



REDISCOVERING HONG KONG'S MIGRANT WORKERS THROUGH A PILE OF OLD NEWSPAPERS

Introduction

The history of Hong Kong is the history of its migrant workers. For centuries, workers from all over the world migrated here and built Hong Kong from the barren rock it was to the global metropolis it is today. Yet, discrimination against the group has always persisted in Hong Kong's public discourse. From Victorian classism to contemporary localist xenophobia, the dynamics of intolerance were ever-shifting and relational. This research seeks to trace the genealogy of discrimination against migrant workers in Hong Kong from 1841 to 1997 through the city's most influential newspapers.

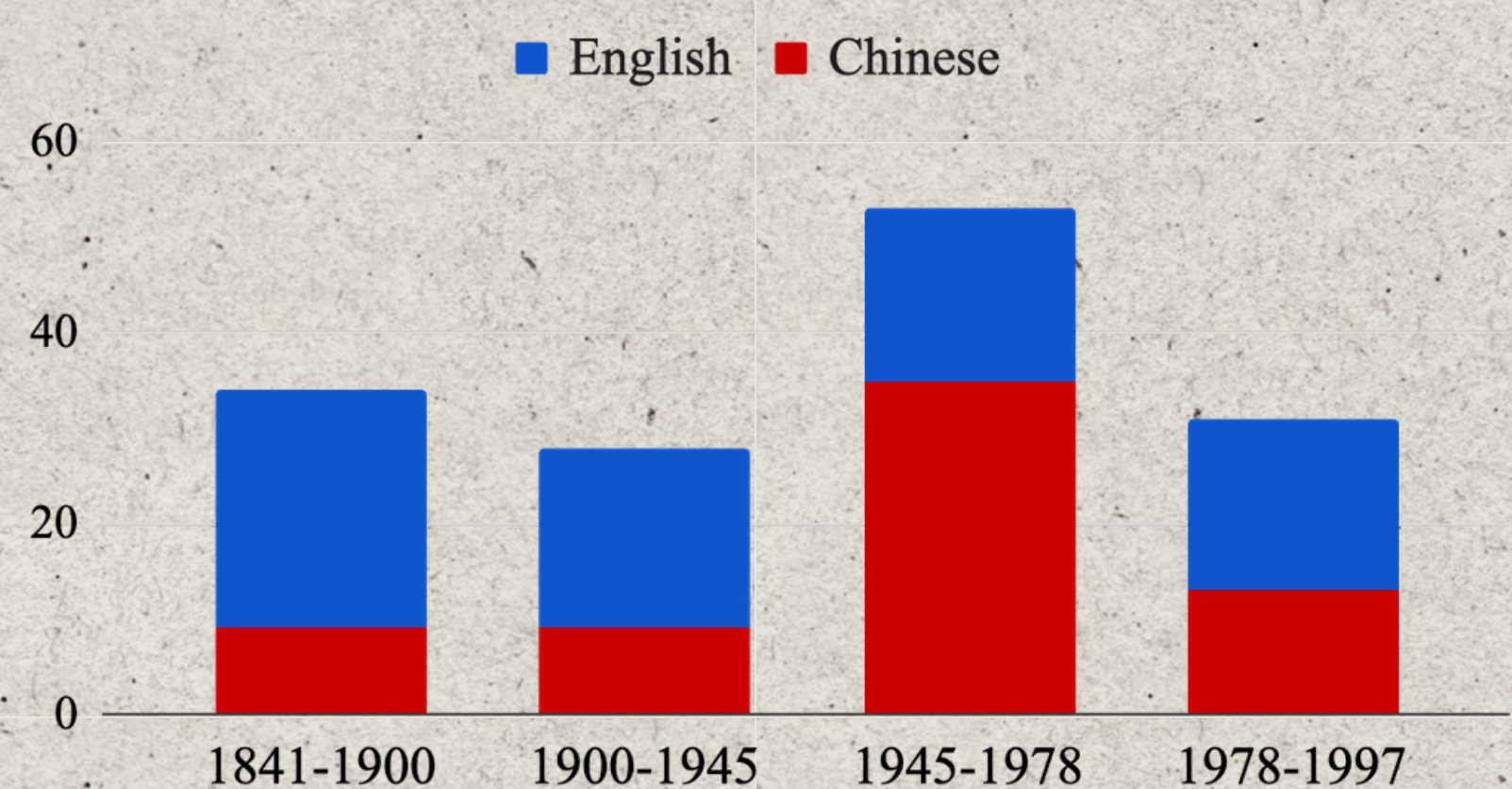
Output

More than **2,500** newspaper issues ranging from 1842 to 1997 have been sampled and analysed in this research. In total, **12** newspapers were studied:

Name	Language	Years Active
<i>The Friend of China and Hongkong Gazette</i>	English	1842-1860
<i>The China Mail</i>	English	1845-1974
<i>Chinese Serial</i>	Chinese	1853-1856
<i>Hong Kong Daily Press</i>	English	1857-1941
<i>Chinese Mail</i>	Chinese	1872-1946
<i>Universal Circulating Herald</i>	Chinese	1874-1959
<i>South China Morning Post</i>	English	1903-Present
<i>Keng Sheung Daily News</i>	Chinese	1925-1984
<i>Wah Kiu Yat Po</i>	Chinese	1925-1995
<i>Kung Sheung Evening News</i>	Chinese	1930-1984
<i>The Tien Kwong Morning News</i>	Chinese	1933-1941
<i>Ta Kung Pao</i>	Chinese	1938-Present

A preliminary database containing **146** newspaper articles concerning migrant workers has been constructed following the collection of materials:

Distribution of Collected Articles



KEY FINDINGS

1. Localist Xenophobia was not present prior to 1980:

Xenophobic exclusivism from earlier residents towards Mainland Chinese newcomers—what I initially postulated to be the most historically prominent issue of migrant worker discrimination—was **actually uncommon in public discourse throughout Hong Kong's history**. The earliest trace of this derogatory rhetoric against Mainland Chinese began following the economic migration of the 1980s.

