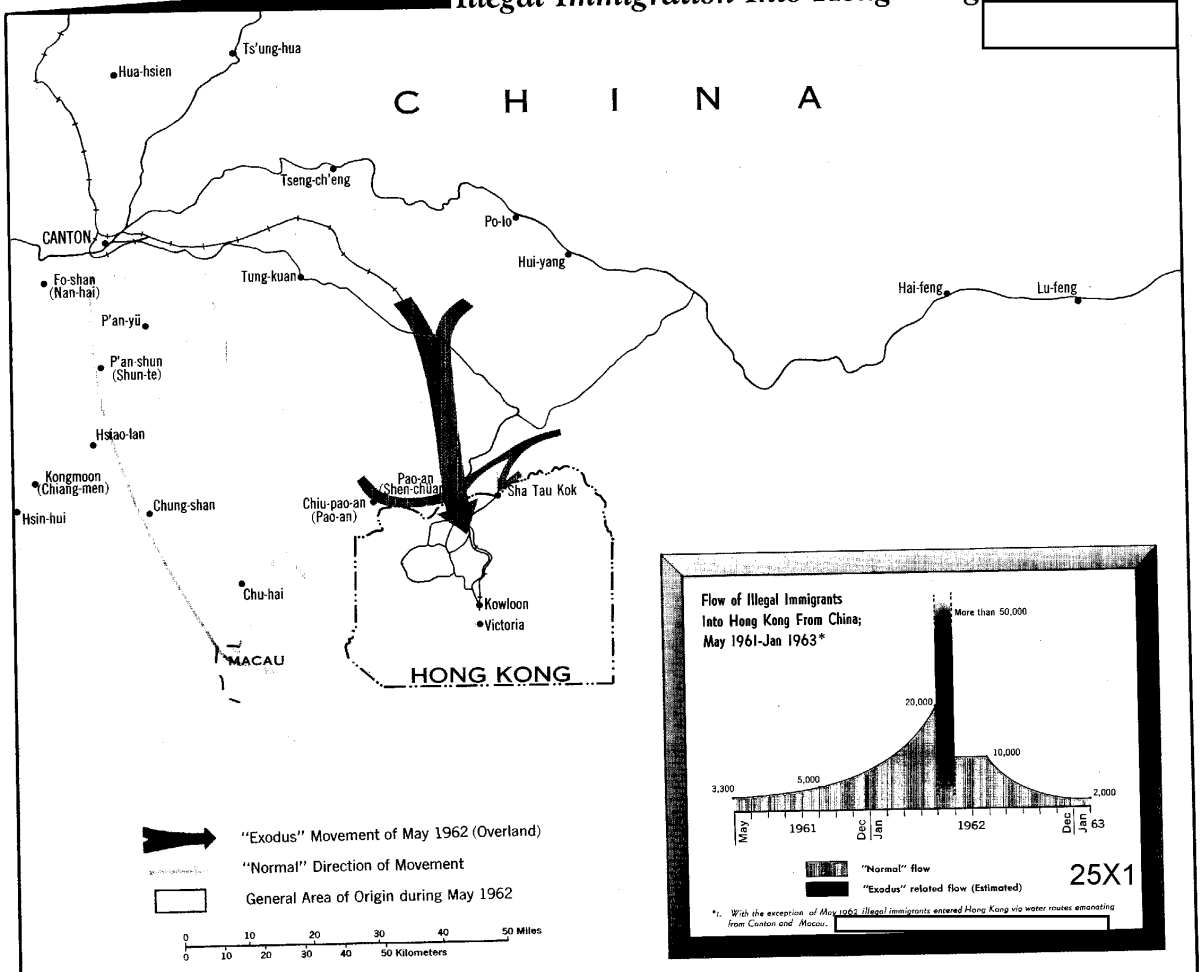
Illegal Immigration Into Hong Kong: 1961-62



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