

Alliance and Hostility: Social Relations between
Recent Immigrant and Resident Hawkers in Kwun Tong.

Author: Josephine Smart
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Institution: Dept. of Anthropology
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M5S 1A1

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I. A general description of Kwun Tong and the Shui Wo St. market area.

Kwun Tong (KT) is a mixed industrial and residential area of a population over 800,000 the greater number of whom live in public housing estates (Lemming, 1981). Shui Wo St. is situated in the KT town centre a block behind Mut Wah St. The east end of Shui Wo St. opens into Fu Yan St. which runs perpendicular to Mut Wah St. and Yue Man Square which are the major thoroughfares in downtown Kwun Tong. The west end of Shui Wo St. ends in Hip Wo Street which is the major bus route linking the Sau Mau Ping public housing estates to the transportation network linking KT and other districts in Hong Kong. Along Shui Wo St. are 2 alleys bridging pedestrian traffic between Shui Wo St, Mut Wah St. and Hip Wo St. There is a bus terminal at the intersection of Mut Wah St. and Hip Wo St. Another one at Yan Di Court between Yue Man Sq. and Mut Wah St. Within walking distance from Shui Wo Street are more than a dozen mini-bus terminals servicing the various parts of the KT district as well as other districts. Shui Wo St. is situated close to the nexus of the transportation network and yet itself is not a major vehicular thoroughfare. This geographical proximity to the communication networks brings Shui Wo St. the pedestrian volume that makes street hawking a viable undertaking there. At the same time the relatively undemanding vehicular traffic on Shui Wo St. gives it a spatial advantage to accommodate the encroaching illegal street hawkers as well as the large volume of shopper traffic drawn to the hawking agglomeration. Moreover, there is a bazaar situated at the intersection of Fu Yan St. and Shui Wo St. which further contributes to the attraction of Shui Wo St. to shoppers and illegal street hawkers alike. In short, Shui Wo St. is endowed with various geographical and spatial advantages to turn it into a thriving market area.

Shui Wo St. comes to life around 8 a.m. Nearby on Mut Wah St. and Yee On St. illegal cooked food hawkers can be seen working as early as 6 a.m. to serve the workers and students. The street hawkers on Shui Wo St. need not start sooner than 8 a.m. because the bulk of their customers, the housewives, rarely do their shopping before 8 a.m. The peak morning shopping period is between 9-11 a.m., the afternoon between 4-7 p.m. The major commodities on sale include vegetable, fresh fruit, live fish and poultry, meat (cooked and uncooked), various kinds of dry food and clothing items. These are the major staple goods all housewives look for in their daily shopping trip(s). In addition there are many other commodities available ranging from hairpins and combs to curtains and jade jewelleryes.

Many of the illegal street hawkers working on Shui Wo St. are licenced bazaar vendors who abandon the safety and security of their bazaar stalls to the promise of better business and higher income as a street vendor outside the bazaar. Most of the street hawkers are unlicenced vendors. Some are old timers who have worked in the same spatial position for 10 years or more. Some are newcomers who have

worked for as little as 6 months. There are more male vendors than female vendors at the ratio of around 2:1. The number of street hawkers working on Shui Wo St. has gone up steadily since 1980. My last visit to HK in 1982 indicated that the street hawkers were 2 rows deep on each side of Shui Wo St. with one row on the pavement and the other back to back with it on the street. Upon my return in 1983 certain sections of Shui Wo St. became 3 rows deep with street hawkers on each side rendering vehicular traffic as well as pedestrian traffic almost impossible if not sometimes outright hazardous. During the morning peak hours the number of street hawkers on Shui Wo St. must total close to 250 if not more covering the length of the street between Fu Yan St. and Shui Ning St. which is maybe 250 metres in all.

A total of 41 hawker blackspots were identified in the KT district and the estimated number of illegal hawkers to be around 2190 in 1983. The heaviest concentration of illegal street hawkers were found in the KT town and industrial centre and the Ngau Tau Kok area.

II. Recent Immigrant Hawkers in the Shui Wo St. market area.

A. Who are the recent immigrant hawkers?

It is not always easy to tell the recent immigrant hawkers apart from the resident hawkers by appearance. In fact there is little agreement among the street hawkers themselves on the criteria upon which a recent immigrant hawker is characterised. Most people would agree that the length of residence in Hong Kong is a good measure to differentiate the recent immigrants from the local residents. Those who have resided in Hong Kong for 7 years or less are recent immigrants without a permanent Hong Kong citizenship. While this technical and legal criterium is consistent and straightforward, it is by no means the only nor the most important measure of differentiation. In fact some hawkers are still regarded as 'recent immigrant' hawkers even though they have been in HK for more than 7 years. However, anybody without a permanent HK citizenship is always regarded as a 'recent immigrant' regardless of his occupation and socio-economic status.

