

Squatters in Hong Kong: 1950s – 1980s.

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Between the late 1940s and 1970s, Hong Kong faced immense problems arising from a surge in urban population. At the end of the war, the number stood at around 600,000. By the end of the 1970s, it had skyrocketed to five million, almost 90% of which was within the urban areas. Besides the high rate of natural increase, of greater importance was immigration from mainland China. It was estimated that by the late 1960s, the densities of population in sizeable urban areas had become perhaps the highest in the world.

The availability of work in the city led the great majority of new immigrants and refugees into the already overcrowded urban areas. Further to the rapid population growth, the physical setting of Hong Kong also brought about urban problems. Both urban Kowloon and northern shores of Hong Kong were backed by steep ridges.

By the early 1960s, the north coast of Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon Peninsula were mostly built over. Gradually rents had become well beyond the means of many city-dwellers. Roofs, cellars and lofts were let, and before strict official control was instituted, people spilled over onto the pavements. It was inevitable that urban squatting thrived, especially in northern Kowloon where hillside space was available. These squatters were not composed solely of refugees, many were in fact long-time local residents who were not able to pay high rents for tiny subdivided apartments or bedspace and preferred to become squatters.

With the huge number of squatters built over some relatively inaccessible sites, triad elements emerged. Very often the police were unable or not willing to police the squatters effectively. In fact, many squatter huts were erected by the triad society and then sold to the incomers. Some triad members even constructed basic access paths or roads to the squatters, as well as provided illegal electricity wherever possible. For the larger squatter sites, gambling dens and drug dens were set up in some quiet corners which generated further profits for the triad.

Apart from the land squatters, with the escalating post-war population, sheltered creeks, inlets, coastal areas and traditional fishing communities also became crammed with squatter boats and stilted huts.

Squatters were not purely residential. The larger sites were miniature towns with their own shops, schools, restaurants and small industrial units. Infiltration of small industrial units into previously residential areas and squatter areas were common as industrialization proceeded significantly since the 1950s, which gave rise to considerable sanitary and hygienic problems, in addition to fire hazards.

Many squatter huts were built on steep hillsides. During heavy rainstorms, landslides occasionally occurred in such areas, sometimes resulting in a loss of life.

By the mid-1950s, the squatter problem had gradually threatened to disrupt the whole urban framework. The government was to embark upon a massive scheme for building multi-storey resettlement accommodation.

With the resurgence of illegal immigration in the late 1970s, new squatter areas of some size sprang up in many peripheral urban areas, including steep slopes along Victoria Road. At the end of the decade, the government recorded over 330,000 squatter residents. The figure excluded those who lived on boats and stilted huts. Established squatter areas became even more crowded, thus posing a higher fire risk and exacerbating environmental and social problems.

Undesirable as it might be, it has to be recognized that all types of housing, including squatter huts, had a role to play in meeting basic needs for shelter, given constant population pressures. It was one of the most prominent features of post-war Hong Kong development and an important common experience shared by many Hong Kong people.

1940 年代末至 1970 年代，香港市區人口急速膨脹，導致社會問題叢生。戰後初期，人口維持在 60 萬左右；但到了 1970 年代末，已暴增至 5 百萬，其中 90% 居於市區。除高企的自然增長率之外，更為關鍵的是來自內地的大量移民。及至 1960 年代後期，大範圍市區的人口密度也許已登上世界首位。

絕大多數新來港的移民和難民會湧入已經擠迫不堪的市區，因為就業機會較多。人口劇增，再加上香港的自然環境，均令都市問題一一浮現。九龍市區和港島北岸都是群峰環伺，平地不多。

到了 1960 年代初，港島北岸及九龍半島大部分地區已為建築物覆蓋，然而市區居民卻負擔不起日益上漲的租金，天台、地窖和閣樓均闢作住房出租。在官方嚴厲的管制措施確立之前，人們群起佔用行人道。市區寮屋猖獗，實屬無可避免，尤以九龍北部為甚，原因是有山坡地可用。寮屋居民並非全為難民，許多其實是居港已久的本地居民，只是付不起狹小分間單位或牀位的高昂租金，寧願當上寮屋戶。

數量龐大的寮屋在幾乎難以到達的地點搭建，讓黑社會有隙染指。警方往往不能或不願真正維持寮屋區的治安。事實上，許多寮屋是黑幫蓋的，再售與新來者。有黑社會成員甚至修築通往寮屋區的簡陋小徑或道路，又盡量向居民提供非法電力。至於在大規模的寮屋區，常見賭檔毒窟藏身僻靜一隅，為黑幫帶來更多利潤。

戰後人口遽增，除陸上寮屋外，住家艇和棚屋亦擠滿了避風河灣、入海口、沿岸地帶以至傳統漁民社區。

寮屋區並非純屬住宅，規模大的儼如微型市鎮，自設商舖、學校、食肆以及小型工場。自 1950 年代，本港工業化進展神速，小型工場滲入昔為住宅區及寮屋區的例子，比比皆是。情況不獨潛藏火災隱患，還衍生不少環境和衛生問題。

很多寮屋建於陡峭山坡，暴雨期間，偶爾會出現山泥傾瀉，引致人命傷亡。

到了 1950 年代中期，嚴重的寮屋問題逐漸危及整個都市架構。政府終於開展一項龐大的建屋計劃，興建多層徙置大廈。

1970 年代後期，偷渡潮重現，新的寮屋區在都市周邊不同地區湧現，佔地不小，當中包括域多利道一帶的陡峭斜坡。政府於七十年代末錄得寮屋人口超過 33 萬，

數字還不包括艇戶及棚屋居民。大型寮屋區愈見擠迫，火災風險自然更高，同時令環境和社會問題惡化。

鑒於人口壓力持續，所有類型的住宅，包括寮屋，即使不可取，在提供容身之所這種基本需要上，無可否認起了一定作用。寮屋是戰後香港發展最顯著的特色之一，亦成為許多香港人重要的集體回憶。

中文翻譯：鄭瑞華