

## CHINESE "AMAHS"

**T**HE HARD-WORKING Chinese "amahs" (house maids) of Hong Kong are the unsung heroines of the cold war.

Since the Communists captured the China mainland eleven years ago, "amahs" have been flocking across the border, from Hong Kong into Red China, in increasing numbers.

They go on short-term visits, from three days to a week, armed with Hong Kong re-entry permits which get them back across the border after their visits are over.

The main purpose of their trips is to take food to hungry relatives in Communist China.

A side product of their trips is one of the most heart-rending stories of conditions in China today.

The Chinese amah works from dawn till the household is asleep for 365 days a year. Those who make the trip—thousands every month—spend their meager earnings on foodstuffs such as oil, meat, dried fish, noodles and sugar which they take across the border to their relatives.

Amahs make up a large proportion of the estimated 10,000 Hong Kong residents who visit Red China monthly. Office and factory workers cannot leave their jobs too readily.

Household employers, in view of the hardships involved usually give their amahs about a week off, twice heart-breaking trips.

And they are heart-breaking. Many of the *amahs* come home in tears.

During the past few weeks, *amahs* have returned to Hong Kong with stories of back-breaking labor in Red China and hunger bordering on starvation.

Their stories are highly colored by their emotions but all of them have the common denominator of "too much work and too little food."

Information gathered from official Chinese Communist sources supports the reports of food shortages and mass labor campaign.