One of the major differences between the recent immigrant hawkers and the local resident hawkers is in their manners of conducting business. Recent immigrant hawkers are notorious for 'self-exploitation'. They are the ones who will sell at prices that gives them a mark up of anywhere from 15% to a few percent. They will exploit their labour at cheap cost for the sake of competition. Their rock bottom prices indeed give them a competitive edge and often their greater turnover more than compensates for their lower profit margin. Before the significant invasion by the recent immigrant hawkers in the Kwun Tong area since 1980, the resident hawkers used to enjoy a higher profit margin of 30% and more. Now they have to content themselves with a lower profit margin to keep up with the competition. As a result of the greater competition due to the greater number of street hawkers operating in the market, there is a steady decline of profit margin among the street hawkers. This is not entirely a bad thing as the overall lower commodity prices in the Shui Wo St. market area attracts more shoppers from the other districts outside Kwun Tong so that the greater sales volume often more than make up for the lower mark up.

Anyone who is not a known long time HK resident and who sells too cheaply is likely to be regarded as a 'recent immigrant' regardless of his legal residence status. This is especially so if the person in question has his immediate family and other social ties in China and not in HK. Those who are closely attached to other recent immigrant hawkers are also especially susceptible. One of the unlicensed fruit hawkers in the Shui Wo St. market area was nicknamed "Crazy Chan" after his practice of selling at rock bottom prices which any self-respecting business minded local resident hawker will not do. He is called "crazy" for 2 reasons: first, he had a major brain operation in 1980 which resulted in the folding of his grocery store business to finance the

*become a fruit
+ wanted
vegetables.
So saying it
to be so much*

*length of residence
is not the
most important
determinant
and when
more important
than mere temporal
length of time.*

*have no family, or no family with them.
young or because from China.*

operation. He then became a hawker. He likes to remind people of his neurological impairment and tends to attribute all criticism of himself and his street trading practice to his "brain problem" as he puts it. Secondly, he conducts his business like a recent immigrant hawker despite the fact that he has been a resident of Hong Kong for well over 15 years. He has a wife and three children in Hong Kong.

It is widely accepted in the market by the street vendors and shoppers alike that there is a tendency among the recent immigrant hawkers to conduct their trading activities in a less organized and orderly manner. In the vegetable trade especially, it is rather easy to spot the recent immigrant vegetable hawkers from their resident counterparts. The local resident vegetable hawkers usually conduct their business in a more organized manner. Their goods are nicely displayed on bamboo trays supported by wooden structures (chicken cages being the most common) or specially ordered metal stands which can be collapsed when not in use. The vegetable are washed and trimmed before they are put on display. In contrast, many recent immigrant vegetable hawkers do away with the labour intensive 'beautifying' chores in their business. They spread a ground sheet on the spot, dump out their vegetable directly from the containers they come in and leave it up to the customers to sort out how much they want and to do the trimming and washing themselves at home. To make up for their savings in labour, the recent immigrant vegetable hawkers charge about 50% to 100% less than their local resident counterparts. Many shoppers are attracted to the cheaper prices.

Not all the recent immigrant vegetable hawkers are 'ground stall' operators (地檔). Some of them follow very closely the practice of their resident counterparts in washing, trimming, and nicely displaying their goods for sale. Such labour intensive chores call for the utilization of much manpower which is needed non-stop throughout the trading period because the displayed goods must be replenished as soon as they are picked up by customers. For many of the recent immigrant hawkers whose family is in China, or whose wife is tied down with one or more small children, their lone labour is barely sufficient to meet with the demands of handling the transactions, never mind anything else. To save even more manpower, many recent immigrant vegetable hawkers who work alone sell their vegetable by the lot and not by weight, thus saving the work of weighing out the individual parcel for each customer.

On the other hand, most local resident vegetable hawkers do not have the problem of labour shortage. Most resident vegetable hawking units are family based operations where as many as 10 people can be working together in a single hawking enterprise which usually is spread out into several retailing outlets nearby together (Smart, 1983a). I know of one such family which has been in the vegetable vending business for almost 20 years on Shui Wo St. There are eight children in the family and all of them except a married daughter help out in the family business under the supervision of the father.

Two of the daughters and one son work full-time in the family business, the rest help out part-time due to commitment in school or as in the case of the oldest son due to his wage employment in an advertising company. Those recent immigrant vegetable hawkers who can afford the manpower to do the labour intensive chores of washing and trimming and display arranging are either working as a family-based unit involving husband and wife and/or children or as a joint venture between 2 or more people so that a division of labour is possible to handle the various demand for manpower in the business.