*'Life in "Paradise" Isn't Easy! Little Mainlander Injures Forehead in Car Accident on First Day of Work'*¹

2. Discrimintory rhetoric was deeply intersectional:

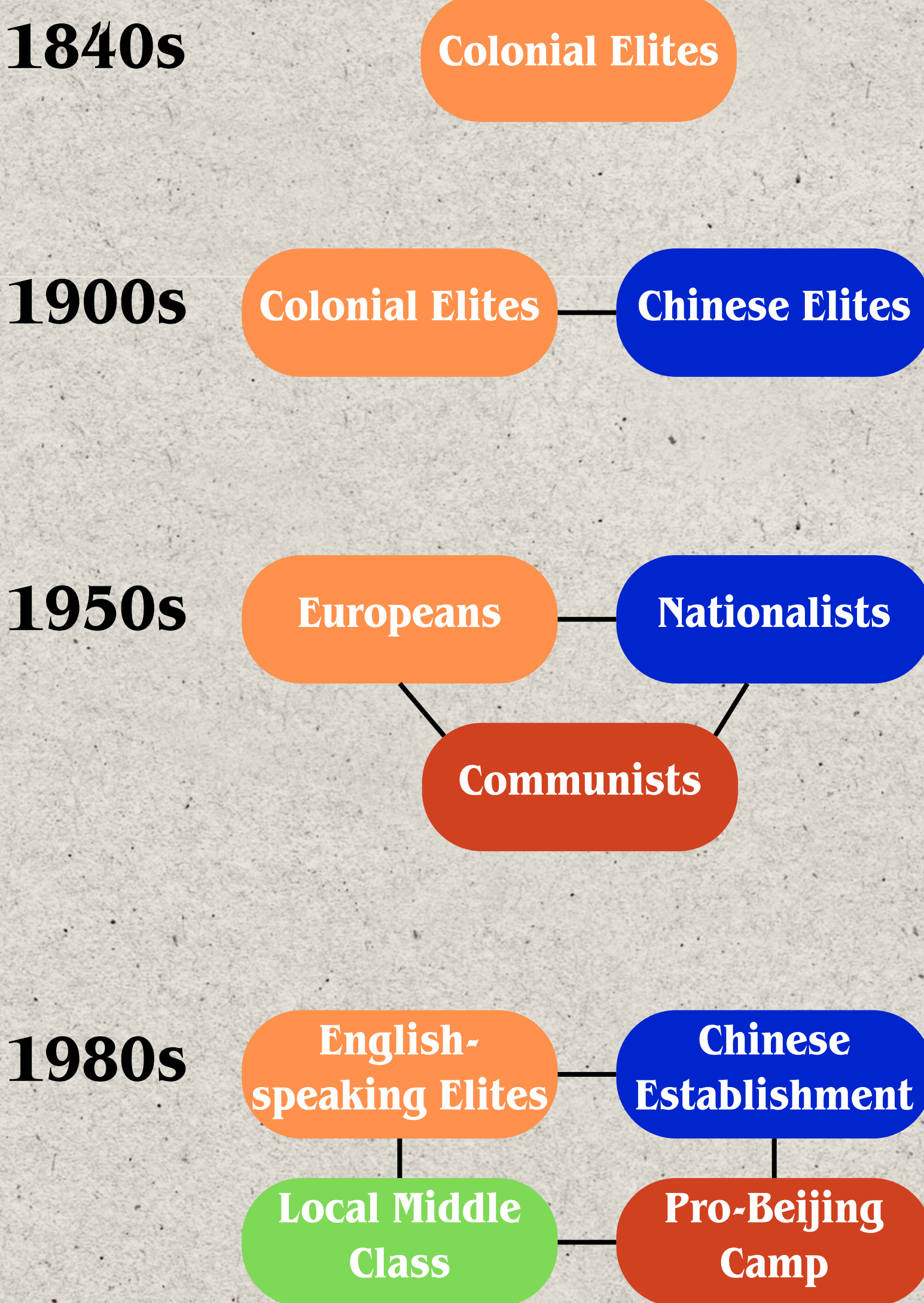
The historical rationale of discrimination against migrant workers was **deeply intersectional**: differences in race, ethnicity, social class, level of education, nationality, political beliefs, gender, and religion have all been exploited in crafting and propagating rhetoric for othering. Mutiple components could often be connected together to craft a rhetoric for othering even within a single article.

*'No pain, no gain. Isn't it no true? Parasite.'*²

3: Public discourse was always controlled by elites:

Public discourse of migrant workers in newspapers—whether positive or negative—was fundamentally an expression of interest of the various elite groups represented by the press, a process which **migrant workers were never a direct participant in**. Rather than genuine concern for migrant workers, elite-led public discourse posited the group as a passive subject, merely manipulated to illustrate issues concerned by them or as a vocal point for political contention. Ultimately, **the 'presentation' of migrant workers in the press was never a 'representation' shaped by migrant workers themselves**.

Historical Power Structure of Hong Kong's Public Discourse:



References

1. “天堂不易居！大陸仔第一日開工 碰上車禍傷了額頭 [Life in 'Paradise' Isn't Easy! Little Mainlander Injures Forehead in Car Accident on First Day of Work].” *Wah Kiu Yat Po*. August 26th, 1980, 5-3.
2. PARASITE. “Rennie Mill Camp.” *South China Morning Post*. June 21st, 1952, 13.