

Occasional Papers No. 14 (February 2002)

**Social Relations Between Pearl River Delta and Hong Kong:
A Study of Cross-border Families**

Alvin Y. So

Division of Social Science, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Abstract

This paper shows that cross-border immigration from Mainland China is closely tied to economic and social development of Hong Kong. Around 1949, the influx of refugee capitalists and workers not only led to the rapid industrialization of Hong Kong but also produced a refugee mentality that failed to challenge the British colonial rule in the postwar years. In the late 1970s, another influx of young male mainlanders not only prolonged the lifespan of the labor-intensive industry in Hong Kong but also produced a large group of immigrant workers incapable of finding spouses in Hong Kong society. Finally, after Mainland China opened its door for investment and after the signing of the Joint Declaration in the mid-1980s, there was a massive relocation of industrial activities across the border to the Pearl River Delta. This paper shows that such industrial relocation has resulted in two different sets of cross-border familial relations. Although the Hong Kong middle-class men's second wives phenomenon was generally tolerated and seen merely as *funglau* (sexually potent and active), Hong Kong working-class men's mainland wives and children were discriminated against and condemned as causing Hong Kong's social and economic problems. This paper argues that the government's policy of exclusion has sowed the seeds of discrimination, polarization, and conflict against mainland spouses and children in Hong Kong society.