One distinctive characteristic about the recent immigrant hawkers is their accent. Some of them didn't speak any Cantonese when they first arrived in Hong Kong. Their Cantonese is thus heavily flavoured with the accent of their native dialect. For those who do use Cantonese while they were in China, their Cantonese still bears many differences from the Hong Kong version in accent and in use of idioms. Even among local born Hong Kong residents, there are slight linguistic differences between the urban residents and the native rural residents in the New Territories in their use of the Cantonese dialect. The recent immigrants hawkers in the Shui Wo St. market area are predominantly either Chiu Chow or Hoi Lok Fung. They speak different dialects but which are mutually comprehensible. Among themselves their native dialect becomes the major means of communication.

It is extremely difficult to estimate the number of recent immigrant hawkers working in the market area. Before May 1979, there was a 'touch base' policy in which all illegal immigrants from China who managed to get into town were accorded the right of abode by virtue of their sheer luck or hard work. But that touch-base policy was scrapped when the government realized more drastic measures other than the deployment of the army must be utilized to put some kind of effective control over the problem of illegal immigration from China (Geddes, 1982). The large influx of illegal immigrants from China over the years since 1949 has been the single most significant factor in the population growth due to the influx of illegal immigrants. After 1980, illegal immigrants apprehended within Hong Kong territory are returned to China, regardless of whether they ever made it to the urban area or not. Those who managed to hide from the authorities would no longer be recognized as bona fide residents of Hong Kong nor be given a HK identity card which later became a crucial piece of document for proving one's legal residence status in Hong Kong as well as for getting wage employment.

In 1981 it was made mandatory for all HK citizens to carry their ID at all times. Employers can be charged for hiring illegal immigrants. Police conduct regular spot checks to flush out illegal immigrants who came to HK after 1980. The offence of not carrying one's HK ID carries a maximum fine of HK\$1000. Those Chinese immigrants who came to HK through legal procedures after May 1979 are given a HK ID bearing a code letter 'H' signifying their legal status as recent immigrants in HK. That particular code letter 'H' has become the one most important means of differentiating those recent immigrants whose residence in Hong Kong began in 1979 or later from the other residents of Hong Kong.

After checking out two thousand arrest records in the Kwun Tong (KT) district between 1980 and 1981, it was found that less than 20% of the arrested street hawkers are holders of a HK ID bearing a

code letter 'H'. In other words, less than 20% of the arrested hawkers have arrived in Hong Kong since 1979 (see Table.1).

Table.1. Distribution of arrested hawkers holding a HK identity card bearing a code letter 'H' signifying their residence in HK since May 1979, Kwun Tong district, 1981-84.

Date	N	%
Oct.1984	727	13
Apr.1984	350	19
Oct.1983	274	22
Apr.1983	240	17
Oct.1982	98	16
Apr.1982	77	16
Oct.1981	76	16
Apr.1981	80	20

N= No. of arrest records examined.

%= Percentage of N holding a HK ID with a code letter 'H'.

Since there is no means to differentiate those Chinese immigrants who came to HK before 1979, there is simply no reliable means to estimate what proportion of the hawking population in KT or any particular trading area is made up of immigrants of various lengths of residence in HK. There is no doubt the participation of recent immigrants who have lived in HK for 7 years or less in street hawking is significantly higher than that indicated in Table.1.

The Urban Services Dept. estimated there were 1477 illegal street hawkers in the KT town and industrial centre in 1983. Roughly 22% or 390 of them are recent immigrants who came to HK after 1979. Most of the recent immigrant hawkers are young males from the Guangdong province. In the Shui Wo St. market area most of these recent immigrant hawkers belong to the under-30-year-old group, they tend to participate heavily in the fruit, vegetable and fish vending trades. Most of them are of Chiu Chow (潮洲) or Hoi Luk Fung (海陸豐) origin. The domination of these particular ethnic groups in street hawking is not a local phenomenon of KT as attested by the remark one vegetable hawker made to the effect that he could always secure himself a niche in another market area outside KT because there is always other Hoi Luk Fung people in the vegetable vending trade elsewhere. Kwun Tong seems to have a larger share of the Chiu Chow and Hoi Luk Fung street hawkers in comparison to other districts. The arrest records for the month Oct.1984 shows that 35% of all arrested hawkers in KT are either Chiu Chow or Hoi Luk Fung. The figure for the Shamshuipo district for the same period indicates only 21% of the arrested hawkers in that district are Chiu Chow or Hoi Luk Fung.