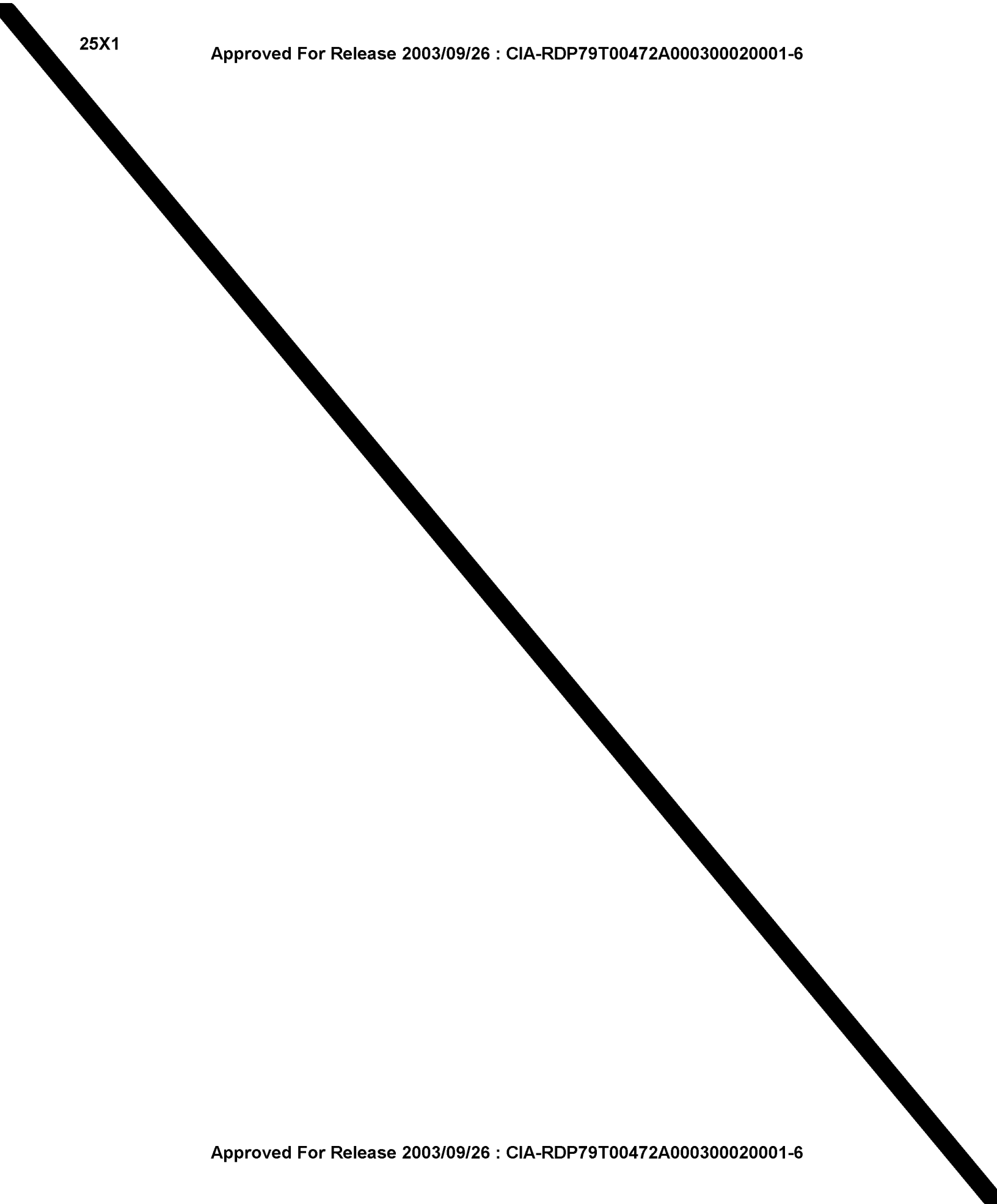

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