In the market place these predominately young recent immigrant hawkers are nicknamed 'cousin' (表哥 - son of a maternal uncle of aunt, or the son of father's sisters) after the fact that most people in HK have some relatives in China. The nickname 'cousin' really means 'cousin in China', it is a euphemism used to emphasize the insider-outsider/host-stranger division between the speaker and the person spoken to. Another common nickname is 'Ah Chan' (亞燦). The

name 'Ah Chan' carries the derogatory connotation that the person is unsophisticated. Unlike the first nickname which is specifically applied to recent immigrants, the latter nickname can be used for the local HK residents as well. Interestingly these nicknames only apply to the male recent immigrants. The relatively small number of females among the recent immigrants probably has something to do with the lack of linguistic hostility towards them. In the market area the female vendors are outnumbered by the males in the ratio 1:2. Among the existing female hawkers in the Shui Wo St. market area, only a fraction of them are recent immigrants and these are either attached to their husbands who are street hawkers or to their parents who are in the hawking trade.

B. Social interaction among the recent immigrant hawkers.

Social interaction among the recent immigrant hawkers is heavily structured around the ethnic ties by place of origin. People who share a common place of origin are known as 'tong heung' (同鄉). This identity by place of origin has central importance among the recent immigrants in gaining access to various resources including housing, employment, credits, protection and even marriage.

There is a tendency among the recent immigrant hawkers to form closely knit social groups. They usually work in close proximity to each other so that the market area is interspersed with pockets of recent immigrant hawkers grouped together by commodities. Their geographical closeness is often reinforced by their sharing of a common place of origin or in some cases by kin ties, both biological and fictive. In most cases a new recent immigrant hawker is introduced into the market network through the help of an existing hawker who is usually a fellow 'tong heung' who may have worked and lived in Hong Kong for many years. Spatial positions are a valuable means of production among the street hawkers and it is next to impossible to secure a favourable spatial position within the market without the assistance of existing hawkers or the interference of triad elements. The introduction into the market network by a fellow 'tong heung' hawker is a necessary step in gaining access to a spatial position, knowledge concerning the source of commodities, pricing practices, sales tactics and other social rules in the market area necessary in the making of a viable street hawking operation. Once a recent immigrant hawker gets established within the market area, he in turn will bring in other fellow recent immigrants from the same place of origin into the market network and help them set up a place of work near his own spatial position.

Their social interaction often extends beyond the market place, groups of young recent immigrants are seen going out together to the movies or to the billiard hall and video arcade. Gambling and prostitution are indulgences which many young male recent immigrants regard as a necessary 'rite de passage' in their transformation from being the deprived

Chinese citizens in China to the free and indulgent Hong Kong citizens having unlimited access to all material goods and decadence. Several young recent immigrant hawkers I talked to agree that one of their goals after their arrival in Hong Kong is to try out the various aspects of the 'good life' in this highly materialistic and decadent society. They will work a few days and then take a day or two off until they spend all their incomes. They are fully committed to the ideology of living for the day.

But not all recent immigrant hawkers take that attitude towards their work and life in Hong Kong. Many of them have parents or wife and children in China who depend on their remittances for their livelihood. They may be geographically away from China, but their social ties are still contained in their home village in China. Hong Kong offers them a source of income in a scale they could hardly even dream of in China, yet many of these recent immigrant hawkers and other Chinese immigrants in general rarely have the opportunity or incentive to enjoy their access to the 'good life' in Hong Kong which they were deprived of while in China and which is often given as one of their reasons for their desire to come to Hong Kong at the cost of leaving their family and social base behind. There is a fruit hawker who came to Hong Kong in 1969 and had worked at various jobs in wage employment until he became a banana vendor about 7 years ago after an industrial accident which took 4 fingers off his right hand. His normal working day begins in the morning around 7 or 8 a.m. He first goes to the fruit wholesale market to order his stocks for the day, then he takes his Chinese breakfast Yum Cha before he begins setting up around 11 a.m. By 7 p.m. on a good day he will have sold all his bananas and he will be home around 8 p.m. or earlier, being \$200 richer or more after putting in a full day's work. On a slow day he may not be able to go home until 8 or even 9 p.m. He shares a squatter hut with 5 or 6 others who also come from his home village. He works everyday of the week unless the weather is too bad or if he falls sick or at certain holidays like the Chinese New Year day. He visits his wife and three children in China regularly. His place of work and residence may be in Hong Kong, but it is China that forms his locus of social affinity. Another more recent immigrant who came to Hong Kong in 1980 has a job as a waiter in a restaurant. His days begin at 6 a.m. and end at 11 p.m. with a break of several hours in the afternoon during which he takes the opportunity to go home to take a nap. He has a bunk bed space in a large room which he shares with 5 other people all from his home village. He receives 3 meals a day free of charge at the restaurant and a monthly salary of HK \$1,600. He doesn't get his 4 days off per month according to the labor laws, and when he does get a day off it is spent sleeping off his accumulated fatigue over the weeks and years of hard work. His wife and children live in China. He sends money home regularly. He takes every opportunity to see them which is not often. Like most other recent immigrants I have talked to, he complains about the terrible living conditions in Hong

Kong for the poor and the many social pathologies which are rare in China. Many recent immigrants in Hong Kong share a similar dilemma of selling their hard and often cheap labour in Hong Kong without the opportunity to enjoy the various social and cultural benefits. Their emotional and financial attachment to China remains strong as long as their family is separated from them. They are dislocated persons without a social base in Hong Kong.

In general most of the younger recent immigrants are relatively free of family ties in China other than their filial piety to their living parents who remain in the home village. These young recent immigrants form their own social groups mostly made up of other recent immigrants who share a common place of origin. Their interaction with the local residents of Hong Kong is rather limited and rarely carried beyond their place of work. Partly due to this self-segregation and partly due to the general prejudice against recent immigrants among the Hong Kong public, it is very difficult for the recent immigrants from China to find a spouse among their local resident counterparts. Many marriages are concluded between recent immigrants who already knew each other while they were in China. Their social dislocation in Hong Kong no doubt contributes to their tendency to seek out each other. Many of the recent immigrants, and even some long time or Hong Kong born residents, look to China for a spouse. Many such marriages are arranged through the help of a relative or friend in China. Often the bride remains in China awaiting the periodic visit from the husband and his regular remittances. Children born of such marriage stay with the mother. Normally the husband in such marriage arrangement will try to apply for his wife and children's right of residence in Hong Kong. But for various reasons such as housing shortage and high cost of living among others, some husbands prefer to leave their family behind in China.

Many of the recent immigrant hawkers who have their family in Hong Kong find it difficult to cope with the high cost of living by keeping a wage employment. The wage scale for unskilled labour in the industrial sector is rarely over HK\$2,000 a month. Thus street trading becomes an attractive alternative because of its comparatively higher income level and its utilization of otherwise unproductive family labour. Many children of recent immigrant parents in the street hawking trade are kept away from school in order to help out in the family economic undertaking. Legally it is a violation to keep one's children from school before they turn 14 or before they finish primary school which is free. In some cases the immediate economic concern of the family overrides the legal consequences and takes precedence to the children's right to formal education.

When civil and public order complaints by residents that they were exhibiting ways of residents.

lack of social base puts the immigrant hawker in a vulnerable position. He may be pushed out of the best sites if he is not established.

Because hawkking is illegal - you can't go to police if there is a dispute with customer or fellow hawker. So show of force is the best way to get what they want.
So immigrant hawkkers seek the help of triads - each triad group has a defined territory.

10

III. Social interaction between recent immigrant hawkkers and resident hawkkers.

A. Alliance between fellow street hawkkers in reaction to government policy in hawkking control.

A visitor to Hong Kong who happens to be caught in the middle of a raiding of the illegal street hawkkers by the General Duties Team (GDT) of the Urban Services Department (USD) will be shocked by the para-military flavour of the exercise. He will see one or two orange trucks approach the proximity of the hawkking agglomeration and out pour 20 some odd blue uniformed personnels who swiftly and silently block the major exits in the area. As suddenly and swiftly as the approach of the GDT, the street hawkkers' attempt to disappear before the closing in of the GDT is performed with an accentuated ferocity that conjures images of the chaos and confusions expected in the event of an earthquake or bomb shelling. The running hawkkers cry out aloud to warn others of 'zhai guai' (走鬼) - meaning running from the ghost- or running from the authorities. Wheeled hawkking carts fly down the street oblivious of the safety of innocent passerbys and fleeing hawkkers alike. Overloaded carts spill their contents and litter the street with oranges and apples, boiling soup and oil, fish balls, cooking and eating utensils, dead or live fish among others. It is a miracle there hasn't been a case involving the escape of live snakes in the winter time during one of these daily raids of the market area.

The slowest in the exodus or those who happen to run the wrong way into the approaching GDT are stopped. It is not uncommon that an apprehended hawkker will try to force his way out. It is survival of the fastest and a daily ritual most street hawkkers have learned to perform with perfection. Any illegal street hawkker who hasn't mastered the art of 'zhai guai' isn't likely to remain a street hawkker for too long. The fine for an offense of obstruction is HK\$100, that for an offense of hawkking without a licence is HK\$250. Sometimes an arrested hawkker may lose his entire stock and hawkking paraphernalia due to confiscation. The loss may amount to as much as several thousand dollars or the entire investment capital for some. More often than not the presiding judge will order the return of goods and hawkking paraphernalia to the arrested hawkkers. While this humanistic tendency among most judges and magistrates pleases the street hawkkers, it is a source of frustration to most USD officials who regard such leniency in court as a major factor undermining the efficiency in their attempts at controlling the illegal street trading activities.

Due to the great potential monetary loss upon arrest, not to mention the loss in working time due to the charging procedures at the police station, illegal street hawkkers try to avoid at all cost the GDT or the Nuisance Squad of the police which is a special unit assigned to hawkking control. Their common plight vis-a-vis the government policy of restricting hawkking licence issuing while at the same time

Waste of time with
police station
paper procedures
so the time goes to
court for fine

A jeans hawkker
will have
\$6,000 + worth
goods on his
cart.

intensifying the raidings of the major hawking agglomerations has a unifying effect among the illegal street hawkers. Information sharing becomes a necessary condition for survival. The movement of the GDT is of central interest to them. Strategic look outs are positioned in the periphery of the hawking agglomeration to warn the working street hawkers of the approaching GDT. In some areas this kind of look out arrangement is an organized effort manned by the triads and financed by the street hawkers, in other areas like Shui Wo St. such organized spy networks are absent. One hawking unit I am familiar with consists of 4-5 working members. Around 8:30 a.m. one of the working members is sent to post a look out at the GDT depot 2 blocks away to spy upon their movements. Before the GDT and the transportation vehicle leave the depot, the 'spy' will have already returned to his base to report his findings and to alert his neighbours of the possible imminent arrival of the enforcement agents. Information sharing concerning the movement of the enforcement agents becomes a way of life among them. In any case it is impossible for one hawking unit to run off without alerting the nearby hawking operations. Your neighbours may be your business rival in the fight for more and better working space, but they are also people to keep a reasonably good relationship with since mutual aid is very much a necessary survival condition in the market area.

Street hawkers will stand together to pressure the GDT into moderating their stand against an arrested hawker. If a GDT member attempts to confiscate the hawking paraphernalia of an arrested hawker, he will be booed and hooted by the watching street hawkers in support of the arrested hawker's protest at such 'unreasonable' treatment. There are often threats of vengeance from sympathising onlookers coupled with advice from well meaning mediators who will suggest a move to take one step back by both parties in order to resolve the confrontation. There is always a large crowd of onlookers at any arrest most of whom are street hawkers in the same hawking agglomeration. It has been known for such crowds to get violent. The GDT members I have interviewed all express concern for their personal safety in such a situation in the course of their duty where they are greatly outnumbered by the street hawkers who see themselves as the oppressed while the GDT are seen as the oppressor.

State intervention in the street hawking activities has been the single most important factor in bringing the illegal street hawkers into a temporary but intense collective unity vis-a-vis the daily prosecutions exercised in the form of market raidings.

B. Alliance between recent immigrant hawkers and resident hawkers by social ties.

Many of the recent immigrant hawkers in the Shui Wo Street market area are introduced into the market network by established existing street hawkers or shopkeepers. This introduction is mostly mediated by biological kin ties or

Kaffee need help from neighbours for temporary work in a store - when you go to toilet etc.

Notes
on
S.K.
Law

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to
writing

People get introduced into street hawking by an established hawker - patron-client a matter of reciprocity.

fictive kin ties by virtue of their sharing of a common place of origin. For many of the newcomers into the street hawking trade, their place of work is less determined by its proximity to their place of residence or a sound economic decision than by their social ties with a patron in the same place of work. This affiliation is a most valuable resource in gaining access to a more favourable spatial position than otherwise available to a newcomer who is expected to take up spatial positions either at the periphery of the market place or those that nobody else wants. A good location of work is central in the making of a profitable and viable street hawking operation.

The nature of the alliance between the recent immigrant hawker and his patron varies depending on the particular relations of production between them. In most cases it is an alliance built upon general reciprocity. In some cases it is based upon business partnership which is actually a form of disguised employment. The patron provides the investment capital, the necessary hawking paraphernalia and the spatial position for operation. The recent immigrant hawker splits the profit from his hawking endeavour with his patron equally or at some previously agreed upon rate. There is hardly any economic autonomy for the recent immigrant partner, he is a wage employee who gets paid by piece work. There is yet another form of alliance which is based upon a strictly employer-employee relationship. It is unlikely that a hired hand in a hawking unit will remain economically subordinated for long. Once he or she learns the ins and outs of the hawking trade, he or she will usually break into the market independently.

or may be
paid for
\$20-\$50
a day.

These lines of alliance hold as long as there is little conflict in their economic interest between patron and client. In the market place where competition for customers, working space, and right to other limited resources is such a prevalent way of life among the street hawkers, it is not surprising that these lines of alliance dissolve and resume according to the tide of self-interest.

C. Causes of Conflict.

Economic competition breeds antagonism and this is just as true for the resident hawkers as for the recent immigrant hawkers. The recent immigrant hawkers, in the course of their participation in the market area, often involve themselves in direct confrontation with the existing resident hawkers in their competition for spatial positions and customers. Such issues of competition have always been and still are the single most prevailing cause of mutual hostility between the established resident hawkers. But due to their long years of association in the same market area, many non-economic social relations become established between them and strongly underplay their antagonistic stand vis-a-vis each other in their economic competition. Their long years of association also gives them a chance to iron out their territorial disputes and other conflicts. Their

interactions are structured by a set of social rules that spell out the criteria for the allocation of spatial positions and certain unspoken but observed guidelines concerning price rivalry. Newcomers into the market often deviate from these existing social norm either because they are ignorant of the established social rules or because they find them to be too restrictive in their profit making. Those recent immigrant hawkers who are introduced into the market network by other established hawkers or shopkeepers in the area are ususally knowledgable of some of these social rules in the market area become they became a street hawker there, and thus their incidents of direct confrontation with the resident hawkers are rare. If they do break some of the rules they are forgiven as a token of 'face' to their patron. On the other hand those recent immigrant hawkers who break into the market network without a patron are more likely to engage in direct confrontation with the existing street hawkers due to their ignorance of the accepted social rules or their reluctance to follow them.

The dispute over territorial rights constitutes the single most predominant cause of conflict between street hawkers. The value of a spatial position in the market area is determined by its proximity to shopper traffic and a route of escape from the GDT or police as well as a favourable working environment. In essence a good spatial position is one that is viable and profitable giving everything else being equal. The same operation may be a raving success in one location but a total failure if it is relocated elsewhere. In general, spatial positions at the periphery of the market area are less favourable due to their geographical distance from the nucleus of acitivities. But there is always the exception to the rules. Commodity grouping can turn an otherwise unfavourable location into a major attraction. On Shui Wo St. the desirability of a spatial position is generally measured by its proximity to the bazaar located at the intersectin of Shui Wo St. and Fu Yan St. Fruit, vegetable and fish street stalls are clustered around the bazaar. The end of Shui Wo St. away from the bazaar becomes a no-man's land for fruit, vegetable or fish hawkers. But this far end of the Shui Wo St. houses a pocket of garment vendors who only operate in the morning and some of them only come here once or maybe twice a week as part of their caravan route. It is the only garment vending section in the whole hawking agglomeration on Shui Wo St. and it is very popular. But a vegetable vendor will have a hard time in the same location since most housewives will prefer to shop in the vegetable section of the market where the price competition is keen and the commodity range is greater.

Normally a newcomer in the street hawking trade will not be able to do better than getting a spatial position at the periphery or the market area of the periphery of the particular commodity group he belongs. All the best locations of operation are already occupied by existing hawkers and if one does become available it is allocated according to the rule of seniority among the existing

hawkers. Newcomers are ranked at the bottom in this system of seniority while those first street vendors in the market are ranked at the top having priority in their access to such prime spatial positions when they become available. It will be many years before a recent immigrant hawker can secure himself a prime spatial position according to this normative model of spatial allocation. Many newcomers are reluctant to wait this long. Like everybody else, money making is the major concern among the recent immigrant hawkers who constitute the majority of the newcomers in the market area. Spatial displacement of an existing hawker is the only way to bypass this normative model of spatial allocation. Or if they are reluctant to attempt a spatial displacement, then they try to out-compete their resident counterparts by pricing down their commodities. Neither strategy endears them to the existing hawkers in the market area. Both strategies entail violation of the social rules and norms in the market area. And each strategy is literally a declaration of war to the particular street hawker(s) concerned.

The violation of territorial rights is usually encroachment upon the spatial position of an existing hawker rather than outright displacement. The encroachment process is usually gradual. A tray of vegetable will quietly slip a few inches over to the neighbour's stall space and after a few days another tray makes its way over the (invisible)fence. One day the neighbour will find part of his stall space overtaken by his aggressive neighbour and he has to either assert his territorial rights or to lose it for good. Verbal warning will be issued which is normally met with counterargument about the aggressor's right to the space on the basis that he has ALWAYS used that very same space for his own hawking operation. The next stage in this drama of territorial defense and attempt at displacement is a show of force. Whoever has the greatest support in the market place by a show of manpower and force wins. The importance of building up a social base in the market area is nowhere better illustrated than in an incident of territorial dispute. A hawker without a social base in his place of work is like a soldier without weapons. He has no support behind him and he is most vulnerable to external pressures.

While the threat to deploy physical violence to settle disputes in the market area is a necessary stage in the settlement process, the actual administration of physical violence is rare though not unheard of. The avoidance of the use of force has little to do with the basic goodness of human nature or the lack of willingness to engage in a bloody battle by one's supporters, rather it is avoidance in association with the street hawkers' aversion to attracting the unnecessary attention of the police and the GDT. It is common practice to step up surveillance of a market area after a fight is reported. The intensified presence of the enforcement agents creates much inconvenience for all street hawkers who work in the area. For one thing they will have to 'zhai guai' every time the GDT or police shows up. It is

bad for business. And if you are unlucky enough to be one of the central actors in the fight which calls upon the attention of the police, then you are looked upon very unfavourably by your fellow street hawkers who resent you for the trouble you bring them. It creates a very strong social pressure to keep down physical violence in the market area.

For the established resident hawkers, their long working experience in the area also brings them a solid support base among fellow street hawkers and shopkeepers. But for a recent immigrant hawker or any newcomer to the market area, such a resource is often outside their range of accessibility. Many recent immigrant hawkers try to correct this deficiency by cultivating lines of alliance with their fellow recent immigrant hawkers. Most of these alliance groups are based on ethnic identity of identity by place of origin (同鄉). Others who either lack an existing social base in the market or who need more support than what is available will have to resort to the use of Triad intervention which can be had for a fee or a membership. The use of public space is by definition accessible to all who wants it. Therefore the concept of spatial monopoly among the street hawkers is contrary to the formal legal rules. The territorial disputes between street hawkers is thus outside the realm of the formal legal system. State intervention or regulation in the allocation of spatial positioning as well as in the regulation of territorial rights among the illegal street hawkers is non-existent. Wherever state regulation is ineffective the Triad takes over the task of administering 'law and order' in line with their own self-interest. They are the informal law enforcement agents (Smart, 1983b).

Those newcomers who lack the resources to obtain a more favourable spatial position through patronage or encroachment will have to content themselves with a place at the periphery of the market area. To make up for their spatial disadvantage, they offer their commodities at very low prices. When most vegetable street hawkers are charging \$2 or more for a catty of Chinese turnip, these disadvantaged newcomers may charge only \$1 a catty. Their cut throat prices are very effective in attracting customers but at the same time they also attract the resentment of the other hawkers who have to depress their mark ups in order to remain competitive. Most of these disadvantaged newcomers are recent immigrants who work alone. In the Shui Wo St. market area most of them are vegetable vendors who work in the open area behind the bazaar or in the stretch of Shui Wo St. further away from the bazaar. They are mostly ground stall operators who display their commodities on a ground sheet with little organization and arrangement. Their increasing presence in the market area have definite effects in depressing the prices of commodities.

IV. Conclusion.

I have attempted so far to show but part of the wide spectrum of social interactions between the recent immigrant hawkers and the resident hawkers. I have hardly done enough to illustrate the various aspects of the social interactions among the recent immigrant hawkers and among the local resident hawkers respectively. This obvious omission is partly due to the lack of space and partly due to the lack of time to organize my field data at this stage of my field research. Those who are interested to find out more about the street hawkers in Hong Kong will have to wait another year when my thesis is finished.

I hope my data have succeeded so far to convince the reader of the complexity in the social relations between the street hawkers in the market area. This complexity revolves around two central issues in the organization of the street hawking activities- namely mutual aid and economic competition. These two seemingly opposing entities are bridged by the overwhelming concern among the street hawkers for their personal economic well-being. On the one hand they have to establish a network of social contacts in the market area which can be called upon to support them in their territorial defense, to assist them in their cat-and-mouse game with the GDT and police, to loan them the credits they need, to look after their stalls while they are at lunch, to offer them a place to store their stocks and hawking paraphernalia at non-working hours, to exchange information and many others. A successful street hawker always builds around himself a solid social base in the market area. It is erroneous to believe that the resident hawkers only include other resident hawkers in his social network. As a matter of fact there is a lot of social exchange between recent immigrant and resident hawkers in the market area. The overriding importance of consolidating one's support base crosses the boundary of business rivalry and overlooks the otherwise tense and uneasy co-existence between the recent immigrant and resident hawkers.

On the other hand economic rivalry is a consuming passion among the street hawkers who are always competing for more customers and larger and better working space. The increasing presence of the recent immigrant hawkers in the market area intensifies the economic competition. It gives the resident hawkers a cause to harbour resentment towards the recent immigrant hawkers who bring about a depression of profit margin in commodity prices and a greater competition for customers. At the same time the recent immigrant hawkers harbour certain resentment towards the resident hawkers who are said to be overly selfish and inconsiderate in monopolizing the access to prime locations so that the newcomers have to work double as hard to get by at the less favourable sites of operation.

The level of hostility between the recent immigrant and resident hawkers no doubt is moderated somewhat by the pressure exerted by external factors such as government intervention in street hawking activities which call for the

*mutual aid
economic competition*

need to organize some form of collective mutual aid network, no matter how brief and temporary, to protect their economic interest.

Both alliance and rivalry are powered largely by self-interest among the illegal street hawkers. The balance between these two opposing tendencies is determined by the nature of the internal dynamics within the market area as well as the nature of external intervening factors which bear a direct effect upon the economic well-being of the market place.

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